Sir John C. Molteno, 1814-1886

A Biographical Sketch by R. F. M. Immelman

Introduction

What you have here is a short draft biography of John Charles Molteno (1814-86). He was the first Molteno to live most of his life in Africa and about whom a lot is known. In a separate piece below, I pay tribute to the author, Dr R. F. M. Immelman and explain how he came to write it. But here I want to tell you a little about John Charles Molteno himself.

John Charles Molteno, aged 58, on his appointment as Prime Minister of the Cape in 1872

John Charles Molteno

John Charles was born in Central London in 1814, the eldest of five children. As a child, his family apparently called him Charles, but once at the Cape, he was known as John Molteno. His father, also called John, was the second son of George Anthony Molteno, the first Molteno to come from Milan and settle in England. John was a public servant working as Deputy Keeper of Legacy Duty at Somerset House. He died prematurely – aged only 39 – in 1827 and, as he commented sadly when already very ill, was able to leave no significant assets in his will for his wife, Caroline (nee Bower), to survive on. Caroline's father, George Bower, who was by this time a senior and highly paid official in the Bank of England, found a house where she and her children could live. This was in Rye Lane in the village of Peckham, on the outskirts of London, where he already had his own home. The unexpected impoverishment of Caroline's family meant that the young John Charles had to be pulled out of school at the age of 13 or 14 and go to work as a clerk in the City. He soon realized this was a dead end, and so, as a young lad of seventeen, jumped at the opportunity to emigrate to the Cape Colony in the hope that he might have a better chance of making his way there.

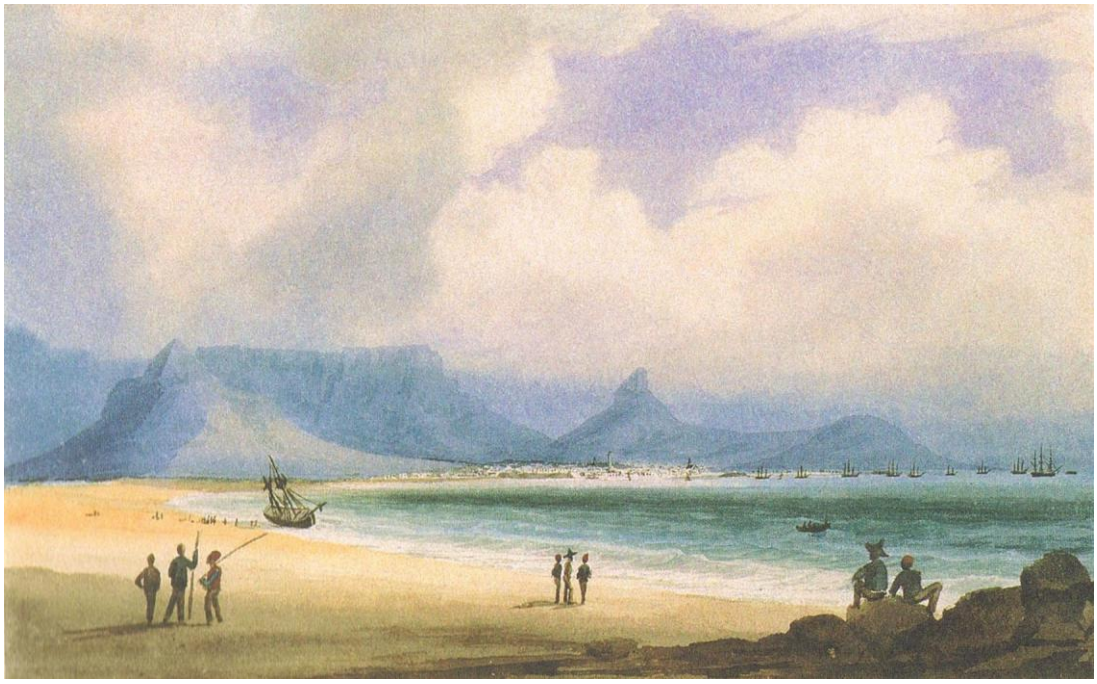


Table Bay looking across at Table Mountain from Milnerton Beach in the first half of 19th century

He arrived in the still very small port of call, Cape Town, in 1831. Although employed initially in the public library, he almost immediately made contact with a firm of import-export merchants. In the course of the next ten years, he built up his own successful wine-exporting business. But when he saw the writing on the wall for Cape wine exports to Britain, he ventured some 400 miles up-country, and bought a vast tract of desolate and drought-prone land north of the tiny settlement of Beaufort West on the Karoo. Here he began to build up a big sheep farm producing wool for export.

A couple of years later, in 1843, and now 29 years old, John married Maria Hewitson. She had lived all her life in Cape Town. Now she suddenly found herself on this remote and primitive farm, miles from anywhere, at Nelspoort. She got pregnant and, tragically, died in childbirth two years later. John was deeply traumatised. But he plunged back into developing his farming enterprise for the next five years.

By 1851, having gone 20 years without seeing his mother or brothers and sisters in London, he was sufficiently well off to make the voyage (by sail, of course, at this time) back to England. On his return to the Cape, he married for the second time. His new wife, Elizabeth Maria, was half-Dutch, the daughter of Hercules Jarvis and his Dutch wife, a Miss Vos. John's marriage was a turning point in his life. He and Elizabeth Maria had ten children who survived infancy; and it is from them that the Moltenos, Murrays, Andersons, Stanfords and other branches of our family are descended. What is more, Hercules Jarvis, who was only 11 years older than his new son-in-law, became John's political mentor. When Britain decided to set up an elected legislature a few years later in 1854, both Hercules and John stood and were elected.

Quite soon, John realized that an elected legislature with little control over the executive – it continued to be controlled from the Colonial Office in London – was not in a position to steer the future development of the territory. In 1860, therefore, he began a decade-long campaign to win what was called Responsible Government – namely local self-rule in all matters except foreign policy and defence – from a reluctant imperial authority.

The work involved as a very active member of the legislature led John, on his return from a second trip to England in 1861 (also by sail and taking several months), to move his home from Beaufort West to Cape Town. In 1863 he bought Claremont House which was situated a few miles south of the town centre in what was still largely countryside. For the next sixty years Claremont House became the hub of Molteno family life in Cape Town.

When the British Government finally conceded Responsible Government in 1872, John was asked to become the first Prime Minister, following of course a vote of confidence by Parliament. For the next six years, he threw himself into initiating a series of measures to promote the economic development of the Colony. It should be remembered that the Cape, before the discovery of gold in 1886 on the Witwatersrand, was far and away the dominant territory in Southern Africa in geographical extent and economic activity.

Tragedy struck the family in 1874 when Elizabeth Maria, having given birth to her 14th child in 23 years of marriage, died. John was dumb-founded, as his daughter Caroline makes clear. But he reacted in a manner that caused further upset and sorrow for his children by remarrying within months – a young woman, Sobella 'Minnie' Blenkins, who was 30 years his junior and only a few years older than his own eldest daughters.

Then in 1878 a disagreement over who should have the final say over policy broke out between the Prime Minister and the Governor. Sir Bartle Frere, acting in a manner contrary to the spirit of Responsible Government, dismissed John as Prime Minister and cobbled together a narrow parliamentary majority for a compliant successor, Gordon Sprigg.

John, by now ageing significantly after a lifetime of exertion, retired from politics. But he was drawn in again when the Sprigg administration collapsed three years later. He refused to serve a second term as Prime Minister but did hold ministerial office for a year or so in the new Prime Minister, Thomas Scanlon's, administration. Following his final retirement in June 1882, the British Goverment conferred a knighthood on him and he became Sir John Molteno, K.C.M.G.(Knight Commander of Order of St Michael and St George). He and his wife, Minnie, moved to England later that year. But homesick for the Cape, he returned in 1886, and died soon after his arrival in Cape Town.

Why John Molteno is such an important figure in the history of the family

John and his wife, Elizabeth Maria, had a very large family – ten children in all. Each of them, except the eldest daughter Betty, married and had children. It is from these grandchildren of John that so many Moltenos, scattered around the world today, are descended.

He was also, of course, the maker of the family's Africa connections. While this relates mainly to South Africa, there has also been a branch of the family in Kenya ever since two of John's grandsons, Jarvis and Lenox Murray, moved there over a century ago and became farmers. Lenox's descendants are still there.

John's farming and entrepreneurial success had a huge impact on the lives of his descendants. He took advantage of the rising market in wool in the mid 19th century and made a significant income out of raising merino sheep on the Karoo. He also engaged in other commercial activities. He and his brother in law, Percy Alport, built up Beaufort West's main shop and supplier. They also started a small bank. And following the discovery of diamonds in 1869, John set up a transport rider business with several ox-wagons plying the route from East London to Kimberley. Apart from his own huge energy and hard work, he always employed managers, which relieved him of the day to day running of his various ventures.

His prosperity made lots of things possible. Claremont House was not just a home, but came with about 100 acres of land. As Cape Town grew, the estate became prime surburban land. Over the years following his death, the family gradually sold off bits of it as building plots. And these became today's suburb of Kenilworth stretching between Claremont and Wynberg and down to the suburban railway at Harfield Road.

John Charles could also afford to travel back to England on several occasions. Following his first trip in 1851, he went again in 1861, 1871 and in the 1880s. These trips helped keep up a few tenuous links with his family in England – in particular his mother until her death in 1866, his much loved Uncle Charles Dominic Molteno (who died in 1873), and his younger sister Nancy. She had married John Edward Bingle, a school master who owned an educational institution in Richmond. Nancy outlived her brother and only died in 1892. John never saw his younger brother, Frank, again because he had emigrated to Hawaii. These Pacific islands were so remote that Frank was never able to return to London even for a visit. This was sad because he was a particularly loved member of the family. As for the other brother, Fred, he was in Australia at the time of John's second visit to England in 1861. Fred did return to London a few years later. But he was seen as something of the 'black sheep' of the family. He was always hard up, trying out a shifting kaleidoscope of occupations from 'commission agent' to 'journalist' and 'classical tutor' – as he described himself in successive census returns. He lived at various addresses in Peckham and Lambeth. But there is no record of him and John contacting each other, let alone meeting when the latter was visiting England, nor indeed of any contact between their respective offspring despite their being, of course, first cousins.

Another spin-off of John's financial success was that he was able to afford to send six of his sons to Cambridge – Percy, James, Victor, Ted, Harry and Clifford. Their elder sister, Betty, also went, but only for a short time in the mid 1880s. They were the first Moltenos to go to university. And they became as a result lawyers, doctors and progressive farmers. Education and marriage lifted John's children and his grandchildren firmly into the middle classes!

I should mention one last consequence of his prosperity. During the last 25 years of his life, it made it possible for him to devote much of his time, certainly during the parliamentary sessions, to his political

activity. The eventual outcome of this, as I have already pointed out, was his becoming the first Prime Minister of a British colony in Africa. Two of his sons, Charlie and James, took advantage of their father's reputation and also became Members of Parliament in the 1890s. And in the next generation, my own father, Donald Molteno, was asked by the African National Congress (ANC) to stand for election in 1937 as their Member of Parliament. This followed his involvement as their lawyer in the constitutional case which challenged the racist removal of Africans from the voters' role in the Cape Province. Donald went on to play a major role in the 1950s and '60s in the struggle to resist the remorseless onslaught of apartheid on the lives of ordinary South Africans, and to uphold the values of non-racialism, human rights and democracy. In this very dark period of South Africa's history, he served twice as President of the South African Institute of Race Relations, was a leading figure in the Civil Rights League, and authored the Progressive Party's constitutional programme for the restoration of a colour-blind franchise (albeit not a universal franchise) in the early 1960s.

What kind of man was John?

We get some idea from Dr Immelman's biography. But I would like to describe here how remarkable and attractive a man John Molteno was. We have as evidence not just the facts of what he did in life, but also the recollections of his political colleagues and his children, in particular his daughters, Caroline and Betty.

John was brought up as a Christian. He makes specific reference to his religious faith in one of his early letters to his mother. Writing to her in 1842 – after he had got out of the failing wine trade, but before he was making significant money from sheep farming – he tells her, slightly sadly:

> 'Although I have not succeeded in pecuniary matters, I have gained what is of infinitely more value – sound views on religion and a firm conviction of the vain and transitory nature of the things of this life.' And he goes on: 'although it is true I do not often write much on the subject, you must not therefore come to the conclusion that I think little on it; quite the contrary. I hope and trust that no act or deed of mine is uninfluenced by religion…'

But he was not concerned with denominational affiliations. His parents had baptised him a Roman Catholic. He married Elizabeth Maria Jarvis, who grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church, to which she remained loyal all her life. The ceremony was conducted by a minister of Die Groote Kerk, the earliest Dutch Reformed Church building at the Cape. And he was buried at the end of his life in the Church of England graveyard at St Saviour's, Claremont. There is even some slight evidence that religious faith was not something important to him. *A Biographical Dictionary of Ancient, Medieval and Modern Freethinkers* published in 1920 even lists John Charles, and quotes his son Percy as saying that, although his father's life was 'in the highest sense religious' [the usual orthodox description of a free thinker who was a good man, J. McCabe, the author of the *Dictionary,* comments], he was, continues Percy, 'above the narrow formulates of any sect.'

As for his physical appearance, 'he had the rough words and appearance of a farmer.... With the flowing beard he grew in later life, together with his height, his typical big dusty black coat and his deep booming voice, the "Beaufort Boer" made for a commanding and memorable figure.' (SABC broadcast). 'Sir John Molteno was a man of commanding presence and great physical strength. In private life, he was of most simple and unostentatious habits.' (*Dictionary of National Biography,* 1901). Indeed for many years he used to ride on horseback all the way to Beaufort West, something his political opponents used to tease him about since it would have been much more comfortable to travel by cart or coach.

Great energy was perhaps the defining characteristic of his life. This spilled over into being very demanding of everyone around him. Certainly, his employees felt exhausted by him! And he didn't shrink from dragging his wife off to England in 1861 when she was pregnant with Percy. And doing so on a sailing vessel rather than taking a steamship which, primitive as they were in those days, would at least have made for a much shorter voyage. And then, on the same long holiday, he took the family all over the Continent to see the sights, as his daughter, Caroline, describes in her *Reminiscences*.

Enthusiasm, in fact, was another of his characteristics. On a subsequent trip to Europe in 1871, for example, he and his two eldest daughters, Betty and Caroline, visited the famous Postojna Cave in Slovenia. They arrived in Trieste and took the train up through the mountains. Immediately, John Charles realized that this new railway could help persuade people at the Cape that it was possible to drive a railway through mountainous terrain, and that his project to build a long distance line up on to the platteland was therefore realistic. So he dashed off a letter bubbling over with the idea.

He was a very warm-hearted man. He was devastated when his first wife, Maria, died in child birth at Nelspoort without him at her side (in desperation when things went wrong, he had ridden off to Beaufort West, a distance of at least 30 miles, to try and get help). And he loved his children very actively, talking with them at home about political and intellectual matters, writing to them when he was away, and taking them travelling with him whenever possible. He had an enquiring mind. He subscribed to a couple of leading intellectual magazines published in London, and his son, James, describes how he loved to have articles read to him, and to discuss and argue over them.

He was also courageous. As a boy of 17, he emigrated to the distant and almost unknown territory of the Cape Colony, 6,000 miles and a three or four months sail over the seas. When the wine trade failed, he rode on horseback hundreds of miles into the interior and decided to carve out a new occupation as a farmer in the harsh terrain of the Karoo. And when a few years later in 1847, the Seventh Frontier War broke out three or four hundred miles away in the Eastern Cape, he immediately joined the Beaufort West commando and rode off with his fellow burgers to take part in the fighting. They soon elected him Assistant Commandant.

The public weal was important to him. He felt an obligation to take part in public life. He got elected to the local council in Beaufort West. He served in Parliament for nearly 30 years where he had a reputation as a conscientious, hard-working Member. And as Dr Immelman's biography shows, once he gained office as Prime Minister, he drove forward a variety of measures to advance the welfare of the Colony's inhabitants.

Probity was an assumption with him, and the foundation, in part, of his political reputation. What he committed himself to, he carried through. What he believed, he said. And in a forthright manner. One particular incident shows this very clearly. When the British Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, was trying to foist a Confederation on Southern Africa (under British imperial sovereignty, of course), someone floated the idea that the British Government would reward John with an honour if he abandoned his opposition and went along with the government's wishes. John was unequivocal and contemptuous in his rejection of this attempt to buy his support.

His significance in South African history

John Molteno, and indeed the whole generation of liberal Cape politicians who rejected anti-Boer prejudice and political discrimination against their fellow citizens of colour, are today almost completely forgotten figures in South African history. What they stood for was swept aside by a number of developments. The Cape's economic primacy gave way to the Transvaal following the discovery of the world's richest deposits of gold on the Witwatersrand after 1886. An increasingly bitter and zenophobic Afrikaner nationalism grew up in response to British policy towards the Boer Republics. Both factors resulted in sidelining the Cape political tradition after the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. And a new axis of political conflict in the country came to the fore in the 1950s with the rise of more militant Black resistance to racial discrimination, segregation, political exclusion, and the bureaucratized persecution of millions of ordinary African, Coloured and Indian South Africans under apartheid.

The irony is that today, nearly a century and a half after John Molteno became Prime Minister of the Cape in 1872, many of the values he stood for are now enshrined in South Africa's democratic constitution. The South Africans who drafted it in the early 1990s were probably mostly not aware that they were reverting to the Cape's largely forgotten tradition of a rigid constitution, an independent judiciary, a colour-blind franchise, enforceable civil rights, and the political notion that the duty of government is to govern in the interests of *all* the people, not just some ethnic fraction.

It is very easy to feel there isn't much use thinking about the political approach or specific policies pursued by a politician who was influential in his country 150 years ago. Our world today is so different from the mid 19th century. Or is it? We still face questions of sovereignty. In Britain, for example, there is the divisive issue of our membership of the EU and the transfer of limited powers to Brussels that it entails. Immigration and racial prejudice are still big questons in many countries, Britain included. And what is the proper role of government in managing the economy? Should government promote development? What can be done about poverty? In whose interests should a political party govern – the country's, or some particular segment of the population? Indeed, are democratic institutions to be taken for granted, or must they still be fought for where they donot yet exist, and defended where they do? The specific *form* a political issue takes may look different across the ages and in different countries. But the *underlying substance* of what is at stake is often very similar.

This is why it is useful to examine John Charles Molteno's political record. Particularly for South Africans. For nearly 20 years, he fought for the people of the Cape Colony to be self-governing, and free from the dominance of British interests and Whitehall decision-making. And when the struggle was won, he became the first Prime Minister of a new self-governing state that stretched over half the landmass of South Africa. For six years, 1872-78, his administration laid the foundations for a modern country.

A word of warning, however, when talking about politics so long ago. Words change their meanings over time. When we see a political label used in the 19th century, we must not assume that it meant the same thing then as it would today. Let me give a couple of examples. In John Molteno's time Eastern Cape political figures like Gordon Sprigg often described themselves as 'progressives'. They were of the view that it was progressive to support an expansion of the British Empire in Southern Africa, to curb the power of chiefs, and to replace communal rights over land with private tenure. John Molteno did not regard such steps as 'progressive'. Indeed he was suspicious of British imperial intentions to foist its Confederation scheme on Southern Africa. He was also accused by some white critics of preserving the power of chiefs in places like Basutoland and holding back white settlement.

Or take another example which shows the confusion which political labels can create. Historians might describe John Molteno as a liberal. And so, I would argue, he was in certain specific ways. But modern Americans might be confused by this because, in the United States today, the term 'liberal' is used by right-wing politicians to decry advocates of 'big government' and state-provided social welfare. John Molteno was not a liberal in those senses.

So what was he? Liberal? Progressive? Or Conservative, as John X Merriman asserted in a tribute to him years after his death? It is simply misleading to use one or two adjectives like this to characterise him. For a serious evaluation of what he did, and his relevance to questions still facing democratic South Africa in the 21st century, we must look at what he did issue by issue.

Independence from British colonial control

he first issue was relations with Great Britain. That country was at the time by far the largest, richest and most dominant European imperial power. But, in every British colony, the fundamental question was how long the local population, whether indigenous or immigrant, would go on acquiescing in the imperial government in London controlling local policy. Could Whitehall even do it competently? In military terms, certainly, John Molteno's personal experience of British troops in the Seventh Frontier War had taught him that the British Army was led by an arrogant officer corps drawn from a narrow social class, and that its *modus operandi* was unsuited to African conditions. Its subsequent defeats at Majuba, Isandhlwana and during the Boer War proved this time and time again.

But even more important than the question of competence was the issue: in whose interests would Whitehall determine policy for a particular colony? Would it reflect the economic priorities of the British business class at home? Or would local economic development, including encouraging a balanced economy, take precedence? In this respect, John had witnessed the collapse of the Cape wine trade at the end of the 1830s when Britain altered its tariff policy towards French imports with no consideration of the impact on the Cape.

Much later, when he was already Prime Minister, he experience, and became a victim of, the unwisdom of British strategic policy. This happened when a new Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, pursued his attempt in the late 1870s to force the Boer Republics into the British Empire at gunpoint, thus catalysing the growth of Afrikaner nationalism.

John Molteno concluded as early as 1860 that it was essential for the Cape, and by implication South Africa more generally, to have sovereign, locally controlled governments that could reflect local public opinion and act in its interests. In this respect his decade-long fight for responsible government was a forerunner of both Afrikaner nationalists' determination to have a fully sovereign South Africa in the 20th century and the goal of independence for all African countries which African nationalists fought for.

Little wonder, then, that John Molteno took the lead in fighting for the independence of the Cape government from British control. This was in line with the autonomy that the two Boer Republics to the north of the Cape had already asserted from the 1840s on. It was also part of the wider movement in British colonies of settlement – the Canadian provinces, the Australian colonies and New Zealand. The demands of Britons who had settled in these territories grew out of the same conviction that the American colonists had formulated when they staged their Revolution in 1776 and fought Britain militarily for their independence. Government must be close to the people geographically. It must be controlled by people living under its authority if policies are to have any hope of reflecting the interests of the local population

as opposed to those living in the imperial metropole. This basic democratic impulse was reflected in the generations that followed – the struggle for independence of subject peoples throughout the British, and indeed the other European empires, the founding of the Indian National Congress in the late 19th century being a landmark in that historical process.

In this respect, John Molteno undoubtedly played a 'progressive' role.

Parliamentary institutions and probity in politics

The constitutional model which came with Responsible Government at the Cape in 1872 involved in broad terms a replica of British parliamentary institutions and practices. As in its other colonies where it conceded it, the British Government now gave way to local decision-making, with the Prime Minister and his ministers responsible to the elected legislature. But two limitations on local competence remained. At this stage in British imperial history, the British Government still demanded control over foreign policy and declarations of war and peace. Indeed it was only after the First World War that Britain was forced to concede in the Statute of Westminster that Commonwealth membership implied no right of British Cabinets to commit Commonwealth countries in either foreign policy, or matters of war and peace.

John Molteno was reluctant from the start, to accept these limitations to the Cape Government's competence. In 1875 he got Parliament to approve a resolution to annex Walvis Bay 'and the surrounding territory' – in effect, the whole of what would become South West Africa lying between the Northern Cape and Angola. But the Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, vetoed the idea. As for war and peace, when the Ninth Frontier War began in 1877, John Molteno struggled to avert overt war. Instead he treated the conflict as a police matter and even got the Governor initially to undertake not to send British Army units across the border.

So far as the actual working of parliamentary institutions was concerned, John became well known as a conscientious parliamentary practitioner. He was a Member of Parliament for almost 30 years from 1854 to 1882. Contemporary accounts all agree he took his parliamentary role very seriously, always attending debates and vigorously participating when he had things to say. J. H. de Villiers (later Lord de Villiers), whom John Molteno appointed to his Cabinet as his first Attorney General, recalls 'Molteno was a fighter who did not mind hard knocks, as long as he could return them.' And Richard W. Murray 'Limner') described him when he was first elected in 1854:

> 'The representative of Beaufort is good-natured with everyone and everything but the Government and the Eastern Cape representatives. He is apparently in the prime of life and a man of ample proportions – cultivates his beard or rather allows it to cultivate itself – has an intellectual appearance, a bright and restless eye, is easily amused and takes a very active share in the business of the House.'

And in a documentary put out by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), it was said, 'he was an adept debater and orator, but his public speeches were notoriously informal and impromptu'.

Equally important, he was a man of outstanding probity. It was only after he left office that the diamond magnate, Cecil John Rhodes, decided to spread his wings from big business into politics. Cape politics became awash with cash in the 1890s and the first big corruption scandal came about. By contrast, when John Molteno had been in office, he had run a tight financial ship, with no whiff of corruption. And when

Lord Carnarvon had tried to get him to abandon his opposition to the Confederation Scheme, John Molteno scornfully rejected the attempt to influence him with the promise of honours.

Development and Government's proper role in relation to it

Turning to the substance of policy – what governments actually *do* – John Molteno's government faced the classic issues that so many governments in Africa and Asia faced after independence. What should the role of government be in the wake of a sleepy colonial administration which, to the extent it had done anything much to promote economic development, often allowed policy simply to reflect the interests of British business at home. One example of this was British concerns after the Second World War to strengthen the sterling area – which led it to keep control over its colony of Malaya's huge foreign exchange earnings from its rich tin and rubber sectors. The issue facing newly independent governments becomes even more pressing when rich mineral and oil discoveries are made. Who should develop them? What taxation arrangements should be put in place? How should government spend the money? Indeed would government make sure the resulting revenues did not leak away into the pockets of a tiny corrupt minority?

John Molteno's administration faced precisely these choices. Diamonds had been discovered only three years before he formed his administration. The Cape Government's revenues looked set to increase. The economy started growing very fast. Large numbers of immigrants flowed in from Europe. The agricultural-based economy found itself playing second fiddle to the new mining sector with its demand for workers, as well as the export revenues it brought in. Whole new classes emerged. In particular, a tiny group of ultra-wealthy mining magnates arose and began to throw its weight around politically in the Cape and in the South African Republic. And a much larger number of skilled and unskilled workers also emerged – which introduced the start of class-based politics in South Africa.

The big issue John Molteno faced was what role, if any, government should play in promoting economic development. His decision was clear. What the country needed was a vastly improved transport infrastructure. That meant, first, much better shipping services between the Cape and England. Various companies already sailed this route. But there was no regularity of service, nor a sense that it was important to be able to make a quicker voyage. John Molteno entered into negotiations with Sir Donald Currie's Castle Line. Ironing out the details of an agreement took time. The key thing John Molteno decided was that the Cape Government should spend some money on what was in effect a subsidy to the shipping industry. In return for this contractual payment, the Castle Line committed itself to a regular weekly mail boat service, and cutting the number of days the voyage would take. Both commitments cost the company huge sums of money because new and faster ships had to be built. This investment did not take place until the Cape Government decided to spend its own money supporting the improved shipping connection.

The second, and far more expensive and risky, decision John Molteno's administration took was to modernise communications *within* the country. In the second half of the 19th century, that meant building railways. Hitherto, only two or three very short lines existed, none of them crossing the mountain barriers into the interior. John Molteno realized the necessity of building a long distance line, some seven hundred miles in length, to Kimberly which was the centre of diamond mining in the Cape. Ox-wagons simply could not supply the heavy mining equipment, or consumer and other goods, on the scale and within the time-frame that the mushrooming mining sector required. It so happened that, during a trip round Europe which he had taken with his daughters, Betty and Caroline, the year before he became Prime Minister, they had arrived in Trieste. Wanting to visit the famous Postojna Cave in Slovenia, the three of them caught a train on 10 November 1871. The line went through the Carpathian Mountains. It immediately struck John

that this showed it was technically possible to build railways through mountain barriers, and he wrote off excitedly to colleagues at the Cape to this effect.

He must also have concluded that the private sector had neither the capital nor appetite to take the risk of undertaking this huge infrastructure development itself. He therefore persuaded the Cape Parliament that it should raise the necessary loans. This happened and railway construction began. It was a slow process and the railway only reached Kimberly a few years after he had ceased to be Prime Minister.

There is a rather lovely account of how John Molteno himself determined the route the railway should follow. The story came out at a talk which Sir David Tennant, Agent-General for the Cape of Good Hope Government, gave on 2 November 1897 to the Royal Colonial Institute in London. It was entitled 'The Railway System of South Africa'. In the discussion that followed, Sir David was asked how the decision had actually been made. A Mr B W Murray stood up in the audience and said:

> 'I think I can help him. We had in South Africa, when responsible government became a fait accompli, as our first Premier Mr – afterwards Sir John – Molteno, and he was faced by a powerful Opposition. Ministerialists as well as Oppositionists were loyal to the interests of this country. It is singular that in South Africa its public works have not been conceived or designed by professional men. When Mr Molteno formulated his railway scheme, he sent for his consulting engineer, who asked him what was the route he desired. Mr Molteno asked for a map of South Africa, which was brought to him. Taking a ruler he drew his pen along it in a direct line from Cape Town to Beaufort West. "But," said the engineer, "that means you go slap bang at the Hex River Mountains." "Never mind," said Mr. Molteno, "that is the way I want to go." And that is the way it did go. The Opposition was not in accord with the route, but seeing that it endangered railway construction by not agreeing to it, they accepted the Molteno line. With this result: after twenty minutes' discussion the Cape Parliament — that is, the House of Assembly — passed a vote of £4,000,000 for railway construction. Rather smart legislation that, I think.'

What is relevant for our own times is that both these key development policies involved abandoning a minimalist view of the role of government, and instead using public financial resources and creditworthiness to kickstart key infrastructural investments. In the case of the new sea links with Britain, the Cape Government relied on the private sector to deliver the investment and improved service. But the railways became a public asset.

Social policy

Development, of course, not just a matter of economic growth. Indeed economic development needs social investment, including notably an educated population. John Molteno's government, as Dr Immelman's biography makes clear, took at least two important steps in the field of education. One was to expand public libraries across the country. The government decided to subsidise each library on a pound for pound basis. This required local communities and authorities to commit their own resources too. Interestingly, this model has a very modern ring to it. In Britain the central government often now promises only matching funding of this kind. The result at the Cape, Dr Immelman who was himself an eminent South African librarian argues, was to lay the legal and financial basis for library expansion for decades to come.

The second important step was to encourage university education. One of the earliest measures of the new administration was legislation in 1873 to set up the University of the Cape of Good Hope. This was a body which laid down course curricula, organized examinations and awarded degrees.

Would a British colonial administration have done the same things? All we can say is that it had not done so in the preceding three-quarters of a century of direct rule from Whitehall.

As for ordinary schools, we have to remember that Britain itself had not yet introduced universal state-funded primary schooling. At the Cape, there were a growing number of schools, but they were private initiatives, often Church or Mission organized, and they usually charged fees of some kind. Further research is needed to find out what, if anything, the Molteno administration did to expand schooling.

Relations between English-speakers and Dutch-speakers

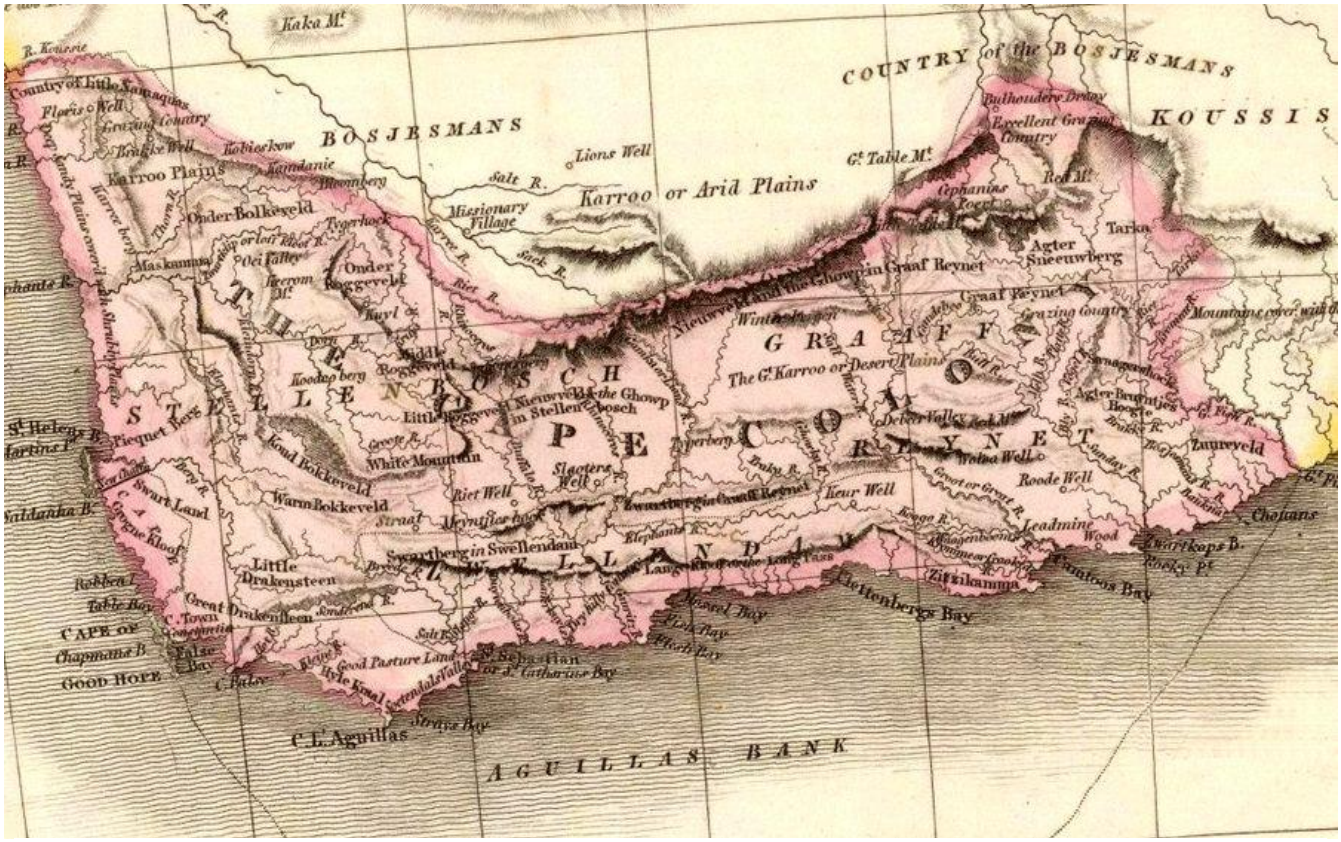
Relations between the Dutch-speaking Boers and the new wave of English-speaking immigrants after 1820 was another big issue. John Molteno believed that members of each community should respect one another and work together for the good of the country. And that government should not act in the sectional interest of one or other group. To understand one reason why he believed this, we ought to remember his own circumstances. His mother-in-law, Hercules Jarvis's wife, was a 'Boer'. His wife, Elizabeth Maria, grew up speaking Dutch at home. John himself was surrounded on the Karoo by Dutch-speaking farmers. And when he stood for the Beaufort West District Council, he was elected by a predominantly Dutch-speaking electorate. What is more, one of his closest friends was Oom Dirk de Jongh, with whom he travelled around Europe in 1861. What he took from all this was not just a liking and respect for his Dutch-speaking compatriots, but a conviction of the overriding importance of good Dutch-English relations and, in political terms, a determination not to ride roughshod over the Dutch community. This is why he opposed the attempt by Britain to get its way over a Confederation of all Southern Africa by force against the Boer Republics in the 1870s. This aggressive stance, of course, ended up 20 years later in the Boer War and the political disaster of South African 20th century history that was its direct consequence.

The Elephant in the room – the place of Black and Brown South Africans in the politics, economy and social life of the country

The fundamental question at the Cape, and in all the new states of South Africa, was always what the place of Black and Brown South Africans should be in politics, the economy and social life. White politicians often acted as though the issue could be ignored. But that only delayed the ultimate necessity of answering it.

To understand what was at stake requires rigorous thinking. It is easy to slip into slack-jawed conventionalities. The Cape in the 19th century was in one sense a geographical arena inhabited by a number of ethnically diverse elements. Some people – Khoi-khoi and San – had lived there long before Dutch and French, and later British, immigrants from Europe settled following the Dutch East India Company's annexing of the Cape Peninsula and setting up a supply station there for its ships to the East Indies. This settlement led in turn to people from beyond Africa and Europe being brought to the Cape – mainly Malay-speaking Javanese, Muslim by religion, and initially coming as slaves. All slaves, however, had been freed from the formal conditions of slavery (as opposed to poverty and continuing dependence on white employers) in the 1830s. A fourth and growing element in the Cape community were people of mixed ancestry, with every kind of permutation of Dutch, British, Khoi-khoi, San, Malay and Bantu-speaking origins. Particularly in the Northern Cape, small groups of Basters, Afrikaners, Griquas etc pursued a largely subsistence existence in very remote areas.

The fifth – and during the 19th century most rapidly growing – section of the Cape's population were Nguni-speaking Africans. They were living in the most contested part of the Colony from the late 18th century – the Eastern Frontier and the lands beyond. This was where the main military clashes took place between white settlers moving from the south and west into the well watered regions already occupied Nguni-speakers. By the time John Charles Molteno arrived at the Cape in 1831, these Frontier Wars had been going on for half a century. He himself fought in a Boer commando in the Seventh Frontier War of 1846-47.



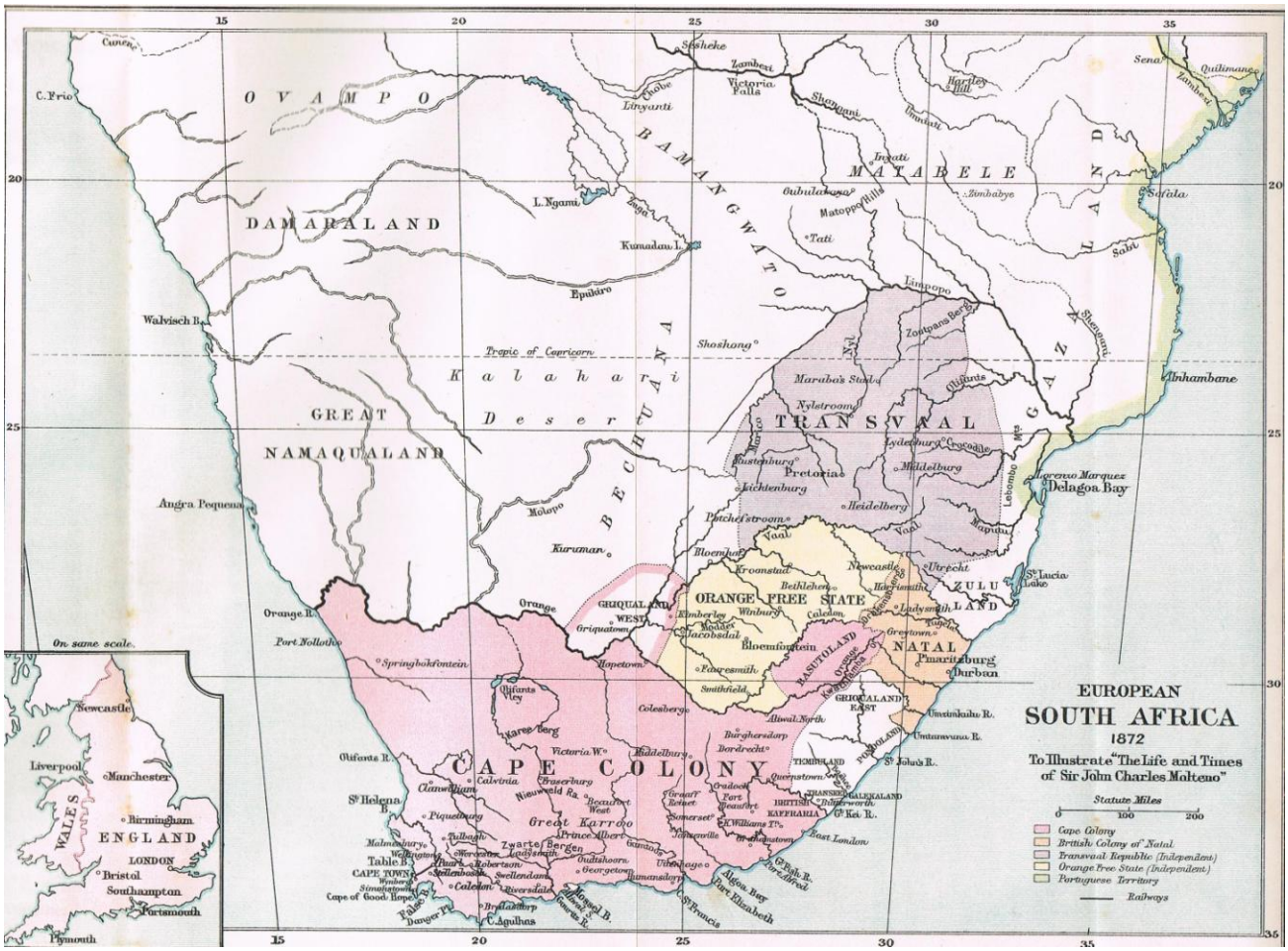
The Cape Colony in the early 19th century

The Cape had two questions which had to be resolved. First, given the fact that the territory beyond its boundaries stretching along the Eastern Coast between the Cape Colony and the much newer colony of Natal was densely inhabited, what ought policy to be? We know the final outcome. By the end of the Ninth Frontier War (1877-78), the way had been opened militarily for the extension of the Cape boundary right up to Natal. This was done formally in 1894. We also know that the century-long series of Frontier Wars took place not as a result of some long-term strategy of territorial expansion on the part of the Dutch East India Company in the late 18th century, or the British colonial administration throughout the 19th century. Rather the wars usually broke out, as is the case with so many wars, as a result of chance events on the ground which then escalated and turned into full-scale armed conflicts.

To talk about what 'ought' to have happened is not a very sensible historical exercise – as with most 'what if' questions. The reality was encounters between people living in radically different types of social and economic system, with mutual incomprehension, and competing for scarce land. With both sides

possessing weapons of various kinds and an absence in the colonial era of peace-making institutions, warfare was probably inevitable. Similar historical trajectories had taken place in North and South America and Australasia.

No frontier war took place during John Molteno's period as Prime Minister until the last year of his administration. But when the Ninth War did break out in August 1877, he insisted that the Cape's local forces comprising 'mounted commandos of mainly Boer, Thembu and Fengu origin' under the local command of Chief Magistrate Charles Griffith and Commander Veldman Bikitsha deal with the matter. He rejected the conflict being used a pretext for British conquest of Gcalekaland and moving the frontier eastwards. John Molteno also extracted an initial commitment from the Governor, Sir Bartle Frere, not to allow British Army regulars to cross the border and get involved. John Molteno also rejected billing the Cape Government for the cost of bringing these imperial troops in. The upshot was that Sir Bartle Frere dismissed John as Prime Minister despite a vote of no confidence in him not having taken place in Parliament. The Governor proceeded to replace him with a more compliant politician, Gordon Sprigg, who for three years avoided a vote of no confidence by persuading sufficient Members of Parliament not to rock the boat.



'European' South Africa at the time John Molteno became Prime Minister, 1872

The second question demanding an answer was much more important. Given that the Cape Colony existed, albeit within steadily expanding boundaries and a growing inflow of newcomers from Europe and from

Africa beyond the colony's Eastern Frontier, what should be the rights of those who found themselves living within those boundaries? In particular, given the linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the population, should everyone by accepted as living in a single country which they shared with one another? This question had profound implications. Should everyone be recognized as participating in an economy they were all part of in one way or another? Should all people be equal before the law? If so, this would mean that everyone living in the Cape Colony would have the same legal rights, and be subject to the same courts. And would have the right to take any job they could get. And to buy and own property, notably land, wherever they could find a willing seller. As for personal relations, it would be up to each individual who they became friends with, or lived with, or chose to marry.

This acceptance of everyone at the Cape living in a common society was the basic legal situation. It had profound political implications too. It meant that every adult had the right to qualify for access to the franchise and the right to hold elected office. The franchise in the 19th century was, of course, not universal in any country. Women were excluded. And all potential male voters had to meet certain 'qualifications' – a job, or education, or a certain amount of property. But in a common society, there could be no manipulation of franchise qualifications in order to engineer excluding members of a particular community. The long-term implication of these legal provisions, even if not much realized by whites who were the great majority of voters at the beginning, was that the proportion of voters and elected representatives who were not 'European' in origin would rise as education, prosperity and the purchase of land increased the numbers who would qualify. In the Cape, this meant a growing proportion of electors coming from the original indigenous population, the former slaves whom the Dutch had brought in (socalled Cape Malays), the growing number of people of mixed ancestry and lastly, Xhosa-speaking Africans, more and more of whom found themselves incorporated into the Cape Colony as a result of the Frontier Wars.

The situation in which 'race' was irrelevant to legal and political rights is, of course, what South Africa is today. It was not what South Africa was during almost the whole of the 20th century when the dominant white community, and in particular Afrikaner nationalists after 1912, rejected the notion of all South Africans being participants in a shared society. Instead, racial classification, residential segregation, racially discriminatory restrictions on the right to live and travel anywhere in one's own country, denial of skilled jobs, and political exclusion of Black and Brown South Africans became the order of the day.

It is absolutely clear that John Molteno's vision was built on acceptance of a common society. He wanted the Western and Eastern districts of the Province to remain together in a single country. He believed there was no great divide between English and Dutch-speaking South Africans. The constitutional arrangements he operated under involved a franchise open to all who qualified – black, brown and white. There was no question of *legal* restrictions by way of colour on who could stand for office. Nor on his watch did any manipulation of electoral qualifications for communal advantage take place. This was something that Cecil Rhodes did openly in the 1890s after John Molteno had passed from the scene. Nor did the law provide for segregation or discrimination. Everyone (except women!) was in principle equal before the law.

John had learned his politics early on from his father in law, Hercules Jarvis. It is relevant therefore to note that Hercules Jarvis was very much aware of his Malay and Coloured electors in Cape Town. On being elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly in 1854 (the same election John Molteno won a seat on the Karoo), Jarvis specifically referred to the Assembly as having been built on 'on liberal and enlightened principles'. And he went on:

> 'I cannot conclude, however, without thus publicly expressing my thanks to some of my fellow citizens, who do not generally take part in our proceedings, and of whom I am happy to see so many in our midst. I allude to the imposing array of Malay priests, who have so much influence among

> their adherents, and who I feel assured are here today to give me their support. I will only say that it will ever be my wish to support them in anything they may wish to bring forward in the future Parliament, should I have an opportunity of doing so. [Cheers and murmurs.]'

One more point needs to be made. Britain's ousting of John Molteno as Prime Minister turned out to be an important political turning point in South African history generally. His removal opened the road to the British military attack on the Boer Republics at the end of the 1870s. This aggression, in turn, laid the foundation for the emergence of modern Afrikaner nationalism. And when after the Second Boer War (1899-1902), a Liberal government in London restored self-rule to Afrikaners in 1907, it cravenly conceded that the electoral basis would not be the colour-blind franchise of the Cape, but the racially defined 'whites only' model of the defeated Boer Republics. This historic error was repeated by the Liberals three years later when the British Parliament passed the Union of South Africa Act in 1910. By giving White South Africans a political monopoly, this opened the way to the whole racist tragedy of 20th century South African history – with its indescribable suffering for all Black and Brown South Africans over three generations.

A definitive assessment of John Charles Molteno's political record will require more detailed historical research. I also have no evidence, one way or the other, about how far he shared the social prejudices of so many white people in South Africa at the time. But I hope I have at least begun a well founded evaluation of what he did during his time in office and where he stood on the important questions of his day.

Robert Molteno
June 2013

How these Biographical Sketches came to be written

A tribute to their author, Dr R. F. M. Immelman

The late Dr R. F. M. Immelman was the well-regarded Chief Librarian of the University of Cape Town (UCT) Library in the 1950s and '60s. He was also something of a scholar and wrote, compiled or edited a number of books relating to the history of South Africa. They included his *George McCall Theal: A Biographical Sketch* (Cape Town: Struik, 1964), Theal being an early historian of South Africa.

Dr Immelman also very nearly wrote a history of the Molteno and its related families! What actually exists are three pieces that are reproduced on this website. They are *The Molteno Family: Italian Origins and English Roots* (collected by P. A. Molteno and compiled by R.F.M. Immelman); *Sir John C. Molteno, 1814-1886: A Biographical Sketch;* and *Hercules Crosse Jarvis, 1803-1889: A Biography* (from material collected by P. A. Molteno). Sadly, none these pieces nor his other work on the history of the family ever saw the light of day. The drafts and all the work that went into them remain buried in six box files in Collection BC601 in the UCT Archives.

What happened, very briefly – and the details are now largely lost to sight – was this. Many members of the family were prolific letter, diary and reminiscence writers in the 19th century and early decades of the 20th. One of our relatives in particular, Percy Molteno M.P., who was Sir John Charles Molteno's second son, went much further. He commissioned an Italian archivist in the 1890s to dredge up from the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan what he could find about the earliest origins and history of the Molteno family going back to medieval times. Percy also wrote a lengthy, two-volume work on his father's political life at the Cape, *The Life and Times of Sir J. C. Molteno K.C.M.G., First Premier of Cape Colony.* This was published in two volumes in 1900.

But the main work of collecting and looking after the wealth of written and visual material in the family was done by Sir John's granddaughter, Kathleen Murray. She had become a successful fruit farmer in Elgin during the first half of the 20th century. Over the years she assiduously collected everything relating to the family she could lay her hands on. And when she died in 1984 at the age of 92, she donated the entire collection to the UCT Library where it now rests, carefully sorted and preserved, across several shelves of box files. At the same time, she left the Library a sum of R4,000 which was intended 'to prepare and publish her history of the Murray/Molteno family'. The University refused the bequest on the grounds of its being wholly insufficient for the scale of the task requested.

Cousin Kathleen, as I knew her (she was my father's first cousin), wanted very much for the history of the family to be properly written up, as this abortive bequest shows. In fact, some 30 years before her death, she had in the 1950s made a more serious attempt to get the job done. She had approached Dr Immelman and asked him to do it, using her huge personal archive. The project, as sketched by Dr Immelman, was extremely ambitious. There were to be three volumes:

1. Caroline Molteno's *Journals* (1868-76) and *Reminiscences.* Caroline was Sir John's second eldest daughter and Kathleen Murray's mother, and a significant figure in her own right;
2. A Biography of Hercules Jarvis. He had lived in Cape Town almost from when the Cape first became a British colony in the early 1800s. He became first Mayor of Cape Town. And he was Sir John Molteno's political colleague and father-in-law – and hence the ancestor of the whole South African branch of our family.
3. A composite volume comprising a history of the Molteno family; a life of Sir John Charles Molteno; a short account of George Bower's family; a selection of annotated family letters; and the family trees of the Molteno, Murray, Bower, Bristow and Anderson families.

Dr Immelman did a huge amount of work. He sifted through and selected the most relevant of the materials Kathleen had gathered. He got Caroline Molteno's entire journal typed up (some 200 pages), as well as quite a number of family letters. He developed a card index system (comprising several hundred cards) referring to each person in the family, and even significant places and topics. This systematised all the information he had garnered from Caroline's *Journal*. And he began to draft some of the text for Volumes 2 and 3, as well as a Foreword to Volume 3, dated August 1958.

But something went wrong. The conception of the volumes does not seem to have been well thought through. The work looked set to omit much of importance. To give just three examples, it did not intend to tell the story of the political role played by Sir James Molteno (one of John Charles Molteno's sons) in the run up to, and during, the Boer War (James later became Speaker of the Cape Parliament and, after 1910 of the first Union of South Africa Parliament). The project also overlooked the extraordinary life, political and personal, of John Molteno's eldest daughter, Betty Molteno. Nor, apparently, did it intend to cover the career of Percy Molteno who settled in England and Scotland following his marriage to Bessie Currie and became a Director of the Union-Castle Company and a Liberal Member of the British Parliament (1906-22). Nor, it seems, did the three projected volumes intend to give a picture of the many farmers in the family who pioneered progressive farming in the Western Cape, the Karoo and East Griqualand.

There seems also to have been considerable ambiguity as to who precisely would be the author(s) of the work. At one stage it was provisionally entitled '*Chronicles of the Molteno Family,* edited by Kathleen Murray and R.F.M. Immelman'. Clearly, however, Dr Immelman was doing all the hard graft. Yet in 1966 (in a letter dated 14 February) Kathleen writes: 'I have written a short, more personal life of Sir John Molteno to go with the family history I am writing.' There is no trace of either of these texts by Kathleen in the UCT Archives.

What is certain is that she and Dr Immelman eventually fell out. One member of the Library staff vividly recalls an occasion when Kathleen spoke quite rudely to him in front of his colleagues. The long and the short of it is that no book was ever fully drafted, let alone saw the light of day.

We must, however, be very grateful to the Dr Immelman for the work he put into the project. In particular, for his accounts of the lives of our two ancestors, Hercules Jarvis and John Charles Molteno. They are short, exist only in draft, and are merely parts of the much more ambitious work that was contemplated. What is more, they could not be described as significant works of biography – after all, he only had a limited number of personal letters available to him and no time to examine the official archives. But his accounts do give us a real sense of the lives and characters of both Hercules Jarvis and John Molteno.

Robert Molteno
May 2013

Foreword by Dr R. F. M. Immelman

Seeing that Sir John Molteno is the central figure round which this whole work turns, and that not many of his letters have survived, it was considered necessary to include a short life of him here. Although it is true that a two-volume account of his life and career exists, this was however published over 50 years ago. As many of his descendants therefore may not possess or be able to obtain a copy, the existence of that work did not seem sufficient reason why a briefer sketch should not be included here.

The main emphasis has been on the character and personality of Sir John, rather than on his career. Mention had, however, to be made of the chief landmarks in his life, in order to afford a clue to events, to which reference is made in the letters. Where possible, his own words or letters have been quoted, or extracts from accounts written at the time have been included. This is not therefore an attempt at a full-scale biography, but is simply, what it has been called, a biographical sketch. For further details, reference should be made to Percy Molteno's very full *Life and Times of Sir J. C. Molteno.*

The connection of the Molteno family with the Beaufort West district for over a century was considered of such general interest and some historical interest that not only has a chapter been devoted specifically to the village during the years when Sir John lived there, but some of the letters too have been grouped to show something of the nature of the life there at a later period. Additional information is however scattered throughout the various volumes of this work.

Although J.C. Molteno was only knighted in 1882, he has been referred to throughout as Sir John, in order to distinguish him from his father, sons and grandsons by the same name. For a ready reference, an outline of his career has been inserted at the beginning of Caroline Molteno's *Journal*.

R.F.M.Immelman

Elgin, August 1958

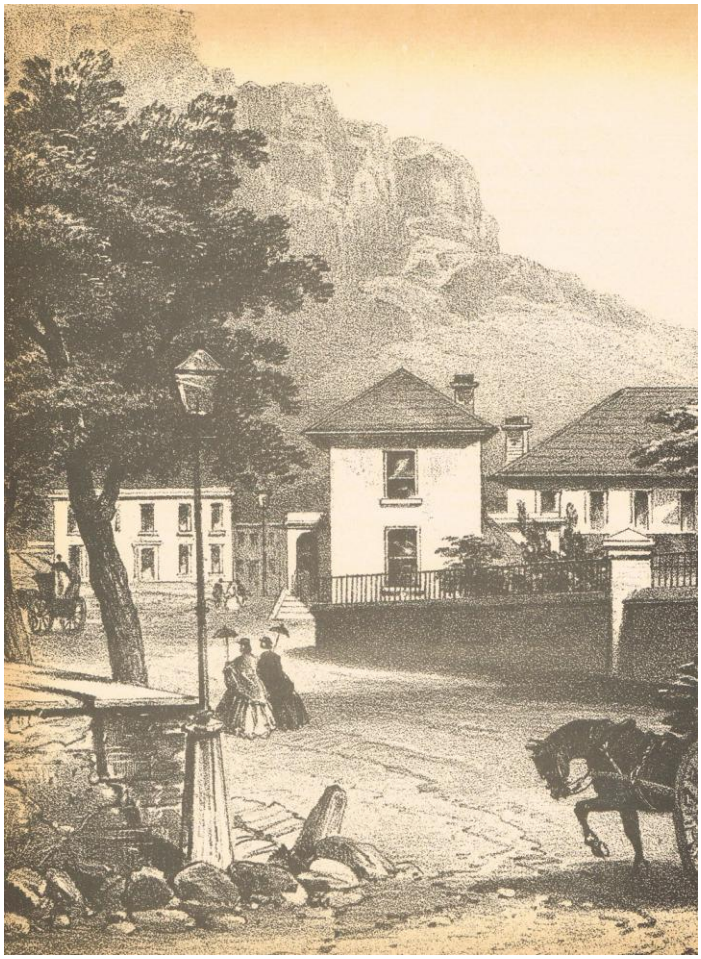
Table of contents

Chapter 1: Youth and arrival at the Cape

The Moltenos were a well-known and ancient Milan family. In about the year 1770, three Molteno brothers had left Italy to come to England.[1] (A more detailed account of the origins and history of the family in Italy, during the Middle Ages, will be found in Appendix ..., while a resume of what is known about the family in England is contained in Appendix ...). [2]

The South African branch of the Molteno family is descended from John Charles Molteno (afterwards Sir John), who came to South Africa in 1831. He was the eldest son of John Molteno (11.2 1788 – 1827), who had married Caroline Bower (1790-1866), and was born in London on 5 June 1814 (see Appendix on the Bower family[3]). The subject of this biographical sketch will, to distinguish him from other members of the family, be referred to throughout this work as Sir John (although he was called "Charles" in his parents' home).

His father died when he was 14 years old, and as soon as possible after that he endeavoured to become self-supporting. He started work in the office of a shipping and insurance broker, where his duties brought him in contact with ships from all over the globe. His imagination was fired with the desire to see wider horizons and for a life offering greater scope. When therefore an opportunity presented itself, he jumped at it and accepted the post of assistant in the South African Library at the Cape. He sailed from England in around August 1831.



The Gardens, upper Cape Town, a 19th century street scene, as John Molteno might have seen it

The following letter from J.H. Richardson[4] of number 23 Cornhill, London to "Mr JNO Charles Molteno, proceeding to the Cape of Good Hope" explains the circumstances of his first post in South Africa:

London, July 26, 1831

Sir

The following is an extract from Mr A Johnstone Jardine's [5]letter to me dated 3 November 1830, and forms in fact the conditions on which you proceed to the Cape, viz:

"He would receive from me for the first year £25 and board and lodging, with occasional remunerations for extra or diligent services; besides in the library he would have so many spare hours for writing etc. that he could easily at least realise £30 a year 'additional'."

You will see therefore that much will depend on your own assiduity and attention, but if you conduct yourself with the propriety I fully expect and indeed rely upon, I'm sure Mr Jardine, to whom I have written to entreat it,

in the letter for that gentleman which you take with you, will afford you every encouragement in his power; in whatever situation of life you may be hereafter placed, never be satisfied with just doing what may be rigidly expected from you, but always do more, anticipate people's wants, and even wishes, and you will soon become so necessary as to be sought after on all hands, and your advancement will be the certain consequence.

When you get out, consult with Mr Jardine with respect to the numerous accounts owing to me at the Cape, and with Mr Jardine's approval (and probably, he may choose, in his name), continually press, always in the civilest manner (except, unfortunately, the party should be bad ones) for settlements, and if the persons say they cannot get bills on London, say that Messrs Donaldson, Dixon and Co of Cape Town will receive any sums, however small or large, on my account, and will direct their house here to pay me the amount, who always advising me of what has been so paid in; and this is well done I will take care that you shall be remunerated; Mr Jardine will best know which party will require most urgent pressing, but most I apprehend will require urging to make the payments as early as I could wish.

I believe I have thus given you as full instructions as are necessary, and in the firm hope that you would do both yourself and me justice, in the undertaking in which you were engaged, I commit you to the charge of Mr Jardine sincerely wishing you uninterrupted happiness and prosperity.

I remain yours very truly,

J.H.Richards, number 23 Cornhill

To Mr John Charles Molteno, London.

Before tracing Sir John's career in southern Africa, it is worth noting that his uncle, Charles Dominic Molteno, was employed in the East India Company's offices in London, and in that way may have heard the prospects of the Cape were promising. He seems always to have been specially attached to his nephew. Moreover, his wife through her brother, John Scott (see the section on the Glass relatives), had moved in literary circles in London and in Edinburgh.

Jardine, the Cape Town librarian, too knew Sheridan and Scott. When he found he needed an assistant, he may have requested one of that circle to look out for a promising young man, which Richardson did. It is of interest to note that another link with this group is forged by the marriage in later years of Frederick, Sir John's brother, to Laura Sheridan, a relative of the playwright. These various links helped to bring Sir John to South Africa in 1831.

Although Sir John was working in the "British Museum of South Africa" (the South African Public Library in Cape Town), he was from the very beginning given some commercial contacts, when asked to collect Richardson's debts. There is no doubt that he took advantage of this opportunity, because although he remained for about a year under Jardine's wing, by the end of 1832 he had started work in the office of John Bardwell Ebden. The latter was a large wine exporter and a leading Cape Town merchant. He was, too, the founder and chairman (for 40 years) of the Cape of Good Hope Bank, and was prominent in both the commercial exchange as well as in public affairs.

While Molteno was working for him, Ebden in 1834 was also appointed to the Legislative Council. In this firm, Sir John received a sound training in commercial and financial methods, besides a good insight into the colony's prospects and affairs.

The result was that this ambitious and energetic young man, by 1837, at the age of 23 years, started his own business. Trading under the name of Molteno and Co, he commenced exporting wine to Britain, as well as to Mauritius. He also exported wheat to the latter island, from which he imported sugar. Within a short time he extended his business by trading with Australia and Java. By 1839 he had prospered sufficiently to be able to build his own large warehouse in Roeland Street, Cape Town, while in the following year he commenced exporting wool in a small way. Sir John therefore became one of the pioneers in that field.

In order to assess the prospects of the wool trade, in 1840 he made the long trip to Beaufort West by mule wagon. On this occasion, in August of that year, he bought a large stretch of land there as he became convinced of the potential of the area for sheep farming. Being farsighted, he realised that the wine trade was declining

The Karoo at Nelspoort today -- very little changed from what John Molteno would have seen when he first arrived there in 1840

while wool, as an article of export in place of wine, had a promising future. By 1842-43 the slump in the wine trade which he had foreseen became so alarming that he closed down his business, sold his warehouse and collected what he could of money owing to him.

In the meantime Sir John had put all his available assets into acquiring land in the Karoo and stocking it with sheep. By 1844, when he moved to settle on the farm Nelspoort, near Beaufort West, he owned 100,000 acres of land which he had acquired fairly cheaply. This land was divided into farms, each under its own name and separate management: Nelspoort, Kamfers Kraal, Baakens Rug, etc. He now devoted all his attention to wool farming, and in the course of the next 10 years became one of the largest - and for his day, most progressive - sheep farmers.

Ruins of the House of Sir J.C. Molteno, Nel'spoort

Meanwhile, after some years' acquaintance, he had married Maria Hewitson, who had grown up in Cape Town. She was willing to accompany him to that remote farm, and how very remote it seemed in the year 1844.

In order to pick up the threads again with the other members of his family circle in England, let us pause here and try to picture Sir John's circumstances. Communication with the Cape in those days of sailing ships was slow and hazardous. Moreover, when Sir John moved 400 or so miles away from Cape Town to Beaufort West in the interior, he was even more remote.

The Molteno farms at Nelspoort – a modern collage of nameplates

At that time, before trains and regular postal services, there were no proper roads, while travelling by ox wagon was tedious and time-consuming. Even to send a letter from Beaufort to Cape Town was difficult, but from Beaufort to England it appeared almost insuperable. Under the circumstances, therefore distance and slower communication were material factors causing him to lose close touch with his relations other than his mother, his sister Nancy (Mrs Bingle) and his uncle Charles Dominic Molteno.

No family papers had been brought by Sir John with him, so that our knowledge of the family and of his relatives in England is today mainly dependent on such correspondence as has been preserved, or has subsequently been unearthed. It must be borne in mind too, that during this period he was a young man leading a busy, strenuous and hard-working life as a pioneering sheep farmer near the frontier in a far distant colony. He therefore had little time for letter writing. Moreover, he did not visit England again until after 19 years had elapsed, namely in 1851.

An additional factor probably for losing touch with his brothers was that they, too, had gone off to faraway places: Fred[6] was wandering about in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, while Frank was in the Pacific Islands. Then, his sister Alicia had married a Mr Hartley, and gone off to Australia, where she died at the age of 32 years. The mother, therefore, acted as the family link, giving each one news of the others and often enclosing letters from them. For example, Sir John writes in 1842: "I return you herewith Frank's letter."

Chapter 2 Letters to his mother, 1842-1849

The best picture of Sir John's life at that period is to be gained from such of his letters to his mother in England as have survived.

Letter 1 - April 1842

Caroline Molteno (nee Bower), John Molteno's mother, c. 1840s

… The seasons do indeed come fast round; I have now been upwards of 11 years away from you. I did think that in this time I should so far have succeeded as to be able to see you all again, if still alive, but in this I have greatly disappointed. The chance of my returning home seems now more distant than ever. Although I have not succeeded in pecuniary matters, I have gained what is of infinitely more value - sound views on religion and a firm conviction of the vain and transitory nature of the things of this life.

Used as I generally am to writing merely on matters of business, I confess I am often at a loss in writing private letters (in this I find I am not singular). You need, my dear mother, I trust, be under no apprehension as to my religious views, although it is true I do not often write much on the subject; but you must not therefore come to the conclusion that I think little on it; quite the contrary. I hope and trust that no act or deed of mine is uninfluenced by religion… Give my love to Nancy, Alicia [7] and Fred.[8] I return you herewith Frank's [9] letter.

Believe me, my dear mother, your affectionate son,

J.C.Molteno

...The prayer book you mentioned I intended to send with Arthur,[10] if such a one was to be had in the opportunity. I must now however wait for some other opportunity... With regard to myself, I have but little to say. I know you will always be thankful to hear that I enjoy most excellent health, for which great and most estimable blessing I trust that at all times I feel thankful to the Almighty, as well as for many other blessings I enjoy.

Letter 2 - Cape of Good Hope, October 9, 1842

My dear mother,

I have not written you I find since April last, and have therefore to acknowledge the receipt of your letters dated 7 February, 1 May, and the one by Arthur Jackson dated 18 July. The *Childe Harold* arrived in Table Bay the evening of 18 September after a very fine passage. The next morning I went

off to the vessel and found Arthur very well, and in good spirits. I was rather surprised to find him First Mate, as your letter of 1 May, in which I think you mentioned his promotion, did not reach me till some days after, the vessel it came by making a longer passage. I was, of course, much pleased to hear from him, as well as from your letter, that you were all well.

I do not know whether Arthur wrote to you - he sailed on 24 September and expects to call at the Cape on his return from Bombay. He was I think (as well as myself) disappointed at not being able to get on shore, but I hope next time he will be more fortunate, but as ships anchor a good distance from the shore, and squalls frequently come on very suddenly, the officers are seldom able to leave their vessels.

[From an old print in the possession of P. D. Eprile, Johannesburg.

Table Bay – a storm in the days of sail, first half of the 19th century

I am extremely sorry to hear that Fred has again been so unfortunate, I trust that something will soon turn up, as at his age it is highly desirable that he should be doing something. You give me no account whatever of the reason of his leaving, which I should have been glad to receive, as only a short time before, everything seemed to be going on so very well. It is very pleasing to hear that Nancy is still doing something and I trust that Alicia will soon be able to follow her example.

I am always much gratified with the very full accounts you give me relative to all your arrangements, as well as of the whole of the family, and I would not have you for a moment think the contrary, because I do not particularly reply to anything. As I have said all along, you have an inexhaustible fund of interesting matters to communicate to me, while I have in return nothing to write about but myself, consequently it is hardly to be expected that my letters should be so long, or interesting to you, as yours are to me.

I have lately been [on] a journey up the country, to a farm in which I am interested. You can form no idea of what travelling is in this part of the world, used as you are to good roads. Here we have no made roads. We have to cross over mountains and through rivers, all in a state of nature. On this

journey I experienced much cold weather, as it was the winter season, and many of the mountains were covered with snow. It quite put me in mind of England.

The kind of mountainous terrain ox-wagons had to get across to reach the Karoo

I daresay you will have heard that we have had a severe winter: 10 ships have been wrecked in Table Bay, driven from their anchors and stranded. One of these was a large ship with troops, in all about 700 persons on board. The whole were fortunately saved; but another vessel with convicts went on the shore soon after and out of upwards of 300 souls, only about 100 were saved, near 200 lost their lives - it was an awful sight, the ship went to pieces not 200 yards from the shore, and within sight of thousands, were the miserable people drowned or dashed to pieces, among the broken fragments of the ship. Although thousands of people were collected on the shore, little assistance could be rendered, as the ship went entirely to pieces almost immediately.

I must now conclude, and trusting that this will find you well, as it leaves me, with kind love to my dear sisters and Fred. I have given Arthur [11] the prayer book in case he should not call on his return.

I remain, my dear mother, your affectionate son.

J.C.Molteno

Letter number 3 - Early 1845 (an incomplete fragment)

…Respectability with small fortunes, not sufficient to live upon in England, but which, well laid out here, enable them to command every comfort, besides the prospect of providing for their families, proves it. I hope, my dear mother, in future you will ascertain a better opinion of the Cape; believe me, it is by no means what you would suppose it.

With regard to my wife, I have every reason to feel happy with my choice. She was a member of the same family I resided with for the last eight years, and consequently we understand each other's tempers and dispositions perfectly. Although she never resided out of Cape Town, she is perfectly happy and contented with our country life; indeed, I make truly say (and in being able to do so, I humbly thank God) that we are both perfectly happy, and depend upon it, my dear mother, happiness is not confined to any particular part of the world, but the Almighty has so ordered it, that it is just as easily found in the wilds of Africa (as you are pleased to term this colony), as it is in England. "The best society is of virtuous thoughts; no exile can deprive a man of this city; no prison of this society; no pillage of these riches; no bondage of this liberty."

Maria Hewitson, John Molteno's first wife
(identification not certain)

I much wish you could procure a good account of the Cape; perhaps you may be able to get the loan of some recent work, as there are several. If you were so fortunate, as we are at the Cape, in having a public library of 30,000 volumes to resort to, you would experience no difficulty in this respect.

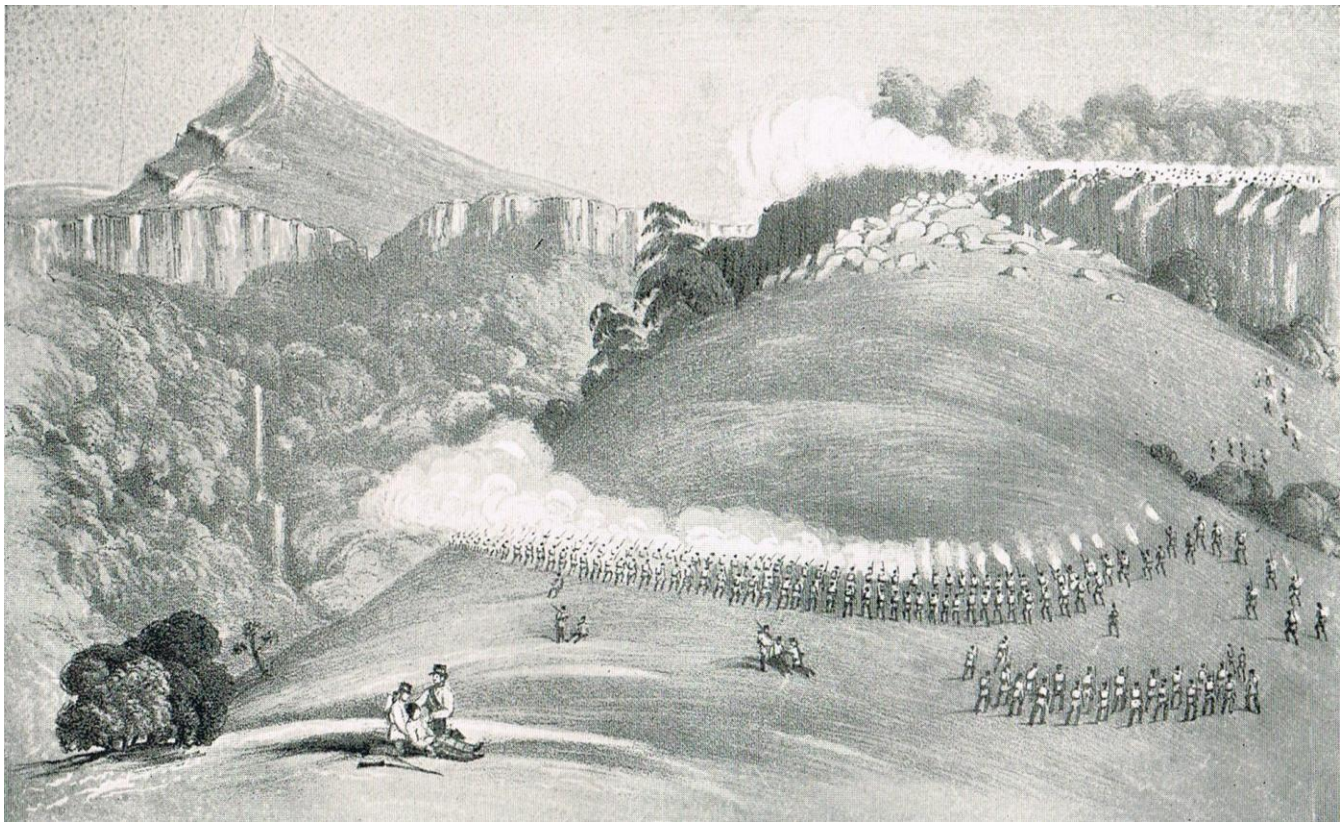
I intend writing a letter to Alicia and also to Arthur Jackson which I shall enclose. Give my love to my dear sisters, and Fred, who I intend writing to in answer to his letter, and believe me, my dear mother,

Your affectionate son

J.C. Molteno

Shortly after this letter was written, in July 1845, his wife gave birth to a stillborn child, but herself succumbed soon after, on 15 July 1845. She and her baby were buried together in the same grave in the Beaufort West Cemetery. Sir John, at 31 years of age, therefore, found himself again alone on his vast, isolated farms.

In the following year an event occurred which interrupted Sir John's monotonous life: the Seventh Frontier War broke out in 1846. At once he joined the Beaufort West commando of mounted burghers, which was called up to resist the eruption of the Xhosa tribes into the colony. Very soon his fellow burghers, by electing him Assistant-Commandant, showed that they realised his mettle. Later, Sir John's ability and energetic alertness was noted too by the Commandant-General of the Colonial Forces, Sir Andries Stockenström.



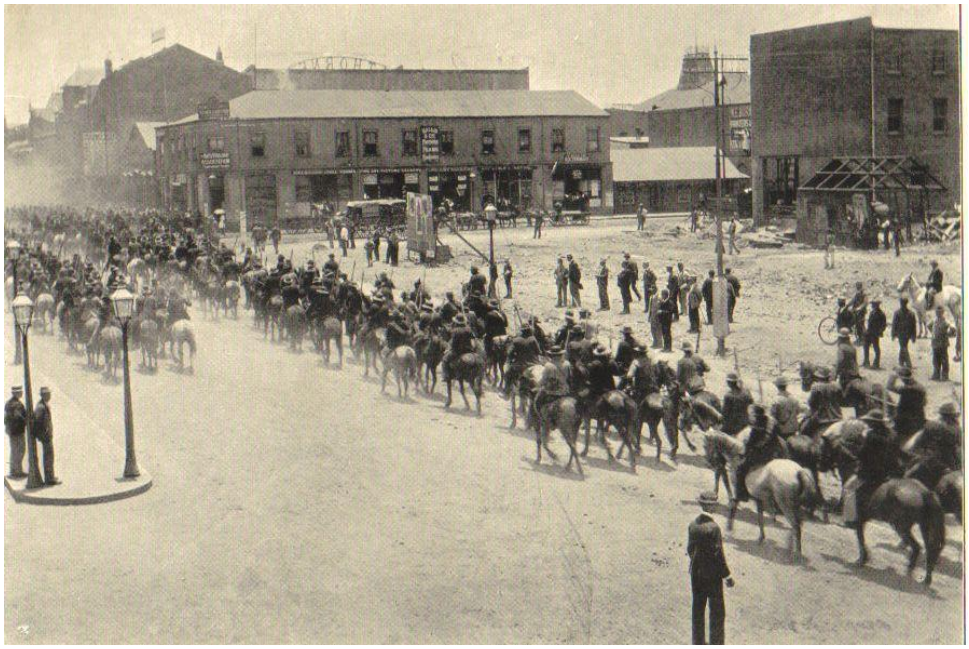
British troops storming the Amatola Heights in the Ciskei during the Frontier War of 1851 (the one after the Seventh Frontier War in which John Molteno took part in 1846)

During the military operations on the eastern frontier, he gained first-hand knowledge of the realities of this type of warfare and an insight into the inadequacies of the ponderous and cumbersome methods of the professional officers of the Imperial troops, who conceived of warfare according to the Army codebook of pre-Waterloo Vintage. They had no conception of guerrilla warfare in the Transkei bush and kloofs against a swift-moving and elusive enemy, who conducted warfare consisting of a series of quick raids. The regular infantry repeatedly failed because they moved so slowly, encumbered as they were by numerous slow supply wagons, whereas the mounted burghers moved swiftly and successfully.

The Imperial officers were jealous of their authority and considered the colonial forces undisciplined troops. Then, too, the former demanded immense quantities of arms and provisions, and considered operations without them impossible, whereas the colonial militia time and again proved them wrong at a fraction of the expense.

The contempt of the Imperial officers for the Colonial Militia; their repeated failure to adapt themselves to the conditions of border warfare; the friction between them and the burgher forces; the breakdown of commissariat arrangements; the immense expenditure involved in military operations according to their cumbersome and ponderous methods; the extreme rigidity of the professional military mind; the way the burghers were pushed into the danger spots and required to tackle most of the really difficult situations - while being called up at their own expense and required to be away from their farms and homes for long periods at considerable loss and worry to themselves... these and other related factors made a deep impression on Sir John's alert mind.

The experiences he gained then, at first hand, influenced his approach to similar situations when he was in Parliament. Over 30 years later, his convictions on the subject directly led to his clash with, and to his dismissal as Prime Minister, by Sir Bartle Frere.



A Boer Commando, late 19th century

A letter from him to his mother at this time gives some idea of the circumstances during this campaign:

Letter 4 - Ravine Bush - near Fort Beaufort, Cape of Good Hope, June 24, 1846

My dear mother,

I think I wrote to you last the beginning of March - after [a]waiting Arthur's arrival for two months, I was obliged to leave the country. He arrived the early part of April, and I was just about making preparations to get him up to me [12], when the Caffir War broke out and I, together with all the men that could be spared from the district, moved off to the frontier with all possible haste.

The place I now date from is on the frontier of Caffirland, and distant near 400 miles from the district of Beaufort. We are about 330 men from our district, and are encamping on the top of a hill, waiting the arrival of those from the more distant parts of the colony, when the whole of the troops and burghers (as the inhabitants are called) will move upon the Caffirs in their own country. The whole Army will be near 15,000 men, 3,000 which will be left to protect the border while the rest advance.

I have no doubt ere you receive this, you will have heard from Arthur and other sources of the invasion of the colony by the Caffirs, burning and destroying the houses and property of every description, and carrying off the cattle and sheep. I can give you but a faint idea of the dreadful destruction, fortunately the lives lost been fewer than might have been expected, but the people managed to collect together in sufficient numbers to protect themselves and families, but still many

have fallen. I am happy to say that the district I reside in is far removed, and there is now very little chance of the Kaffirs being able to penetrate further into the colony. I have a letter from Arthur of 6 May, saying that he was on the list of those to be balloted for in Cape Town, and will perhaps have to come up to the seat of war. I trust he will escape.

Since the forces have come, the Caffirs have retired back into their own country with their plunder. I have been in several engagements with them, but none of us were hurt, although the bullets whizzed about us, but the Caffirs are not sufficiently acquainted with guns, and generally fire too high, or they would do much more damage. The fifth of this month, my birthday, was spent by me in a very different manner to what it had ever had been before. On that day a party of us, of 100 mounted men, made a dash into Caffirland and surprised a large party of Caffirs, killing 13 of them and capturing 5,200 sheep and nine horses, which we brought off safely, the only casualty on our side one horse wounded. A few days afterwards, the division under Colonel Somerset attacked 50 miles from here, engaging the enemy, and completely routed them, near 500 were killed.

It is generally supposed that the war will now soon be over, as it is quite impossible the Caffirs can stand against the large forces now being brought against them. It is to be hoped that this will be the case, so that the farmers and people called together from the whole colony may be able to return to their homes.

Since I left, I have not received letters of any kind. Arthur did not send those he brought with him. I hope that Arthur will send you some Cape papers, which would give you a better idea of what the colony has suffered; all around the farms are still smoking and many of the people are completely ruined. Those that have saved any of their stock are now losing them from want of pasture, as where such numbers are collected together in one spot, the grass is soon destroyed, and they must keep together until the war is over for mutual protection. Beside myself, I have been obliged to bring two of my men and four horses, besides arms. It comes very hard upon most people to be obliged to leave their families and affairs. I hope, please God, there will be a speedy termination of the war.

It is not probable that I shall be able to write to you, my dear mother, before all is over. If it pleases God that I return in safety, I will write to you immediately, and in the meantime I hope you will not make yourself uneasy about me. I think the danger, now we shall be so strong, is much diminished, but all is in the hands of the Almighty. Trusting that this will find you and my dear sisters and brother in good health.

Believe me, my dear mother, ever your affectionate son,

J.C. Molteno

After his return to his farms from the war, there followed another letter to his mother, who had apparently complained of his slackness in writing:

Letter 5 - Beaufort, Cape of Good Hope - May 18, 1849

My dear mother,

Yesterday I received your letter of 14 February, which has caused me much painful feeling. I must so far plead guilty, having allowed an unusually long time to elapse without writing, to account for which I might assign various reasons, but how could I forget you all? No, my dear mother, you must not suppose that I forget you, or that I am indifferent to your welfare. Nothing that I know of in this world could give me greater pleasure than to have it in my power to place you in a comfortable position. I have hoped to be able to do this long ago, but alas, my dear mother, I too have had struggles and difficulties to contend with, of which perhaps you have very little idea.

I, however, always try to feel thankful for the many blessings which it has pleased God to leave me in the enjoyment of, the chief of which is good health, and when I come to look around me at the thousands, or I may say millions, of my fellow creatures so much worse off in every respect than myself, my heart overflows with gratitude towards that God who has favoured one so utterly undeserving.

That it is good to be afflicted we know, and as to anything like happiness in this world, young comparatively speaking as I am, I have long since given up all hope of it. The Christian's life is but a struggle, a warfare, and this is not his home.

As mentioned at the commencement of this, I only received your letter yesterday; the post leaves tomorrow early, and it is now late at night, and being anxious to lose not the moment in relieving anxiety which you seem to feel, and not hearing from me for so long a time, I must defer replying particularly to your letter for the present, but hope very shortly to write you a long letter.

With love to my dear sisters, and Fred,

Believe me, my dear mother – your affectionate son,

J.C.Molteno

PS. You can direct to me as usual Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope, as, if not in Cape Town, they will be sent to me in due course.

For the first time since his departure for the Cape 19 years previously, Sir John, shortly after this in 1850-51, paid his first visit to England. He timed it so as to be able to visit the Great Exhibition of 1851. His relatives must have found it difficult to recognise the rosy-cheeked, lanky stripling who had left them in 1831 in the bearded, broad shouldered and bronzed man in the prime of life (36 years old) who had returned to visit them.

Chapter 3 Life in Beaufort West, 1851-61

In the days when he was conducting his own business in Cape Town, Sir John had, in all probability, known a fellow exporter in the wine trade by the name of Hercules C. Jarvis. Sir John renewed his acquaintance with the family when in 1846 P. J. Alport, a Beaufort businessman, married Sophia Jarvis and brought her to Beaufort West as his bride (cf section on the Jarvises). Mrs Alport's parents and sister Maria may presumably at some time have paid her a visit at Beaufort. In any case, Sir John would certainly have been asked by the Alports in 1850 to call on the Jarvis family when he was passing through Cape Town on his way to England.

At all events, the outcome was that shortly after his return, the marriage of Sir John took place to the daughter of Hercules Jarvis. On 21 October 1851 at Somerset House, Green Point (the bride's home), Elizabeth Maria Jarvis became his second wife. The Rev Dr Abraham Faure (1795-1875), the predikant of the Groote Kerk, performed at the marriage ceremony and the witnesses were Thomas Watson, W Gadney, O.J.M.Bergh and A. de Kock. The bridegroom was in his thirty-eighth year, the bride being 20 years of age.

Sir John undoubtedly realised that life on a sheep farm was too rough and lonely for a girl who had grown up with every possible advantage in a comfortable home in Cape Town. Probably he remembered too the tragic death of his first wife. He therefore moved his home from the farm to the village, where they resided for the next 10 years. In collaboration with his brother-in-law, he started the firm of P.J.Alport and Co in Beaufort, later opening branches in Prince Albert and Victoria West. A local bank was also established by him at Beaufort.

Elizabeth Maria Jarvis, about the time of her marriage to John Charles Molteno in 1851

Before dealing with St John's public career, let us pause for a moment in order to try to obtain a picture of the sort of life to which, at the end of 1851, he had brought his bride, the life in a small remote village in the far interior, as Beaufort was in those days. An illustration in this book shows what it then looked like. In *The Findlay Letters* [13] mention is made of the long drought in the 1850s, when the Beaufort district lost 800,000 sheep. From a rather disgruntled pen we get the following pen picture of the place:

"You ask me what sort of place Beaufort is for shops and trade. Well, there are only 11 stores in all the place and the principal business is between two, Alport and Watson, Tennant & Co... Here we are awfully wild coves, shy stones through windows and suchlike, the

John Charles Molteno's family home in Beaufort West in the 1850s

only amusement we can get just now.

"The people here never invite anyone to their houses at night; in fact a fellow may be here a long time before he passes the threshold of any of its worthy citizens… everyone turns up his nose at his neighbour. I assure you I don't like to run any place down, but for society I don't think there's a more beastly place on the globe."

Sir John Fraser [14] amplified the picture by explaining that erven [15] were only sold in 1822 and the church built in 1830. He himself was born there in 1840, so he remembered it in the early 1850s:

"There were then only a few residents… The necessaries of life were mainly exchanged or bought from the 'smous' or travelling pedlar, who usually bartered his commodities for stock, which was then driven to the Cape and realised... Gradually, however, the ox-wagon was superseded for quicker journeys by the horse-wagon or cart, both of which were afterwards mounted on springs, but for the conveyance of heavy loads of merchandise and produce of all kinds from the ports… To distant towns, the ox-wagon… was mainly used, having the loads covered by great tarpaulins and drawn by 16 or 18 full-grown oxen…

Typical horse-drawn cart – Harold Anderson, Wallace Molteno and George Jackson in the Karoo, late 19th century (women unidentified)

> "After the return of my sisters from Cape Town, the eldest opened an infant school, in a separate building in the Parsonage grounds… Our walk [16] usually took the direction from the back of the Parsonage property, through the Gamka River, which ran down just behind it, and either up or down its banks through the mimosas which covered them, or straight out across the veldt towards a little kopje [17] about 2 miles out… There were no roads in existence, merely footpaths, or wagon-tracks to follow… The country was wild, sparsely inhabited, overrun with beasts of prey of all kinds…"

Fraser, too, gives a graphic description of trekbokke [18] invading Beaufort about 1851:

> "There had been reports of a great drought having visited the far-back country… One day a travelling 'smous' came to Beaufort and brought tidings that thousands of trekbokken were coming in from the north, devouring everything before them….
>
> "About a week after… We were awakened one morning by a sound as of a strong wind before a thunderstorm, followed by the trampling of thousands of all kinds of game – wildebeest, blesboks, springboks, quaggas, elands, antelopes of all sorts and kinds, which filled the streets and gardens, and as far as one could see covered the whole country, grazing of everything eatable before them, drinking up the waters in the furrows, fountains, and dams, wherever they could get at them, and

> as the poor creatures were all in a more or less impoverished condition, the people killed them in numbers in their gardens. It took about three days before the whole of the 'trekbokken' had passed, and it left our country looking as if a fire had passed over it…"

Bishop Robert Gray [19] on his tours of the country in 1848-50 mentioned that in the country near Beaufort: "The farms exhibit signs of wealth, and here and there, where there is a 'fontein', there are patches of arable land covered with luxuriant crops…" Then he went on to state that "most of the English population reside in the country, there being… not less than 40 farmers in the neighbourhood." He visited a mission school for coloured people and "examined the government school. There appears to be an excellent teacher here." There was a courthouse, in which he held a meeting.

Wool farmers of Beaufort West, including John Molteno (standing 3rd from the left?)

On the Sunday he held services in the Dutch Reformed Church: "Mr Fraser, the Dutch Minister, received us very kindly… The evening service was at five o'clock, Mr Fraser omitting his usual English service. There was a good congregation. I preached on both occasions. In the afternoon, at Mr Fraser's request, I addressed both the coloured and Dutch Sunday School,[20] who were brought into the church for that purpose. His clerk interpreted for me. The coloured school consisted chiefly of adult heathens. For heathens, they seemed very attentive."

On the second occasion [21], he recorded: "We held divine service in the government schoolroom. The congregation was about 70 both in the morning and evening… We settled finally the sites of the church,

parsonage and burial ground…." Again, the school was visited: "After breakfast [I] attended a public examination of the government school, which I thought in a satisfactory state."

In 1856, he based his impression of Beaufort West on record in the following words:

> "Beaufort is one of the most isolated towns in the colony. In itself it is a cheerful, pretty place, the church which I then consecrated is neat and out of debt. The coloured people seem in a most deplorable condition, partly from the working of the Wine and Spirit Ordinance and partly from being without religious education. There is no school to which they can go.
>
> "This is no fault of the people of Beaufort, for nowhere have I seen a greater desire to improve them, yet there are 500 souls[22] sinking deeper into degradation day by day. There have been missionaries, but they have gone. The people asked me to send a missionary of our church, and some offered to pay £50 a year." [23]

Such then was the village in which Sir John lived and his daughters were born: Betty in 1852, Caroline in 1853 and Maria in 1856.

Betty Molteno as a young girl, c. 1860

Maria Molteno, Betty's younger sister, about the same date

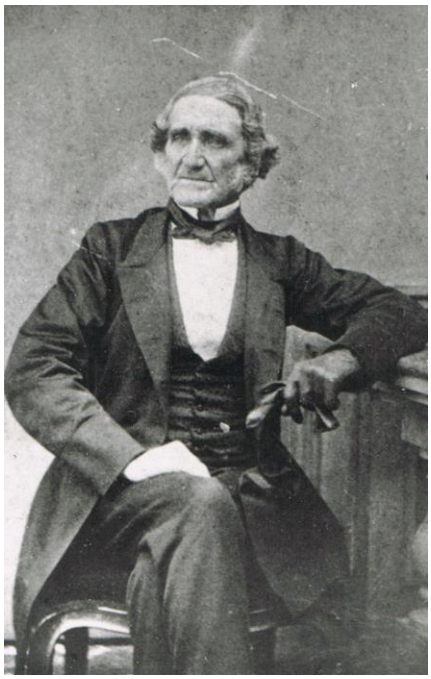
Chapter 4 The start of Sir John's public life – the 1850s and 1860s

Sir John is related to have made his first speech in public at a meeting held on the Market Square at Beaufort West in 1849, in connection with the Anti-Convict Agitation.[24] Sir John Fraser - who spent his childhood in Beaufort - was a child of 10 years at the time. He described this occasion in his reminiscences, *Episodes in my Life*, as follows:

"The meeting… attended by the Beaufort residents and the farmers… my father [25] opened in prayer, but which culminated in a riot on account of the refusal of certain residents to illuminate their premises for the occasion. This was later the cause of proceedings at law." [26]

From 1850 onwards, Sir John Molteno began to take a greater part in public life. Probably his experience of responsibility and leadership during the Frontier War had given him more self-confidence, while his fellow colonists in his district had come to know him well and trusted him. As a result, he now became a member both of the Beaufort West Municipal Council and of the local Divisional Council. Then in 1854, when the elections were held for the first Parliament under representative government, he stood as a candidate and was elected to the legislative assembly (M.L.A.) as representative for the Beaufort West constituency. He remained a member for Beaufort from 1854-1878, and then for Victoria West, a former part of his old constituency, from 1880-1883. In 1854 therefore his long political career began, which led to the highest honours and only terminated with his resignation from Parliament in 1883.

The annual journeys to Cape Town to attend Parliament, when his family accompanied him, are vividly described in Caroline Murray's *Reminiscences*.[27] In those days before railways had been built in the colony, such journeys by ox-wagon or mule-wagon were not to be lightly undertaken. When, in addition, a young wife and several small children travelled, it was a trip requiring careful planning and a long period of intensive preparation. At the end of it, however, there was the joyous welcome of the Jarvis home awaiting them, as Caroline has so poignantly sketched it.

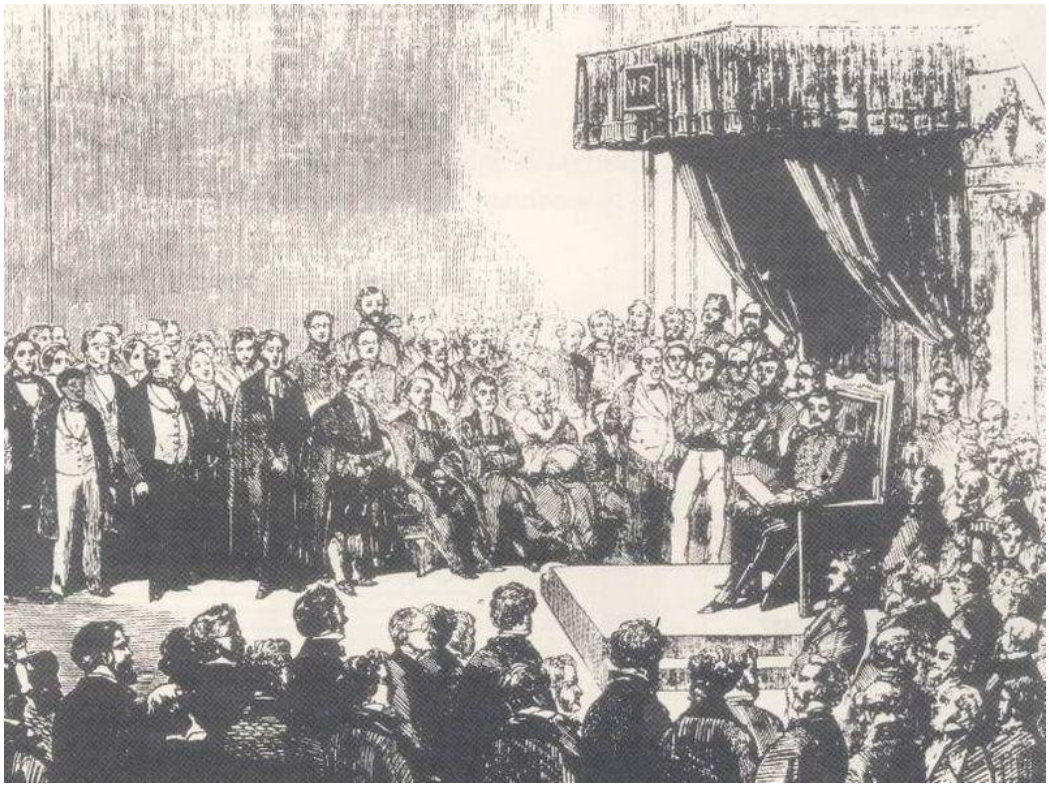


Hercules Jarvis, merchant and Mayor of Cape Town, c. 1860

Sir John commenced his political career at the age of 40, at the very beginning of parliamentary government. As a member representing an upcountry constituency, he carefully felt his way. His father-in-law - who was more experienced in public life[28] - undoubtedly guided him, and there is no question but that he learned much from his discussions of current affairs with the older man. How he struck a contemporary in his early days in Parliament (1855), we learn from the following:

"The representative of Beaufort is good-natured… He is in the prime of life and a man of ample proportions… has an intellectual appearance, a bright, mischievous and restless eye, is easily amused, and takes a very active share in the business of the House.

"His speeches are made offhand, without much consideration or effort - a kind of ready-made oratory, full of practical remarks… He is a consistent denouncer of government abuses… He is outspoken, vigilant, attentive and is justly entitled to be considered, by comparison, a parliamentary star of some magnitude." [29]



Opening of the first Cape Parliament, Cape Town, 1854 (engraving)

He sported a vigorous beard, for he "cultivates his beard, or rather allows it to cultivate itself" [30]. In 1863 he is again depicted by the same pen as "the gentleman with the bald head and heavy beard", a man who was "marvellously patient and painstaking. He never leaves his seat from the moment the session opens 'til it closes… He seldom speaks without saying something." [31] He was the champion of the colonists and "never commits himself to an appearance of wishing to curry favour with the government or its representatives. He is very apt to be led away by excessive zeal for anti-government attacks. He remembers great oppressions and thoughtless injuries which the people have had to bear." His independence and fearlessness of mind in saying what he felt to be right were indubitably the dominant characteristics of the man.

It is not the intention here to give a detailed account of Sir John's political career. This has been done in great detail by his son Percy A. Molteno. [32] Only some of the landmarks of his life will be noted, in order to make the journal and letters more intelligible, as well as for the sake of those readers who won't have access to the published biography. What has however been envisaged is to indicate, by means of quotations from printed sources and from letters, the kind of man he was and what his contemporaries thought of him as a person.

Between 1854 and 1859, Sir John was feeling his way and finding his feet in Parliamentary life. From the beginning, he gave voice to the opinions of the conservative platteland [33] and more and more came to be acknowledged as its spokesman. By 1860, he had made up his mind the parliamentary institutions without full responsible government were a failure. In that year he therefore moved the first resolution affirming the necessity for the establishment of responsible government, and for the next 12 years he came - slowly but surely - to the fore as the leader of the party which was in favour of it, whose battle cry was: "Responsible government before everything".

The years 1860 and 1861 mark the ending of one period and the beginning of another as far as the Molteno family was concerned. Until that time Sir John's home had been in Beaufort West, although his wife and children had accompanied him to Cape Town for the parliamentary sessions. In 1861, however, he took his family to England to introduce them to his relatives and for a tour of the Continent. [34] They were away for 18 months. On

their return the Moltenos settled permanently in Cape Town, first at Mowbray and then at Claremont House. [35] From this date onwards they were no longer living in a small Karoo village hundreds of miles from Cape Town, but in the suburbs of the mother city itself.

Claremont House, John Charles Molteno's family home from 1863

Although Sir John and his descendants continued to own a number of farms in the Beaufort area for over a century, yet the family's focal centre became the suburbs of Cape Town. The reasons for the move are not difficult to guess: Sir John was devoting himself more and more to his political and parliamentary duties, which necessitated his presence in Cape Town. Furthermore, his family was increasing and the older children were growing up. For the sake of their education, Cape Town offered facilities not to be found at Beaufort West. But throughout the rest of his life, Sir John continued to represent Beaufort and later Victoria West, a part of his earlier constituency, while his farming and business links with it remained close all his life.

Chapter 5 Opposition leader, 1862 - 1872

Sir John had used his trip to Europe to acquire information, to interview leading men about Cape affairs and to become more conversant with the problems of government generally. On his return, he felt better equipped gradually to play more of a leading role in political life.

In 1863 Parliament met in Grahamstown and he was generally acknowledged to be the leader of the House, in opposition to the permanent officials who formed the government. R.W. Murray said of him:

> "He has very little sympathy with any policy admired by honourable gentlemen from the Eastern province." [36]

Another writer, describing him at this period of his life, summed him up thus:

> "Molteno, as a man of business and a large landholder, understood both the main interests into which colonial society was divided. His sympathies were with the West, but from his home in Beaufort he was in touch with Midland opinion and near enough to the East to understand and on the whole to disagree with its point of view." [37]

Some of his chief opponents in later days, like Sprigg and John Paterson, came from the Eastern province.[38] For the aspiration of the MLAs from the border districts, which aimed at separation of the eastern from the western part of the colony, he had no sympathy. With their fear of a sudden uprising of natives within the area and of irruption of the Xhosa tribes from across the Kei River, he had every sympathy and understanding.

He believed, however, in the need for the unity of the colony, in the urgent necessity for self-government as being in the interests of all sections, as well as in the ability of the colonists thereafter to find their own solutions for their problems.

By no means everyone favoured responsible government. Here the monkey, Saul Solomon, 'the member for Cape Town', and the bear, Sir John Molteno, the first premier, are dancing to the tune of the organ-grinder, presumably the governor Sir Henry Barkly. (UCT Macmillan)

It was said of him that during the Grahamstown session: "He seldom speaks without saying something… about responsible government." [39] No wonder that on his return he was accorded a vote of thanks at a public banquet in Cape Town in recognition of the good fight he had put up in Parliament. The following description shows how he struck a contemporary (J.H. de Villiers, afterwards the Chief Justice) [40] in 1868:

> "The two outstanding official members of the Assembly were Richard Southey, the Colonial Secretary, and W. Downes Griffith, the new Attorney-General, an Irishman whose brusque manners were not atoned for by intellectual brilliancy. These two were charged with introducing and defending government measures. Over against them stood John C. Molteno, the Lion of Beaufort, and Saul Solomon…"

Molteno was "cautious, a fighter who did not mind hard knocks so long as he could return them, stiff in opinion, often in the wrong [de Villiers thought], he was, though a Londoner born, the champion of colonial liberties and the advocate of prudent administration."

The Goede Hoop (Good Hope) Masonic Lodge which was the venue of the first Cape Parliament

Both Sir John and Hercules Jarvis became great admirers of Sir George Grey's ideas regarding colonial administration: self-government, federation of the various colonies in southern Africa, shaking off the shackles of Downing Street control, firm and fair dealings with all races, development of natural resources, and, particularly, the provision of educational and cultural facilities. They had learnt to know Grey personally during the years he was Governor.

Jarvis's letterbook between the years 1868 and 1878 prior provides evidence of their later contacts, in the form of the many letters he wrote to Sir George Grey. Notes in his journal recorded interviews with Grey in London, following which he usually states tersely "wrote Molteno". In this way he kept his son-in-law informed about all matters which were discussed between him and Grey. These contacts between Grey on the one hand and Jarvis (as well as Molteno) on the other give us an insight into the admiration of these men for Sir George Grey's ideas, with which they were in complete agreement.

Jarvis at all times between 1851 and 1866 supported and assisted Sir John to the best of his ability. Both men tried hard in 1877 to convince Colonial Office officials and other influential English politicians, that it would be in the interests of the Cape Colony to reappoint Sir George as governor, as successor to Sir Henry Barkly. Jarvis was plainly disappointed when they failed.

Sir George Grey, in his tribute to Molteno, confirms this affinity between them:

> "I found Mr Molteno [41] a very active member of the Cape Parliament. I regarded him as a very able and a very good man... I am carried back to the time when I sat with Mr Molteno [42] by the side of

> the stream in the desert [the Karoo] and we talked of many things, and he and I from that day to this - until he died - never changed, never swerved, from the ideas which we then held...
>
> "Sir John Molteno's was an interesting life. The early independence and then the isolation in the desert,[43] where the solitude and quiet and any leisure were devoted to thought and preparation… He never went back, but always grew in his grand ideas of freedom, of good government and [a] desire for the welfare of the country.
>
> "Then after this solitude, he comes forth and takes his part on the stage of life in the highest position, and carries out his long-pondered and well-devised plans; they succeed, but he goes too fast for many who never wish to progress at all, and he is thwarted and eventually has to succumb to these reactionary forces, and has to see others spoiling the work he has done so well… The best reward is the work which he has done."

It is not suggested that Sir John was a mere blind follower, but it is undoubtedly true that Grey's greater experience in different colonies - South Australia and New Zealand - and his knowledge of men and affairs made Sir John surer of his ideas and strengthened him in his line of conduct. The fact that Jarvis and he over the years maintained contact with Sir George, sought his advice and requested him to use his influence on behalf of the Cape for many years after he left the colony, go to prove how greatly they admired his views and respected his opinions. If any man can be said to have influenced Sir John, it would be Sir George Grey - and it was the kind of influence which brought out the similarity of their views and strengthened their common approach to colonial problems.

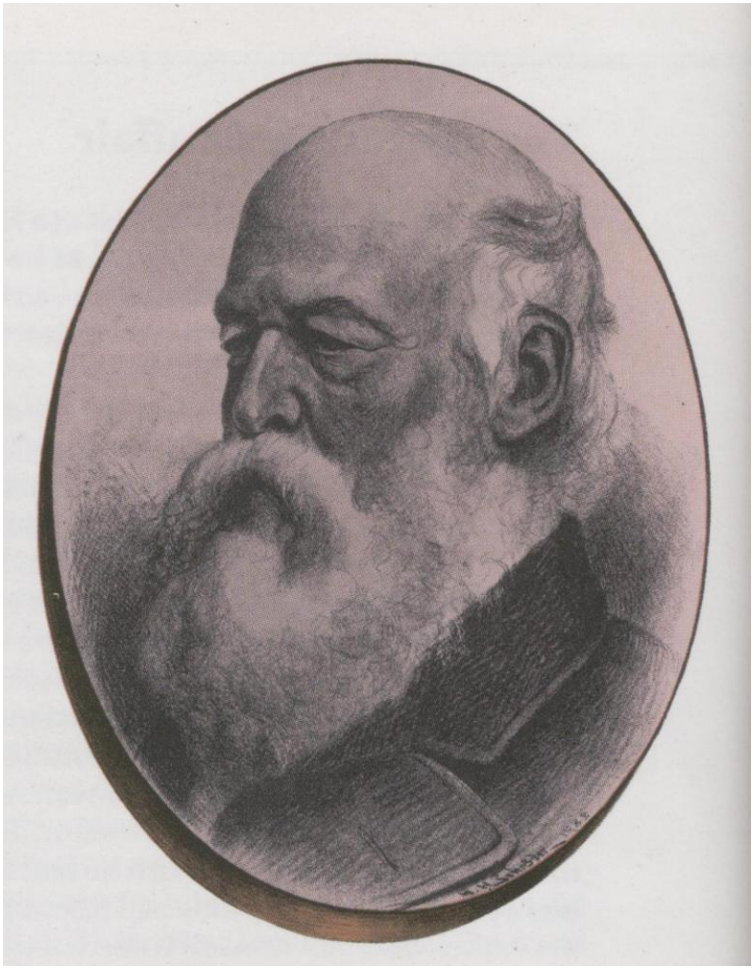
Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, Sir John had the support of William Porter and Saul Solomon, two most highly respected leaders of Parliament, who had the confidence of the colony at large. Sir John himself, however, differed from them in this respect in that he was more in touch with the farming population, being regarded as one of themselves, and so had the support of the Dutch colonists as well as of many English, even if some Eastern province separationists opposed him.

As leader of the opposition, Sir John strove for sound administration, efficient control of public expenditure, and cutting the latter to match revenue. He resisted Governor Wodehouse's autocratic ideas and used every crisis throughout 1867-69 to emphasise the need for self-government, whereby the cabinet would be responsible to parliament and would not consist of permanent officials, who are not answerable to the people's elected representatives. The "dismal 60s" witnessed depressions, droughts, bankruptcies, and economic setbacks, while the government of the country had reached a deadlock.

Chapter 6 Prime Minister, 1872-78

During 1870 Sir John was confined by a prostrating illness to his home for about six months. His daughter's journal, as well as his wife's letters, give full details of his visit to the Caledon Baths in search of health. Sir Philip Wodehouse left in May 1870, to be succeeded by Sir Henry Barkly, who was instructed by the British government to introduce responsible government at the earliest possible moment.

On 30 July 1871, Sir John moved the Constitution Amendment Bill for the introduction of responsible government. During 1871 and 1872 he took a trip to Europe and Egypt, accompanied by his daughters Betty and Caroline. They listened to the debate in the House of Commons, when the enabling legislation confirming the introduction of self-government to the Cape was passed. Finally a new era dawned and the Governor had to make the difficult decision of who to call on to form the first Cabinet: Porter, Solomon, Southey and Molteno were all possible candidates. For various reasons none of the other three would accept offers - partly on account of age, partly too for lack of support in the country generally. Finally, the choice fell on Sir John because he commanded the greatest measure of support. On 1 December 1872, he therefore took office as the first Prime Minister of Cape Colony.



John Charles Molteno – a sketch of the Prime Minister in a Dutch newspaper

The following letter was written by Sir John to one of his closest friends - Vincent Rice, his colleague for Beaufort (M.L.A. 1869-72) - the day following his selection as Prime Minister:

Claremont, October 22, 1872

Vincent Rice, Esq. M.L.A.

My dear Sir

…I am now able to inform you that after some preliminaries relative to Mr Porter and Mr Solomon, which I have no time to go into, the Governor yesterday charged me with the duty of forming a ministry. Mr Advocate de Villiers has accepted the Attorney Generalship; and I have written to Mr Glanville late M.P for Grahamstown, and who could, if he wished, get re-elected - if not for Grahamstown, for some other eastern constituency; Mr Smith of King William's Town; and Mr Vincent M.L.A. asking them to act as Secretary for Native Affairs, Commissioner of Crown Lands & Public Works and Treasurer General.

If they all accept, I think such a ministry would stand a fair chance of possessing -

Saul Solomon M.P., a Jewish immigrant from the island of St Helena and close colleague of John Molteno who asked him to be the Cape's first Prime Minister, a post Solomon refused

at any rate for a long time - the confidence of Parliament and the country. Should any of them refuse, their places must be filled as well we can, but I hope they will accept.

You must not mention the names I have alluded to until matters are further advanced, but insofar as myself and de Villiers are concerned, there is no necessity for keeping the thing particularly quiet.

I have no time to write more today –

I remain, yours very truly,

J.C. Molteno

Sir John's wisdom in making his Cabinet as widely representative as possible - both of various sections as well as of different parts of the colony - was proved when it is seen how it helped to dispose of the separationist agitation in the Eastern Province. *The Cape Argus* in August 1871 had voiced public opinion in saying of him:

"…Mr Molteno is a thoroughly representative colonist, familiar with the wants and resources of the country, and as such, trusted as few men are by large and important interests in the country… We believe that political friends and foes alike respect Mr Molteno's outspoken manliness."

A newspaper which generally opposed him, *The Standard and Mail*, in November 1872 wrote of him in the following words which, coming from such a source, may be regarded as a fair contemporary appraisal:

> "There is much in the public character of our future Prime Minister, which we, though not exactly soldiers fighting under his banner, can admire and respect. He is steadfast in pursuit of any objects he sets before him, but he does not seek to obtain [them] by chicanery and doubledealing… he is fair and manly… But nothing passing around in the world… escapes his notice; strong, sound common sense… And good vigorous sentences… express with force and fluency the ideas that are in him."

So Henry Barkly, the Governor called him into office, wrote of him [44]:

> "His straightforward character and unremitting devotion to the development of the resources of the country made it a great piece of good fortune that he was the Prime Minister when it was necessary to reorganise the administration and carry out a new system…"

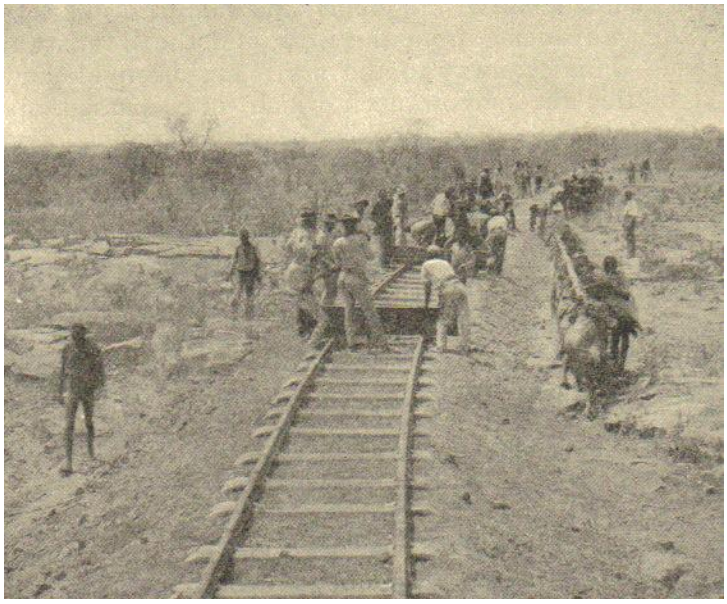
And then at this point we cannot do better than cite J.H. (Onze Jan) Hofmeyr's assessment of Sir John at this time, when he was editor of the *Zuid Afrikaan*, the leading Dutch newspaper:

> "…Mr Molteno had done much for the colonists during the years of representative government, but at the same time there were many men, who cherished the doubt whether he had the ability requisite for the inauguration of a new regime in a difficult period.
>
> "But though the historian… will probably not rank Mr Molteno among statesmen of the first-class, yet he must be allowed to have been possessed of a considerable measure of ability... Even Molteno himself showed by the care and circumspection with which he went to work that he did not rate his own abilities too highly. But the new Prime Minister, while not possessing any of the diviner fire of the Olympian statesman, yet had ingrained in him by disposition and education a sense of restraint and tact and a business capacity, which made him the right man in the right place at the right time
>
> "Mr Molteno made mistakes in his Administration, but of whom could this not be said? Had he been a man of more striking parts, he would probably have made more. In any case, it was indeed fortunate for the colony, that at that period of its development, the finances were in the hands of Mr Molteno, for, though not Treasurer General, his was the guiding hand of the administration of the Treasury, and he is also the man whom we have to thank for the development of our railway system: for no-one else but Mr Molteno would've been able to persuade the conservative Dutch farmers to pledge the credit of the country to a comprehensive railway scheme.
>
> "Mr Molteno's choice of his colleagues had as an effect, that the old parties were completely broken up, and it was some time before a really strong opposition could be formed…."

Though Mr Hofmeyr never considered Sir John "a colossus of statesmanship", yet he was prepared to admit that he was "a man of honesty, uprightness and energy, and, if possessed of no extraordinary qualities, at least not unsuited to the task of guiding the destinies of the colony". [45]

Chapter 7 The Molteno Cabinet in office

The new Cabinet immediately set about purchasing the private Cape Town-Wellington railway line and established a state owned railway system, which was the foundation of all later railway development. Thereafter the railway was extended from Wellington to Worcester, as well as from Port Elizabeth into the interior. At the same time surveys by railway engineers were authorised for further extensions over the mountains into the Karoo, from Port Elizabeth towards Graaff Reinet and from East London northward. It was a gigantic scheme of railway expansion for the colony at that time to tackle simultaneously, but the opening up of the interior towards the Diamond Fields was the real objective.



Early railway building in South Africa

The old Board of Examiners set up in Sir George Grey's time was superseded by the University of the Cape of Good Hope, established by legislation in 1873 as a body to compile 'curricula', to hold examinations and grant degrees. The various colleges at Cape Town, Rondebosch and Stellenbosch were enabled to prepare their students for the University's examinations.

J.H. de Villiers (afterwards Lord de Villiers) had been Attorney General in the Cabinet, but in December 1873, Sir John appointed him Chief Justice. Being South African-born and being rather young, the appointment aroused much comment and some controversy. In the light of his subsequent career, it was seen what a sound selection it had been at the time.

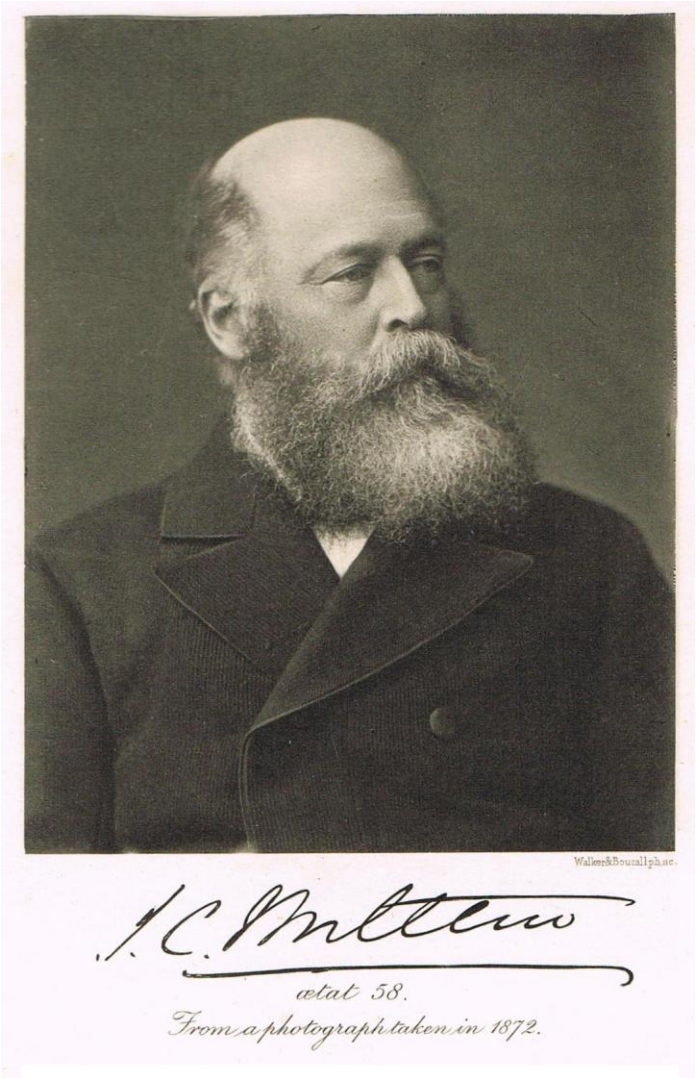
Sir John himself had taken the post of Colonial Secretary, but kept a firm grip on financial policy. As Treasurer General, he had chosen C. Abercrombie Smith (later Sir Charles), who proved an able and sound man. Sir John later appointed him as Auditor General, in which post for over 25 years he rendered very good service.

In July 1873, after the first session of Parliament, Sir John went on a tour of the Eastern province. As this tour is described in the journal, as well as in various letters, there is no need to dwell on it here. It is sufficient to say that it helped to give the final quietus to the old cry for the separation of western and eastern provinces. The telegraph system was extended to all the main centres of the colony, and public works of all kinds were tackled. As far as revenue permitted, development of the colony was the Cabinet's main objective.

One of the measures with which the name of Sir John has been associated ever since is a 'Memorandum of Regulations' issued in 1874 from the office of the Colonial Secretary. This enactment "having in view the encouragement and proper management of public libraries in the smaller towns", [46] was sponsored by St John himself, who had not forgotten the institution in which, as a very young man, he had started his career, viz. a public library. This measure came to be known as the Molteno Memorandum: "These regulations, with some modification, continue in force in the Cape at the present day, and have, in principle, been followed elsewhere in South Africa." [47]

State aid for public libraries was provided by the Molteno Memorandum on the pound-for-pound principle, up to a certain maximum and thereby the establishment of libraries in every town or village in the Cape Colony was stimulated. The larger town libraries were given grants exceeding the maximum, but in essence this Molteno Memorandum remained the basis of state (or provincial) support of libraries until the 1940s, when a completely new system took its place. In the annals of library history in South Africa, however, the name of Sir John will always be honoured as that of the library assistant, who when 40 years later he became Prime Minister, did all in his power to promote library development.

Sir John for many years was popularly known as the 'Lion of Beaufort', on account of his powerful voice and large build. When he was on his feet belabouring an opponent, it was said that his roar was apt to devastate the other party. "He conveyed to his audience a sense of the great power and force within him almost fierce in its volcanic energy of expression… his belligerent energy, when in reply to attacks, the premier throws his body back, lifts his head, and snorts like a war horse… lashed to fury… the natural expression of a determined character which had grappled with great obstacles with an overwhelming energy… held an audience spellbound." His luxuriant beard and bald head added to the impressiveness of his appearance to enhance the effect.



John Charles Molteno – signed portrait on becoming Prime Minister, 1872

From Sir John Molteno, written to Betty less than a fortnight before his dismissal from office by Sir Bartle Frere.

Colonial Secretary's Office, King Williamstown, 23 January 1878 [48]

Dear Betty – I had written Minnie [49] a long letter early this morning, the news contained in which she will tell you. Later in the day your letter of 7 January reached me. I do not know how it came, as the ordinary post comes tonight, perhaps it came by sea.

All the accounts you allude to are true and things certainly promise well. I hope we are not destined to be again disappointed. Tell Minnie things look better and actually going in the direction I wish and indirectly, by an interview I just had with His Excellency [50]. He has telegrams by Taymouth Castle, more troops coming, but it does not yet appear if they are for the Colony or Natal.

I am glad Mr Alport and Dr Murray [51] take such an interest in Frontier affairs. Tell Frank I thank him for his letter and all the news, [and] will try to find time to reply, but he must not stop writing to me on that account, if I am not able to write.

I am taking as much care as I can of myself. Notwithstanding all the discomfort, I am better here near the scene of action. I do not know what I should have done away from King Williamstown. John [52] is not exactly wanted for Coffee and Camp, but is most useful and I do not know how we should have got on without him. He does his best quietly and willingly.

Love to you all from your affectionate father,

J.C. Molteno

Chapter 8 The Carnarvon controversy

In 1872 the Cabinet annexed the islands along the West Coast, while in 1874 Fingoland and Griqualand East and in 1876 Tembuland were added.[53] Meanwhile Sir Richard Southey was administering Griqualand West (formerly known simply as the Diamond Fields, and referred to as such in the journal and letters [54]) as a separate territory. Lord Carnarvon had, it should be mentioned, become Secretary of State for Colonies in 1874. The Molteno cabinet soon became involved in a dispute with him concerning the custody of Langalibalele, who had been banished from Natal - first to Robben Island and then to the Cape Flats. This was only the beginning of Carnarvon's interference in South African affairs.

The first intimation thereof came in the form of a visit from J.A. Froude, the historian, mention whereof is found in a letter dated 22 September 1874 from Sir John to his daughter Maria.[55] Froude came as Carnarvon's agent, but little by little the Cabinet became aware of his meddling in the affairs of the country.

By June 1875, in trying to further Carnarvon's scheme of bringing all the South African colonies and states together in a confederation, Froude was conducting intrigues directed against the Cape Ministry and addressing meetings where he publicly criticised their handling of the country's problems. Sir John opposed Carnarvon's proposals and objected strongly to his interference in the affairs of a self-governing colony, while ignoring its government. Parliament supported the Prime Minister and refuse to have anything to do with Carnarvon's schemes.

During 1875 and 1876 Sir John persuaded Parliament to pass a resolution approving the annexation of Walfish Bay "and the surrounding territory", including Damaraland and the whole area between the Orange and Cunene rivers. Lord Carnarvon refused to consent, as he wanted to retain Walfish Bay as a seaport for Griqualand West, which he conceived of as a separate state in his confederation scheme. Molteno, on the other hand, wanted to annex Griqualand West to the Cape.[56]

In any case, however, the incident of Walfish Bay serves to prove how ignorant Colonial Office authorities, who had to make the decisions, were at the time of the geography of South Africa. Sir John issued a solemn warning forecasting the many future difficulties which would ensue if this territory were not then added to the Cape Colony. In the end only Walfish Bay itself was annexed (1877), but before many years had passed, Germany stepped in and proclaimed the whole of South West Africa a German colony. Forty years later South Africa became involved in war with Germany and it cost many lives before South West Africa was captured. Today the South African government is still involved in a dispute with the United Nations concerning the status of the territory. All this could have been avoided if Sir John's warning had been heeded in 1876. Subsequent events have proved how farsighted and right he was.

In 1878, Parliament approved of the annexation of Griqualand West to the Cape Colony. In the meantime Sir Bartle Frere was sent out in 1877 by Lord Carnarvon as Governor and High Commissioner, charged with carrying his confederation schemes into effect. The Cape Ministry thoroughly disapproved of his actions in Natal and in the Transvaal, in which he as High Commissioner had authorised Sir Theophilus Shepstone to proclaim a British colony.

Sir John had gone to England in July 1876, but that Carnarvon-Frere-Shepstone combination was too strong for him. They regarded him as an obstacle in the way of putting confederation into practice, so when the Gaika-Galeka war of 1877-78 broke out, the Governor soon found grounds on which to dismiss the Molteno Cabinet.

This turned in effect on the refusal of Sir John to place the colonial burgher forces under the control of the general in command of the Imperial troops.

His personal experience of the war in 1846 undoubtedly led him to believe that the Imperial troops were incapable of conducting the kind of guerilla warfare necessary in a frontier war against natives. Moreover, he believed strongly that the Cabinet of a self-governing colony was responsible for its own burgher forces, which would do the job - in his opinion - in a fraction of the time and at a small percentage of the expense which the use of Imperial troops would involve.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the dispute may be, the fact remains that Sir Bartle Frere on 6 February 1878 dismissed the Cabinet of a self-governing colony, which commanded the support of Parliament. The Governor's actions at the time were regarded as unconstitutional. He called on Sir Gordon Sprigg to form a cabinet which would have his confidence. Sir Bartle Frere and Lord Carnarvon between them bungled affairs thoroughly; one disaster followed the other - the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877; the Zulu War of 1877-78; and the Boer War of 1880-81, ending in General Colley's death on Majuba. Sir Bartle Frere had to be recalled.

Sir John resigned in 1878 from Parliament as he felt too frustrated. He returned for a further spell in 1880-1883 as M.L.A. for Victoria West (part of his old constituency) and from 9 May 1881 to 30 June 1882 he was Colonial Secretary in Sir Thomas Scanlon's Cabinet, but he felt frustrated and out of sympathy with the prevailing political policies.

Chapter 9 Racialism and the 'Beaufort Boer'

'Onze Jan' Hofmeyr in 1872 considered that Sir John: "had shown himself a man with a broader national feeling than some of his contemporaries, and the majority of the Dutch-speaking members had submitted to his leadership, as one, who… was able to look at things from their point of view with a measure of sympathy". [57]

This characterisation is further explained by John X Merriman, who had been a minister in the Molteno Cabinet:

> "Mr Molteno's bent of mind was certainly conservative... No-one before or since has so completely obtained the confidence… of the colonists of Dutch descent... As a large landowner, as a conservative, and at the same time an ardent believer in the right of self-government for the community, Mr Molteno was looked up to as the natural leader of the country party...
>
> "It was mainly owing to the personality of Mr Molteno, who was able to persuade the Cape Parliament to enter on what at that time was considered a gigantic scheme of public works… No-one else could have hoped to get such measures through Parliament largely composed of small landowners, in a country divided by local jealousies, and having just emerged from a period of financial difficulty and distress…
>
> "Sir John Molteno was above and before anything else a parliamentarian.… He was prudent, cautious, and with a great deal of common sense. He had, more than anyone else, unreservedly the confidence of the people of this country… [and was] called 'the Beaufort Boer'." [58]

Elizabeth Maria Molteno (nee Jarvis), John Molteno's second wife, c. 1860

Before all else, Sir John remained a farmer. He had acquired a real knowledge of the people of the country, largely as a result of many years' residence among them in the Karoo, but also from the fact that his second wife was partly of Dutch extraction. Her mother spoke Dutch in the home to the day of her death; both Mr and Mrs Jarvis belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church, of which the latter became an elder and Mrs Molteno too always remained a devout member of the same church.

Sir John, however, never would have anything to do with racial divisions, but aimed at representing all sections and working for the progress of the country at large. He, more than any other Cape Premier, had the confidence of the majority of the people. It is very noticeable that from the day of the dismissal of his Cabinet, racial lines of cleavage became more and more apparent.[59] The Carnarvon-Frere-Froude policy brought about many disasters all over South Africa and from them resulted many ills, the fruit of which we are still picking today.

The day which witnessed the unconstitutional dismissal of the Molteno ministry and which spelt the reversal of Sir John's policies was indeed a tragic moment in our history. Never again have we seen that unique combination of an Englishman becoming a Beaufort Boer, commanding the confidence of all sections of the population, representing the Dutch-speaking farmer and even winning over the English Eastern province, initially so distrustful of him. What a disaster it has proved that Lord Carnarvon became Secretary of State for Colonies when he did, that he cherished a policy of his own which he wanted to force on the country, and that Sir John was not able to return for a second period of office.

Sir HENRY BARTLE FRERE, Bart.

Photo by Maull & Fox, London.

The Governor, Sir Henry Bartle Frere, who dismissed John Molteno's ministry unconstitutionally in 1878

Chapter 10 Sir John's family in the 1870s

The nature of the home life of the Moltenos comes out clearly in the journal and in the letters, so we do not need to go into detail here.

The deaths of Sir John's small son Alfie and of his great friend Vincent Rice (while on a visit to Claremont House) undoubtedly were hard knocks during his period of office. But the greatest blow of all was the death of his wife, Elizabeth Maria Jarvis, in April 1874, followed by the baby's death the following year. All these shocks, coming on top of the trouble in which he was involved through the Froude-Carnarvon activities, were enough to unnerve a man stronger than he was. But he carried on grimly, doing what he conceived to be his duty, although these blows naturally caused him to age rapidly.

Elizabeth Maria Molteno's tombstone, St Saviour's, Claremont

To show the nature of his relationship with his children, here follow three letters to his eldest daughter, Betty, written at various times:

Letter 1 - Wellington, September 30, 1874

My dear Betty

I intend returning this afternoon. I have bought a horse for Charlie – let James go to the Salt River station this afternoon to meet the train at six o'clock and bring a saddle and bridle with him, to ride the horse home. The boys can come to meet me by the 6:30 train.

Hoping to see you all well and with much love to you all,

Your affectionate father

J.C. Molteno

Letter 2 - Letter from Colonial Sec's office, Cape Town, Monday (about 1875)

Dear Betty

The *Asiatic* is in, as you will doubtless have heard. She will most likely leave for Port Elizabeth on Saturday, but the agents cannot say positively as yet. I have ascertained that a port-hole cabin, quite in the centre of the ship, is available for you. I thought you would like to know about the ship as soon as possible.

Your affectionate father,

J.C. Molteno

Letter 3 - Albemarle hotel, London, 1 August 1876

Dear Betty

Betty Molteno, John Molteno's eldest child, as a young woman, c. 1870s

As you will have many letters by this mail giving you full particulars of our voyage, our arrival etc etc, it is not necessary that I should write at any great length, perhaps merely repeating what will be found in other letters.

I wonder how you all are, how you have got on since we left. I hope, please God, this will find you all well. You must consider this letter as written to all my dear children at the Cape. I often think of you all. Your absence is the only drawback to the pleasure and good I am deriving from this trip, but I look forward with pleasure to the time when I shall be with you all again. How are Barkly and Wallace? They being the smallest, I mention them more particularly. Jamsie and Victor will I hope write to me themselves. Ask Barkly if anyone has been teasing him while I have been away, if so, they must look out when I return!

Although we have got over the distance so quickly, you seem so far away. I think the voyage has done me good. One gentleman who saw me this morning excused himself for saying, when we got more intimate in the course of conversation, that he had imagined from all he had heard, that I was done up or worn out with worry and overwork, instead of which he has found me strong and vigorous. I think it looks as if others had a similar idea, as they all say I am looking so well. I think my eyesight is

improving. I find I am getting into the habit of putting the glasses up on my forehead and keeping them there without knowing it - this is perhaps gratifying, and may perhaps be taken as a good sign. I must now try and not overwork my eyes. [The] doctor thinks there is no cataract tendency from the strain that is of necessity put upon me.

How are Dr Murray and Caroline, and how do you all get on at their house? You must write me fully. I saw Lord Carnarvon yesterday. He met me in the most cordial manner, as did Mr Herbert Lowther and all the people at the Colonial office. President Brand [60] called with his son and daughter immediately on our arrival, Mrs Brand not being well. Mr Froude called yesterday! Most friendly, but of course we did not touch upon politics; this may come after.

I am to dine with Sir Gordon Wolseley on Thursday and with Mr Cox (great friend of Sir Henry Barkly) of the Colonial Office tomorrow, but he says Lady Wood is in the country but will call on her return. I suppose she is Mrs Cox and retains the title of Lady Wood in her own right. A good many people have called. [I] have not yet seen my sister [61], but have communicated with and shall see her, I hope, tomorrow. The fact is too much has been crowded into two days, that it looks more as if we had been here a week.

John Molteno with his two eldest children, Betty and Caroline, c. mid 1870s

I must now conclude and I may add a postscript in the morning. My kindest love to you all, my dear children. Many kisses for Barkly and Wallace - you must ask them how the polar bear and walrus are getting on. I wish I could just look in and see you all for a little, but 6,000 miles intervenes, the idea of which sometimes depresses me for a little and I fancy if once back again, I should not easily make up my mind to leave you all again. I intend to write to Mr Alport but may be prevented; if so, you must give him full particulars about us all and say I will write by next mail. I did write to him from Madeira. Best love to him and Aunt Sophia and remembrances to all.

Believe me, your affectionate father,

J.C.Molteno

John Charles Molteno, surrounded by his family and friends at his daughter Caroline's wedding to Dr C F K Murray, Claremont House, February 1876

In August 1875, Sir John was married to his third wife Minnie Blenkins, the stepdaughter of Annie Jarvis (his second wife's sister). The latter had married Major W. Blenkins - a widower with several daughters - but a few years after their marriage he had died in India and she had returned with her own two sons and two stepdaughters to Cape Town, where she settled down near her father Hercules Jarvis.

Chapter 11 Retirement and a knighthood

Shortly after Sir John resigned from the Scanlen Cabinet and intimated that he would not be standing for Parliament again, the K.C.M.G. was conferred on him. This news was conveyed to him in the following letters from Sir Hercules Robinson, the Governor, and from Lord Kimberley, Secretary of State for Colonies.

Government House, Cape Town, 12 August 1882

Dear Mr Molteno,

I have a telegram from Lord Kimberley this morning, begging me to inform you that he will feel much pleasure in submitting your name to the Queen for the distinction of K.C.M.G., in the event of your being willing to accept the honour.

It is very gratifying to me to make this intimation to you, and I may add that I do not think such a mark of the Royal favour has ever been more deservedly bestowed.

Yours sincerely,

Hercules Robinson

Hillingdon House, Uxbridge, 16 August 1882

Dear Mr Molteno

Although we have had no communication since you left England, I cannot resist giving you one line to say how glad I am to be the formal announcer to you that you are made a K.C.M.G.

I trust that it has been a pleasure to have the Order, which you have so well earned, and you have my best wishes that in your retirement into private life, you may have the full enjoyment of health and domestic happiness.

I tried to catch your son [during] the short time I was in London, but failed as he was away in Paris. It is very little that I trouble my house in London now.

Believe me, yours very truly,

Kimberley

Government House, Cape Town, 19 August 1882

My dear Sir John,

I have just received a Reuters telegram announcing your appointment as K.C.M.G. and I cannot resist writing one line to express to Lady Molteno, as well as to yourself, my cordial congratulations upon such a well-merited mark of the Royal favour having been conferred on you.

Believe me, yours sincerely,

Hercules Robinson

[to] the Honourable Sir John Molteno K.C.M.G.

Among the many messages of congratulation which he received, the following one from Sir Charles Mills - agent general for the Cape Colony in London - represented the opinion of a man who had served directly under him as Under-Colonial Secretary during the period of Sir John's premiership:

8 Albert mansions, Victoria Street, S.W, 19 August 1882

My dear Sir John Molteno,

Permit me to tender you my hearty congratulations and best wishes on the well merited honour which Her Majesty the Queen has been pleased to confer upon you.

Few men know better than I do how eminently deserving you are of this, and indeed of any distinction with which thorough integrity, sterling honesty, and unremitting zeal in the discharge of onerous and responsible public duties, can be rewarded. None can more earnestly and sincerely wish you a long and happy life to enjoy the honour which you have now received, and, what is yet more precious, the universal regard and esteem of your fellow men.

Permit me to avail myself of this opportunity to express to you my grateful thanks for all the consideration and kindness which I have received at your hands during the many years I had the pleasure and privilege to be associated with you in our official duties. They will never be forgotten.

Again congratulating you most heartily, I am with kindest regards and best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Charles Mills

P.S. I may mention that Lord Kimberley after dinner at his house the other day told me in strict confidence of your intended knighthood, adding that he knew it would please me to hear it. I said I felt greatly rejoiced - but that having the advantage of knowing your sons, as well as yourself - I should have been better pleased, had it been a baronetcy - to which he replied "so should I". I have mentioned this incident to show you privately, how high your standing is, as well as in the estimation of all men.

A letter from F. Schermbrucker (1832-1904) came from a different section of the population, from a man who had arrived in the Eastern Cape in 1857 as a German immigrant, and who had, by sheer ability, forged ahead: M.L.C. from 1882-88 and M.L.A. for Kingwilliamstown, 1868, 1889-1904. From 1884-90 he was Commissioner of Public Works and Crown Lands, while he had also seen considerable service in various frontier wars. On some

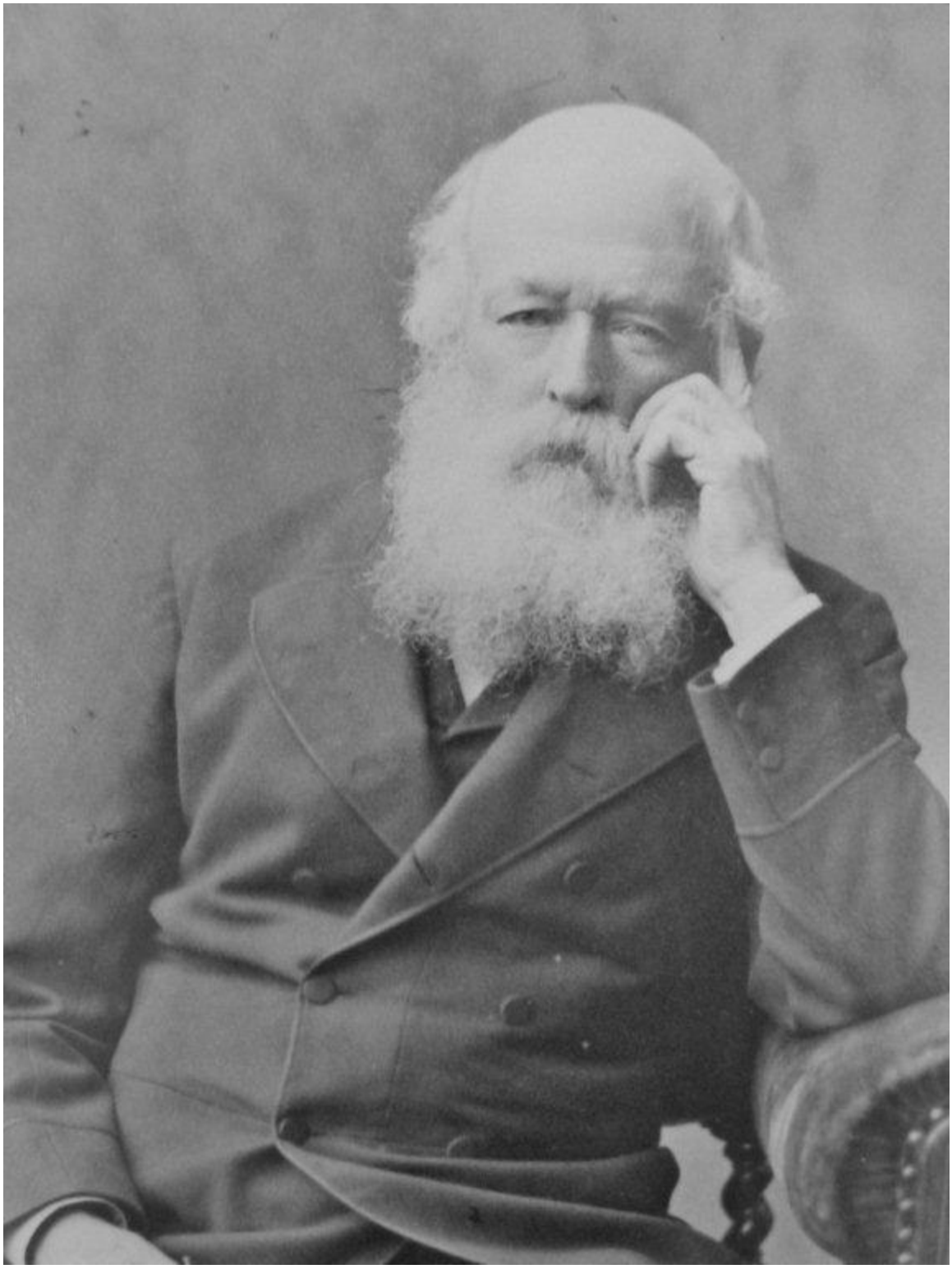
matters he had supported Sir John, on others, as an Eastern Province representative, he had differed from him. His tribute is therefore all the more convincing:

> *14 Williamstown, August 24, 1882*
>
> My dear Sir J.C. Molteno
>
> Pray accept my most hearty congratulations to the distinguished honour, which it has pleased Her Majesty to bestow upon you. All the colony, I am sure, feels proud in the recognition of the faithful services of the first responsible Prime Minister of this colony and I do most sincerely wish that you may long live to enjoy your Honours; the most worthy and distinguished true Colonist, whose example will soon excite our Colonial youth to try and imitate your singular political honesty of purpose and unswerving perseverance.
>
> As one of those who fought under your banner for the introduction of responsible government into this colony, I feel particularly happy in being able to congratulate you now upon your complete success after many trials.
>
> Believe me always,
>
> Yours, very sincerely devoted,
>
> F. Schermbrucker

A tribute to Sir John from F.W. Reitz - at the time President of the Orange Free State - contained in a letter he wrote on 27 January 1894 to Percy A. Molteno, may well be cited here:

> "I trust that the work which your father so nobly begun may not be left uncompleted. When he secured responsible government for us, he fairly started us (as I think) on the road to a more perfect autonomy and independence.
>
> "I mean independence as far as duty, expediency and the loyalty you and other British colonists owe to the Queen will allow."

Between 1883 and early 1886, Sir John lived in England, where several of his sons were then studying.[62] He was accompanied by Lady Molteno and the four young children of his last marriage. He returned to the Cape, and on 1 September 1886 he died very suddenly. He was buried in the cemetery of St Saviours Church, Claremont.



Sir John Charles Molteno, a year or so before his death in September 1886

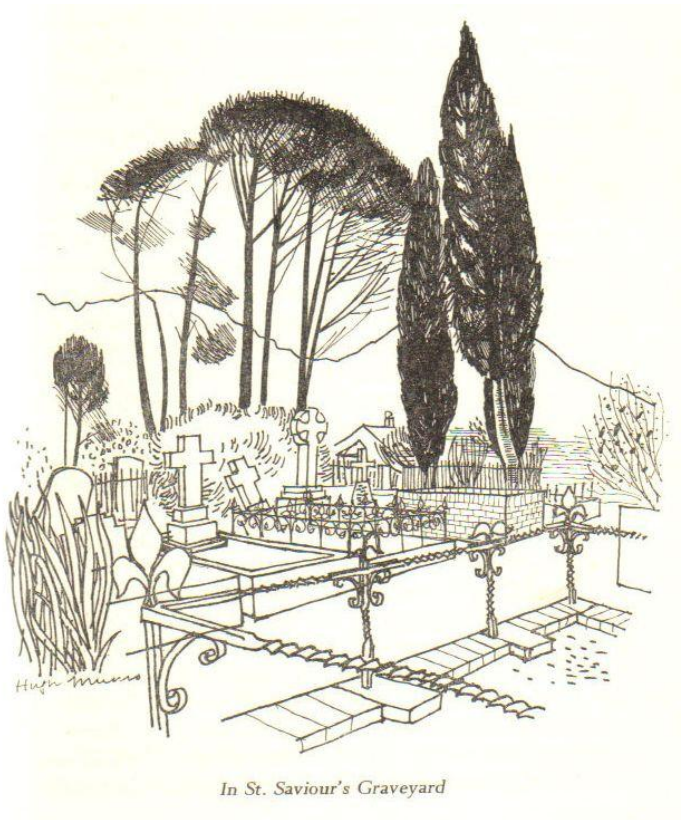
So passed away a man "after a strenuous life for 72 years, most of which was given unsparing aid of the public affairs of his adopted country". [63]

"His death was the occasion of unanimous and sincere expression of sorrow from the whole of the country and from all political parties, who felt that they had lost a great and a good man. [64]

"Indeed, the most representative man that the country had yet produced, whose name will ever be associated with the history of the Colony, and his public career may always serve as a model for men, possibly possessed of more superficial brilliance, but you will never outshine him in the sterling qualities of political honesty, sound judgement, and common sense." [65]

Chapter 12 Funeral of the late Sir John Molteno

On Saturday afternoon, the mortal remains of the late Sir John Charles Molteno, K.C.M.G., were interred in the Claremont Cemetery. The funeral arrangements were of the simplest character. From the residence of the deceased gentleman to the cemetery, which is but a short distance, the coffin was borne on the shoulders of the male employees on the estate, while the mourners and friends followed on foot, the unpretending nature of the solemn scene reminding one of those quiet rural funerals so beautifully sketched by Washington Irving.



In St. Saviour's Graveyard

St Saviour's, Claremont – where Sir John Charles and Elizabeth Maria Molteno's tombs lie side by side

The gathering of those who attended to pay their last tribute of respect, if not one of the largest witnessed here for some time past, was certainly one of the most representative. The pall bearers were: Sir J.H. de Villiers (Chief Justice of the colony), Sir T.C.Scanlon, M.L.A. Honourable Burghers, MLC; the Honourable J.X.Merriman, M.L.A; the Honourable C.W. Hutton, M.L.A; the Honourable Abercrombie (Auditor General); Mr W. Searle and Mr C. A. Fairbridge; among those in the procession being the Right Reverend the Bishop of Cape Town, Sir David Tennant (Speaker of the Legislative Assembly), the Honourable J. Tudhope etc.

The mourners were Lady Molteno, three daughters and seven sons of the deceased; Mr H.C. Jarvis (father-in-law), Mr Alport (brother-in-law), Dr Murray and Mr T.J. Anderson (sons-in-law).

The body was received outside the church by the curate, the Rev J.G. Sutton, the lessons being read in the sacred edifice by the Rev Canon Ogilvie. The service was full choral, the hymm '*A few more years shall roll, a few more seasons pass*' being sung before the lessons, and "now the labourer's task is done" after; the Psalm, the 90th, being chanted.

As the body was borne from the church, the Dead March in Saul was impressively rendered by the organist Mr Halford Smith. At the grave the remaining portion of the ritual was read by the Rector, the Rev R. Brooke assisted by the Rev H.E. Morris, and after the coffin had been lowered into its resting place, the choir sung the hymm '*Through all the changing seasons of life*'. The coffin was of plain teak, with a brass plate bearing the inscription:

Sir John Charles Molteno
Born 5 June 1814
Died 1 September 1886

The lid was covered with a number of floral tributes, amongst them being a wreath of rare beauty from Mr Saul Solomon. It was the workmanship of Mr Charles Ayres and consisted of no fewer than 150 white azaleas, a

number of banksia and other roses, together with white stocks and maiden-hair fern. We should add that, as a mark of respect, His Excellency the Governor and Lieutenant-General Torrens sent their carriages to join in the funeral cortege. [66]

Among the mourners – Hercules Jarvis, Percy Alport, Tom Anderson and Dr Charles Murray

Chapter 13 Recollections of Sir John Molteno written by his daughters

a) Sir John's daughter Caroline Murray

Caroline Murray, John Charles and Elizabeth Maria Molteno's second eldest daughter

"Although a man of his strong temper and force of will would be likely to make many enemies, his real generosity and disinterestedness made it impossible for anyone to cherish any really bitter feeling against him. In his own case he carried out fully the principle of 'forgive and forget'. I never remember - either in the case of his own children or anyone else - his ever bringing up the past offence against them. He often dealt with thoughts or mistakes very severely at the time, but never referred to them again afterwards.

"In his private as well as public life he was strictly conscientious as to the way in which he employed money. He liked liberality, but he hated extravagance. He knew the right value of money. I remember his saying once, in the course of conversation, that he did not consider that money or any other possessions we might have were exactly our own, they were ours as stewards, and therefore there was a great responsibility in the use we made of them. He was very simple in his tastes and hated self-indulgence and ostentation - perhaps the only self-indulgence he was guilty of was that of too great exclusiveness - he was very reluctant to go into society and disliked the restraint of strangers, but it was rather the contemplating than the reality that he felt a burden - for he enjoyed nothing more than good conversation and warm discussion and always seemed greatly inspirited by it.

"His character never shone out more grandly than at the time of his great defeat in Parliament, which really closed his political career. He had been so conscious of the absolute right of his cause that he never had a doubt but that his friends would see it too and rally round him when the battle came. The way in which he bore the trial was characteristic of all his political life. There was no petty personal feeling in it, his anxiety was all for the failure of a good cause, and the strong conviction of the evil consequences which must follow and which now, by the country's own act, he was powerless to influence. He was a true patriot; he placed his duty to his country - not in name alone, but in actual fact - highest among his earthly duties, and he scorned to take advantage of the trust reposed in him for the benefit either himself or any belonging to him in even the smallest degree."

In later years when talking of her father becoming Prime Minister, Caroline recalled his unwillingness to accept the salary which went with the appointment. At that time, it was £800 a year. He was ardently keen to serve his country, but not for payment, and Caroline remembered his coming home with the first instalment and placing it in his wife's lap saying: "You must use this as you think best, I will not take it." Eventually he doubtless found the expenses connected with his position justified his acceptance of a salary.

b) Sir John's daughter Betty Molteno - written in March 1895

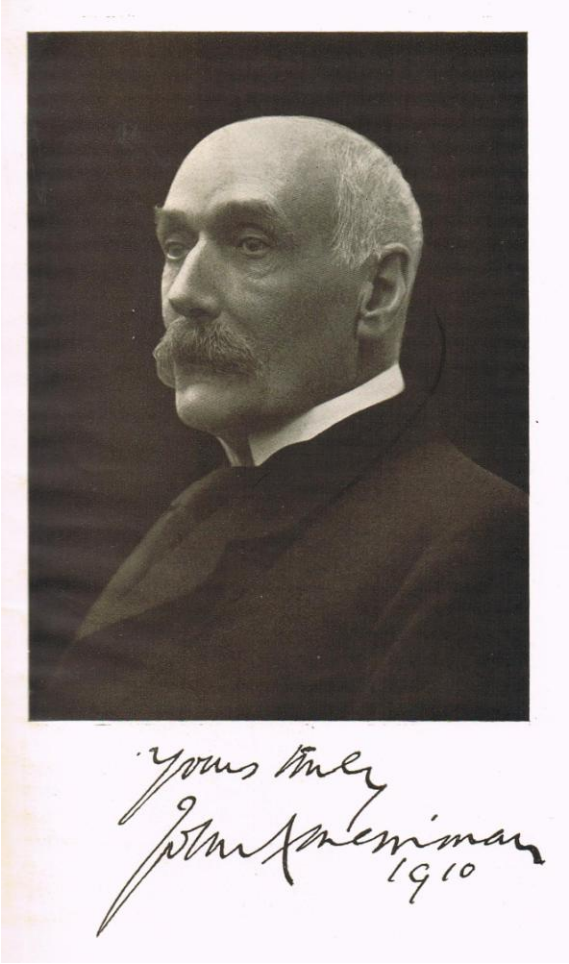
Betty Molteno, John Charles and Elizabeth Maria Molteno's eldest child

"He married Mama in the September of 1851 (I think it was in September). He had paid his first visit to England being determined to be present at the Great Exhibition of 1851. He told me that his weight was less than 100lb when he went to England, and that he gained a great deal in weight during his visit.

Of his Nelspoort life, you will know that his activity at this time was prodigious, that he was working out numberless ideas. I understand that people working with him said they could not stand it - that he wore them out. He was an exceedingly early riser and insisted on those who are employed by him doing the same. Mrs Musto told me that when she and her sister Mrs Arthur Jackson first came to Africa, they stayed at his house… She also told me that later on when Mrs Arthur Jackson died, she does not know what she would have done without Papa - that he procured milk daily for the poor little baby - brought it or sent it to her himself. She said that the impression he made upon her in those days was that of one whose thoughts were projected into the future, who lived in another world from other people…"

Chapter 14 John X Merriman's tribute

John X. Merriman,[67] who entered the Cape Parliament in 1869, had been a member of Sir John's Cabinet from July 1875 to February 1878. As a former colleague, he performed the unveiling of a portrait of Sir John in the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town, and took the opportunity of recalling to mind the manner of man he was and what he had achieved:



Pioneer politics: Mr Merriman's tribute to a former colleague

Sir John Molteno's force of character

Mr Merriman today unveiled a portrait of the late Sir John Molteno, the first Prime Minister of the Cape of Good Hope, whom he characterised as a fine example of the 'old-type' Englishman. The ceremony took place in the dining room of the Houses of Parliament in the presence of about 100 persons, there being a fair number of ladies present.

The portrait, though not a large one, is striking, and is said to be an excellent likeness. Sir James Molteno, son of the gentleman whose memory was honoured, afterwards responded in a few appropriate words.

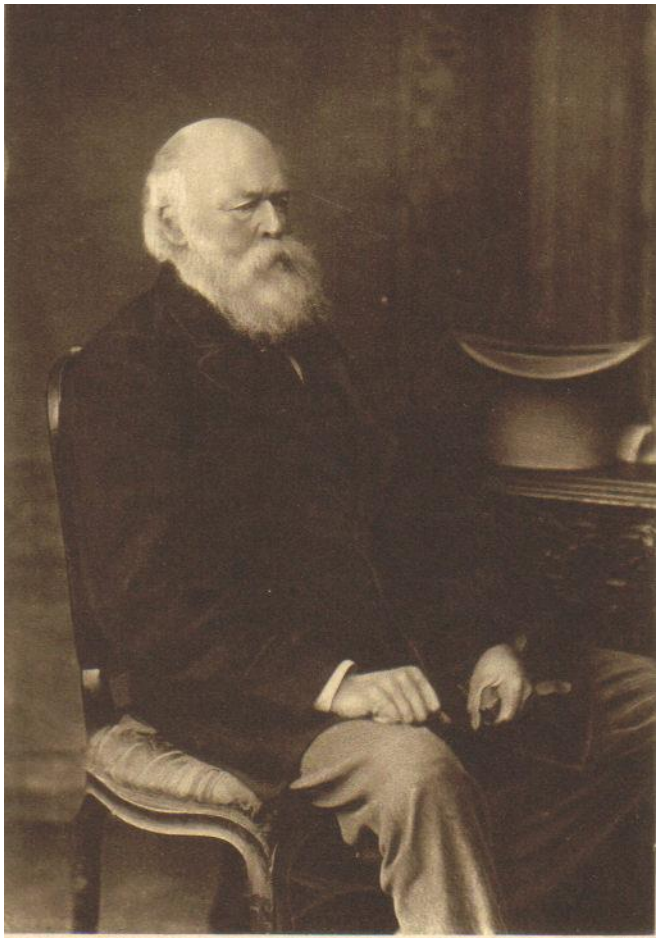
Mr Merriman referred to the tendency of the age to forget, and in a characteristic manner dwelt upon certain changes that had occurred since the pioneer days in politics.

The President of the Senate, the Speaker of the Assembly and Sir Thomas Smartt were in attendance as Mr Merriman took the cord attached to the covering of the picture, and after a preliminary sentence or two, the latter revealed the portrait, which, he said, was an excellent likeness of Mr Molteno in his prime…

Proceeding, after the portrait had been scanned by those present, Mr Merriman referred to his personal recollections of the subject of the picture.

"This was a man."

Sir John Molteno, he said, was a fine specimen of a man if ever there was one. He was a true type of Englishman, although of foreign extraction, his family having come from Lombardy to England. There was, however, nothing Italian about him, as he was a type of good old Englishman, and as dogged a man as ever there was in Parliament. Yet he became a real Boer, and afterwards belonged to the Boer type. Thus he combined the attributes of a good Boer and a good Englishman.



John Charles Molteno, at the time of his final retirement from politics in 1882, aged 68

Describing some recollections of his subject, and referring to him as "my first chief in Parliament", Mr Merriman showed how, in the early days of responsible government, the sum of £600,000 was the old revenue on which to run the Cape Colony. They were in very low water at first, and Mr Molteno taught them a good old lesson of economy.

"Well," added Mr Merriman, "there were differences of opinion, but he got the House to vote for retrenchment. Afterwards there was an air of prosperity, and we secured the priceless gift of responsible government. But I am not so sure it is the best form of government. I don't know if we are better or wiser, but we are certainly richer.

"When we got responsible government, he took in hand the communications, namely, the railway, and he borrowed what was then the incredible sum of £4 million. Nobody else would have got the older members of Parliament to agree to that. He is therefore the father of railway extension. In these days the railway stopped at Wellington, but you can now go in a railway carriage in comfort right to central Africa. It is a great thing for the country like this, and nobody would have started a thing like that without Sir John Molteno.

Reforming the world

"I will not go into the history of how Lord Carnarvon tried to force the country to Federation before its time and the encounters he had with it…. Then we were all dismissed by the Governor - a most unconstitutional and improper act."

"Mr Merriman, having shown how Sir John Molteno had tolerated the mistakes made by his hot-headed supporters, and how loyal he was to his subordinates, proceeded: "I doubt if we shall ever see his like again. Times have changed, and money power has come into this country,[68] and everyone's idea is to get rich in some sort of way. The country is changed. The good old Boer whom I saw when I first entered Parliament, of whom Sir John Molteno was a type, has vanished altogether. The Boer was the dominant force in South Africa, but he is not so any longer. But times have changed, and we shall see again the time when the good old Boer will govern the country, and people with a real stake in the country will come forward again."

"Sir John Molteno, he said, governed the country well, and did one or two great things for the country. His type should have more dominance in this country than was the case at present. That was before the days when they had 42 lawyers in the house. They then had 42 Boers. Though they were not perhaps so smart then, they governed the country all right. We ought to consider that the dominant force of this country was the landholder, and the people to govern the land were the people who owned it. He hoped the time would yet come for this, and the country would then be on a safe basis.

"In conclusion, Mr Merriman said political memories were short, indeed, and the names of the past political pioneers were hardly ever mentioned nowadays: 'What shadows we are, what shadows we pursue'.

"It was a bad trait of South Africa to forget those who had gone before us, and we ought to remember those people more. We ought certainly to remember what Sir John Molteno did for the railways. He was the first man to make true progress possible in South Africa for having started the railways going."

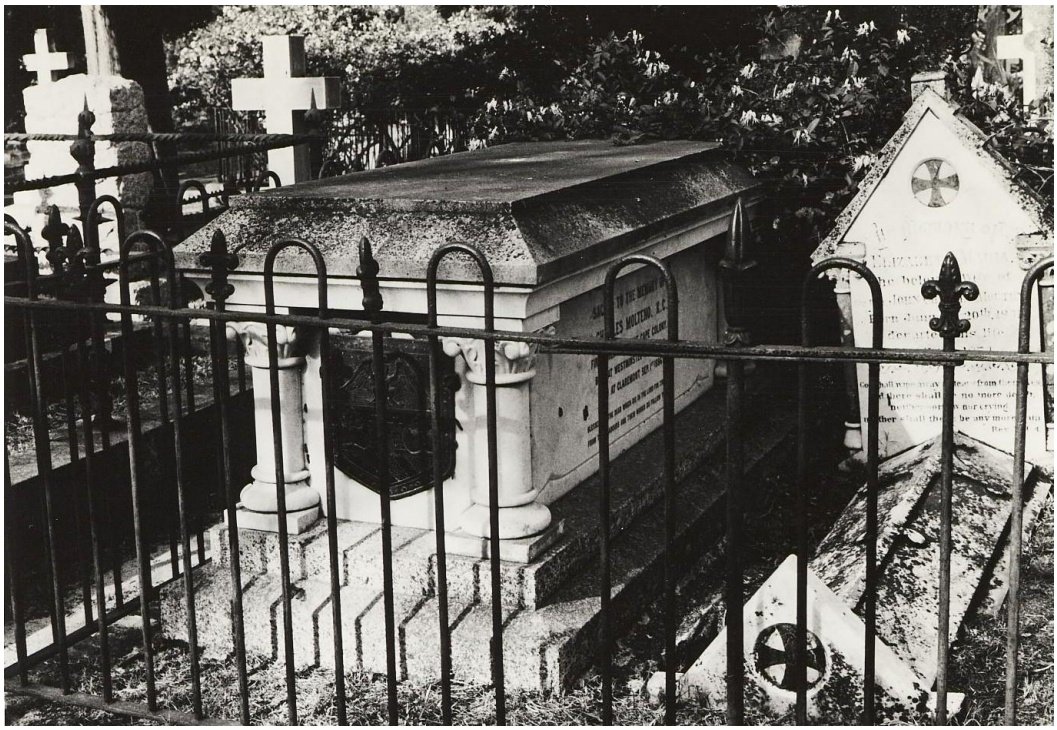
Father and son

Sir James Molteno thanked Mr Merriman for what he had said. What struck him most about his father's career was his force of character. He was in no way an opportunist; he saw a thing plainly and nothing would make him budge from the position he took up.

Many things in respect to responsible government, which we now saw clearly, were not so clear, and he worked hard for the initiation of that policy. It was gratifying that one of his young men should be alive today to tell them what took place, and what was the character of the man in those days. He quite agreed as to the short memories we had of great men, who seemed to fade away and perish, and he reaffirmed what he had once said, to the effect that we had insufficient reminders of them before us.

His father was an old soldier, and first got to know the Boer, as he had to take part in the Kafir Wars as Commandant. He was then a young Englishman alone in the Karoo; but the others all flocked to his tent. He first went to Parliament in 1854, and, finding the political machine was not enough for the country, did not rest until they secured responsible government, which had expanded from time to time.

Speaking on behalf of the numerous members of the Molteno family, Sir James thanked Mr Merriman for taking so prominent a part on this occasion, and also thanked the ladies and gentlemen who attended to perpetuate the memory of one who was a guide in our country.



The tomb of Sir John Charles Molteno, St Saviour's, Claremont

Chapter 15 Memorials to Sir John

The town of Molteno in the Stormberg area between Queenstown and Burghersdorp was named after Sir John, as was the Molteno Pass in the Nieuwveld Mountains near Beaufort West. When Cape Town's new reservoir, to hold 50,000,000 gallons, was completed in 1882 at a cost of £98,000, it was just at the time when Sir John had announced his impending retirement from public life and so the Molteno Reservoir was named in his honour [69], while the adjoining street in the gardens became Molteno Road. There is also a Molteno Road in Claremont, which is the road leading to his former residence, Claremont House.

In many other towns in the Cape Province too, there are Molteno Roads to be found. As has been stated elsewhere, a portrait was painted of Sir John which hangs in the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town.

Endnotes

Please note: Notes in bold are by the Editor of this website, Robert Molteno; the remainder are by the author of the biography, Dr R. F. M. Immelman.

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[1] **It is by no means certain whether more than one Molteno arrived in London at this time, or whether he or they arrived direct from Milan or via Paris.**

[2] **These exist as one document in the UCT Archives, and are reproduced in this section of this website under the title *The Molteno Family: Italian Origins and English Roots.***

[3] **This has not yet been digitized.**

[4] J.H. Richardson was at that time the South African Library's London agent, who attended to the supply of the books which were ordered by the Library Committee in Cape Town.

[5] Alexander Johnstone Jardine, who is mentioned in the letter, was librarian of the South African Library from 1824 until 1845: "He was a friend of the playwright Sheridan of the Scott circle, and a man of considerable culture and wit. He was described by a Grahamstown admirer in the following terms: 'He is not like one of your bookworms, who grow thin on literary lore, but possessed of a goodly presence and comely aspect, that sheds a cheerful influence on the establishment.'" He was the grandfather of the late Major William Jardine, the Africana collector of Sir Lowry's Pass. (cf. *Adventures in Africana* by D.H. Varley. Cape Town, 1949)

[6] **The story of Frederick Molteno, sometimes referred to as the 'black sheep' of the family, and certainly not successful financially in the way his brothers John and Frank were, will be told on this website at a later date. So will what is known about Frank Molteno and his descendants in Hawaii.**

[7] His two sisters.

[8] One of his brothers.

[9] Another of his brothers.

[10] **Arthur Jackson, a first cousin of John Molteno. Their mothers were daughters of George Bower.**

[11] Arthur Jackson, his cousin.

[12] Arthur Jackson, his cousin, who had been an officer in the merchant navy, was brought by Sir John to Beaufort to assist him as manager of one of his farms. Three other Jackson cousins followed and all became sheep farmers. Some of their descendants are, today, still sheep farmers in the Beaufort and neighbouring districts.

[13] Pretoria, van Schaik, 1954. pp. 66-67.

[14] Fraser, op.cit, pp. 6-8, 14.

[15] Plots of ground.

[16] He accompanied his father, Reverend Colin Fraser.

[17] Where the station and railway buildings now are.

[18] Masses of springboks migrating across the Karoo. **Farming in the Karoo was hugely challenging, particularly in the early generations of sheep-raising. Wild animals abounded in the kloofs and preyed off livestock. Droughts were, and remain**

today, a recurrent threat. And periodically good rains in some distant region led to plagues of locusts or springbok sweeping across the land, devouring every blade of vegetation in their path.

[19] Gray, Bishop R. *A Journal of the Bishop's visitation tour through the Cape Colony...* London, S.P.C.K., 1852. Part One: pp. 62-65.

[20] **Social segregation, as it was called, was firmly established generations before the legal edifice of apartheid was built in the 20th century. Most white South Africans rejected ordinary human intercourse between themselves and their fellow South Africans of African and Asian ancestry. This was embodied in where people lived, what schools they went to, and so on. All this despite the Cape Colony's formally colour-blind laws, including those defining political rights.**

[21] Ibid. Part Two: pp. 6-9.

[22] **This is an extraordinarily tiny number for anyone who knows Beaufort West today. One has to remember how tiny were the populations of urban settlements in the mid 19th century. Even the population as a whole was in the order of one tenth, or less, of today's 50 million.**

[23] *South African Church* magazine, 1856.

[24] **The story of the anti-convict agitation to resist the British Government's intention to turn the Cape into a penal colony, like New South Wales, is told in full in R.F.M. Immelman, *Hercules Crosse Jarvis (1803-1889) – A Biography,* which can be also be seen on this website.**

[25] Reverend Colin Fraser, Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church at Beaufort West, 1824-1870.

[26] Cape Town, Juta, 1922. p. 16.

[27] **Caroline Murray's *Reminiscences* have been digitized and will be available on this website in the *Diaries and Reminiscences* section.**

[28] **See R.F.M. Immelman, *Hercules Crosse Jarvis (1803-1889) – A Biography,* which can be seen in the *Biographies* section of this website.**

[29] *Pen and ink sketches in Parliament*, by Limner (R.W. Murray, senior) Cape Town, 1855. pp. 8-9.

[30] Ibid., p. 8.

[31] R.W. Murray in J.C.M.I., p. 91.

[32] Molteno, P.A.: *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno…* London, Smith, Elder, 1900. Two volumes.

[33] Rural areas.

[34] cf. Caroline Molteno's reminiscences.

[35] cf. chapter on Claremont House, preceding the Journal.

[36] Murray, R.W, op.cit., p. 9.

[37] Walker, Eric A, *Lord de Villiers and His Times…* 1842-1914. p. 41.

[38] **The Western and Eastern provinces of the Cape had very different origins. Their ethnic composition was very different – the Eastern province being mainly African and English-speaking British settlers who came after 1820, while the Western province comprised predominantly Coloured and Boer South Africans who spoke Dutch. The two regions were also several hundred miles apart and with very poor communications between them, except for occasional ships along the coast.**

[39] R.W. Murray in J.C.M.I., p. 91.

[40] Walker, op.cit., p. 41.

[41] That is, from 1854 to 1861.

[42] Caroline Molteno remembered this visit. cf. her *Reminiscences*.

[43] That is, the Karoo.

[44] Lewis, Cecil: *Founders & Builders*.

[45] Hofmeyr, J.H.and Reitz, F.W. *The Life of Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr (Onze Jan)*. Cape Town, 1913. Pp. 122-123.

[46] Union of South Africa. *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Libraries of the Union*… Cape Town, 1937. pp. 2-3.

[47] Ibid., page 2.

[48] Sir John, as Prime Minister, with Governor Sir Bartle Frere and John X. Merriman, a Cabinet minister, were then at King Williamstown, to be near the scene of the frontier war.

[49] Lady Molteno, whom he had married in 1875.
[50] His Excellency Sir Bartle Frere, the Governor.
[51] His son-in-law, Dr C.F.K. Murray, who married Caroline Molteno in 1876.
[52] A coloured man whom Sir John had brought from Claremont as a personal servant.
[53] **See map of 'European' South Africa in 1872 on page 9 above.**
[54] Molteno, op.cit., Vol. 1, p. 232.
[55] Included in the *Journal*.
[56] **The history of Southern Africa during the 19th century was one of constantly expanding colonial frontiers. This was partly at the instance of Boer farmers who had emigrated from the Cape after the abolition of slavery in 1836 and who had spread into a hinterland where they soon declared the South African and Orange Free State Republics. But as John Molteno's desire to annex the huge territory between the Orange and Cunene rivers to the North of the Cape shows, English-speaking colonists were also pressing for expansion, and not only on the Eastern Frontier where the 1820 settlers had been placed. The British government itself was a player. When diamonds were found in 1869 in an ill-defined area between the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State, the British Government annexed it. This became for a short while the colony of West Griqualand. Apparently, ignorance of geography and a reluctance to allow its own Cape Colony to take strategic control of access to this vast new source of wealth led the Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, to oppose John Molteno's desire for the Cape to take over the vast area between Griqualand West and the Atlantic Ocean. Imperial Germany annexed less than a decade later!**
[57] Hofmeyr, op. cit., p. 123.
[58] Molteno. op cit., Vol. 2, pp 454-457.
[59] **Dr Immelman speaks here of 'the majority of the people' and 'racial lines of cleavage'. We today have to remember that he was a white South African of his time. What he meant was that John Molteno commanded the confidence of a majority of *white* people. And the 'racial cleavage' he refers to is that between English and Dutch-speaking white South Africans. John Molteno was, as Dr Immelman probably correctly asserts, a 'conservative' political figure.**
[60] President J.H. Brand of the Orange Free State, who was in London at the time for discussions concerning Lord Carnarvon's confederation scheme.
[61] Mrs Nancy Bingle.
[62] **I think Dr Immelman is wrong about these dates. John Molteno arrived in London only in March 1885. His son Percy was alarmed to find him suffering from fainting fits and rushed him off to see a specialist. John and Minnie stayed in Britain for the next year – partly in Wales and partly in London. But in March 1886 John, who had not enjoyed being there, returned to the Cape by ship, accompanied by Percy who had graduated at Cambridge the year before. One upside to John Molteno's stay was that Percy was living in London (where he was trying to establish himself as a barrister), Victor was also studying in London before going up to Cambridge in September 1885 to study medicine, and in July James arrived also to go up to Cambridge and study law, accompanied by his youngest brother, the 13-year old Barkly, who was to be a Royal Navy cadet. So in addition to Minnie's four children who were at school in Eastbourne, John Molteno had the pleasure of three of his grown-up sons being in the same country as himself.**
[63] *Men of the Times, Old Colonists…* Johannesburg, Transvaal Publishing Company, 1906. p.457.
[64] Molteno, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 467.
[65] *Cape Argus,* 3 September 1886.
[66] *Cape Times*, 5 September 1886.
[67] **John X Merriman was a veteran Cape politician who as a young man had served in John Molteno's Cabinet and years later became a Prime Minister of the Cape himself.**
[68] **Merriman is referring to the huge changes that South Africa experienced as a result of the discovery of diamonds in 1869 and then gold in 1886. Prospectors, miners, railwaymen, entrepreneurs and many others poured in to both the Cape and the South African Republic. Their presence profoundly changed the composition of the white population. A new generation of extremely wealthy mine owners, newcomers to the Cape, arose. One of them, in particular, Cecil John Rhodes – to whom Merriman is almost certainly making reference to here – entered Cape politics and used his fortune to win elections and to get his way. The political centre of gravity moved away from the farming community John Molteno**

had represented all his life. A very different kind of society took hold in the last decade of the 19th century. And new political attitudes emerged, including anti-Boer jingoism and an unthinking British patriotism that was not necessarily in the best interests of the Cape or South Africa as a whole.

[69] Ellis, J. Alf. *Cape Town from 1800 to date*. Wynberg, 1897. p. 27.