Reminiscences of the old Cape

Caroline Murray

Introduction

Caroline Murray was the second eldest of John Charles Molteno's children. Born in 1853, she was one of his most remarkable offspring – able, fearless, sensitive. She had an acute observational eye, excellent memory, and a real ability to write. When she married Dr Charles Murray in 1876, having faced down her father's initial opposition, she became a full-time wife and mother, and bore ten children. But this did not stop her from having an abiding interest in public affairs. She was active in opposing the Boer War and a firm advocate of non-racialism – not just in the old white South African sense of relations between Boer and Briton, but also between white and black South Africans. She was a leading member of a small group pressing for women to have the vote. And she also responded to the problems of her son, Jack Murray, by pioneering building public support for the mentally handicapped.

Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), wife of Dr Charles Murray

These *Reminiscences* were written around 1913, probably at the request of her eldest daughter, May, who had started to publish every four months a *Chronicle of the Family* to keep everyone in touch with one another. Certainly, various instalments of the *Reminiscences* were published there. Caroline was at least sixty when she wrote them.

They are fascinating primarily for the picture they give of the old Cape in the 1850s and 60s – both in Cape Town and in the tiny village of Beaufort West 300 miles away in the Karoo. For members of the family, Caroline gives us a unique and

affectionate portrait of her English and Dutch grandparents, Hercules Jarvis and Maria Vos, and of their home in Somerset Road. And there are many other wonderful descriptions – of her mother, what it was like travelling down to Cape Town from the Karoo in an ox-wagon, the family's tour of Europe in 1862, and their life in Cape Town.

Robert Molteno
August 2012

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Grandpapa Jarvis

I have often wished that we had some record of our family in the old days when they lived at Somerset Road. I am making an attempt to recall some of my own earliest impressions of that time, hoping that others may follow the same road and fill in the gaps.

Hercules Jarvis's coming out to the Cape – The earliest link of our family with the Cape was through Grandpapa Jarvis.[1] I wish that I knew some connected history of his life[2] but all that I aim to do here is to try to convey to his descendants some of my impressions of him and recollections of things he told me. I asked him once what gave him the idea of coming out to the Cape at a time when so few people even knew of its existence. He replied that his father and his brother, being in the Army,[3] became acquainted with it on their way to and from India, and in that way his interest was aroused so that when a friend of their family, a Colonel Brown, was ordered out to the Cape, Grandpapa's parents were persuaded to allow him to go out under his care. He was then only fourteen years old.

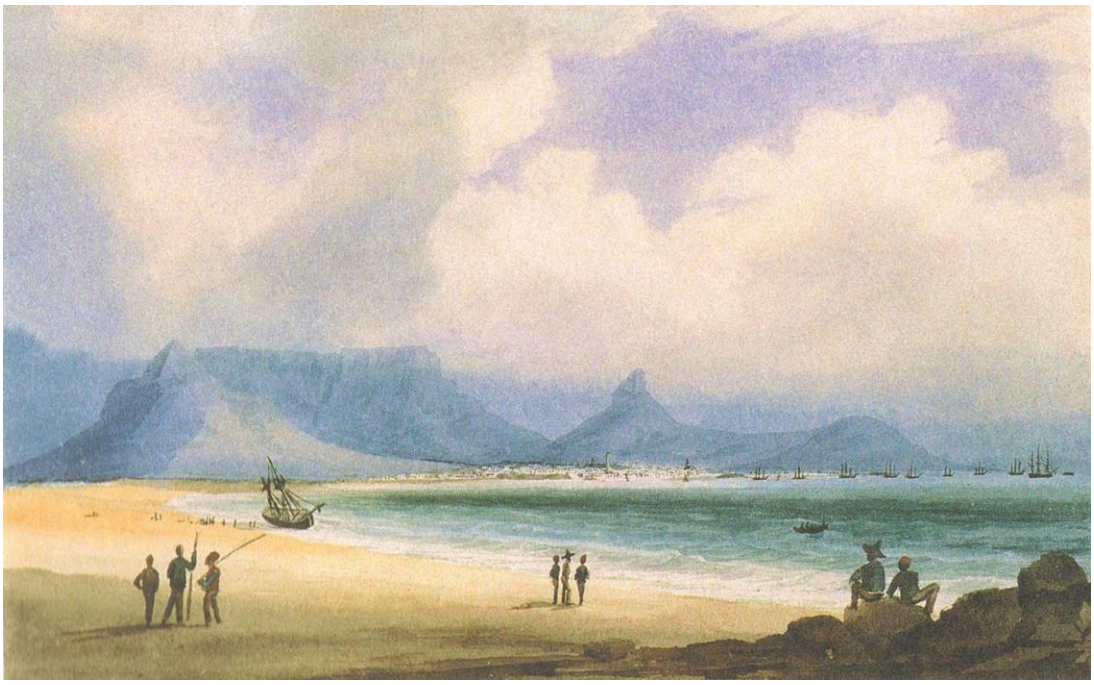


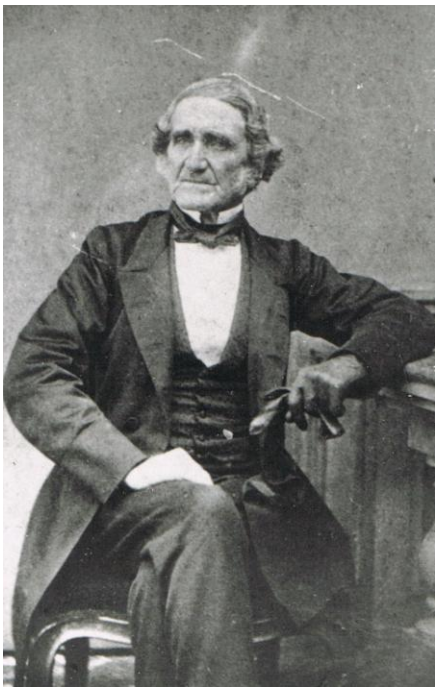
Table Bay (with Lion's Head between Table Mountain (left) and Signal Hill (right) as it probably looked when Hercules Jarvis first arrived

At that date 1818 there was no regular steamer service[4] to the Cape and they must have made the voyage of six months on a sailing ship. Apparently Grandpapa remained at the Cape about two years. He told me that now and again he would be seized with a fit of homesickness when he would climb up to the top of the Lion's Rump[5] and, gazing there over the sea, would have a good cry.

A dangerous voyage to Algoa Bay – Colonel Brown seems to have been very good to him, and to have taken him with him wherever he went. Once when the Governor Lord Charles Somerset was going round the coast to Algoa Bay, Colonel Brown accompanied him and Grandpapa was also invited to be one of the party. They seemed to have had only a small vessel and a rather adventurous voyage, finding themselves when a fog suddenly lifted in an unexpected place somewhere near Cape Point. But this was on their return journey. At Algoa Bay there were then only two houses, one a farm and the other a military station.[6] On their arrival Colonel Brown lent him a gun and in an hour he came back with a buck.

When embarking for their return voyage they had some experience of the dangerous seas there. He told me that, as they stood on the shore, he was keen to go off in the first boat but Colonel Brown made him wait to go with him and the Governor in the lifeboat. That first boat was swamped and everyone in it drowned. He seems to have made a favourable impression upon the Governor for, at the end of the return voyage, he offered him a commission in the Army. This was the second time he had had that opportunity, for before he left England, his relative, Lord St. Vincent, had made him the same offer but he seems to have had no desire for a soldier's life.

On his return to his people at the end of two years, he greatly appreciated the life in his home in Wales and especially he enjoyed the hunting, but when he was about seventeen, the spell of Africa seized him again, and this time held him fast and claimed him as one of those men with high ideals of public duty whose love for their adopted country was expressed in services, the fruits of which we now enjoy, though often all unconsciously. ·



Hercules Jarvis as his granddaughter, Caroline Molteno, would have seen him when she was about eight years old

Cape Town in 1818 – At that time the leading merchants were mostly Dutch and resided in Cape Town, which was then a very different place from the present bustling modern looking town. Its streets seemed wide and silent with no high buildings, few shops, but many fine old dignified houses with large cool halls and rooms and high stoeps where, in the evenings with the doors and windows thrown open, the family received guests and drank coffee. This Grandpapa has described to me.

I have been told that he was a slender, delicate looking youth, very fond of dancing. One day, when watching him at a dance someone remarked that he was going to be married. 'What,' was the reply, 'he looks more like going to be buried.' All through his life he was a most abstemious man and a very small eater. Whenever he had any kind of illness his one remedy was to go to bed and starve. I remember how this used to exasperate his anxious family. He never argued about it but quietly took his course and certainly he wonderfully retained both his physical and mental powers and keenness of interest, to the very end of his long life.

Grandmama Vos and her family in Cape Town

Amongst the lifelong friendships he early made was that with Mr. & Mrs. de Jongh, the parents of Miss Christina and Mrs. Botha. Their mother was a Miss Vos and her parents' home was in one of those beautiful Dutch houses in the upper part of Strand Street. It occupied, with its large courtyard and slave quarters, a block reaching through to the next street behind, and Miss Christina has described to me its beautiful old Dutch and French furniture and precious Eastern carpets all now scattered and lost in a time when their value was quite unappreciated. The splendid old house, like many others, has now been turned into ugly warehouses and shops with scarcely a trace left of its former glory.

At nineteen Grandpapa married Elizabeth Maria Vos,[7] daughter of Hendrick Daniel Vos, son of Johan Hendrick Vos (1749-1810) whose brother was Jacobus Johannes Vos, President of the Burgher Senate, to whom King George III presented a silver cup when the British withdrew from their occupation of the Cape in 1800. She was only sixteen and was a relative of Mrs. de Jongh whose name was also Vos.

The Jarvis home in Somerset Road, Green Point

[probably] Elizabeth Magdalena Christina Vos, wife of Hercules Jarvis

Sophy Jarvis, a daughter of Hercules, and wife of Percy Alport

The business in which Grandpapa was embarked was that of a wine merchant, at that time a very profitable one as there was a flourishing export trade. He made his home in Somerset Road[8] at Green Point where, from his stoep, he could gaze over the sea that he loved and watch the shipping that so keenly interested him. There I picture him still with the familiar 'spy-glass' in his hand. There was very little building then in the neighbourhood and their house and the de Smidt's adjoining it seemed quite isolated. It was the spot on earth that, to my child-mind, seemed most like Paradise. As I think of it now, in the light of my older experience I know that there was ground for that feeling.

The memory of that home deserves to be valued and loved by all its descendants, for when I think of the great divergences of character, age, relationship and nationality combined in it and reflect that I have not one memory connected with it of anything but kindness, sympathy, and the most generous hospitality, then I realize that it was something quite unique. It is only with the memory of a child that I can recall my Grandmother who presided over this home with a quiet dignity and authority that never seemed to press or jar, yet was the source of its harmonious working. We loved to follow her about as she busied herself with her household duties. There was never bustle or disorder but there were always faithful old servants and always a bountiful table where an unexpected guest was sure of welcome. I never remember Grandmama speaking anything but Dutch to us although in her children's education and environment the English language and ideas had the preponderating influence.

Die Groote Kerk – Grandpapa joined her Church, the Dutch Reformed, and became one of its elders. It was in the Groote Kerk in Adderley Street that all their children were baptised and married. When I go now into that vast solemn building I can still feel myself a frightened little child buried in one of the high pews and gazing across with awe, at the mass of elders in black with great bibles in front of them, amongst whom sat our kind Grandpapa. But it was the

huge pulpit supported by carved lions and with its overpowering canopy that struck real terror when the thunders of the preacher echoed from beneath it and seemed to call for some crisis.

Aunt Sophy – When I can first remember the home at Somerset Road Aunt Sophy[9] had already left it for she was married at barely seventeen to Uncle Alport, and she lived for some years in a cottage in the neighbourhood.

Aunt Annie – Aunt Annie too, had been married at seventeen, to Major Blenkins, a widower whose eldest daughter was just about her own age. Soon after their marriage they left for India where they s pent the short, but very happy two years of their married life. Then after a short illness Major Blenkins died and Aunt Annie had a hard struggle to survive him when her second boy was prematurely born. She has often told me of the tenderness with which their friends in India cared for her in this dark time. In her [parents'] home at the Cape no news came of this tragedy until a ship sailed one day into Table Bay, and a letter from the Captain informed Grandpapa that his widowed daughter was on board with two children and their Ayah. The little family became part of the home in Somerset Road and were also joined by Major Blenkins' younger daughters, Margaret and Minnie,[10] who were about the ages of Aunt Betty and Aunt Emmie and who were welcomed, and claimed as Aunt Annie's own children.

Anne Jarvis, a daughter of Hercules, and wife of Major Blenkins

Maria, my mother – It was just before this sad homecoming that my mother[11] had been married. This is the household with which my earliest recollections are associated but I must not forget some of the servants.

Meme Hannah, Tat Simon and Meijje – There was old Meme Hannah and her husband Tat Simon who had been slaves in the family but who, after the liberation had returned as servants and remained till their death with Grandpapa and Grandmama.[12] I don't remember what their duties were but they regarded themselves as privileged members of the household. They had a daughter named Meitje who afterwards became our nurse and she had a little girl, of about our own age, called Honey. The staid capable housemaid's name was Louisa, and there were some fine native 'boys' of whose dignity and faithfulness I have often heard Uncle Alport speak with great admiration and affection.

The earliest impression that has remained in my memory is of a scene in my Grandmother's bedroom in Somerset Road. I was then about two and a half years old and our baby brother Johnnie, eighteen

months.[13] He was propped up in pillows on the bed and was playing with the pages of a book or paper. There was a stir of anxiety in the room and I knew that he was very ill. I still remember the face of a lady who was there to help to nurse him. Shortly after he died, and the vague impression of sorrow still remains.

The next event I can recall is the birth of our sister Maria, when I was three years old. I recollect being asked what I thought of my baby sister and feeling something was wrong by the look with which my reply was received. 'She is too black' meaning, of course, red. We were then living in Beaufort West where Papa had farming and business interests with which Uncle Alport was associated.

My mother – Papa was almost twenty years older than our mother, and I wonder now as I think of what it must have meant to her, with her gay, sunny nature and attractive beauty to be suddenly transported from her happy environment, into the heart of the desolate, almost awesome Karoo, which in those days of long and comfortless ox or mule wagon journeys, seemed like the very end of the world. No wonder that she and Aunt Sophy were almost overwhelmed by the terrific wilderness around them. But she had a wonderful power of sunshine within her, and life with Papa could never be dull. Also she had dear Aunt Sophy who was more like a mother than a sister to her with a quiet strength and ability that made her seem older than her years.

The Family's Ox-Wagon journeys from Beaufort West to Cape Town in the 1850s

Then there was always the yearly visit to Cape Town to which we looked forward when Papa went up for the Session of Parliament. He had been a member since the first Parliament sat in 1854. That journey seemed to form a very important part of my early childhood.

Much preparation was necessary for this twelve to fourteen days *trek*, as on the bare and lonely route there was no way of supplying anything that might be forgotten. The selection of mules or oxen and of drivers was a matter of the greatest consideration. Provisions, too, had to be thought of and were all packed into a large basket with a cover, called a *cos mantje*,[14] for hotels of any kind were then unknown and the few farms we passed were of the most primitive description. Inside the wagon was stretched a sort of cane framework called a *katel* upon which mattresses were laid, and there my mother and the children slept while the men slept on the ground.

Tented ox-wagon ready to go, Graaff Reinet in the Karoo

When the eagerly looked for day at last arrived the long tent wagon with its team of twelve to sixteen animals would be standing ready in the wide straggling street, in front of our house, the drivers looking proud and smart with wild ostrich feathers stuck in their felt hats and in their hands the long bamboo-stick whips which they could crack with a sound like the report of a pistol. Papa himself would have seen to the important matter of packing which had to be done with scrupulous care and economy of space. This was seldom completed without some nervous strain, so that when at last the critical moment arrived and we were all ready to climb in and take our places, it would be an awful moment for everyone when Papa's eagle eye would fall upon some unfortunate individual trying to smuggle in surreptitiously some forgotten but necessary belonging.

It was a relief, like after a storm, when we heard the crack of the whip and the shout to the oxen as we slowly creaked and rumbled through the little village out into the lonely veldt. I used to long for some relief in the monotony of the limitless Karoo. Always the same bare level plains covered only with sparse low bush and plentiful stones stretching away to mountains on the horizon which seemed to promise some new thing, but which, when reached, brought only a higher plateau of the same featureless expanse. It was not scenery that would appeal to a child who longed for trees and flowers, but it created a memory that now no other scenery can stir with quite the same emotion.

The stages of our journey, or *outspans*, were determined by the important consideration of water. We had to take the rare chance of pools in a river bed for a wash, and often had to depend for drinking-water upon the *vaatje*, a sort of little flat cask which would be filled and have to last till the next water was reached. In the thirsty heat, when the stage between was long, this was often a severe trial. As to food, there was room for only the barest necessaries. Butter and milk were unknown luxuries then in

the Karoo, and the smell of black coffee still brings before me flowered *commetjes*[15] handed round before the first *inspan* at the earliest gleam of daylight.

A typical Boer outspan the Molteno family might have encountered

Yet, despite the hardships, these journeys were always a new delight and adventure. I can remember, sometimes lying awake at night in the wagon, listening with a creepy feeling, through the immense stillness, to the weird cry of the jackals, while close to us, the friendly munching of our animals feeding at the *disselboom*[16] to which they were tied, gave a welcome sense of some familiar companionship.

Sometimes we took the route through Bain's Kloof and Wellington, sometimes through Ceres and Mitchell's Pass or through Montague Pass and George, and thence from Mossel Bay by sea to Cape Town. In the latter route I remember we passed the little Inn of Messrs. Furney and Swain, which after the bareness of the Karoo, seemed a little oasis of comfort, and the meal of bacon and eggs for which they were famous an unbelievable luxury.

It was at Mossel Bay that I remember first meeting Mrs. Merriman when we could not have been more than five years old. Her parents, Mr. & Mrs. Vincent, were old and valued friends of my father and mother. When we were being kindly entertained at their house, I remember being shown a cupboard filled with what seemed to us, little wanderers, an astonishing collection of beautiful toys at which we gazed with admiration curiously mingled with a vague sense of superior experience of the real life. The greatest treasure was a large doll which she held rather anxiously in her arms, and when her mother asked her to let us hold it for a moment I remember in indignant surprise when she replied in Dutch 'No, they will break it.'

An old Cape mountain pass

It was at that time I think, that we had a wretched little voyage from Mossel Bay to Table Bay in a tiny boat with a couple of cabins opening from the cuddy. We were miserably seasick and must have

lamented rather noisily, for someone suddenly put a head into the door of our cabin and said in a stern voice: 'The captain says that if you don't stop that noise he row you overboard.' Not for a moment doubting, we were effectually silenced.

I have never forgotten the delight that the beauty of the mountain passes gave me, nor, on the other hand, the anxiety with which we watched some other wagon coming to meet us on the narrow road overhanging deep precipices. When we had to take the outer side with our long unwieldy team of animals, it was a moment of real terror, having vividly on our minds the stories of disaster with their well-remembered landmarks.

At Wellington Grandpapa had a house with vineyards or a farm, and there we would have the great joy of looking out for him, with our cousin Bazett, coming to meet us. Then their cart would join us and we would all travel on together to Cape Town, our caravan exciting, in those days, no unusual interest as we drove, with as much dash as possible through the streets, on through the welcome gate of Somerset House.

Looking back to the conditions of those days, I wonder that our parents with so little fuss could have accomplished this journey from Beaufort West to Cape Town and back, with their small children every year until I was seven years old, but I think that difficulties had quite an exhilarating effect upon Papa and certainly they never, for a moment, deterred him from any end he wished to attain.

Early Childhood in Beaufort West

The Molteno family home in Beaufort West, 1850s

Before I was old enough to remember he once brought back Grandmama and all her family for a visit to our home in Beaufort. When the party returned to Cape Town Aunt Annie with Bazett and Willie[17] were left to stay with us until we went up the following year. This was immense happiness to Betty and myself who looked up to our cousins with the reverent devotion of little girls for their boy playfellows of a year or two older. I must then have been about four years old, but one of the impressions I can recall is of all four of us going to a school where, on arrival, we were placed in rows and made to hold out our hands for our nails to be examined. If the result was not satisfactory a rap of the cane on the knuckles was the punishment. But I have not unhappy memories of the school and the kind teacher, Miss Fraser, whose father was the minister of the Dutch Church which my mother attended. Besides, the pride of going to school would have compensated for much. I can just remember standing in a long row of children gazing up at a blackboard hanging on the wall and making out the letters N A M E.

As I recall those early days at Beaufort and the few families that formed its simple society, each name bears a little group of associations which always make me feel a special interest when I meet now, in such a different world, anyone connected with them. There were Dr. and Mrs. Christie with whose children we most often played as they lived not far from us on the opposite side of the long straggling street. He was the only doctor in the dorp until Dr. Kitching, Beatrice Bisset's father, settled there for a time. A very great friend of Papa's was Mr. Rice whose father, Dr. Rice, was principal of the Blue Coat School in London and a distinguished scholar. Kind motherly Mrs. Rice was a Miss de Jager of Beaufort. Near us lived Mr. Dantje de Villiers, a man of great ability and character and who had a very large family. One of his daughters married Mr. W. Elliott who managed one of Papa's Nelspoort farms for many years and who is the father of Mabel and Emily Elliott. Then there were the Pritchards, Thwaites, Devenishes, Mustos, Kinnears and the Dutch clergyman Mr. Fraser and his family. The lonely old postmaster, Mr. Cardwell, was said to belong to a very good family in England and no one knew why he came to bury himself in this far-away solitude; but he was very kind to us children when we went to his post-office which I think must have also been a little shop, and there was always a handful of small pink rose peppermints ready for us. Mr. Madison too, the manager of Uncle Alport's store,[18] was always a kind friend with a pleasant word of welcome and often a little packet of sweets for us too.

Many years after when, for the first time, I revisited Beaufort, it was with the keenest interest that I sought, and did find, some of the old landmarks in my memory. As I walked down the street, still shaded by the familiar old pear trees, an old man rose from a stoep where he was sitting and coming forward, shook me warmly by the hand. I found he was our old friend Mr. Madison. When I asked him how he could possibly recognise me when he had not seen me since I was seven years old, he said, 'Oh, I could never fail to recognise a Molteno face.' Then he began to talk of Papa and of how optimistic he was as to the possibilities of the district. He told me how once when Mr. Rawson, the Colonial Secretary, was on a visit to Beaufort he invited him to go with him to one of his Nelspoort farms where he said he could show him 40,000 sheep collected in one spot. This he did, to Mr. Rawson's complete amazement, for those were the days when the Karoo was looked upon as a worthless desert.

There was no kind of social life or amusement that I can I remember in that serious little community but once, when Sir George Grey, the Governor, was expected, I recollect seeing, with some wonder, little white muslin frocks, with pink and blue ribbons, being made for Betty and me. The actual function has left no clear impression except that the Governor took me up in his arms and kissed me. Another time I again remember seeing Sir George Grey, was about two years later, when he called at Somerset House to see Papa just before we left for England. I remember sitting on his knee while he talked to Grandpapa and Papa who both had a warm admiration and friendship for him.

It was strange to look back to these times when Percy[19] and I met him again many years after in London. He was then an old man of over eighty but he talked in the tenderest way of the old days at the Cape and of the people there, while at times, as we talked of recent stirring events, there would flash out the old generous fire of his youth.

Aunt Sophy and Uncle Alport

As my mind wanders back to those old days at Beaufort, dear Aunt Sophy and Uncle Alport seem linked with our lives almost as closely as our own parents. Their home was quite close to ours, our gardens meeting at the back.

Uncle Percy Alport, John Charles Molteno's brother in law and business partner in Beaufort West, c. 1850s

How well I remember that garden – the vines with the irrigation *sloots* between – the peach and fig and apricot trees. Two other friendly trees, a walnut and a mulberry, which seemed to me of gigantic size, stood in front of our house.

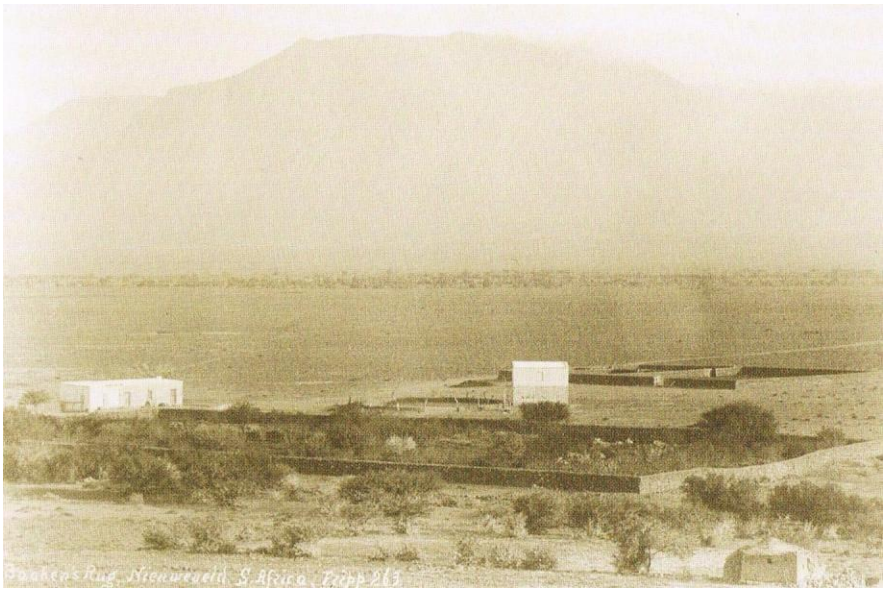
Between our garden and the back of Aunt Sophy's house, were the kennels, with a railed-in courtyard, where Uncle Alport kept his hunting dogs. These we regarded with the same terror as we would wild animals. I can still see Uncle Alport riding back from a hunt with the dogs dancing round his horse and with hares and *corans*[20] hanging from his saddle. His horses and dogs were to him like children in the tenderness with which he cared for them.

One could not think of Uncle Alport and Aunt Sophy apart from one another, their lives were so completely blended. In the beautifully ordered home that dear Aunt Sophy made wherever she went one could feel the influence of her quiet, capable character while the sweetness of her unselfish nature made her a helpful refuge in every difficulty, and it was just this combination of gentleness and strength that gave her the courage to uncomplainingly endure a life of unusual suffering which finally reduced her to a complete helpless invalid. She told me that she had a severe attack of rheumatic fever when a child of twelve and that since she was sixteen she had not known one day free from pain. Papa was deeply attached to her as well as to Uncle Alport. To Mama she took the place at Beaufort of a mother more than of a sister.

Papa's Nelspoort farms

Besides the yearly journeys to Cape Town the travelling wagon or 'boldervag' was also used when Papa took us all with him on his visits to the Nelspoort farms.

A Spartan existence – I can just recall the pleasurable excitement of change and travel as well as a certain feeling of disappointment when we reached the bare comfortless little farm houses with earth floors and not a scrap of green or shade about them. The only thing that brought any life or interest to



Baakensrug, one of the Nelspoort farms, some time in last half of the 19th century

us was the bleating flocks that came, in the evenings, to the kraals. At this time the parents of the present generation of Elliotts and Jacksons[21] occupied the different Nelspoort farms. I wonder whether their descendants ever try to realize, in the contrast, today, of their luxurious homes and surroundings the vision that comes to me of that stern struggling past and especially of the heroic patient mothers upon whom the heaviest part of the burden fell. It is a memory that may well be treasured with reverent admiration as well as with gratitude for upon their endurance and sacrifices were slowly built up the comforts their children now enjoy. I sometimes wonder what are we building up for the future?

Little Jarvis Molteno's death – When I was about five years old there came upon us a crushing sorrow. Our little brother Jarvis, who was about two and a half years old, was taken from us after a very short illness, which we called 'white sore throat.' He was a dear serious little fellow and I still have a picture in my memory of his little face and figure as he gravely walked about under the big walnut tree as if his mind were full of thoughts. Papa was passionately devoted to his only boy and had made him his constant companion. The blow fell so suddenly that he was almost distracted with grief and the darkness of those days is still deeply shadowed in my memory. Papa could not bear to separate himself from the precious little earthly remains which were laid temporarily in a sacred spot in our garden to be removed to wherever we should eventually make our home. When, some years after, we had settled down at Claremont House and then our little brother Alfred died and was laid in St. Saviour's churchyard, the two older brothers were laid with him in the same grave.

The last of the family that was born in Beaufort was Charlie.[22] He was one year old, Betty was eight, Maria four and I was seven when we made our last journey through the Great Karoo to Cape Town. It was more than twenty years after that I again passed through that strange yet fascinating desert and gazed out upon it from the window of a railway carriage with a thrill of old memories like from another world.

Our first homes in Cape Town

Distant Rondebosch – The months of the Parliamentary session which we spent every year at Cape Town were a great joy to us all and especially to Mama who always wished to be as near as possible to Somerset House. One session Papa hired Murchison House at Rondebosch but Mama felt herself

isolated there for, with no trams nor trains, and only about one omnibus a day to Cape Town, it seemed quite far away in the country.[23] Usually Papa hired a house somewhere at Green Point which had then only a few scattered houses with large grounds around them.

Green Point Common— Once we had a house belonging to Mr. de Jongh. It was close to the sea and within an easy walk of Somerset House across the bare wide common which, in the spring was gaily carpeted with pink and yellow sorrel flowers or *surung blommetjes* as we called them. We spent many happy hours of play upon that common. In places it was dotted over with low thorny bushes upon which the butcher bird or *bokmakierie* impaled its poor little victims – lizards, *hadjes* and all kinds of strange creatures, but mostly little frogs with their legs stretched out stiff and dry so that when we collected them and planted them in the ground in rows like armies of soldiers, they looked as if brandishing their weapons for some furious attack. Then what patient searches, and to me always vain ones, we used to have for the mysterious *Kookamaacranka*. I never did understand why we searched for them so earnestly. But best of all I remember and loved the evenings when the light was low on the wide open space with its great horizon, and the piled masses of thunderclouds were touched with the glory of the setting sun.

The Common, as I remember it, has completely vanished. A railway, trees, golf links and trams have brought a wholly new environment to it as well as to all those scenes of our childhood grouped around the once so dearly loved Somerset Road which in its 'slummy' atmosphere of today has nothing left of its old dignity and aloofness.

Aunt Betty Bisset, one of Hercules Jarvis's daughters and wife of James Bisset

How well I remember there the feeling of the fresh early morning air on the stoep before breakfast when the 'fruit boys' would come to the steps with their tempting baskets. They were all Malays and carried their two large round baskets, suspended from a bamboo pole across their shoulders. This was before the days of fruit shops, and our present medley of nationalities.

Bazett and Willie Blenkins – were our only playmates. We took the keenest interest in their school life and friendships and read all their books – mostly tales of schoolboy life and of adventure. Reading was always bur greatest delight and resource. I remember once there were two little white-haired boys who used to play with them. They were Mr. Abram Fischer, afterwards the only Prime Minister of the Free State, and his brother.

One of the secret terrors of that time to me was the little monkey, Jacko, who used to be tied up in the woodhouse and made a great pet of by Bazett and Willie.

Behind the house we could wander up the bare slopes of the Lion's Rump where, in the spring, we used to amuse ourselves by threading long chains of

the gay *surung blommetje* with which they were carpeted.

Aunt Betty – I can remember, in the evenings, sitting on the steps of the stoep with Aunt Betty Bisset[24] and watching her with loving admiration as we followed her gaze into the distant sky while she told us some story or repeated some poem that seemed to carry us away into another world. I wonder whether any children ever loved and worshipped their aunts as we did ours.

The Family's first visit to Europe – Papa decides we go on a sailing ship, 1861

And now, after this last journey up from Beaufort, came the great event which opened a completely new chapter in our lives – our visit, of eighteen months, to Europe. It had been just ten years since Papa's last visit, before he and Mama had yet even met one another.

Visits to Europe were not then the common event they are today,[25] nor were they accomplished with the ease and speed and luxury to which we are now accustomed.

There was one mail steamer a month with a voyage averaging thirty-five days. The penny postage of today was then one shilling. With the small steamers, ill-ventilated and smelly from the whale oil lamps,[26] it was no wonder that there were always some 'bad sailors' to whom the entire voyage was a martyrdom. But just when we were ready to start there sailed into the Bay a large vessel from Australia called the *Westbourne*. It was a sailing ship.

Ships always fascinated Papa and he was immediately seized with the idea of our making the voyage in her. With all speed the arrangements were completed and our large party safely embarked – boats from the Jetty in Adderley Street, taking us to the ship.[27] Our party consisted of Papa and Mama, the four children with our coloured nurse Meitje, (old Meme Hannah's daughter), and to our great joy, our dear Aunt Betty who was then a girl of seventeen.

Grandpapa and Grandmama came to see us off and brought us many toys for the long voyage. It must have been an anxious parting for them for it would probably be at least four months before they could get any news of us. Fortunately we made an exceptionally good passage of only seven weeks. Captain Bruce and his brother, who was first mate, did all they could to make us comfortable and we had splendid big stern cabins but, though Papa found inexhaustible interest in the navigation of the ship, I think that, to Mama and Aunt Betty,[28] the voyage must have been rather monotonous for, apparently, they had little in common with the Australian passengers.

Although we sighted no land the whole way yet we constantly saw ships and passed many within speaking distance (with the 'trumpet' as we called it). More than once boats came off to make some exchange of provisions and great ceremonies were observed crossing the Line, all of which gave the children endless variety of interest and enjoyment.

I remember particularly the days when there was a dead calm and the sailors would all sit on the deck mending the sails while we sat and talked beside them.

Sometimes the sea would be covered, as far as eye could reach, with the tiny white sails of the 'Portuguese men-of-war' and the sailors would give us tins, perforated with holes, with which to fish for them – painful experience had taught us to avoid, with great respect, their long blue tentacles.

Ship's fare, in those days, was not luxurious. It seemed, as far as I can remember, that, at the children's table, our daily dinner consisted of roast pork and preserved potatoes. Sundays we had tinned salmon and, after dinner, on deck, the steward filled our pinafores with nuts and raisins, which compensated for many shortcomings. There were lovely evenings on the silent deck, lit only by the stars or moon when we would listen in thrilled delight to Aunt Betty's stories as we nestled round her as closely as we could.

Altogether there was, about that leisurely voyage, a feeling of peace and comradeship with our environment and with the life of the great ocean which can never be experienced in the luxury and bustle with which we now race across the great highway of the Atlantic.

Arrival in London – Meeting our English relatives

Caroline Molteno (nee Bower), mother of John Charles Molteno, at time of visit to London, 1861

At last the long voyage was ended and it was thrilling to see the white cliffs of England and feel we were nearing the wonderful world that had seemed like an unreachable dream of all perfection.

Our English Grandmama, Caroline Molteno, in Peckham – The first impression, at St. Katherine's Docks, was distinctly depressing but was redeemed by the interest of meeting our English grandmother and Aunt Nancy,[29] who were there to meet us with the warmest welcome. London was a somewhat abrupt change for children who had led our roving and unconventional life and I think we felt cramped and disappointed in spite of much that was wonderful to us .... For the first time we saw railways, large shops, parks and sights like the Zoological Gardens and Mme. Tussaud's.

The only touch of the warmth of home was centred around Grandmama, who lavished upon us almost passionate affection. Though between sixty and seventy years old, she was still beautiful with a quite youthful figure and carriage - I can still remember her lovely complexion, perfect teeth and soft, golden-brown hair. She used to tell us many stories of Papa when he was a boy and of his harum-

scarum brother Frank, who must have been a lovable character.

Aunt Nancy and Eliza Bingle in Richmond – Then we all went to visit Aunt Nancy in her home at Richmond, where her husband, Mr. Bingle, was Principal of the College. There we first met his niece, Eliza Bingle,[30] at that time a hard-worked and much-disciplined little student who awed us with her knowledge of Greek and Latin. She seemed to us to have little of the freedom to which we were accustomed but she was then, as she has always been since, the kindest and most unselfish of friends.

Uncle Charles Molteno in Edinburgh – Dear Grandmama was very loth to part with us when we went to visit Papa's old Uncle Charles[31] who had married Mrs. Glass, an Aunt of the well-known Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, author of *Rab and his friends.* They, with the two daughters of Mrs. Charles Molteno, lived at a place in the country called Newton. I remember it was a pretty, bright home with a large garden. They were all very kind to us and made much of us and we corresponded for years afterwards.

Charles Dominic Molteno, John Molteno's uncle, Edinburgh

Our headquarters were in Edinburgh and we were very happy there, and felt more at home than we had done in England. I have never seen Edinburgh since but I can quite well recall the old Castle of Holyrood, Arthur's Seat and Carlton Hill. Also I remember seeing Loch Leven Castle and Loch Lomond. Dear Aunt Betty filled all these places with romance for us through her fascinating stories about them. How we did love those walks and talks with her but alas that joy came to a sudden end, for her health began to give anxiety and the doctor, who was consulted, advised that she should at once return to her native climate. It was a great blow to us all when she was sent back home under the care of Dr. and Mrs. Ebden, old friends of Papa. They, like all who met her, fell under the spell of her charm and I often afterwards heard Dr. Ebden speak of her with almost reverent admiration.

It was while we were staying in Edinburgh that Percy was born (September 12, 1861). It was a Sunday and we were all seated at our midday dinner when Dr. Brown came into the room and, in his kindly way, told us that we had another little brother.

With what joy we always welcomed these events and crept, with tense excitement, into the sacred room for our first glimpse of the little newcomer in Papa's arms while Mama, with a happy smile looked on. Her room was like Paradise to us during those days, though the house seemed cold and bare without her sunny presence.

The baby was scarcely a month old when we returned to England to meet Mr. and Mrs. de Jongh and Christina and Nancy, who had come over from the Cape, the latter was only sixteen and had just left school, while Christina was about nineteen. To Christina especially it was a bitter disappointment that Aunt Betty had to return home just as they arrived and were looking forward to a delightful time together, for they had been friends from childhood.

Travelling on the Continent

The happy plan was made that we should all travel, in one party, on the Continent, but it was hard for Grandmama to have so soon to part with us again, especially as there was now the additional attraction of the baby. To console her, we left with her our little dog Punch, whom we had brought from the Cape and, from that time, he entered upon a life of luxury, such as he had never known before and became her treasured companion till his death.

The time I am telling of was over fifty years ago, and travelling on the Continent was, by no means, the common and easy experience it is now. Our large party of thirteen with five children and two nurses used to astonish and puzzle all we met. The hotels were then much more distinctively national than they are now, and though that may not have made them so easy or comfortable for strangers, yet I think it made them more interesting.

In re-visiting since some of the places we stayed at I have been interested to recognise the same hotels still in existence, though probably enlarged. The Hotel de l'Europe in Brussels, the Trois Rois at Basle, the Hotel de Hollande at Baden-Baden, and Beau Rivage at Ouchy, are some that I can remember. At the Trois Rois at Basle, Maria caught some kind of fever which made Papa and Mama very anxious and which hung about her for a long time so that she became very weak.

Mr. de Jongh, ‘Om Dirk’ as Papa called him, was devotedly fond of her and, when we started on our train journeys, he always insisted upon carrying her himself, wrapped in a green plaid shawl. With the two nurses carrying the babies and all the rest following each with some share of luggage, we must have been rather a remarkable group of travelers and I scarcely wonder that there was about Papa, on these occasions, something of the old feeling of tension like when we started on our ‘treks’ through the Karoo. Nothing ever ruffled Mama, who entered into her new experience with the keenest enjoyment.

Language was a great difficulty in those days, before English was so much spoken and the great stay of our party was Nancy who, having just left school, was expected to be able, at all times, to act as interpreter, while Papa and Mr. de Jongh looked on scarcely able to restrain their impatience to understand.

At Baden-Baden we made a long stay and much regret was experienced when our departure was announced. We were urged to remain to see a German Christmas, for which preparations were already being made, and, when it was realized that our plans could not be altered, we were sent away with many regrets and presents of bouquets of flowers and boxes of candied fruits.

It was at the Beau Rivage Hotel at Ouchy that we spent our Christmas and never have I forgotten the glorious view, from the tall windows, of the deep blue lake with the snow peaks beyond glistening against the dear blue sky. Here we reveled in our first experience of snow and ice. Ouchy was then a

very small country place with only a few scattered houses and gardens along the shore of the lake and the one big hotel which had just been finished. Few people were staying there in the winter and our large party was very welcome. We also spent some time at Geneva and in Paris, where I remember that we complained of being sent too often to walk the open space round the Madeleine.

Betty and I, nine and eight, were old enough to thoroughly enjoy this life of travel and adventure, as did our coloured nurse Meitje, who was always an object of curiosity – sometimes more than she liked – for coloured people were then much more uncommon than they are now. Often people stopped to ask where we came from and, many a time, the remark which followed our reply, was, 'Oh, I thought only black people lived there.' Few seemed to know anything about our then far away corner of the world.

Colonel Meehan, a cousin of Hercules Jarvis (date not known)

Colonel Meehan – Amongst the very few relatives we met in England, were Colonel Meehan, a cousin of Grandpapa's, and his most lovable and attractive daughter, who afterwards married a Captain Fawkes. Colonel Meehan was a very handsome old gentleman, somewhat of a dandy. He was evidently very much interested in meeting all our large party and we thought his daughter a most charming lady. After his death we quite lost sight of her. I believe Colonel Meehan's name was really MacMahm[32] but through some misspelling in the documents of his commission it became corrupted into Meehan.

Settling back in Cape Town, 1862

At the end of about eighteen months we returned to the Cape – this time in the monthly mail steamer, the *Cambrian*, with Captain and Mrs. Baynton. The latter was a well-known lady of commanding personality, who held a sort of Court whenever she was on board and it was said that it was owing to the role she played that the rule was subsequently made forbidding captains' wives from travelling in their husbands' ships. However she always remained warmly attached to our family.

Before leaving England, Papa and Mama spent some time in shopping, for they bought all the furniture, plate, glass and china for the home we were to settle into, on our return, somewhere near Cape Town.

Among the passengers on board the *Cambrian* were Mr. Joseph Barry and his three daughters, Letty, Annie and Kitty. Mr. Barry was an old Cape friend of Papa's, they used to spend hours over games of chess varied sometimes to whist[33] but, in the latter case, a fourth hand was always a difficulty, and a very shy young man was resorted to. We did not wonder that he needed some persuasion when we sometimes listened to the fierce berating he would get from the three older experienced players who were in such deadly earnest.

Betty Jarvis to marry James Bisset – At last we lay in Table Bay and watched a boat coming towards us with Grandpapa and Bazett in it. As we all rowed back with them to the jetty Grandpapa whispered that he had a secret to tell us and it was with mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety that we learnt that our beloved Aunt Betty was engaged to be married. We could scarcely restrain our impatience till the evening when we were to be introduced to our future Uncle Bisset.

Wheatbury House, Mowbray – Shortly after our arrival we took up our residence at Wheatfield, Mowbray, where we lived for eighteen months, while Papa looked about for a place where we could settle into as a permanent home. Here Frank was born (16th February 1863) – a little, very fair-haired baby whom Papa called his *witkop*.[34] We seemed there to be living quite in the country and, for the first time, reveled in the delight of flower gardens, green fields carpeted with spring flowers, and a cow called Daisy.

Betty and I went every day to a school kept by three Miss Hanburys, Miss Elizabeth, Miss Mary and Miss Sarah. Miss Mary was our special teacher and we all loved her. She dressed most plainly, like an old picture, always in grey, with a very long waist and her hair curled high at the back of her head with three stiff curls on either side. No one ever had from her an impatient word or look but of Miss Sarah, the youngest sister, who taught us music, we stood greatly in awe, though I never remember her being, in any way, unkind.

Betty and I had had so few companions that it was a most interesting experience to be amongst such a number of girls of all ages and it seemed to me as if nothing could be more delightful than our games of 'French and English', during recess time. It was here that Mrs. Gamble, then Constance Brounger, and we first met. The grounds of their home adjoined our playground and she and her younger sister used to stand at the fence and watch our fun with rather wistful interest. It was not, however, till some years later, that we really became friends for, about that time Mr. Brounger, having completed his railway engineering work here, returned with his family to England. On their voyage home illness broke out on the ship and their eldest son and younger daughter both died. They did not come back to the Cape till Constance and I were girls of nearly seventeen.

The next great event was Aunt Betty's wedding in the big Dutch Church in Adderley Street, which was not then crowded round with buildings as it is now. Betty and I, with Bazett and Willie, felt very important, if somewhat nervous, at forming part of the bridal procession as it passed through the crowd at the door.

'The wonderful air of Kalk Bay' – It was at that time that Margaret Blenkins, who was Aunt Betty's special companion and friend, became engaged to Mr. Christian Watermeyer. Soon after, her health began to cause anxiety and, in spite of the most anxious care, she became weaker and weaker. At last there was talk of the wonderful air of a place called Kalk Bay, then only a little known fishing hamlet and someone went down to investigate.[35] I remember the amusement with which the place was described

and the tiny thatched cottage which was all the accommodation that could be got. It was under these sad circumstances that we first came into touch with Kalk Bay for nothing could help the dear invalid and she passed away on the very day that had been fixed for her marriage and before she had completed her nineteenth year. I can still recall the intensely sad feeling with which I watched her as she lay on her couch on the stoep or in the garden, so pale and listless and the desperate longing that she might recover.

Grandpapa's sisters arrive unexpectedly from China

It was during the time we lived at Mowbray that Aunt Sophia and Aunt Georgina, Grandpapa's only sisters, unexpectedly arrived from Hong Kong, to end their days at Somerset House.[36] Ever since I could remember, we had had constant pleasant reminders of their existence in the shape of presents, by every opportunity that offered; no ship arrived from China without bringing Grandmama boxes of tea, of preserved ginger, chow-chow, and our favourite little preserved oranges – also cabinets, ornaments and all kinds of interesting and pretty things. Aunt Sophia's husband, Mr. Duus, had been Danish Consul for many years, at Hong Kong. On his death they decided to come to the Cape but as there was no way of letting Grandpapa know, it was a complete surprise when one day a cab drove up to the gate at Somerset Road and the two little old ladies stepped out and walked up the garden path to the door.

Aunt Sophia was a gentle, rather sad looking lady, in delicate health, and she lived only about six months after their arrival. She had two sons, John and Edward, who once had spent some time at Somerset House, on their way thither to and from school in Europe. One of them was present at Mama's wedding – John, the elder, was attracted back to the Cape some years later when I can just remember seeing him. In the course of years they ceased to correspond and so have been lost sight of.

Aunt Georgina was exceptionally clever and well educated, a good musician, artist and linguist – she brought with her her harp and taught Aunt Emmie to play it. She was a great reader and critic and altogether a little formidable to some but she was a most intelligent and interesting companion and it was surprising how with tastes formed in such a different environment, she did manage to adapt herself to the simple life at the Cape and its rather foreign character. She warmly appreciated Grandmama's large-hearted, sincere and unselfish character, which seemed to embrace and yet leave free all who came within its influence.

Aunt Emmie was then a girl just entering her teens, keen to seize every educational opportunity, and to her Aunt Georgina's advent brought a whole world of new interest; they became devoted companions and friends though there always remained about Aunt Georgina a certain reserve – a kind of something remote from our experience. What must have been to her a great compensation for the loss of old friends and interests was her enthusiastic appreciation of the beauties of Nature. She delighted in long exploring rambles in which Aunt Emmie and we loved to share her keen and understanding enjoyment. There her spirit seemed to breathe quite freely – she was young again.

It was wonderful how there seemed always to be room when needed, at Somerset House, and when the two old aunts arrived they immediately fitted, quite naturally, with all their camphor wood chests and numerous belongings, into a room that seemed made for them, called the Long Room. It always appeared to us a mysterious distant abode, though it opened just off the dining-hall.

Emmie Jarvis, the youngest of Hercules' daughters, and the only one not to marry

Inexhaustible treasures seemed to be stored there and when we would be seized with a craze for 'dressing-up' or making tableaux, Aunt Georgina would dazzle us with the wonderful satin dresses, jewellery, etc., which she would produce and in which we delighted to deck one another. On these occasions our Fairy Queen would always be Aunt Emmie – with her beautiful wavy, golden hair over her shoulders and her wonderful blue eyes, she appeared to us a vision of perfect beauty. She was our ideal too of all that was good beyond hope of our attainment and our inspiration in the path of knowledge, for we always tried to follow the books in which she was interested and so learnt to find them for ourselves at a time when they were not so plentiful or accessible as they are now.

Amongst the treasures the aunts brought with them from China, were some very beautiful things from the Palace at Pekin – carved ebony tables and chairs and a tall vase of most wonderful workmanship and colouring, said to be hundreds of years old. When the house at Somerset Road was broken up,[37] this was sent by Aunt Georgina to an Antiquarian friend of hers in Denmark, who presented it to a museum in Copenhagen. In those days many things were lost through ignorance of their value.

When I was a girl I remember once, as I was waiting in our carriage for Grandma, outside a shop in Cape Town, an old gentleman, Mr. Percy Vigors, came up to speak to me. The sale had not long before taken place of the house at Somerset Road and he told me that amongst some things sold from the loft there were two pictures which were discovered to be by some old Master and of very great value and that they had · been sent over to Europe. These pictures must have been amongst the belongings of a brother of Grandpapa's, Captain Jarvis of the Indian Army, who was himself an artist, and who died on his way from India to spend his leave at the Cape.

In this connection there is a curious story Grandpapa himself told me. He had no idea that his brother contemplated coming out to the Cape and he had had no communication from him for a long time, but one day as he sat writing in his study, a sudden feeling came over him of his brother's presence in the room – so vivid as to be almost a vision. The sensation was so unexpected and so remarkable that he took up his pen and at once made a note of the day and the hour. Sometime after, a ship arrived from India and Grandpapa received a letter from the Captain informing him that that his brother had been a passenger and had died on the way. When he compared the date given he found it coincided exactly with the time noted in his book. Amongst his things were several interesting pictures and a beautiful miniature in ivory of his father as a young man in military uniform.

Papa buys Claremont House, 1863

Those eighteen months at Wheatfield are full of happy memories – the walk to school in the fresh early morning, past where the men were making the deep cutting where now the railway runs – the break in lessons at eleven o'clock, when we ate our lunch – never since has butter seemed so delicious as those firm golden pats made from Daisy's rich milk, by our clever black cook Clara – the long oak avenue leading from the Main Road to the Miss Hanbury's school, lined with pink monthly roses, which sometimes the older girls would gather in masses and make into wreaths for our hair and dresses – the trellised walk, covered with roses and honeysuckle, leading to one of the sitting-rooms we mostly used at Wheatfield, where I used to love to dreamily breathe in the soft scents of the flowers and watch the bumble bees and birds busy amongst them, while the world melted away into fairyland. Sometimes we would wander down to the river below, and imagine ourselves in all sorts of adventures.

The garden at Claremont House, looking up to Table Mountain and Devil's Peak, 1880s

The Rector of Mowbray Church was the Rev. Mr. Long, who was, at this time, carrying on his great case before the Privy Council against Bishop Gray, the first Bishop in South Africa, and all the congregation were strong partisans of Mr. Long. One of the churchwardens was Mr. Mann, whose wife was a daughter of Sir Thos. Maclear, the Astronomer Royal. I remember their pew, near ours, always well filled with their large party of children. The Syfrets, too, were all young children then living with their parents at Blumenthal.

At the Hermitage, next to Wheatfield, lived Mrs. Wools, with her three married daughters, one of them, Mrs. Sampson, with all her children. It is strange to think that many of these children are now grandparents! Along the Liesbeek Road was a pretty little place, called Sans Souci, where old Captain and Mrs. Sampson lived. But the friend whom Mama most often went to see was Mrs. Tennant, in her very neat, well-ordered little house just off the Main Road, in what is now called Liesbeek Road. She was an old lady of strong character, whose husband had been a partner in the firm of Thos. Watson & Tennant, and had had some business connections with Beaufort.

Remembering the death of Arthur Jackson's first wife at Nelspoort – I used to listen with much interest to her talks with Mama about the very early, difficult days at Beaufort, and especially when she spoke, always with deep feeling, about old Mr. Arthur Jackson's first wife – a beautiful, sensitive young girl, brought out from England and suddenly plunged into conditions for which she was wholly unfitted, and

to which she succumbed at the birth of her first child – the present Arthur Jackson. Mrs. Tennant described how deeply Papa felt for her, and how he dashed off on that night, at , breakneck pace, to Beaufort, to find a doctor — but it was too late. I always understood afterwards why he has such a specially tender feeling for her child. What tragedies lie sleeping in that vast mysterious Karoo, that looks so old and worn and gnarled in the struggles of centuries, that one gazes in silent wonder when, sometimes, in a happy season, it suddenly bursts into the fresh bloom of long-forgotten youth, and every moulderlng bush is transformed into a blaze of colour. Can one doubt that those sleeping tragedies, too, only wait the call of the Eternal to share a like radiant transformation?

Claremont House – First Impressions – All this time Papa was looking out for a permanent home, and at last he got the offer of Claremont House[38] and decided to purchase it from Mr. Logie. Mama was at first not at all pleased with the contemplated change. Apart from the greater distance from Cape Town, she was not attracted by the old house, which seemed to her dark and depressing and too much shut in by trees, for she loved wide, open breezy distances and all the light and sunshine possible, but gradually she became reconciled, as, under Uncle Bisset's direction and Papa's, old passages disappeared and gave place to the wide entrance hall and large windows, while light papers and paint made a cheerful change. The beautiful drawing room was untouched, but the large bedroom was built to correspond with it at the other end, and a new stoep was laid. The quaint old house had two oval windows in front, one of which is now below the roof and over the window at the end of the drawing room.

While the alterations were being made Papa used to enjoy spending whole days watching the workmen, and there we would find him, when we sometimes drove over in the afternoon, seated happily under the deep shade of the oaks, in his light summer coat, his hat off, and a pile of newspapers and a water cooler beside him. Old Mr. Logie, who also owned Greenfield House, had moved there with his wife and four grown-up daughters. We often found him with Papa; he was a dour old Scotchman, and took a sort of grim pleasure in showing us over the garden and grounds and watching our delighted enthusiasm.

When at last we moved over to Claremont we found endless enjoyment in the beautiful old garden, full of interesting trees and shrubs, the vineyard and orchards with their wealth of fruit of every variety, and the woods and wild growth that surrounded them on every side. But Betty and I, then eleven and ten, thirsted for plenty of life and outlet, and we missed the companionship which school life had given us, for now we were obliged to have a governess, and one of the Miss Logies had offered to take that place. She was a conscientious gentle lady, whom we learnt in later years to appreciate, but we seemed then to belong to different worlds which could not assimilate, and we felt cramped and more dependent than ever upon every variety of book we could get hold of.

‘**Quiet old Wynberg’** – In our afternoon walks sometimes Miss Logie would take us to see friends of hers in quiet old Wynberg. One of them was a dear old lady, Mrs. Blanckenberg, whose house is still called by her name. Nearly all Wynberg then belonged to two old Mr. Maynards, who would never sell any land – for which indeed there was no demand – and year after year saw no change of any kind. Proteas and all sorts of wild shrubs and flowers grew in the open land on either side of the Main Road. Between Claremont and Wynberg there were only two houses – which are still standing – India House and Donore – the latter was called the Hermitage, and was seldom occupied, having the name of being haunted.

The Cape Flats – Sometimes we would wander over the flats[39] towards the high white sand hills – about where now the Victoria Road runs, or down to a little farmhouse surrounded by fir trees, like a dark island in a sea of brown reed, amongst which grew lovely flowers. That was long before the advent of

the Australian wattle and of roads and houses, which have altogether altered the character of the flats. In these walks there seemed everywhere to us a feeling of loneliness and longing for a fuller life, and we used to lose ourselves in endless imaginings of school-life adventure. We needed companions, but there were none in our immediate neighbourhood, nor did we easily make friends, so that the occasional children's parties gave more excitement than pleasure, for we always felt shy and strange.

Our greatest happiness was the interchange of visits with Somerset House, and regularly, at least three times a week, Mama would drive there, coming back with the carriage laden with parcels – for all we needed, even to groceries, had to be got in that way from Cape Town, the choice of shops, even there, being then only very limited.

How different at that time was the Main Road— along which a dusty omnibus would run, three or four times in the day, from Wynberg to Town, and as that was the only public conveyance, it can be understood that not many people lived in the suburbs, where there were mostly large estates, and the country was free and open on either side of the road. Even in the villages the little thatched cottages of the Malays and Coloured people never seemed to intrude, but rather gave a picturesque touch. From Sir Thos. Maclear's house at Mowbray to the Toll Gate – where we stopped to pay our ten pence – I can only remember two houses. One was an inn, where the mail carts stopped, called 'Rochester Castle'. It stood bleak and desolate, battered by the full force of the Southeasters, and just beyond was a line of single, sad fir trees, bent nearly double in their long and lonely struggle. The other was a large house on the opposite side of the road at Roodebloem, called Pickering's. Many a time as we struggled through the furious wind, perhaps dashing out of the carriage after a parcel or the coachman's hat careering towards the sea – would someone exclaim, 'Never will anyone build here,' and now Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock (then called Papendorp) cover all that part, and the wind no longer reigns supreme.

[**Note by Robert Molteno, Editor:** Sadly, Caroline's Reminiscences end at this point.]

Endnotes

[1] Hercules Jarvis (1804-1889) first came to live at the Cape in 1816, only a few years after Britain, having seized it from the Dutch during the Napoleonic Wars, had decided to keep it as a permanent colonial possession. Hercules married Elizabeth Maria Vos, who was Dutch (ie an Afrikaner). It is as a result of their various daughters' marriages that the Molteno, Bisset, Blenkins, and Alport families are all related through common descent from Hercules and Elizabeth Maria. Hercules became a prominent local businessman, Mayor of Cape Town, and the city's first member of Legislative Council when representative government was instituted in 1854. Only ten years older than his son in law, John Charles Molteno, the two men became close political colleagues.

[2] The family is fortunate in that in the 1950s Dr R. F. M. Immelman, Chief Librarian of the University of Cape Town Library, wrote a biography of Hercules Jarvis. Unfortunately, it was never published, but I hope to make it available on this website at a later date.

[3] ie. The British Army in India.

[4] There were, of course, no steamships at all at this early date in the Industrial Revolution century.

[5] In addition to Table Mountain itself, Table Bay is overlooked by two smaller massifs, Signal Hill and Lion's Head.

[6] Algoa Bay later saw the town of Port Elizabeth established there. This is where Caroline's elder sister, Betty Molteno, became Headmistress of the Collegiate School for Girls in the late 1880s.

[7] The Moltenos and their descendants do not always remember that they are of part Dutch ancestry because of this marriage of Hercules Jarvis and Maria Vos. John Charles Molteno's children all had, as Caroline vividly recalls in

these *Reminiscences*, a Dutch-speaking grandmother who played a huge part in the home life of the older Molteno brothers and sisters as they grew up.

[8] Caroline adds this footnote: 'This part is now entirely built over and has become a real slum. De Smidt Street turns off the Main Road towards Signal Hill, and following this road recently I found Jarvis Road turning left from it, and above it stood the long low house once lived in by Hercules Jarvis, and now a tenement dwelling for numerous coloured families.'

[9] Caroline is describing here her aunts, the daughters of Hercules and Maria Jarvis. They all married, except for Aunt Emmie (who is mentioned later in these *Reminiscences*). Aunt Sophy and her husband, Mr Percy Alport, sadly never had children because of her lifelong ill-health as a result of rheumatic fever when a child.

[10] Minnie Blenkins, when she grew up, became John Charles Molteno's wife, after the death of his second wife, Maria, in 1874. Minnie was Annie Blenkins' stepdaughter.

[11] Elizabeth Maria Jarvis became John Charles Molteno's wife six years after the tragic death of his first wife during childbirth on her husband's remote Nelspoort farm in the Karoo in 1845.

[12] Slavery was only abolished in the British Empire in 1834.

[13] In her 23 years of marriage to John Charles Molteno, Maria bore fourteen children, four of whom died in infancy – Johnnie, Hercules 'Jarvis', 'Alfred' Bower, and Sophia Mary.

[14] In Afrikaans today, a kos maandjie or food basket.

[15] Little basins or cups.

[16] Central shaft of the wagon to which the oxen would be yoked.

[17] Bazett and Willie Blenkins, Caroline's first cousins, and with whom she and her sister, Betty, shared much of their childhood. Their mother, Aunt Annie, had been widowed in India, as already noted.

[18] Uncle Alport and Aunt Sophy also lived in Beaufort West where Mr Alport ran the village's main store. He became a business partner (in addition to being a brother in law) of John Charles Molteno. These relatives provided Caroline and Betty with another beloved family home during their early childhood in Beaufort.

[19] Percy Molteno, John Charles Molteno's second son, was the brother to whom Caroline felt closest in personal terms and political outlook throughout her life.

[20] Korhaan or Karoo bustard.

[21] Back in the late 1840s, John Charles Molteno had persuaded a couple of his Jackson first cousins (relatives through his mother, Caroline Bower's sister who had married a Jackson), including Arthur, to come out to the Cape where they started by helping him to manage his farms on the Karoo. Several Jackson descendants, who are our very distant cousins, still farm there.

[22] Charlie, or John Charles Molteno, was his father's eldest surviving son. It is through his line that for generations now, the eldest son of the eldest son (going back to John Molteno in London in the very early 19th century) has been christened John Charles. In each generation, they are known, usually in alternate sequence, as John or Charles Molteno.

[23] For those in the family who know Cape Town today, it will strike them as extraordinary, and almost comic, to see how remote these almost inner city suburbs of the city felt one and a half centuries ago.

[24] Hercules and Maria Jarvis's daughter, Betty, married James Bisset (b. 1836), a Scottish engineer and architect who emigrated to the Cape. It is through this marriage that the connection between the Molteno and Bisset families originated. It was reinforced two generations later when Jervis Molteno married Islay Bisset, a granddaughter of James and Betty.

[25] 'Today' meaning around 1913, the date when Caroline began to write down these *Reminiscences.*

[26] Although Caroline had no idea of it, her Uncle Frank Molteno was at this very time a sea captain based in Hawaii and whaling in the Northern Pacific in order to supply the world with oil for its lamps. This was before the age of fossil fuels – oil and gas.

[27] For about a century after Britain took over the Cape Colony, no harbour was actually built at Cape Town. Instead, ships anchored out in Table Bay at a safe distance from the shore, and passengers and freight had to be ferried to

the beach. The jetty Caroline refers to was a later development. It was built at the foot of Adderley Street where it debouched on to the sandy shore where a line of palm trees had been planted.

[28] Aunt Betty, who was a younger sister of Caroline's mother, was in fact only about ten years older than Caroline.

[29] John Charles Molteno's mother was Caroline Bower. She had married John Molteno, and been widowed at an early age in 1827. She had moved to Peckham, then the last village on the drover's track to London from Kent. But by the time Caroline's family stay with her in 1861, the village had long been swallowed up in London's sprawl. Aunt Nancy was John Charles's sister. She had remained in England and married a schoolmaster, Mr Bingle.

[30] Eliza Bingle was a niece of Mr Bingle's and grew up in his and Nancy's household. She became a devoted 'honorary' member of the Molteno family and indeed came out to South Africa on at least one occasion.

[31] Charles Dominic Molteno was John Charles's favourite uncle. Partly due to his long life, he played quite a role in keeping various members of the family in touch with one another. There is a whole interesting history about his wife which will in due course be found elsewhere on this website.

[32] Could this be McMahon?

[33] This tradition of playing chess and bridge seems to have been passed on to subsequent generations in the family. Perhaps the combination of strategy, skill and the joy of winning (always a joy to high achievers) have something to do with it!

[34] Extremely blond hair is a quite frequent occurrence among Moltenos. My younger brother, Patrick, was also nicknamed *witkop* as a child.

[35] Kalk Bay was only 15 or so miles from the centre of Cape Town. But at a time when there was neither a suburban railway nor even a road down the Cape Peninsula, it felt seriously remote. Kalk Bay became the family's favourite seaside place and several members of the family – including Tom Anderson, Wallace Molteno and Frank Molteno – all had holiday houses there in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. My father, Donald Molteno, learned to swim off the rocks at Kalk Bay, and my brothers and I eventually scattered his ashes off the end of the harbour wall there in the early 1990s.

[36] It is confusing that Caroline refers to them as Aunts. They are in fact her Great Aunts and Grandmama is their sister in law. Nor should Great Aunt Sophia, who had married Mr Duus, be confused with her niece, Aunt Sophy, the wife of Percy Alport. Aunt Georgina Jarvis never married. Aunt Emmie is Sophia and Georgina's unmarried Jarvis niece.

[37] This followed the bankruptcy of Hercules Jarvis. The old family home had to be sold and he and his wife went to live near the family in the Claremont/Kenilworth area.

[38] Claremont House became *the* centre of family life for some 60 years until what remained of the estate had to be sold in November 1929 and the old house was demolished.

[39] The Cape Flats are miles and miles of sandy expanse that, lying between Table Bay and False Bay, separate the Cape Peninsula from the Hottentot Mountains where the African plateau begins. Originally under the sea, very little could grow on these shifting sand dunes. Eventually, some Australian species, including Port Jackson 'willow', were introduced to bind the sand. I grew up on the edge of the Flats. Today, they are largely covered by self-built housing that stretches for miles along the False Bay coastline and where a million or more people live.