

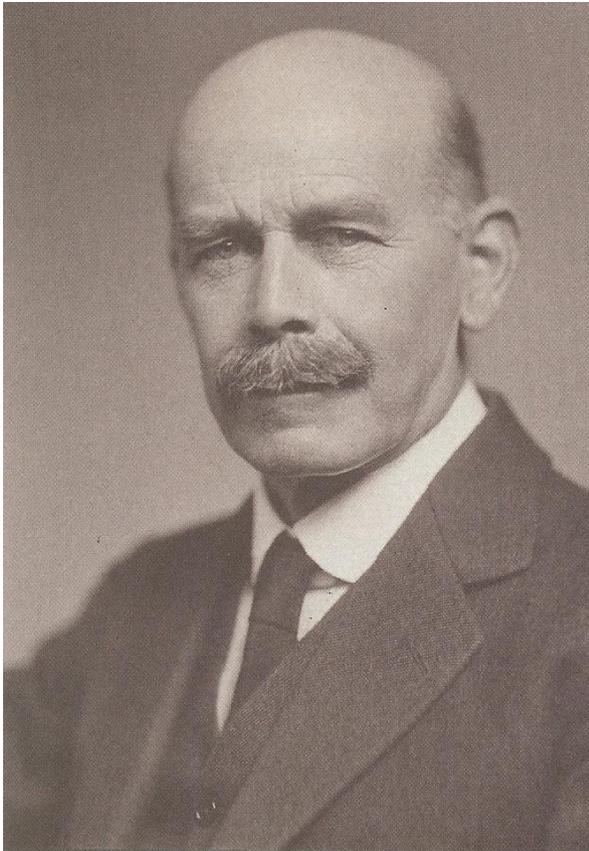
A Man of Principle

The Life of Percy Alport Molteno, M.P.

by Francis Hirst

Introduction

The single most exciting find in the Molteno/Murray family papers in the University of Cape Town's Archives is Francis Hirst's unpublished biography of Percy Molteno (1861-1937). In addition to his detailed account of Percy's life, there are other interesting chapters. One is about Percy's father-in-law, Sir Donald Currie, who was one of the great Victorian shipowners and a man who made a significant contribution to 19th century South African history. Another chapter relates the history of Glen Lyon where Sir Donald bought the three estates, to be left to each of his daughters. Francis Hirst has also written three chapters devoted to the life of Percy's father, Sir John Molteno. These are the best written



Percy Molteno in maturity. Besides playing an important role in the farming industry in England and South Africa, he was also a politician, director of companies, supporter of scientific endeavour and philanthropist.

biography of our ancestor who became the first Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. The book also includes lovely glimpses of Percy's brothers and sisters, and their family life at Claremont House, in the 1860s and '70s.

Percy is a very important figure in the Molteno and Murray families. He was the only Molteno to become seriously wealthy – in large part as a result of his marriage in September 1889 to Bessie Currie. He was the lynchpin of the family for almost half a century until his death in 1937. His and Bessie's homes in England (10 Palace Court, London, and their farm, Parklands, in Surrey), and later their Scottish home at Glen Lyon, were always open to the numerous Molteno brothers and sisters (fourteen in all), and their offspring who came over from the Cape. Percy also frequently used his wealth to support them financially at crucial points in their lives.

Percy and Bessie were the founders of what is now the Scottish branch of the family. Previous to their marriage, only one Molteno had married a Scotswoman. This was Percy's Uncle Charles Dominic Molteno who had married a widow, Mrs Glass, and moved from London to Edinburgh in the 1840s or 50s.

Another of Percy's contributions was the research he undertook into the very early history of the Molteno family in Italy. This remains the only source for what little we know of its origins in Lombardy from the Middle Ages.

Turning to the public arena, Percy played various roles in South African affairs and economic development. He tried to stop Britain drifting into its disastrous war against the Boer republics in 1899. And through his closeness to the Liberal leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who became Prime Minister in the Liberal landslide of 1906, he prompted the rapid restoration of self-rule in the defeated Boer Republics which had been turned into British colonies. Elected an M.P. for a Scottish seat in Perthshire in 1906 (a seat he held until 1918), Percy became deeply involved with those Liberals who feared that Britain's accelerating arms race with Germany might result in the country stumbling into war, which is what happened with the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914.

How Francis Hirst came to write this biography of Percy Molteno

Francis Hirst and Percy Molteno were friends and political colleagues in the Liberal Party for decades. The Hirsts lived at 13 Kensington Park Gardens, W11 – which was only a few hundred yards from 10 Palace Court. Francis, who was 12 years younger than Percy, had had a brilliant career at Oxford – becoming President of the Oxford Union and getting a First. His working life he spent as an author writing a host of books on economic and political questions, and as a journalist. He was Editor of the *Economist* for near a decade. But as the War continued to go very badly for Britain, he resigned in desperation in October 1916 and started an independent weekly, *Common Sense*, devoted to advocating some way out of the endless slaughter. Percy, still a Liberal M.P. at the time, became one of the Directors. The two men worked closely together in their vain attempts, with a small group of prominent but now sidelined Liberal leaders, to influence the course of events.

Francis and Percy also shared a commitment to Gladstonian Liberal principles. These included free trade, low taxation, and a limited role for government. Liberals of this persuasion also had a reluctance, not always adhered to, to resort to military means in settling international disputes.

After the War, the two men remained friends. And in 1926 they spent a very happy few months travelling through the United States with the explicit intention of learning from American business and economic policies. And at the beginning of 1937 Percy invited Francis to join him on another long tour, this time to Latin America. Other commitments, however, led Francis to decline and very soon the recurrence of Percy's acute asthma and eczema forced him also to abandon the plan.

Within weeks of Percy's death in September that year at the clinic in Zurich where he had taken refuge, Francis wrote to May Murray Parker, making clear that he knew the family were contemplating commissioning a life of Percy.¹ May had been greatly loved by her Uncle Percy who looked upon her as virtually a second daughter. She had dashed to Switzerland to see him when he was so ill. Hirst now told her that he was very keen to write the biography himself. And this is what Percy's daughter, Margaret, and her brother Jervis, must have settled on.

¹ See bundle of letters between Francis Hirst and May Murray Parker, dated October 1937 to early 1938. UCT Archives, BC330, Box 107.

Hirst seems to have been thinking about writing the book even before Percy's death. He had plied his old friend at the Clinic with questions about the family's history, and received some material Percy dictated from him. He had also got information earlier in the year from Caroline Murray, Percy's elder sister, who was living at Palace Gate in 1937.² And he got further information about the family from their much younger brother, Barkly Molteno, as well as from May and her sister Kathleen Murray who had come over to London, probably with her mother, at this time. In getting down to work, Hirst also had available Percy's political diaries and his vast correspondence with members of the family, friends and political colleagues (you can see his annotations on some of these letters in the UCT Archives). He had access, in addition, to Percy's own writings and research notes on the history of the Molteno, Jarvis, Bower and Vos families, and his account of his trip to the Kimberley diamond fields. And, of course, he had his own knowledge of Percy from many years of having worked together, and a huge knowledge of Liberal Party politics as a result of his own involvement. In fact, in an important sense, Hirst's biography is also a history of the struggle between the different factions for the soul of the Liberal Party in the opening decades of the 20th century.

Why the book was never published

Francis Hirst worked fast and competently, as you might expect of such an experienced and able author. He completed the whole text by late 1939. All 350,000 words of it! It was edited and typeset. The printer's proofs have the date, May 1939, on them. Although still in galley form (ie the type had not yet been made up into pages with running heads), they had clearly been carefully proofread. They contain very few typographical errors (mainly proper names), and there is only a handful of queries in the margins for the author to sort out.

So why was the book never published? One possible problem is that Hirst had clearly gone over-board as to length. The 632 galley proofs would have made two large tomes, each some 400 pages long. But more importantly, by the time the galleys had been finally corrected in 1940, the Second World War was in full swing and shortages of paper constrained what publishers could produce.

But there seems to have been another reason. Percy's only surviving brother, Admiral Barkly Molteno, had liked some of the draft material Hirst had shown him (in particular the chapter on the history of the Jarvis family which Hirst had sent him as early as March 1938). But when he saw the full text much later, he wrote to his niece, May Murray Parker, on 5 April 1940: 'I don't think it would be at all advisable to bring out Mr Hirst's biography of Uncle Percy for very many reasons at the present time. It would mainly be ammunition for the disaffected republicans to sever all ties with the British Empire.' This is a strange phrase. I can only speculate that Barkly, who had no political experience, may have been referring to the Irish Government which had opted to stay neutral in the War. Or he may even have thought that Percy's critique of British policy towards Hitler in the 1930s would encourage General Hertzog's Nationalist Party to redouble its opposition to South Africa's involvement in the War.

In fact, there is another letter which makes clear that Barkly had had a much stronger worry about the book. He saw it as likely to demoralise Britain's war effort. This, in my view, reflected his alarm at his brother's unqualified opposition to going to war with Nazi Germany. Percy's last letter to *The Times* (4

² Caroline Murray died at Palace Court the month after her beloved brother's death in Zurich. Widowed, 84 years old, and the last of the ten Molteno brothers and sisters (except for Barkly), one can imagine that Percy's death must have been a fatal blow.

May 1937), reproduced in Hirst's book, had argued: 'Germany seems to have made a number of offers in the direction of peace, and also made substantial contributions to the peace of Europe.... Thus there appear to have been a number of opportunities open to British diplomacy for forwarding the conclusion of real peace in Europe, and the restriction of this mad race in armaments.' Not a judgement most historians would agree with today!

Whatever the possible cause, the fact remains that, a few weeks after getting Barkly's letter, May wrote to her sister Kathleen (26 May 1940), saying: 'You have probably heard that Uncle Percy's book is not to be published for the present. I think it is practically finished.'

As to why the book was not released at the end of the War in 1945, it is easy to see that any publisher would have felt that the long exposition of Percy's opposition to war as a matter of principle and his espousal of pre-Keynesian economic doctrines (which nowadays we call free market economics) were entirely out of tune with the times. For the Labour Party had swept into office with a radical agenda to construct a Welfare State and government to take the lead in economic management by means of widespread public ownership.

The merits and limits of Hirst's biography

I have already mentioned some of the virtues of Francis Hirst's biography of Percy, in particular the account of Percy's engagement in both South African and British political and economic issues, and the chapters on the history of the Molteno, Jarvis and Currie families.

There is also a fascinating glimpse of what student life at Cambridge was like at the very beginning of the 1880s when Percy was taking a double Tripos in Mathematics and Law. This was at a time when the University was still only emerging from its domination by the Church of England – when Fellows of colleges had to be ordained Anglican priests and were not allowed to marry. Cambridge was still overwhelmingly a male institution – the tiny number of women students being confined to a couple of women's colleges, women not allowed to attend lectures or take part in graduation ceremonies, nor be appointed lecturers or professors. What's more, the student body was drawn overwhelmingly from an incredibly narrow English upper class.

The chapter describing Percy's mission to the Kimberley diamond fields is equally interesting. Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Beit had set up the de Beers Company and wanted to create a monopoly over diamond production by buying out their remaining competitors in Kimberley. One of the largest of these was the Bultfontein Diamond Mine in which Sir Donald Currie was the principal shareholder. Sir Donald commissioned Percy to act on his behalf in negotiating a financial settlement with de Beers. Percy, who had a great eye for detail and always loved mastering new scientific and technical issues, visited the fields in 1889 and described what he saw. He was in Kimberley at the moment when 'modern' technology (as opposed to sheer brawn and sweat) was beginning to be employed, and a handful of newly wealthy millionaires, led by Cecil John Rhodes, had largely squeezed out the first generation of individual prospectors and miners.

Hirst's book does, however, suffer from limitations. His view of what is appropriate in a biography of a public figure is that it should confine itself almost totally to the public record – their speeches and writings, the other public figures with whom they interacted, and what they did in Parliament. It is true that Percy was an intensely private man. And shy. But as every relative who came in contact with him

attests, he was also a warm-hearted man, intensely generous, interested intellectually in the sciences, botany, modern techniques of agriculture, irrigation, refrigeration ... the list could go on, enthusiastic in talking about the vast number of books he read. He loved horse riding, cycling around Surrey in the days before motor cars made it both unpleasant and dangerous, hiking, mountaineering, and travel. He filled his home at Palace Court with flowers. He relished the fruit and vegetables he grew at Parklands, and his Rolls Royce would always return to London laden with fresh produce for the week ahead. And all his life he was intensely interested in the lives of his brothers and sisters. He conducted a prodigious correspondence with them. In particular, he asked questions about their farms and tried to be of assistance, whether this involved shipping out seed potatoes and fruit stocks, or describing new agricultural machines and techniques, or giving advice. It is a shame that Francis Hirst, having had the opportunity to go through Percy's letters and papers (many of which now seem to be lost), allowed so little of this rich personal detail to come through. We get too little impression of the warmth and wide-ranging interests of this rather austere and serious man with his great sense of public service, the importance of right conduct and unswerving adherence to principle.

Another limitation of Hirst's biography is that he does not see his role as providing the reader with considered judgements, let alone criticism, of the man he is writing about. It is true, of course, that he and Percy agreed on most things politically and economically. But Percy did make occasional mistakes. Towards the end of his life, he allowed his horror of the First World War to cloud his judgement and misread Hitler and the Nazis' intentions, despite his being aware and critical of their anti-Semitism. Another misjudgement was his consistent refusal to support women's suffrage. This is all the more extraordinary, given that his sisters, Betty and Caroline, whom he admired and loved greatly, were articulate advocates of votes for women. Hirst mentions Percy's opposition, but almost in passing, and omits to explore why he took up this position and stuck to it throughout his time in Parliament.

The state of the text you can now see on this website

When I first came across these galleys, I found to my distress that I only had a part of the whole. They took the story of Percy's life only to about 1903, and even then large chunks of certain chapters were missing. It seemed such a loss that not only had the book never seen the light of day, but that the larger part seemed lost forever. The photostat proofs I had, moreover, were of poor quality. The result was that scanning them was difficult and proofreading a very big job. Nevertheless, I started down that road and completed several chapters, including putting in explanatory endnotes and subheadings. Then in August 2013 I made the startling discovery that I did after all have a complete set of galleys, and had entirely forgotten about them. Wonderful news in one way, but a new and monumental task confronting me as well. I realized that I could not afford the time or expense of scanning, proofreading and editing a work of over a third of a million words!

What I have done, therefore, is this. All the galleys have been scanned, and anyone interested in reading particular chapters will be able to read the galley pages, clumsy as they are and messed up with my old scribbles in the margins. But I am also reproducing the small minority of chapters which I had already turned into text. These are in a more readable format and have photographs.

I hope readers will find Francis Hirst's book as fascinating as I have done. Despite its limitations, no other text throws as much light on the history of our family as this does. And non-family readers, including historians, may find particular interest in Hirst's detailed account of the political opposition to the Boer War in Britain and at the Cape – which is very different from most books which concentrate on the

course of the military conflict. Historians of British politics will find equally interesting the account of the long-running struggles within the Liberal Party in Britain over what its domestic and European policies ought to comprise, and its conduct of the First World War.

Robert Molteno

August 2013

Note re the title of the book, its subheadings, footnotes and photographs: There is no evidence as to what title Francis Hirst intended his book to have. *A Man of Principle* is therefore what I have chosen to call it. I have also broken up Francis Hirst's text within each chapter by putting in subheadings as well as photographs. As for the footnotes, the author's are in bold; the remainder I have added in order to help readers who may not be familiar with the personalities and events referred to.

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1. Percy Molteno's boyhood and family life at Claremont House

Percy's recollections of growing up

Born in Edinburgh

"I was born in Edinburgh on the 12th September, 1861, at 40 Heriot Row.³ My father and mother were on a visit to my father's relatives in Scotland. His great uncle, Charles Dominic Molteno,⁴ had married a Mrs Glass, a widow with two children. They had a place called Newton in Fifeshire, near Strathmiglow and Auchtermuchty. This Mrs Molteno was a cousin of the celebrated Dr John Brown of Edinburgh, author of *Rab and His Friends*. Letters of Mrs. Molteno will be found in his collected *Letters*. Dr John Brown saw me into the world.

"Mrs Molteno's brother was John Scott, first editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, who lost his life in a duel arising out of a criticism of some of Sir Walter Scott's work. Sir Walter Scott's son-in-law had fallen foul of John Scott.

Claremont House, the family home at the Cape

"My earliest recollections were of Claremont House, where my father and mother lived after they had returned from Scotland. Claremont House was one of the old properties, dating from the spacious days at the Cape, when the country houses were all surrounded by large grounds with charming gardens. The owners gave a warm welcome to all. 'Afternoon At-Homes' were frequent, when gatherings took place first at one house and then at another throughout the season.

"I remember Lord Wolseley saying to me that he considered the Cape, when he was there in 1875, one of the most delightful places in the world. He had enjoyed not only the hospitality of the old proprietors, but the splendid scenery and fine climate of a country richly endowed by nature with fruit and flowers of every kind.

"The long connection of the Dutch with the East had introduced many handsome plants into the Cape Peninsula. Claremont House's garden was filled with many of these exotics. It was approached by a splendid avenue of oak-trees in continuation of the great avenue which led up to Stellenberg, one of

³ Percy being born in Scotland was the fortuitous result of his father's decision to visit the UK in 1861. It was the last occasion on which John Charles Molteno was able to see both his beloved mother, Caroline (nee Bower) in London, and his Uncle Dominic Molteno, who had moved up from London to Scotland upon retirement.

⁴ Percy makes a mistake here. Charles Dominic Molteno was his great uncle, ie his father's uncle. Charles Dominic, a son of George Anthony, the original Molteno to settle in London. Like his other brothers, James and John, he stayed in London, working in some kind of managerial role in the Docks, before eventually retiring and living in Scotland. He was a much loved figure in the family who kept in touch, for example, with John Charles Molteno's brother, Frank, who landed up in Hawaii.

Van der Stel's old residences, which remains to this day a most interesting example of the Dutch colonial houses.

"Sir Leicester Smythe, who when Governor at the Cape occupied Claremont House for a time, during my father's absence, told me he thought it a most beautiful place. It was certainly a delightful home for children; an old rambling house, mostly on the ground floor, surrounded after the Dutch fashion by great oak-trees, which gave shade in summer and so tempered the hot winds before they entered the house.



Claremont House – May Murray standing in the garden (Table Mountain beyond), 1880s

"The view of Table Mountain from the stoep was magnificent, and the distant Hottentot's Holland Mountains could also be seen. The garden was well stocked with fruit; in fact, there was fruit all the year round and in abundance - guavas and loquats in the winter, grapes, plums, pears, peaches and other fruits in summer.

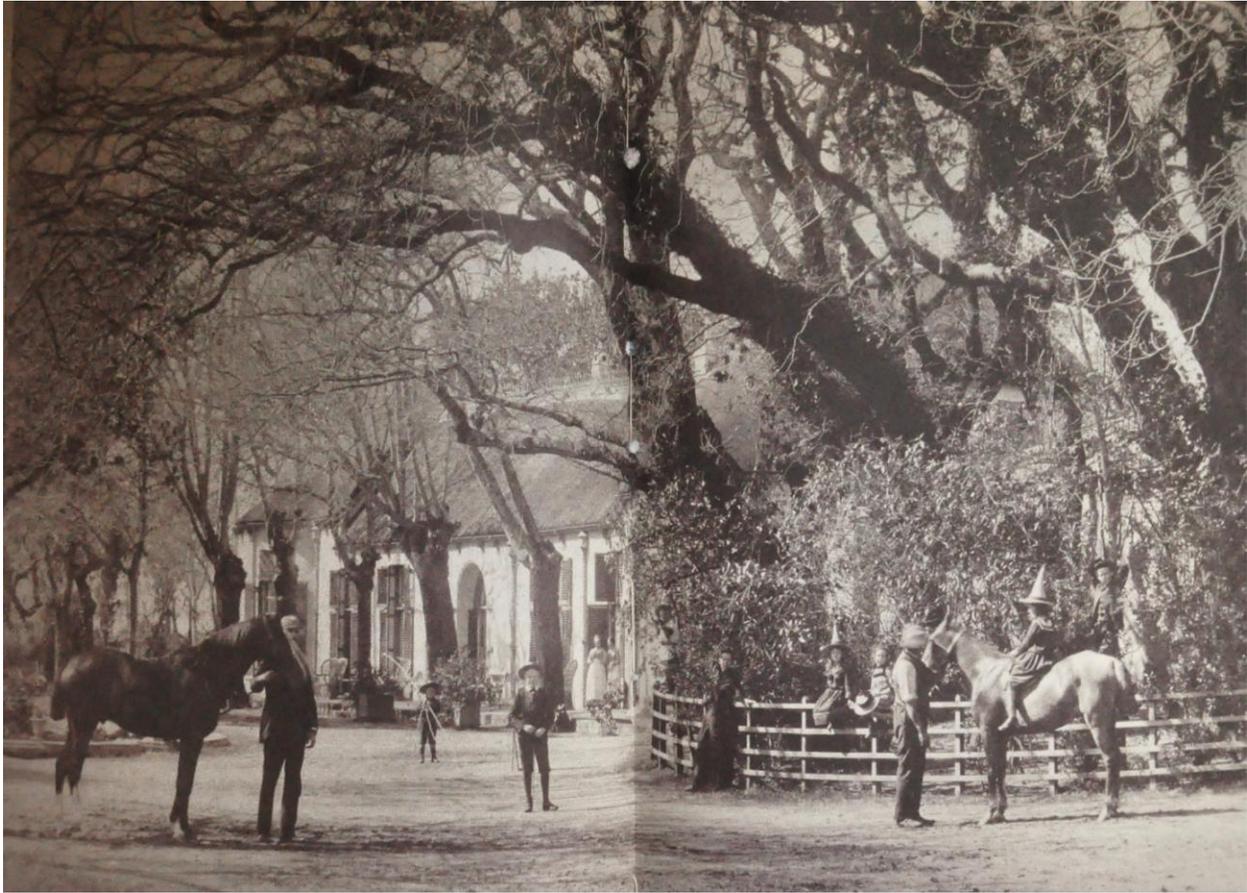
"A large range of stables gave housing to a number of horses and ponies, which eventually filled them as we grew up.

"I was the second in age of seven brothers, and had three sisters, who were all older than the boys.

"Our first introduction to horsemanship was on a Shetland pony which all three of the elder boys rode at the same time, until each was able to manage a pony himself.

"Our education began under a Scottish dominie, the Rev. David Smith, a brother of Abercrombie Smith, who had been a Senior Wrangler⁵ at Cambridge. The curriculum was somewhat unusual, as the main subjects on which we began were Logic, Poetry and Algebra.

⁵ The top mathematics undergraduate at Cambridge each year, widely seen as the most prestigious intellectual achievement.



Claremont House – the children playing in the grounds, early 1870s?

Schooling at the Diocesan College

“Eventually we all went as day-boys to the Diocesan College⁶ at Rondebosch, where there was also a strong contingent of boarders. The Rev. George F Ogilvie (‘Old Jogs’) was our Head Master, a fine character of the old school, a graduate of Oxford, thoroughly versed in the Classics. He was well capable of maintaining discipline,⁷ and set a high standard of conduct and honour among the boys.

“During the period I spent at the school there were some able and interesting men on the classical side - the Rev. Mr. Hogarth, Edward Prince, and William Henry Parr Greswell. The curriculum included Science.

⁶ The Diocesan College, or Bishops as it is popularly known, was founded in 1849 by Bishop Gray, the first Church of England Bishop of Cape Town. Modelled on the English public school, Bishops was a boys only school. All Percy’s six full brothers, except Charlie, went to Bishops, and generation after generation of Molteno’s have been educated there ever since Percy and his brothers were day boys in the 1860s.

⁷ ‘Maintaining discipline’ meant the liberal use of the cane by teachers and senior boys (prefects) at both the preparatory (primary) school and college. In the early 1950s, I well remember the weekly (or was it daily?) queue of small boys outside a room called The Tannery (sic!), where a master administered beatings imposed for failings in relation to classroom work as well as alleged misbehaviour.

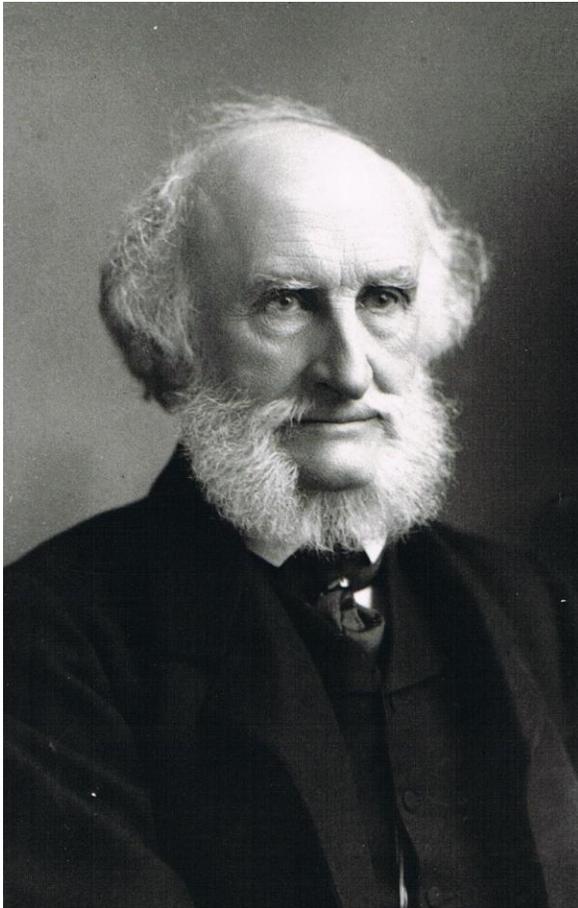
Among the science masters Shelley, a charming man, was succeeded by Lloyd Morgan, whose books on Animal Intelligence and Monism are well known. He eventually became Chancellor of Bristol University.

“I had an omnivorous desire for knowledge of all kinds. Classics, mathematics, physical and natural science, all interested me. I worked hard at them all, and won a large number of prizes.

“Eventually I prepared for matriculation into the University of the Cape of Good Hope, and was bracketed first in the list of successful students and won a bursary - the Porter Scholarship.⁸

“When I was fifteen and still at college, my father (who was Prime Minister of Cape Colony at the time) proceeded to England as Plenipotentiary to confer with Lord Carnarvon.

First trip to England, 1875



Sir Donald Currie

“He had for some time trusted me with the keeping of his private cash accounts, and he decided, though I was to sit for matriculation examinations the following year, that I should go with him and my two brothers to England. We rejoiced in the opportunity and thoroughly enjoyed the voyage. We stayed in London at first at the Albemarle Hotel in Albemarle Street. Despatches were exchanged with the Colonial Office, of which we did much of the copying.⁹

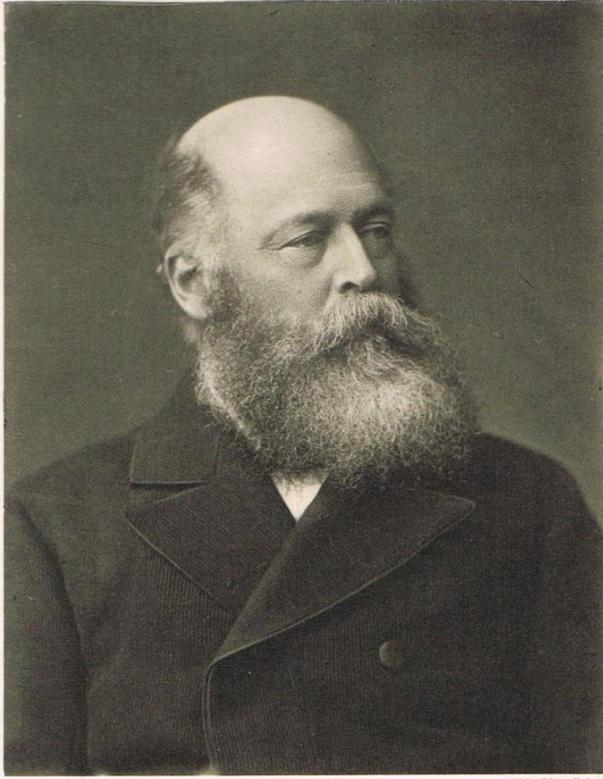
John Charles Molteno’s negotiation of a new mail contract with Sir Donald Currie

“Another important matter was the arranging of a new mail contract. The Castle Line had carried out a service roughly alternating with the then-mail steamers of the Union Company, and had quickened the passage from England to the Cape by building fast new steamers, which considerably reduced the mail contract time. My father determined to get a weekly mail service, and for this purpose he was prepared to divide the service between the Castle Line and the Union Company.

⁸ I can’t resist mentioning that, a hundred years later, I too won a Porter scholarship from Bishops to the University of Cape Town – which greatly helped to reduce the annual fees of my university education.

⁹ Copying – this being the days before the typewriter, let alone the laptop or tablet!

“Sir Donald Currie (managing owner of the Castle Line) with his usual energy immediately called on my father, and put before him suggestions for a new mail service. He was reluctant about promising a weekly service, as he feared the trade would not support a weekly line of steamers; and he brought to bear many cogent arguments and figures from the ascertained performances of his own steamers. But my father was determined. He thought that rapid, speedy and frequent communications were of the



utmost importance to the development of South Africa, and that this was the opportunity of securing it. So eventually a new mail contract was made, providing for weekly sailings. It also provided for increased speed, secured by special premiums, which resulted in the quickening of the passage by several days. This took place in 1875.

“Sir Donald Currie was very good to us boys. He invited us up to his Scotch home, which was then at Cluny, near Aberfeldy. There we had grouse shooting, rabbit shooting, and many rides on ponies, and thoroughly enjoyed the novelty and excitement of this new experience in such a different world from that in which we had hitherto lived.”¹⁰

“My father must have had considerable confidence in me; for one day he sent me with a draft for £467¹¹ to be cashed at the Bank of England, a very formidable undertaking for a boy of fifteen on his first visit to London. However, I got the aid of Ernest Martin of the Castle Company, whose acquaintance we had made. He very kindly accompanied me to the Bank, and I found my way back successfully to my great relief.”¹²

The Family at Claremont House

Sir John Molteno’s character, his immense energy and power of work, his great business ability, his public skill, his political capacity, consistency, fortitude and unselfish public spirit, will be described in a

¹⁰ Percy, a decade later and after graduating from Cambridge University, married Bessie Currie, one of Sir Donald’s three daughters. He very soon began working for Sir Donald’s shipping line and became one of its managing directors.

¹¹ £1 in 1875 would be worth about £60 today. So £467 was an extraordinarily large sum, about £28,000 in today’s money! It gives some idea of John Charles Molteno’s affluence at this time.

¹² **Here, alas, this fragment ends. It was dictated by Percy Molteno during his last illness in Switzerland. He did not revise it, and I have made such slight changes as he would have wished. FWH**

later chapter. Of his wife's lovable, tender and attractive personality, the grief and affliction of her husband and children, and of their friends and relations, on her untimely death are sufficient evidence.

No biography of Percy Molteno would be complete, or even intelligible, to a reader who was not introduced to his three sisters and six brothers.

Betty Molteno, the eldest of John Charles Molteno's children

The three sisters were born first. The eldest, Betty, was a truly noble and unselfish woman. She believed the best of everyone. 'I found such sympathy from her', writes her brother, Admiral Molteno, 'in matters which no-one could have imagined, as from no-one else. She would willingly have been a martyr in any cause where she could by suffering herself save someone else suffering.' After a course at Newnham College, Cambridge, she ran a girls' school at Port Elizabeth with great success for some years, aided by Miss Alice Greene – sister of the Sir Grahame Greene who was secretary of the Admiralty before and throughout the Great War.

In later life she lived at Hampstead and had many English friends, including Cobden's youngest daughter, Mrs Fisher Unwin. Mr Saul Solomon's widow, who lived at Golders Green, was one of her friends, and on

Betty's death wrote a remarkable letter of deep sympathy to Percy Molteno:



Betty Molteno, painting of, c. 1920

"With you and the entire Molteno and Murray family circle in this supreme earthly loss of your gifted, inspiring sister.... Only the other day, she and I were looking together here at a reproduction of that delicately suggestive picture *Sunrise*, by J Farquharson R.A. in this year's Royal Academy. In the lone, lovely flight of the bird, its hasting wings outspread, your beloved sister at once recognized the idea of a winged soul, flying *Home* – to God."

In the course of his reply, dated 10 Palace Court, W, August 30th 1927, Percy Molteno wrote:

"She was my eldest sister, and from my earliest years I received from her the

stimulation of the high and noble ideals which possessed her in such full measure; and I can never be too thankful for the ennobling influence of her fine nature all through my life.

"We are so thankful that she was spared all distress and pain, and passed away in sleep, having had all her faculties in full measure right up to the last. We laid her beside her devoted friend, Alice Greene, in the Churchyard of St. Mabyn's, a wonderful spot.¹³



**Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), early
1900s**

"Farquharson's pictures of nature are exquisite in their understanding and love (I know him; a delightful character), and I well understand how much the picture with the beautiful bird would appeal to my sister, whose character was so largely composed of the noble soul which was enshrined in her."

Caroline Molteno

The second daughter, Caroline, was another fine character with a fund of imaginative sympathy and affection which endeared her to the whole family and a wide circle of friends. She was very fortunate in her marriage and in the devoted love of her husband¹⁴ and children. She had (like several of her brothers) a wonderful memory, and possessed also a descriptive power which appears in some of her letters which have been preserved. With Percy she exchanged many confidences, and it was in his house only a few weeks after his death in Switzerland that she passed away.¹⁵ Within the last few weeks of her life, the writer of this book visited her several times. Her memory for the past was as bright and her interest in the present as vivid as ever. Her characteristics are not easily described. They developed in many ways after her happy

¹³ Situated on the north Cornish coast, at St Merryn's near Padstow, the grave Betty Molteno shares with her lifelong friend and partner, Alice Greene, was refurbished in 2011 on the generous initiative of Alice's relative, John Barham.

¹⁴ Former Royal Navy Surgeon, Dr C F K Murray. He and Caroline had ten children, and it is from this big branch of the family that all Murray segment of the Molteno clan are descended.

¹⁵ October 1937.

marriage, and though she was as sensitive to wrongdoing and to the inequalities of life, she was more ready than Betty to make allowances for politicians and systems of government.

In spite of having so large a family of her own, she was always ready to give a home to relations and friends. On her father's death two of her brothers, Charlie and Wallace, made their home with her, as did Barkly when he served as a midshipman in HMS *Raleigh*, the flagship at the Cape. She always took the keenest interest in politics and public affairs. Percy took a very special interest in all her children and gave them a home when in England for their education.

Maria Molteno



Maria, the youngest of the three sisters, was not so strong a personality as Betty or Caroline. She was gentle, very kind, and more light-hearted. She enjoyed church work, district visiting and social duties. Her husband, Tom Anderson, was senior partner in Anderson & Murison, one of the principal merchant firms of general importers in Cape Town. They had two sons and one daughter. Maria died in 1902 at a comparatively early age.

Maria Anderson (nee Molteno), third daughter of Sir John Molteno), late 1890s

Charlie Molteno



Charlie (John Charles) Molteno, eldest son of Sir John Molteno

to last.

Charlie, the eldest son, who came next to Maria, was tall, handsome and rather unsociable. He was inclined to be quizzical, and rather fond of a rough kind of humour which sometimes caused a little discomfort, as when on a ship he insisted on introducing a friend called Mrs Ham to another called Bacon: "Mr Bacon, you must allow me to have the pleasure of presenting you to Mrs Ham."

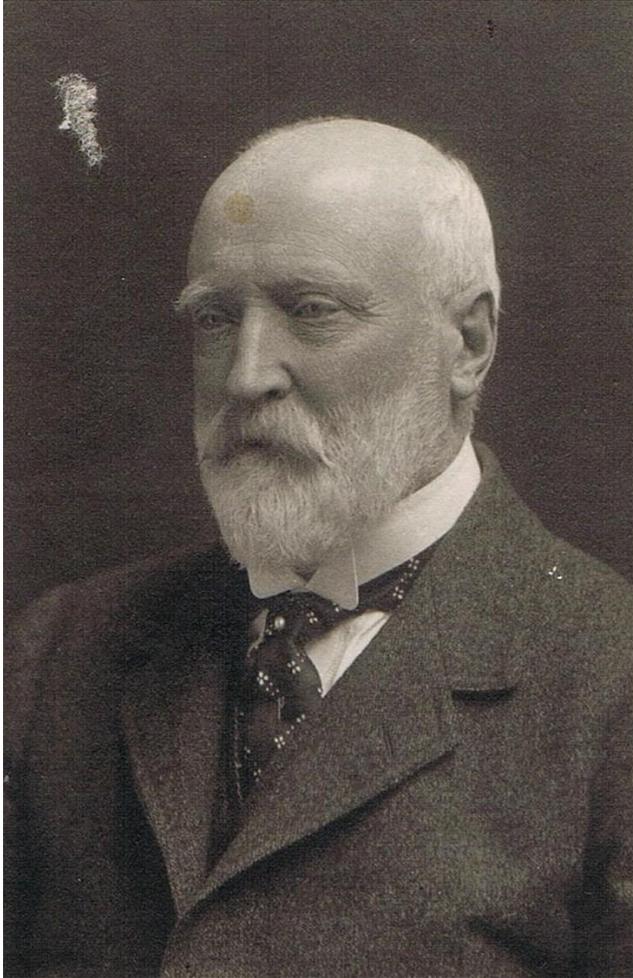
Charlie loved shooting and country life, but did not care for club life. He was educated at the Diocesan College, like his brother Percy. He was not specially good at work, and did not play games. When quite young, he became his father's private secretary and took over a good deal of the business after his father's retirement. After Sir John Molteno's death, Charlie had to manage for some years the large sheep farms on the Karoo, but he did not neglect politics. He took a great interest in the natives and looked after their interests for many years as Member for Tembuland in the Cape House of Assembly, where he was a strong supporter and intimate friend of John X Merriman. He married an American lady.¹⁶ Their two sons and three daughters are still living. In all the financial affairs of the family, Percy trusted him and consulted him from first

¹⁶ Lucy Lindley Mitchell whose exploits as a woman prospector, following her husband's death in 1924, she and Peter Biggs recount in two separate sections on this website under *Diaries & Reminiscences*.

Frank Molteno

Frank, to quote a pen portrait by his brother Barkly:

"was the steadiest and most conscientious member of the family. He was all virtue and had no weaknesses - a teetotaler, a non-smoker, and a hard worker. Percy told me that, since they were grown-up, Frank had never failed to write to him every week. He qualified as a land surveyor and subsequently entered the Surveyor General's office and became assistant to the Surveyor General. He was considerate and trusted and liked by everybody."

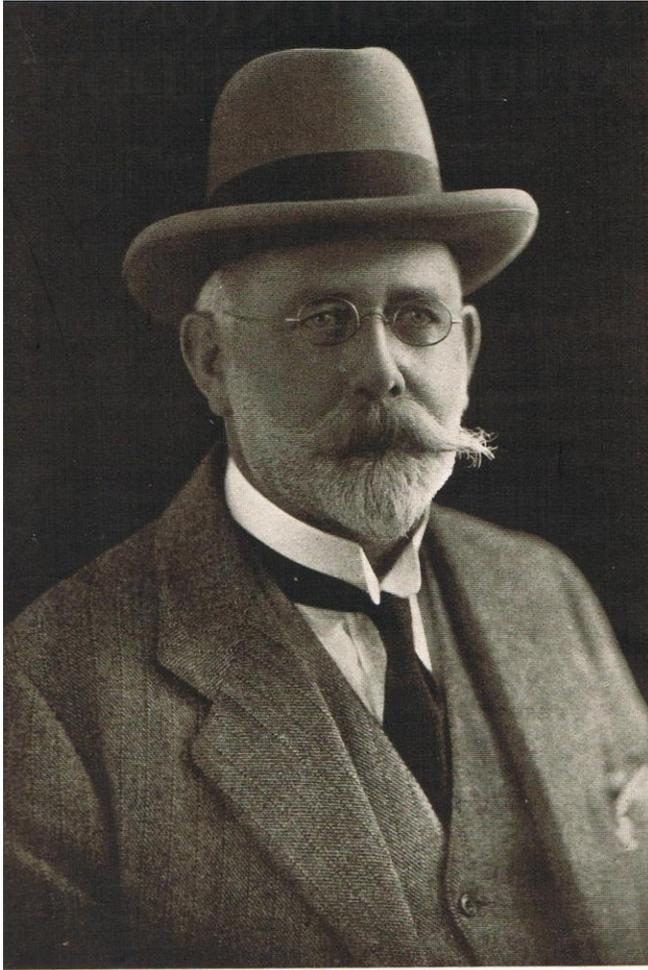


Frank married young and had two sons and two daughters. One son was drowned as a boy when fishing; the other was killed while at Oxford in a motor-bicycling accident,¹⁷ and Frank himself was killed in a railway accident. He and his wife and children were a devoted and a most happy family. He lived for some years at Potchefstroom in the Transvaal, and did a good deal of professional work in connection with gold claims before the Boer War; but most of his life was spent near Cape Town.

Frank Molteno, third eldest son of Sir John Molteno (identification not certain)

¹⁷ Henry 'Vyvyan' Molteno. A brilliant young boy, he was an undergraduate at Oxford at the time of his tragic death near Petersfield in Hampshire in 1912. A moving account of his funeral by Alice Greene appears on this website under *Stories & History*.

James Molteno



Sir James Tennant Molteno, fourth eldest of Sir John's sons, former Speaker of the Union of South Africa Parliament

James was an altogether exceptional member of the family, quite unlike the others. At school and the university he was not only proficient in examinations but excelled at games and took a leading part in the social life of Trinity and in the debates of the Union, of which he became President.¹⁸ He had a great zest for life and most of its pleasures - cricket, hunting, tennis, swimming, racing and cards. He took immense interest in everybody and everything, making as he passed through life many friends – and of course, a few enemies. A love of politics and public life were in his blood, and in party strife he proved himself a valiant and at times a hot partisan.

After being called to the Bar, he spent his whole life in South African politics until about 1913, when he retired from the Speakership of the South African Parliament, to which he had been appointed by Botha when the Union Government was established in 1910. He was knighted in 1910. The most famous incident in his career was his interview with Sir Alfred Milner in 1899, when Milner stated that he was bent on breaking the dominion of Afrikanerdom. In this affair Percy was, as we shall see, equally concerned, along with that brilliant Liberal journalist Henry W. Massingham, then editor of the *Daily Chronicle*. Percy, as we shall see, had complete confidence in his brother's accuracy. Most of the family were remarkable for their memories; that of James was prodigious. His book of reminiscences, entitled *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom*,¹⁹ was written almost entirely without reference to printed material; and yet

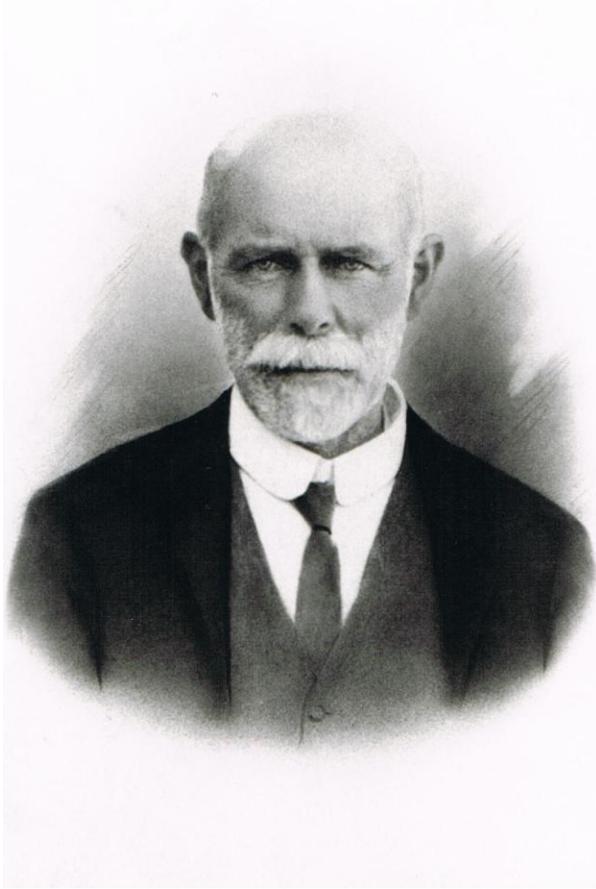
as far as I am aware no inaccuracies of fact were detected even by critics who hated his political opinions and disputed his conclusions.

¹⁸ Like his elder brother, James was at Cambridge. To be President of the Cambridge Union (the University's premier debating society) has long been a stepping stone to distinguished political careers.

¹⁹ Full title - *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom: Recollections Pleasant and Otherwise*, by the Honourable Sir James Tennant Molteno, BA, LL.B, KC, late Speaker of the Parliament of the Cape of Good Hope and first Speaker of the Parliament of the Union of South Africa, Methuen and Co, London, 1923.

James married Clare Holland-Pryor. They had one son, who entered the Royal Navy, and three daughters. He had an ardent love for South Africa, and like his brother Charles was a staunch disciple of John X Merriman, whom he describes (p. 14 of *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom*) as: "My father's old lieutenant in politics and my life-long leader and friend... the noblest public character I have known." James became a member of the Cape Parliament in 1890 at the age of twenty-five. He died in Percy's London house in 1936.

Victor Molteno



Victor, next in age, was a complete contrast to James – very silent, modest and retiring. He wanted to go into the Army, but his father objected, and then, at Percy's suggestion, he entered Clare College, Cambridge, where he played Rugby for his college and qualified as a Doctor of Medicine. He practised the profession entirely in the vicinity of Cape Town. Victor took no interest in politics or public affairs. Shooting was his passion throughout life. He would walk with his gun all day, and even if he had only a few shots he would never give up as long as daylight lasted. Victor married Mildred Jones; they had three sons and two daughters.

Dr Victor Molteno, fifth eldest of Sir John Molteno's sons, early 1920s

Wallace Molteno

Wallace, who was two years younger than Victor, was the only brother except Charlie who had no



Wallace Molteno, sixth eldest of Sir John Molteno's sons, 1920s

education in England. Like all the others, he went to the Diocesan College in Rondebosch. On his father's death, when he was sixteen, he left school and went into his brother-in-law's firm, Anderson & Murison, at Cape Town.²⁰ After three or four years in the office he felt that town business was not his line, and decided to learn farming with a Mr Hochley, one of the best farmers in the Eastern Province. After a few years there he bought a farm near the village of Molteno, and started on his own account. He worked up several farms into good condition and sold them profitably. Eventually, his eldest brother Charlie engaged him to manage their father's large properties near Beaufort West. There Wallace did so well that he bought out the other members of the family and became sole owner. His business training in Cape Town stood him in good stead and, combined with his skill and application of scientific principles to farming, gave him great success. Wallace and his younger brother Barkly corresponded every week during the whole of their lives, though as small boys they had practised pugilism constantly at one another's expense.

Wallace married a Scottish girl named Sandeman,²¹ who proved to be a devoted co-operator in farming. Their two sons and two daughters are all living. All members of the Molteno family used Wallace's large farm and homestead as a holiday resort. The hospitality of Wallace and his wife was unbounded, and their farm was the model farm for hundreds of miles round. By irrigation and by their scientific methods of improving the pasture, they quite altered the face of the dry Karoo.

²⁰ Tom Anderson had married Wallace's sister, Maria.

²¹ Lil Sandeman, whose diary of her extended visit to the Cape in 1905-06 is reproduced on this website under *Diaries and Reminiscences*. In it, she tells the story of how she and Wallace fell in love, and her first visit to the Molteno family farms at Nelspoort on the Karoo.

Barkly Molteno

Barkly, the youngest of Sir John Molteno's sons by his second wife, felt as a small boy the same love of the sea which had inspired John Jarvis (Earl of St Vincent) to run away from home. His father and his grandfather Hercules Jarvis were themselves inspired by the same feeling, and no obstacles were thrown in his way. He joined the *Brittania* in 1885. This was the first time Percy had been brought directly in contact with his youngest brother, to whom he afterwards took the place of a father. He gave

this brother a home in England whenever leave was granted. Sir Donald and Lady Currie also treated him as a son both before and after Percy's marriage to their daughter. Though Percy hated war and militarism, he took the keenest interest in the welfare of the Navy; and I can well remember the pride he felt in his brother's superb bravery and skill in handling the battered *HMS Warrior* at the Battle of Jutland.²²



Captain Barkly Molteno, Royal Navy, seventh son of Sir John Molteno, 1916

Barkly was fortunate enough to serve under some of the most distinguished sailors of his day, including Admiral Sir William Kennedy, his first Captain, Admiral Sir George Callaghan, Sir Arthur Wilson, Admiral Sir Frederick Bedford, Sir George A Curzon-Howe, Admiral Sir Martin Jerram, Sir Percy Scott, of gunnery fame, and Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, who succeeded Sir George Callaghan as Commander of the Home Fleet at the outbreak of the Great War.

During the Great War Barkly commanded seven different ships, serving as Flag-Captain to Sir William Pakenham (who afterwards commanded the Battle Cruiser Fleet), to Sir William Grant, to Sir Martin Jerram, (who led the line of battleships in the *King George V* at Jutland) and to Sir Sidney Fremantle. Barkly commanded *HMS Redoubtable* at the bombardment of Westende in September 1915, and *HMS Warrior* at the Battle of Jutland, when she was sunk by German gunfire. His account of this action was afterwards printed privately in the family *Chronicle*.

Through Barkly, Percy was able to keep himself in close touch with the practical and scientific problems of naval warfare. In August 1916, he spent several days with

²² Percy's immediate report of the Battle of Jutland in 1916, as well as Barkly's own account some years later after censorship was lifted at the end of the War, are reproduced on this website under *History & Stories*. The Battle of Jutland was the only full-scale clash between the Royal Navy and the Imperial German fleet during the War.

Barkly on board the battleship *King George V* when she lay at Invergordon. He was then Member for Dumfries, and he made a very handsome contribution to the expenses of recreation grounds for the officers and men of the Royal Navy at Invergordon.

Barkly and Percy remained in the very closest friendship until Percy's life ended in 1937. Their country homes in Surrey were not far apart.²³ They met constantly, and Percy discussed with his brother all the public questions and especially those connected with foreign policy and armaments - which were uppermost in his mind after the Great War.

Uncle Percy John Alport

Percy Alport Molteno took his first two names from his uncle Percy John Alport, of whom, in his notes on the family, he wrote as follows:



Percy Alport, brother in law and business partner in Beaufort West of Sir John Molteno

"My uncle, Percy John Alport, after whom I am named, married my mother's sister, Sophia Mary St Ives Jarvis. His family came from the county of Stafford in the Hundred of Cuttlestone. They were descended from the Alports of Cannock and Bloxwick, and were landowners there before the time of Elizabeth.²⁴ Originally the family came from Derbyshire, deriving its name from Alport, a village situated in lovely scenery at the opening of Lathkil Dale. Originally Alport must have been Aldport or Oldport, for as early as 1394 one Richardus Aldeport was Master of the Guild at Lichfield, near Cannock. According to a Staffordshire antiquary, Studdert Holmes, the name was Roman. In the Peak District of Staffordshire rise the Alport Heights and a great rock called Alport Stone, about nine miles south of Warksworth. Here there were lead mines, extensively worked by the Romans, and a passageway, or port, which may well have determined the name. Alport Heights and Alport Stone will be preserved in their present state as they have become the property of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Beauty.

"The coat-of-arms has descended through

²³ Percy and Bessie Molteno had their country home at Gomshall and Shere in Surrey; Barkly and his wife Ethel settled in the 1920s at Gold Hill, Farnham.

²⁴ ie. Queen Elizabeth I, the famous daughter of Henry VIII and subsequent Tudor monarch.

eleven generations, but Dr Cecil Alport, his son and a cousin are the only Alports left in England, though others of the family are in New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. I have a copy of the Shield of Arms, which is of a very early and pure type; it is completely filled with waves of water. My uncle Alport went to Beaufort West, South Africa, to join my father who was then farming at Nelspoort and had decided to open a business in Beaufort West. For this purpose, the firm of P Alport and Co. was established at Beaufort, and remained for a long time one of the principal businesses there.

"My uncle Alport brought with him to Beaufort a great interest in animals which he retained all his life. He was very fond of coursing, and kept greyhounds and horses on a farm called Lemoenfontein, near Beaufort.

"He was very keen about improving stock, and introduced thoroughbred sheep to improve the yield and quality of the wool in the flocks at Beaufort. Subsequently, after retiring from active business management at Beaufort, he established (on a farm near Cape Town?) a stud of thoroughbred horses, and imported from time to time a number of very fine animals. To make them known, he had to enter them for the races, but he disliked betting and gambling and would never back his own horses – or any others. He also imported thoroughbred pigs and cows, and took a very keen interest in the Shows.

"He was extraordinarily kind and humane, and anxious about the health and comfort of his animals. The horses he kept for his own use were generally so well fed that they got beyond themselves and caused much trouble by running away and upsetting carriages, often terrifying his wife, who was somewhat nervous.

"He thought that horses ought not to go without food for so long a period as 6 pm to the following morning; so, as his coachman did not live on the place, he would himself go out to the stables and feed his horses at nine o'clock. Some of them quickly got an accurate knowledge of the time, and if their master did not appear on the very stroke of the hour they would break their halters and cause a good deal of trouble.

"Uncle Alport was very kind to us boys and would constantly give us presents of animals and pets, such as rabbits and guinea pigs. In later years he lived at Beaufort Villa, Claremont, where he died...."

John Charles Molteno's children by his last wife, Minnie Blenkins

Our account of the family at Claremont would be incomplete if Sir John Molteno's four children by Minnie, his third wife, were left out. Their childhood, like Percy's, was spent at Claremont House, and he was on the best of terms with them.

Minnie Molteno

The eldest, Minnie, called after her mother, was very fond of music. She lived at home, and after her mother's death bought a charming cottage at Gordon's Bay, about thirty-five miles from Cape Town, where she was fond of entertaining from time to time her many friends.



Minnie Evelyn Molteno, youngest daughter of Sir John Molteno

Ted, Harry and Clifford Molteno

Of the three boys, Edward, Clifford and Harry, Edward – always known as Ted in the family – was a godson of Sir Bartle Frere, having been born early in Sir Bartle's governorship, before the controversy arose which drove Sir John Molteno from office.²⁵ He was educated with his two brothers at Eastbourne College, of which Schreiner – a brother of W P Schreiner and Olive Schreiner – was headmaster. Afterwards all three brothers went to Pembroke College, Cambridge. Edward took his M.B. at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, but never practiced [as a doctor]. For two or three years he travelled in Europe and stayed some time with Count Tolstoy, whom he greatly admired. After his two younger brothers had taken their degrees at Cambridge, they all went back to South Africa with their mother.

Edward and Harry then purchased a farm at Elgin, about fifty miles from Cape Town. Edward displayed prodigious energy there, and achieved remarkable success. He was as fond as Percy of experiments, tried different crops on the land, and engaged in different types of farming, until he discovered that he could grow apples, pears, peaches, nectarines, plums and some other fruits to perfection on soil where previous

cultivators had never grown anything successfully. He is now one of the largest, if not the largest, exporters of South African fruit to England.²⁶ It has been stated that his cold store for fruit was the largest in the world at the time when it was built about six years ago.

Like Percy, Edward has taken the keenest interest in everything that concerns the export of fruit to Europe and the United States, and Percy followed all Edward's farming methods and fruit-exporting projects with close attention and sympathy. Harry has entered into all his brother's schemes, and has worked with him as a partner and invaluable helper.

The second brother, Clifford, qualified as a barrister and was called to the Cape Bar, but never engaged in active practice. He also bought a farm at Elgin, and has lived quietly there.

²⁵ John Charles Molteno, the first Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, was dismissed from office by the Governor in 1878 in what has been regarded as a violation of the constitutional conventions of responsible government whereby the Prime Minister was responsible to the elected legislature.

²⁶ Ted Molteno died in 1950.

Life at Claremont House in the years, 1880-1885
Contributed by Admiral V B Molteno

Claremont House was seven miles out of Cape Town. It was approached by two very fine oak avenues. It faced Table Mountain, three or four miles distant, of which it had a lovely view. It had spacious grounds of at least a hundred acres. There was a vineyard with splendid quality grapes, and orchards which contained quantities of all varieties of fruits - pears, apples, plums, greengages, apricots, peaches, nectarines, guavas, loquats, custard apples, bananas and dates. But the greater part of the property was covered with the natural Cape vegetation of silver trees, proteas, heaths and wild flowers which abound there.



Claremont House, viewed from the oak avenue, 1886

It may be of interest to mention that we had three entirely distinct species of guavas at Claremont House, two of which I have never seen anywhere else in all my wanderings in Africa, Ceylon, China and Japan. One was a bright red fruit, the other a pale yellow with a quite soft inside – and much smaller than the common guava which has a firm-fleshed, seedy interior. Also there was a roseapple, an apple-like fruit outside with one large stone [inside]; the smell of the fruit was exactly like rose leaves. There

were two tennis-courts and two very rough fields on which we used to play cricket with the Bissets²⁷ and Tredgolds, who lived nearby.

Claremont House made an ideal home for a large family of boys. Some five to ten miles away, on the then quite uninhabited Cape Flats,²⁸ there were numerous *vleis* (or lakes), the homes or breeding places of wild duck and all sorts of water fowl, as well as snipe and buck (small antelope). During the holidays there were constant shooting expeditions out on the Cape Flats, with muzzle-loaders. I cannot remember any blank days.

When you left Claremont House grounds, the countryside was absolutely uninhabited - with the exception of four or five small farms – for twenty to twenty-five miles out on the Flats towards the Hottentot Holland Mountains. The only roads were sandy tracks. Even between Claremont and Table Mountain at that time, there were very few houses and hardly any cultivation. The inhabited parts were along the main road to Simonstown, the naval station; and out at Constantia there were a good many large wine farms.

The family formed a little colony at Claremont. The next two houses to the south belonged to the Bissets and the Alports. Aunt Betty (Mrs Bisset, née Jarvis) was a younger sister of our mother. She had five sons and one daughter. My mother's elder sister, Sophia ('Aunt Sophy') had married my father's business partner, Percy John Alport. They had no children, but my Uncle Alport contributed not a little to our enjoyment of country life. He was very fond of horses and sheep, imported breeding rams, kept a stud of racehorses, and was often successful on the Turf. Our grandfather, Hercules Jarvis, with an unmarried daughter²⁹ and a widowed daughter, Mrs Blenkins ('Aunt Annie') and her two sons, lived half a mile away to the south of Claremont House.

On the north side – in the very next house – lived our sister Caroline, who had married Dr. Murray, and contributed to the family circle seven boys and [two] girls, one of whom [May Murray Parker], a great favourite with Percy and his wife, has made several contributions to this book. Beyond the Murrays lived the Andersons, the third and youngest of our sisters, Maria, having married T J Anderson. They had three sons and a daughter. This completes the colony of Moltenos and their relatives in the days of Percy's boyhood and mine.

But our pleasures were not confined to Claremont! Ten miles off at Kalk Bay, then a small unspoilt seaside village on the way to Simon's Bay, my father had bought a house to provide the family with sea air and recreations. It only held about eight children at a time, and was very popular; for it provided us with fishing and bathing and long walks over the mountains, where a variety of game was to be found.

²⁷ The Bissets, a large South African family of Scottish origin, are related to the Moltenos as a result of the first Bisset to emigrate to the Cape in the 19th century, James, having married – like John Charles Molteno – one of Hercules Jarvis's daughters. Several generations of Bissets and Moltenos have grown up together in the Cape since that time.

²⁸ The Cape Flats were a sandy expanse stretching between the mountains of the Cape Peninsula and the Hottentots Holland, and between Table and False Bays. The constantly shifting dunes were later stabilised by the planting of Port Jackson and *rooikrantz* bush. Today this 20 mile-wide expanse is largely covered by houses, much of it self-built shacks, that comprise Greater Cape Town.

²⁹ Aunt Emmie Jarvis.

One [Mr] Auret, a Dutchman, ran fishing boats and one or two sailing boats on Muizenberg Vlei. He had five or six sons, who were staunch allies of the family in all boating and fishing expeditions.

My brothers and sisters all rode. My father always kept five or six riding horses at Claremont, as well as two or three pairs of Cape cart horses for transport purposes. (The Cape cart, then a common vehicle, is now as extinct as the dodo, or the London four-wheeler.) My three elder brothers, Charlie, Percy and James, had their own riding horses; but we younger ones had to share, and on hunting expeditions the question [of] who was to be left without a mount often caused friction and sore feelings. All over the Cape Flats and the foothills of the Hottentot Holland Mountains, Cape jackals were hunted with foxhounds in the winter months, and we Molteno boys rode with the hounds.

At Claremont, we kept five or six cows and a number of pigs. Besides racehorses and rams, Uncle Percy Alport imported prize pigs. These arrivals of well-bred animals excited much interest among us. The garden at Claremont was managed by a white gardener and an old Malay³⁰ called Moos, assisted by three or four Kaffir or Hottentot 'boys'.³¹ The horses were looked after by two white grooms. Partly because of the garden and live stock [and] partly because of my father's position as Prime Minister of Cape Colony, Claremont House – though not so fine a specimen of architecture as some of the old Dutch houses – was a good deal visited, not only by local politicians and officials, but by British and foreign travellers. Occasionally, a Kaffir chief and his headmen from one of the native territories would be shown over the place, dressed in skins and feathers and carrying assegais. [End of Barkly Molteno's account]

Percy's brother, Frank Molteno, writing a boy's letter to his cousin James Bisset, on July 21st, 1875, tells about the good times the boys had at Kalk Bay rowing and sailing, fishing and duck shooting. In this letter, he says:

"Papa is going to give me Charlie's gun. Maria, Charlie and Percy are going to be confirmed here on Saturday at Kalk Bay. Papa is going to buy us the boat in which we sailed the other day. Mr. Auret wants only £15 for it; it is thirteen feet long and four feet broad. James is in the second class at Mrs Jones's school. Percy and Charlie are in the second class at college. Percy is third and Charlie is seventh, and I am in the fifth class."

³⁰ The Cape Malays were descended from Javanese Muslims whom the Dutch East India Company had imported from its South East Asian colony in the previous century.

³¹ Racism in the late 19th century, like other social attitudes, became embedded in derogatory language. White South Africans, along with colonial Britons in other parts of the world, often referred to indigenous African men as 'boys'. Another frequently used term was 'kaffirs', which ironically had previously been used by Muslims to refer to unbelievers regardless of colour. What is striking in Barkly's account, however, is that the subsequent 20th century South African equation – domestic worker = a person not of European extraction – did not yet obtain as a universal rule. Wealthy European families employed a mix of employees in the home and as farm-workers, including fellow Europeans, descendants of slaves from Africa and Asia, and indigenous South Africans of varying ethnic identity.

Another glimpse of family and political life at Claremont House in the 1880s
Contributed by James Molteno

Another glimpse of the life at Claremont is given to us by Percy's younger brother James, who lived there until 1885 – when he left as Percy had done six years before – for Trinity College, Cambridge, and the Inner Temple.

"From my cradle until I was twenty years of age [wrote Sir James], I grew up in an atmosphere of politics.... My father was at the date of my birth (1865) in the zenith of his political career, and seven years after my birth became first Prime Minister under responsible government."

After an interval following the dismissal of his Cabinet by Sir Bartle Frere, he was persuaded to help the third ministry under Sir Thomas Scanlon in the years 1881-1882. In July 1882, Sir John Charles Molteno retired finally from public life and died in September 1886. Percy, therefore, was a boy at Claremont House during his father's administration, and was old enough to take an intelligent interest in the controversy with Sir Bartle Frere, which made an indelible impression on his mind, leaving him a convinced believer in Colonial self-government and a convinced opponent of Imperialism and of all attempts by the Home Government to impose its policy on South Africa. Sir James wrote:

"Our home was a little republic, my father the President, a genial, humorous but withal a stern man.... There were ten children, and when my father married again four more, all brought up in the home.... That was the family custom at the Cape in those days, and in my opinion it tended to the development of character in the children. We were not hedged round by unnecessary discipline, but put on our honour.... Hunting, fishing and all kinds of sport were to be had for the taking. We boys were fortunate in our school – the Diocesan College and Rondebosch, five miles from Cape Town, then under the mastership of Canon Ogilvie, an inspiring teacher, famed in English and Dutch homes alike throughout the length and breadth of South Africa.

"My father kept [an] open house. Politicians, civil servants, naval and military men frequented the old home amongst the oaks of Van der Stel. We youngsters had to fag and be useful, and of course we were curious, and we listened.

"There was no monotony in South Africa in those days.... I remember Sir Henry Barkly and Sir Bartle Frere, the Governors and their staffs. I can see Mr Froude; he was often at our house. In those days politics were on a different plane. One never heard of Boer and Briton.... Everybody knew everybody else. There were no races except the coloured races and tribes.... Then came the Gaika and Galeka wars; the Zulu War; the war with Seccoceni;³² the first Boer war and the Basuto war; and after that the race war [between the British and the Boers, 1899 to 1902].³³

³² More commonly spelt Sekhukhuni.

³³ The process of expanding white settlement, both Boer and British, meant obtaining land, livestock and labourers in what was overwhelmingly an agricultural economy throughout Southern Africa until diamonds and gold began to be mined in the 1870s and 80s. This meant depriving indigenous South Africans of the lands they occupied, as well as other measures to turn many of them into farm workers for white farmers, and later mineworkers. The result was a succession of wars throughout the 19th century, both on the Eastern Frontier of the Cape Colony, and in Natal (against the Zulu Kingdom), and in the interior across the South African Republic. Only once indigenous South

“My father was not reticent in the home. He discussed political problems, both South African and worldwide, and welcomed our participations in the conversations. We were loyal partisans, and subconsciously absorbed his constitutional and political views. We noted with sorrow and dismay the break-up of his fine constitution upon the reversal of his policy and the dismissal of his ministry by Sir Bartle Frere.³⁴ At that time he sought peace and consolation at his seaside resort; and well do I remember Sir Garnet Wolseley after the disaster in Zululand,³⁵ on his way to replace Lord Chelmsford, driving down to Kalk Bay in his four in hand to discuss the settlement with my prematurely aged father.”

By that time, Sir John Molteno’s sight was failing, and his son James remembered reading aloud to him under the old oaks in their garden the *Nineteenth Century* and *Contemporary Reviews*, and discussing the religious, political, economic and scientific controversies in which Gladstone, Huxley, Herbert Spencer³⁶ and others were taking part. His father used to be fond of telling about his early days, of the Kaffir wars and the rough and tumble of up-country life.

In 1884, the Cape Town line of railway was linked up with the Port Elizabeth line at the junction of De Aar, five hundred miles in the interior.³⁷ In the middle of 1885 James and his young brother Barkly, a naval cadet, left the Cape for England, where Percy had been called to the Bar at the Inner Temple, and Victor, another brother, was studying medicine at St Bartholomew’s.

Table Mountain

Described by Percy Molteno

During his visit to South Africa in the winter of 1907-1908, Percy planned with his friend Marjorie Lindley a book on *The Antock Morioi of Table Mountain*, for which she was to provide illustrations.

A fragment of his introduction – three or four pages – which he left makes one wish he had found time to carry out the project. He begins with a sentence from Drake, who circumnavigated the Cape of Good Hope in 1580: ‘This Cape is a most stately thing, and the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth.’ What Drake saw once in his little *Pelican*, Percy saw many times from the decks of the

Africans had been defeated militarily by the end of the century was it possible for Dutch and English-speaking White South Africans to engage in a new generation of struggles between themselves.

³⁴ The details of what happened are told by Dr R F M Immelman in his draft biographical sketch of Sir John C Molteno which you can see on this website under *People and Places*.

³⁵ The defeat on 22 January 1879 of a British Army column of about 1,800 men at the hands of Zulu warriors. This was the most spectacular disaster for British arms at the hands of a technologically grossly inferior local force in the history of Britain’s colonial conquests in Africa.

³⁶ William Gladstone, the great Liberal leader, who profoundly shaped British political discourse in the second half of the 19th century. Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer were influential intellectual voices applying Charles Darwin’s conceptualization of evolution to the natural sciences and society.

³⁷ This pioneering building of long distance railways into the interior of Southern Africa had been undertaken by the Cape Government during the 1870s on the initiative of Sir John Molteno during his premiership. It must have been some joy for him at the end of his days to hear about the completion of this rail link between the Western and Eastern Cape.

great Union Castle liners. His enthusiasm for Table Mountain endured all through his life. Whenever he re-visited the Cape, he climbed it. In 1908, he wrote: "The seaward appearance of the mass of mountain land which constitutes the Cape Peninsula can have changed but little since the time of Drake. It presented the same grand outline when I passed round it one cloudless afternoon in January."

Table Mountain above Cape Town, early 1900s



THE CLOTH IS SPREAD OVER TABLE MOUNTAIN. CAPETOWN LIES BELOW.

Table Mountain towers 3,500 feet above Cape Town. It is the highest and grandest portion of the Peninsula. Percy continues:

"It rises almost vertically from its base to the top of the horizontal wall from which it takes its name. On three sides, it rises precipitously without any buttresses; on one side it is washed by the sea itself; on all sides it is a magnificent object as seen from below. The lights and shades are ever-changing, as is the colouring. Sometimes it is shrouded in mist, but more often it is cloudless and clear in outline against the sky."

He then set out to examine the vegetable and animal life of the Mountain and the wonderful rocks which he had so often explored:

"Portions of native forest still clothe its ravines. The monkey ropes swing from tree to tree; abundant ferns and mosses clothe the rock beneath, kept green by the water, clear as crystal, which had such a reputation for brightness and purity that a supply was regularly brought home by the Dutch fleets for the use of His Majesty the King of Denmark.

"On its lower slopes, the famous silver trees shine in sheets of burnished silver. So partial are they to its soil that they are rarely to be found elsewhere, and never more than a few

miles from its base. The sugar bush [*suikerbossie*], with the special race of birds that feed on its sweet nectar, is also very abundant. Flora of unrivalled variety and beauty clothe Table Mountain from top to bottom. Through the whole cycle of the year, nature has provided flowers in endless variety of form, colour and species. Animal life is represented by several small antelopes, a troop of baboons and numerous coney, or rock rabbits [*dassies*], whose nearest extant congener is said to be the rhinoceros.

"Inanimate forms which simulate life are numerous. The process of denudation has carved many an outline of animals antediluvian and post-diluvian. Here a human face in broad outline against the sky; there a series of faces one above the other. The profile of the great Duke of Wellington is clearly set in the buttress edge of Table Mountain which flanks the Hout Bay Neck – it cannot be mistaken when looked at from Rondebosch on a summer evening. Heads of men or animals are visible everywhere. The lion – as you would expect in Africa – is particularly well represented – a good specimen may be seen in one of our illustrations."

Then, we are told, you may see troops of petrified elephants, or a crested grebe, or a great bird resting its stony frame on the mountain ridge, or curious antediluvians which "stare at you as you disturb their secular solitude, or open rocky mouths at imaginary opponents, the stony spines still erect upon their scaly backs." Percy's fine description reminds one of that wonderful view as the sun goes down from the rim of the Grand Canyon of Colorado. Finally he bursts out into a hymn of praise, a vision of poetry:

"A brilliant atmosphere round you, perched in the sky. Nothing intervenes on any side to hide the world below, or the distant sea with its islands and bays fringed with snow-white sand and breakers, or the blue mountains of Hottentots Holland and all the crumpled, folded belt of mountain land which forms the southern and western rampart of South Africa.

"It is an inspiring scene. Upon what will this great mountain gaze in years to come? It has looked on the Phoenician ships that sailed round Africa, and on the puny Bushman and yellow Hottentot in mortal combat with lion and tiger; then on the tiny ships of Vasco de Gama and Drake carrying men with souls great for enterprise; now on great ocean liners silently gliding in and out of the safe harbour below.

"Will it be a pillar of good hope to men struggling with evils; will it inspire them with its own fortitude, its firmness, its endurance? Great storms beat upon it, wild clouds hide it; but ever again it comes forth serene, calm, stupendous, standing boldly up to meet all the winds of heaven and the waves of the greatest ocean of the whole world, the ocean that separates the Cape of Good Hope from Cape Horn. As you see its magnificent rock walls turned to gold by the western sun, you recall Lucretius; you behold his *flammantia moenia mundi* – the flaming battlements of the world."

Molteno never wrote anything finer than this description of the grand mountain which cast its spell over him in the days of his boyhood at Claremont. A love of landscape – and especially of mountain scenery – inspired him throughout his life, and his passion for nature in all its moods and shapes and for vegetable life in all its forms and varieties find expression here.

Life at Claremont House and Kalk Bay in the 1870s – Extracts from Molteno family letters

Our Claremont chapter may fitly conclude with a few extracts from early family letters in the 1870s, chiefly from Claremont and Kalk Bay.



Kalk Bay, a dozen miles from Claremont House, late 19th century

Claremont, February 18, 1869 – from Caroline Molteno to Aunt Nancy (Mrs. Bingle)³⁸

"You must have enjoyed your stay at Margate. During the last holidays we too made a change to the seaside. Kalk Bay, our watering place, is very different from any English one, and one has to be prepared for a good deal of inconvenience in going there. There are at the most thirty respectable houses – many very dilapidated, and the furniture still worse. The rest are all fishermen's huts.

"We took all the habitable rooms in the hotel, which consisted of only four – one sitting room which served also as a dining room and three bedrooms upstairs.... Still the people

³⁸ Nancy Molteno was John Charles Molteno's sister. She was only a little girl of seven at the time of her father's premature death in 1827. Unlike her three brothers (John Charles, Frank and Frederick) and her sister, Alicia, who all emigrated, Nancy for 20 years remained living with her mother, Caroline Molteno (nee Bower), in Peckham on the fringes of Southeast London. In 1848, however, she married Mr Bingle and then moved with him to Richmond to the Southwest of London where he ran a privately owned school. Nancy tried to keep in touch with her brothers and sisters in the Cape, New South Wales and Hawaii.

tried very hard to make us comfortable and erected a tent for the children on the beach; and as we had not a single wet day during our fortnight there, they were able to make it their daily nursery....

"While at Kalk Bay we drove down to Simons Town to see the Prince's ship, the *Galatea*, but were too late; for she was just on the point of leaving. So we had to content ourselves with sailing – or rather rowing – around her. The Prince and officers were all standing on deck; so we had a good view of them. The *Galatea* is a beautiful vessel and it was a splendid sight seeing her leave the bay with all her sails up...

"Papa is thinking of getting a tutor for the boys, as Charlie and Percy are getting too old for the governess."

Claremont House, February 21, 1871 – from Maria Molteno to 'Dear Aunt Bingle'

"I do not remember much of England, but recollect you and Grandmamma³⁹ slightly. You sent Charley the nursery rhymes which Grandmamma taught me; but he has got beyond them and they suit James and Victor. I remember 'Thank you pretty cow' best of all. There are so many boys I suppose you have forgotten their names, Charley is the eldest. He is a dreadful tease, and very conceited. He is always arguing with Papa about the [Franco-Prussian] war.⁴⁰ Charley takes the side of the French, Percy and Frank that of the Prussians. Jamesie and Victor are not very certain, but change to please the elder boys...

"Papa's trip to the country has done him a great deal of good. He took Charley and Percy with him; they enjoyed it very much. Mr. Smith (the tutor) has given them their trip as the subject for an essay. We have been staying at Kalk Bay for five weeks; it is very pleasant there at this time."

South Western Hotel, Southampton, Sunday evening, March 10, 1872 -- from Caroline Molteno to Aunt Nancy

"We did not leave London after all till Saturday morning. We were quite ready to go on Friday when a gentleman came to tell Papa that a discussion on the introduction of Responsible Government at the Cape was to come on that evening in the House of Lords.⁴¹ So Papa wrote to Lord Kimberley's secretary to ask for tickets for the House. We met Lord Kimberley and Mr Wodehouse at the House by appointment, and they got us seats. Of course we were very much interested in the subject. Lord Granville, Lord Kimberley and another lord spoke in favour of it, and the Marquis of Salisbury and Earl Grey against it; but

³⁹ Caroline Molteno (nee Bower). She died in 1866; so Maria only saw her once in her life, when a very little girl.

⁴⁰ The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 saw France's first, and comprehensive, defeat at the hands of the new rising power of Europe, modern Prussia.

⁴¹ John Charles Molteno had by this time become the leader of all those at the Cape pressing for full self-government. He had timed this visit to England – only his third since emigrating in 1831 – in order to be able to press their case with British politicians.

the result of the discussion and the sympathy of the House were evidently in favour of Responsible Government.

"We have been enjoying this lovely weather driving about. The neighbourhood of Southampton is exceedingly pretty. Tomorrow at two o'clock we start ⁴² with love to Eliza and Uncle Bingle and yourself from us all and a long goodbye, Caroline Molteno."

Claremont House, June 19, 1872 – from Betty Molteno to Aunt Nancy

"Papa says he is too busy to write just now, so one of us must do so for him.... Baby was christened on Sunday. He is named Vincent Barkly. Vincent is rather a fancy name [after Earl St Vincent] and Barkly is in honour of the Governor...."

After referring to a birthday ball and a dinner at Government House, the letter continues:

"You will see by the papers that the Responsible Government Bill passed in the Assembly by a majority of ten and in the Council by one. I think Papa is very pleased; for up till quite lately we were doubtful if [it] would pass in the Council.... The Russian Prince Alexis is expected daily. When he does arrive we shall probably have another ball. Caroline and I are to go to a charade party tomorrow. Caroline is to take part in a sort of Tableau Vivant as a Spanish lady."

Claremont House, February 9, 1873 – from Caroline Molteno to Aunt Nancy

"My cousin, B. Blenkins, has gone off to the Gold Fields. There is rather a stir about them just now, and they say a great many people have gone up there from the Diamond Fields.⁴³ All the 86th Regiment have returned from Natal, where they found nothing to do; for the war was soon settled, fortunately. One of the officers, Major Goodenough, brought me a photograph last Saturday of Langalibalele, the old chief who gave all the trouble. He looks a most disreputable old fellow in his European clothes, but I dare say would look better in his own dress. They say he strongly objected to being photographed, and rolled on the ground, and made faces for a long time, and finally had to be taken asleep. But he is decidedly awake in the picture I have of him. I believe he will be banished for his lifetime to Robben Island."⁴⁴

⁴² **[For Cape Town]**

⁴³ Diamonds had been discovered in 1869; and the presentday gold fields of the Rand in 1886. But in between those dates, small finds of alluvial gold were discovered in the extreme southeastern Lowveld region of the South African Republic around Barberton. This gold rush, however, came to nothing. Young Bazett Blenkins, one of two sons of the late Major Blenkins of the British Army in India and his wife (a sister of Hercules Jarvis), died tragically during the rush in a rockfall at Pilgrim's Rest in 1874.

⁴⁴ **I came upon an undated letter from Maria to Caroline telling how she went with Mr John X Merriman to see Langalibalele, the recalcitrant chief whom Bishop Colenso had championed: "It was such an awkward visit. The three wives wore no clothes hardly. Mr. Merriman had first to go and see Langalibalele, and persuaded him to put on a blanket before I went in to see him." For the whole story, see Percy Molteno's *Life of Sir John Charles Molteno*, Volume 1, p.250ff. FWH.**

**Claremont House, April 12, 1874 – from Caroline Molteno to Aunt Nancy
[The unexpected death of her mother, Elizabeth Maria Molteno]**

"I never could have thought that anyone who was dead could look half so beautiful as she did. She is buried beside her three little boys.... The blank is, to us, and always will be, terrible, but it is worst of all for poor Papa. The last five days he nursed Mamma night and day, and we were afraid he would break down altogether under this, but he bears up very bravely.

"Shortly before her death she told one of us that 'she was quite resigned, though it was very hard to part from us'."



**Elizabeth Maria Molteno (nee Jarvis),
John Molteno's second wife and
mother of ten of his children**

**May 26, 1874 – from Caroline Molteno to Aunt Nancy
[What kind of person Elizabeth Maria Molteno was]**

"Papa has fortunately had a great deal to do lately, and as Parliament is to be opened this week he will be still more busy. After the session is over we are hoping that he may manage to go somewhere for a change. You know, Aunt Nancy, how passionately fond of Mamma he was, and there is such a terrible, terrible change here now. He made her his only intimate friend and companion, and she was everything to him. And then it has all come so suddenly that it is just like a dream, and we shall only gradually realise it all as we get more settled. She was more than a mother to us girls; she was always thinking about us and taking such an interest in everything that pleased us.... She never would make us anxious about anything, and always looked at the bright side of things.... I think death can never be painful to us when we think that we shall meet her again.... Everybody, even strangers, have been so sympathetic. It seems to have been a shock to everyone. Mamma was such a general favourite. I often used to hear people speak about her and say how bright and kind and lovable she was."

Kalk Bay, February 6, 1875 – from Caroline Molteno to Aunt Nancy

"The *Celt* brought us the news of Uncle Charles Molteno's death⁴⁵ in a letter to me from Miss Glass; coming so suddenly it must have been a great shock to you all, he appears to have had to the last so much vigour of mind and body. I have often felt very sorry that we did not go to see them when Papa did.... Maria and I, with the three little ones, are down here at the seaside again.... but all the boys have now returned to College and school. Charley and Percy have both been moved up into the second class. There was a very grand break-up at the College at the end of the year. The Governor was there, with Lady and Miss Barkly, and the Bishop presented the prizes. Percy got two prizes and was very much pleased, I think; but I daresay you saw all about it in the papers.

"I suppose you noticed that we have had Mr Froude here. He was only a very few days in Cape Town, not more than three, I think, on his arrival, and only two before he left. However, we were more fortunate than most people in seeing him. He had lunch and spent an afternoon with us when he arrived, and on his return the evening before he left we met him at dinner at the Governor's, and to my surprise it was arranged that he should take me in to dinner."

June 2, 1875 – from Maria Molteno to Aunt Nancy

[John Charles Molteno remarries a year after the death of his second wife]

"A fresh engagement⁴⁶ has taken place in our family, and although I dare say you will be rather surprised when you hear of it, you will soon see that it is the best thing which could have happened, not only for Papa's own happiness but for all of ours. Papa is engaged to Minnie Blenkins. I did not think when I began my letter that before I sent it I should have such a piece of news to add to it. It has taken us all entirely by surprise. We had no idea of it until he came down from Aunt Anne yesterday and told us that he was engaged to Minnie. I am sure that she will make him a very, very good wife indeed; and it is because he loved my mother so much, and finds that he cannot go on living like this, that he is going to marry again. All his joys and pleasures are so entirely dependent on his home life that the want was too great for him. He wishes the marriage to take place almost immediately, and after it I should not be surprised if he paid you a visit, for he needs a change very much."

⁴⁵ Charles Dominic Molteno, the beloved uncle of John Charles Molteno, and with whom John Charles and his family had stayed in 1861 and in whose house in Edinburgh Percy Molteno had been born.

⁴⁶ John Charles Molteno's daughter, Caroline, had just got engaged to Dr Murray, a former Royal Navy surgeon. Despite Maria's optimistic gloss on her father's decision to remarry only a year after the death of his much loved wife, Elizabeth Maria (and the mother of his surviving ten children), his decision caused huge distress to his children as Caroline Molteno's diaries make clear. The shock was all the greater because his new wife, Minnie Blenkins, was about the age of his eldest daughters, and a first cousin of theirs. Minnie's mother, Annie Blenkins (nee Jarvis) was their mother's sister. What's more, their father decided impulsively to rush into his new marriage, the wedding being arranged for just four weeks after he told his offspring of his engagement.

Kalk Bay, July 5, 1875 - from Caroline Molteno to Aunt Nancy



Lady Sobella 'Minnie' Molteno (nee Blenkins), third wife of Sir John Molteno, Eastbourne, 1890s

"Betty and Maria have already told you all our startling news. We are down here for a few days to get things ready for Papa, for his wedding takes place the day after tomorrow, much sooner than we expected... . Betty spent a week in Government House, which did her a great deal of good. Maria has also just been staying there. Lady Barkly is very kind; she has asked us all three, and any of the boys that [would] like to come, to stay there after the wedding.... I am writing by this mail for my trousseau, or rather part of it ⁵. Lady Barkly has been so kind about it; her dressmaker is to make my wedding dress and most of my dresses. She works beautifully."

Claremont, July 8, 1875 - from Caroline Molteno to Aunt Nancy

"The wedding went off very well yesterday. Minnie looked very pretty indeed, and so did her bridesmaids; it was a very quiet wedding, only some relations were invited, and of course the Bishop and the clergymen who assisted him in the ceremony."

Kalk Bay, January 12, 1877 – from Victor Molteno, aged 10, to Aunt Nancy

"We are staying at Kalk Bay. Papa, Charles, Percy and Frank are going down the country for about a month.... Dr Murray has bought two fine horses. One is a nice riding horse whose name is Orlando. Percy took a prize at college this year.... I think it will be a very good year for grapes. We have 52 bunches on one vine."

Kalk Bay, January 1, 1877 – from Betty Molteno to Aunt Nancy

"Charley and Percy spent a week up in the mountains near Wellington with Grandpapa (Jarvis). They enjoyed themselves exceedingly, and Charley shot two bucks, which were sent us, as well as a porcupine, which was caught while they were there. Percy is top of his class for the last six months."

Claremont House, November 10, 1877 – from Frank Molteno to Aunt Nancy

"I suppose you have heard that Mr Stanley [who found Livingstone] has arrived at Cape Town. He has about fifty of the natives of the interior with him. He has given a lecture here, which I did not go to; but some of the others went, and they said it was very interesting. Percy has given you the enclosed to give to Mr Bingle. It is a list of the Greek and Latin books for the Matriculation Examination for 1878. He is going up for it next year."

Lower Nell's Poort, August 27, 1878 – from Percy Molteno to his sister Caroline

"I have not written to you yet, as there is so little news that would interest you. Yesterday we went shooting on top of one of the Nell's Poort mountains; it is about 7,000 feet above the level of the sea. There was a beautiful view from the top. We could see the Prince Albert mountains covered with snow. We are now staying with Jackson. Charlie and I were invited to a picnic at Beaufort, to be given by Mrs Pritchard and Mrs de Villiers.... There is a pretty fair collection of books here, and they take the *Argus* and the *Empire*, so that we have the latest news and reading to occupy our spare time."

3. Percy Molteno's grandfather, Hercules Jarvis, and his Origins

If energy, business ability, public spirit, tenacity and sagacity, or common sense, with courage tempered by prudence, were the only characteristics that Percy Molteno and his brothers in varying measure derived from their father, they also drew on a store of fine qualities from their mother, a gentle, beautiful and attractive woman, and from her father Hercules Cross Jarvis, who was long remembered as a most lovable character and one of the best citizens of the Cape.⁴⁷

When the Moltenos settled in Cape Town, Hercules Cross Jarvis lived in Somerset Road, at Green Point. Later on he removed to Claremont, remaining on the most affectionate terms with his grandchildren until his death in 1889. He was the son of Captain John Jarvis, and his mother's maiden name was St Ives Dunmore Pyke. It happened that, hearing of some property of the Pykes in the Court of Chancery, to which he might have a claim, old Hercules Jarvis applied in March 1886, to Percy Molteno, who was then learning law in the Temple. Percy kept these letters and made some notes, which show that he looked up many topographical and genealogical books about the Pykes and the Jarvisses. He also, later on, visited Shoreham, where Captain John Jarvis was buried. Hercules Jarvis wrote:

"My dear Percy, I am going to trouble you with a little matter which I am sure you will not object to investigating for me."

In the *Sporting Times* he had seen a notice that in the Court of Chancery, among the names of parties entitled to monies lying there,⁴⁸ were those of Jarvis, Pike and Pyke.

"It may be that I am not in any way interested; but Messrs Cox and Co of 41, Southampton Buildings, Holborn will furnish a 'Book' giving the Christian and surname of the parties entitled thereto. Will you therefore kindly make inquiries whether I am in any way interested?"

Hercules Jarvis's recollections of his family in England

To aid Percy in his search, Hercules Jarvis went on to give some of his early recollections:

⁴⁷ This chapter should be read alongside Dr R F M Immelman's draft biography of Hercules Jarvis which is also reproduced on this website. The Endnotes that I have inserted there will throw much light on individuals, issues and events in this chapter by Francis Hirst that might otherwise be obscure to the reader.

⁴⁸ Hercules Jarvis had gone bankrupt in the very early 1860s. It was this that necessitated the sale of the old family home in Somerset Road, Green Point, and the move to Claremont which lay several miles distant from the centre of Cape Town. As Dr Immelman's biography of him makes clear (see elsewhere on this website), Hercules, already quite elderly, never really got on his feet again as a businessman. This relative poverty during the last 20 or more years of his life is probably what prompted him in 1886 to enlist the help of his grandson, Percy Molteno, in establishing an entitlement to these moneys in the Court of Chancery. The occasion was not successful, but it did set the young Percy off on finding out about the history of the Jarvis family.

"For your information, as far as I can recollect, my father's name was JJ or JH Jarvis. (John Jarvis - in the burial register of Shoreham.) He was first an officer in the Essex Light Dragoons (his portrait in uniform I have, as you know). Subsequently, at his death, he was Captain and Paymaster of the Montgomeryshire Militia, of which Colonel Davies was commander. The Colonel was residing, when I left England, on an estate near Welshpool. My father died and was buried at Shoreham.

"After his death, we removed to Welshpool. I am not aware as to where my father was born, or regarding his relations. As regards my mother, Ives Dunmore Jarvis, she was a Pike, or Pyke, of Exeter. She had a brother and two sisters.

"We were four boys and two girls.⁴⁹ The eldest, John Henry, studied at Addiscombe and went to India in the East India Company's service in the Artillery.⁵⁰ My eldest sister, Sophia St. Ives Mary, married a Mr Duus, a Dane, and Consul for Denmark residing at Hong Kong. He died there, and she here. She had two sons. When last I heard of them, they were in Japan. My remaining sister, Georgiana Charlotte, died here. I left our home at Welshpool in the year 1816 under the care of Colonel Brown and was introduced to Mr Daniel Dixon, of the firm of Hudson, Donaldson and Dixon, by the late Colonial Secretary, Mr. Henry Alexander. I subsequently became the manager of that extensive wine business for many years. I need not tell you of the several public situations I have filled here.

"I was told by my mother that I was born on the 18th of June in the year 1803 or 1804 in London, and christened there (at which Church I am not aware). When I left for the Cape in 1816 Colonel Graham, of the banking firm of Marsh and Co in London, had something to do with the arrangement, as also with my brother's outfit to India, his cadetship and subsequent promotion there."

Percy's reply is missing; but it is evident from his grandfather's next letter that he had done a good deal of research.

Claremont, May 25, 1886

[RM]

"You may have thought it negligent on my part not to reply to your kind letter of April 14th, and your interesting letter of April 28th, received by the last mail.

"When I wrote on the 16th of March I had no idea of giving you the trouble you have undertaken for me. I thought that the moneys in the Court of Chancery could have been ascertained from the Book mentioned by Messrs Cox and Co, and that by an inspection of the Will at Doctors Commons all information would have been attained."

⁴⁹ There were two other children, both of whom died young.

⁵⁰ At this date, which was several decades before the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the English East India Company administered much of India, including training and paying for its armed forces of occupation from the taxes it raised. Addiscombe House was the Company's college where its military officers were trained. Hercules' elder brother was later invalided out of the Company's service. He died on his way to the Cape.

After suggesting that it might be best to abandon the investigation, for which he will gratefully reimburse any expense, he continues:

"Reverting to the unclaimed fund in the name of Pyke, paid in in 1756, you do not say the amount. The accumulated interest since that date must be very large. Emmie⁵¹ tells me her Aunt Sophia⁵² told her that on her mother's side her parents were entitled to a legacy which was not claimed, they fearing the expense.

"Since I received your letter I have been taxing my memory. At the time I was very young; my earliest recollection was the death of my father at Shoreham, and seeing the funeral going down to the church. What impressed itself strongly on my mind was the sight of his grey Arab charger following the procession. The next thing I can remember was staying with 'Uncle Fisher' (he must have been a brother-in-law of my father) on our journey to Exeter to my mother's parents. They lived in the street leading up to the castle. I remember going with the nurse to the castle gate. I would not go in, being afraid of the sentry. We must have stayed there some time until we commenced our journey to Wales. I remember it was a long one, and all I can recollect of it is that we stayed at an isolated inn called the Hundred House.

"I was so very young, only 12, when I left home, that perhaps my mother never thought of confiding in me anything relating to family matters, which she may afterwards have confided to my sisters. With regard to the sum paid in 1817 (this might be 1807) in the name of Jarvis, I heard from my mother that my father had a sister living - where, or whether married or not, I do not recollect. I never heard of a brother, nor do I know of any channel from which information could be obtained except that my father was an officer in the Essex Light Dragoons and subsequently, at the time of his death, in the Montgomeryshire Militia on actual service."

The Jarvis family home at Somerset Road, Green Point – Caroline Murray's recollections

To this account set down in his old age may be added Caroline Murray's recollections of her grandfather, as written in 1913 and privately circulated in a *Chronicle* of the family. It will be noticed that in talking to his granddaughter, Hercules Jarvis referred to his relative Lord St Vincent as one who had been desirous of helping him:

"The earliest link of our family with the Cape was through Grandpapa Jarvis. I asked him once what gave him the idea of coming out to the Cape at a time when so few people even knew of its existence. He replied that, his father and his brother being in the Army, [they] became acquainted with it on their way to and from India, and in that way his interest was aroused so that when a friend of their family, a Col. Brown, was ordered out to the Cape, Grandpapa's mother was persuaded to allow him to go out under his care. He was then

⁵¹ 'Emmie' is Emerentia, one of HC Jarvis's daughters [she never married. Editor, RM's, addition to this note].

⁵² Sophia was Hercules Jarvis's eldest sister. She is recollecting that her and Hercules' grandmother, Captain John Jarvis's wife, had been a Pike or Pyke.

only 14 years old. At that date, 1818, there was no regular steamer service to the Cape⁵³ and they must have made the voyage of six months on a sailing ship.

"Apparently Grandpapa remained at the Cape about two years. He told me that now and again he would be seized with a fit of homesickness, when he would climb up to the top of the Lion's Rump⁵⁴ and, gazing there over the sea, would have a good cry. Col. Brown seems



Signal Hill and Lion's Head, with Table Mountain behind. It was here that Hercules used to climb up and cry in his loneliness

to have been very good to him, and to have taken him with him wherever he went. Once when the Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, was going round the coast to Algoa Bay,⁵⁵ Col. Brown accompanied him, and Grandpapa was also invited to be one of the party. They seem to have had only a small vessel and a rather adventurous voyage, finding themselves, when a fog suddenly lifted, in an unexpected place somewhere near Cape Point, but this on their return journey. At Algoa Bay there were then only two houses, one a farm and the other a military station. On their arrival Col. Brown lent him a gun and in an hour he came back with a buck. When embarking for their return voyage they had some experience of the dangerous seas there. He told me that, as they stood on the shore, he was keen to go off in the first boat, but Col. Brown made him go with him and the Governor in the lifeboat. That first boat was swamped and everyone in it drowned. He seems to have made a favourable

⁵³ In fact, of course, there were no steamships at all at this date.

⁵⁴ The shoulder of Table Mountain that, with Signal Hill beyond it, runs down beyond Kloof Nek and cradles Table Bay.

⁵⁵ Several hundred miles to the east of Cape Town, Algoa Bay is now the site of the significant manufacturing centre, the City of Port Elizabeth.

impression on the Governor; for at the end of the return voyage, he offered him a commission in the Army.

"This was the second time that he had had that opportunity; for before he left England his relative, Lord St Vincent, had made him the same offer, but he seems to have had no desire for a soldier's life. On his return to his people at the end of two years, he greatly appreciated the life in his home in Wales, and especially he enjoyed the hunting; but when he was about 17 the spell of Africa seized him again, and this time held him fast and claimed him as one of those men with high ideals of public duty whose love for their adopted country was expressed in services, the fruits of which we now enjoy, though often all unconsciously.

"At that time the leading merchants were mostly Dutch and resided in Cape Town, which was then a very different place from the present bustling, modern-looking town. Its streets seemed wide and silent with no high buildings, few shops, but many fine old dignified houses with large cool halls and rooms and high stoeps where, in the evenings with the doors and windows thrown open, the family received guests and drank coffee. This Grandpapa has described to me. I have been told that he was a slender, delicate-looking youth, very fond of dancing. One day, when watching him at a dance someone remarked that he was going to be married. 'What', was the reply, 'he looks more like going to be buried'. All through his life he was most abstemious and a very small eater. Whenever he had any kind of illness, his one remedy was to go to bed and starve. I remember how this used to exasperate his anxious family. He never argued about it, but quietly took his course, and certainly he wonderfully retained both his physical and mental powers and his keenness of interest to the very end of his long life.

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



Elizabeth Maria Jarvis (nee Vos) (1809-1864), wife of Hercules Jarvis (identification not certain)

"At 19 Grandpapa married a Miss Vos. She was only 16 and was a relative of Mrs de Jongh.⁵⁶ The business in which Grandpapa was embarked was that of a wine merchant, at that time a very profitable one, as there was a flourishing export trade. He made his home in Somerset Road at Green Point where, from his stoep, he could gaze over the sea that he loved and watch the shipping that so keenly interested him There I picture him still with the familiar 'spy-glass' in his hand. There was very little building then in the neighbourhood and their house and the de Smidts' adjoining seemed quite isolated. It was the spot on earth that, to my child-mind, seemed most like Paradise. As I think of it now, in the light of my older experience, I know that there was ground for that feeling. The memory of that home deserves to be valued and loved by all its descendants; for when I think of the great divergences of character, age, relationship and nationality combined in it and reflect that I have not one memory connected with it of anything but kindness, sympathy and the most generous

hospitality, then I realize that it was something quite unique. It is only with the memory of a child that I can recall my Grandmother who presided over this home with a quiet dignity and authority that never seemed to press or jar, yet was the source of its harmonious working. We loved to follow her about as she busied herself with her household duties. There was never bustle or disorder, but there were always faithful old servants and always a bountiful table where an unexpected guest was sure of welcome.

⁵⁶ This is how John Charles Molteno, as a result of his marriage to Hercules Jarvis's daughter, Elizabeth Maria, in 1851, came to be related to both the de Jongh and Vos families.

"I never remember Grandmama speaking anything but Dutch to us, although in her children's education and environment the English language and ideas had the preponderating influence. Grandpapa joined her Church, the Dutch Reformed, and became one of its elders. It was in the Groote Kerk in Adderley Street that all their children were



Die Groote Kerk in Cape Town where Hercules Jarvis and his wife regularly worshipped, 1841

baptized and married. When I go now into that vast solemn building, I can still feel myself a frightened little child buried in one of the high pews and gazing across with awe at the mass of elders in black with great bibles in front of them, amongst whom sat our kind Grandpapa. But it was the huge pulpit supported by carved lions with its overpowering canopy that struck real terror when the thunders of the preacher echoed from beneath it.

"When I can first remember the house at Somerset Road Aunt Sophy⁵⁷ had already left it; for she was married at barely 17 to Uncle Alport, and lived for some years in a cottage in the neighbourhood. Aunt Annie,⁵⁸ too, had been married at 17, to Major Blenkins, a widower whose eldest daughter was just about her own age. Soon after their marriage they left for India, where they spent the short but very happy two years of their married life."

⁵⁷ Sophy Jarvis, one of Hercules' daughters, is not to be confused with her Aunt Sophia, her father's sister who married Mr Duus and who lived until her husband's death in Hong Kong.

⁵⁸ Annie Jarvis, another of Hercules' daughters.

Percy Molteno sets out to explore his mother's family history – the Jarvises

Elizabeth Maria Jarvis, Percy's mother, was the second daughter of Hercules Cross Jarvis. She was almost twenty years younger than her husband, and died twenty-five years before her father, who lived until 1889. She was attractive, amiable, unselfish, devoted to her husband and children as they to her. Percy only remembered her as one whom he lost when a small schoolboy; but he was much attached to the Jarvis family, and his interest in his Jarvis ancestors was as strong as in the Moltenos.

Moreover, his curiosity was stimulated by the difficulty of tracing their connection with one of his heroes, Earl St Vincent, the great naval commander and reformer of Napoleonic times.⁵⁹ Before his death, when he was collecting material for a family history, he dictated a series of notes about his grandfather Hercules and the Jarvis family. The letters we have quoted from Hercules Cross Jarvis, and the investigation which Percy made at his request while he was reading in Chambers in the Temple,⁶⁰ had set his mind working on the subject; and he followed up these researches soon after his marriage; for there is among his papers a manuscript note dated August, 11, 1890, to the following effect:

"Went over to Shoreham today. At New Shoreham churchyard, saw tombstone of John Jarvis. It is an upright stone facing the west entrance of the Church. The inscription also faces the west entrance. The stone looks aged, and parts of the inscription are illegible. So far as I could read it, it runs: 'Sacred to the memory of Lieut. John Jarvis, Paymaster of the Royal Montgomeryshire Militia... Died 10th (?) June, 1808, forty-seven years of age'."

He appends a tree showing that this Lieutenant John Jarvis married Miss Dunmore Pike, that one of their children was Hercules Cross Jarvis, born 1803 or 1804, who went to the Cape, married, and died in 1889, and that one of his daughters, Elizabeth Maria, married John Charles Molteno.

Lieutenant John Jarvis was therefore Percy Molteno's greatgrandfather. Percy took the trouble to look up at the Public Record Office the muster rolls and paylists of various regiments showing his military career. Thirty-seven years later Percy Molteno, when driving in his car to Glen Lyon, the family home in Scotland, turned aside from Coventry to visit Lichfield and Eccles Hall in Staffordshire, where the ancient home of the Jarvis (or Jervis) family is situated, and where, in Eccleshall Castle, the Bishops of Lichfield resided until recently. Part of his note on this occasion is worth recording:

"Among the monuments in Lichfield Cathedral I noticed one to a Mr. Jarvis who had lived in the Close. At Eccleshall we visited the Parish Church, a very fine one. On looking over the lists in the Roll of Honour, the first name I saw under the letter 'J' was that of John Jervis. We lunched at Eccleshall, and at the Inn were given the programme of a pageant which had been held on August 3rd to 6th of this year. In the list of patrons were Lieut. Col. WSW Parker-Jervis, DSO, and Mrs Parker-Jervis. One episode of the Pageant represented Eccleshall's celebration of the Coronation of George III. Among the arrivals at a dance patronized by the local gentry is Mrs Jervis, 'mother of the boy John Jervis who was to

⁵⁹ See my Introduction to Immelman's biography of Hercules Jarvis for the considerable doubt that must exist whether Hercules was in fact related to Admiral Jarvis, Earl St Vincent. Francis Hirst, later in this chapter, sums up the likely reality of the connection, namely that Hercules's family came from a collateral branch of the main stem of the Jarvis family.

⁶⁰ i.e. Percy was becoming a member of the one of the Inns of Court in London, and hence a barrister.

become the famous Admiral, Earl St Vincent'. Another of the company is Lady Anson, who jokes with young Jervis about his glorious future in the Navy.

"After luncheon we went on to Chatkill Hall, which is situated at some distance from Eccleshall. The house has been modernized and is now let. It was the home of the Jervis family from the time of Edward III onwards, and descended to the present owner, Miss Jervis, now Mrs Gooch. The modern reconstruction has left little of interest in the House, which had a fine walled garden with an early English gateway in brick. The place commands fine views of the country all round, which is purely agricultural."

This visit to Chatkill Hall incited Percy to further researches, and eventually he made a rough draft of twenty-three pages on the life and ancestry of his grandfather, Hercules Cross Jarvis, in which he embodied the letters already quoted as well as some further information.

On September 17, 1936 [ie. some 46 years later. Editor, RM], there appeared an obituary notice of Percy Molteno's brother Sir James Molteno. Thereupon Colonel Swynfen Jervis, of Middle Barton, Oxfordshire, wrote to Percy Molteno:

"I noticed in the obituary notice of your brother in *The Times*, the interesting fact that on your mother's side you were descended from the Jervis family. As one of the few Jervises in the male line left, and as a member of the family who has taken a great interest in tracing all our relationship, I should be much obliged if you could tell me where the connection comes in as at present I have been unable to trace it. I can trace all the descendants of the family from John Jervis and Mary Swynfen, the grandparents of John, Earl of St Vincent (and my four times great-grandparents), but some of the earlier collateral branches cannot be traced down to the present day."

In reply, September 30, 1936, Percy Molteno recapitulated the details about his greatgrandfather John Jarvis, (or Jervis), who was gazetted a cornet of the Essex Light Dragoons in 1795. His grandfather Hercules, he added:

"always used as his seal a winged Pegasus, and had among his belongings a Coat of Arms with three martlets and the Pegasus as a Crest. His family were informed by him that he was closely related to Earl St Vincent's family... I would be very glad if you could succeed in establishing the exact relationship in the pedigrees of the Jervis family."

In his answer Colonel Swynfen Jervis, after tracing his own pedigree back to John Jervis, born in 1631, the greatgrandfather of the Earl, said he was unable to find a relationship between the Jervis family of Staffordshire and Molteno's ancestors. His ancestors had always spelt their name Jervis, having come originally from the Norman 'Gervaise'. He continued:

"As regards the winged pegasus on the seal you mention, the crest granted to Earl St Vincent on his elevation to the peerage (1797) was 'a demi Pegasus issuant out of a naval crown'; but this is only admissible to the descendants of the 2nd Viscount. The coat of arms 'Sa .a chevron erm bet three martlets or' [sic] is the old one of the Jervis family of Staffordshire, and was confirmed at the visitation of the County in 1664. This is the coat of arms borne by myself, and the crest I bear, 'a griffen's head erased etc.' was granted to my [great] grandfather in 1818.

"The coat of arms as mentioned above is usable by any member of the family who can prove their descent from Robert Jervys [born] 1520, from whose seal it was taken at the visitation in 1664 by his great-great-nephew William [born] 1624."

In the last letter of this correspondence, dated October 21, 1936, Molteno wrote:

"With regard to the name having been changed from Jervis to Jarvis. I have always been informed that the name Jervis is pronounced Jarvis; and I remember reading in Tucker's *Life of Earl St Vincent* that he was known to the sailors as 'Old Jarvie'. On looking at some of my papers I see that in the Muster Rolls of the Loyal Fencible Regiment of Cavalry (December 1794 to June 1795) John Jervis, Quartermaster, was appointed Cornet and was promoted from Cornet to Lieutenant in January 1796. When appointed Paymaster he appears as John Jervis but signs himself 'J Jarvis'; so it seems clear there was some confusion in the spelling of the names.

"I remember my aunt (my grandfather's daughter) telling me that a mistake had been made in his commission in spelling his name.

"In case it is of interest to you I enclose an impression of the seal which he used, a demi Pegasus. I notice also that in the Coat of Arms, in addition to the three martlets, there is a Shield of Pretence, with three small objects, possibly leopards' faces; but it is difficult to make them out exactly.

"Owing to my grandfather having left for South Africa so young, and in view of the great distances which then separated South Africa from England by sailing vessels, he was cut off from his relations in this country and so became less familiar with his family connections.

"I see that his elder brother's name was John Henry, preserving the name of John, which appears to have been used so frequently in the various generations of the Jarvis family."

There can be little doubt that Molteno was right about the spelling and pronunciation. Jarvis is the English spelling of the French 'Jervis'. There is an almost exact parallel to Gervaise and Jarvis in the case of Jervaux Abbey in Yorkshire, which is always called Jarvis in the locality. Moreover, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, there are two or three cross-references of Jarvis to Jervis. The evidence of the crest, and the family tradition that Earl St Vincent exerted himself to help the two boys whom he recognized as kinsmen, make it more than probable that Percy Molteno's grandfather came from a collateral branch of the main stem of the Jervises.

In the notes already referred to, Molteno remarks that the Jervis or Jarvis family had produced several other members, besides Lord St Vincent, who had distinguished themselves in the service of their country. There was a Sir Humphrey Jarvis, who went over to Dublin, and was twice Lord Mayor. From him descended the family of Jarvis-White Jarvis, Baronets of Bally Ellis in the county of Wexford.

There was Sir John Jervis, a second cousin of Earl St Vincent, and a younger contemporary, who passed from Trinity College Cambridge to the Middle Temple, represented Chester in Parliament as a Liberal from 1832 to 1850, was Attorney-General under Lord John Russell in 1846, and rose to be Chief Justice of Common Pleas from 1850 to 1856, when he died at the early age of fifty-four.

Percy Molteno's account of Hercules Jarvis's life

Resuming the family story, Molteno wrote:

"When Captain John Jarvis died, he left his widow with a young family to be provided for. The Jarvises had never been wealthy, and Mrs Jarvis had to seek some opening for her boys as soon as they were old enough to begin a career of their own.

"In all probability through the influence of Earl St Vincent, the eldest son John was introduced to Lord Castlereagh, the famous statesman who had charge of our foreign policy at the Congress of Vienna. Castlereagh secured a cadetship for him from John Huddleston, a director of the East India Company, through whose patronage John and Henry Lawrence went out to India. The boy Jarvis was sent to the new Military Academy at Addiscombe House, where officers were trained for the Indian Army. Among the many well-known men who studied there may be mentioned Henry Lawrence, Robert Napier, Baird Smith, Arthur Cotton, and Earl Roberts."

It may also be recalled that Colonel Sandeman (whose daughter married Wallace Molteno, Percy's younger brother) was trained at Addiscombe.⁶¹ After passing through Addiscombe, John Jarvis was appointed to the Bengal Artillery and served some time at Dum Dum, afterwards notorious for the dum-dum bullet. In 1832, he was invalided and sailed for the Cape, intending to stay there with his younger brother Hercules. But he died in August at Mauritius during the passage.

[**Note:** What follows is largely, possibly almost exclusively, Percy Molteno's own account, not that of his biographer, Francis Hirst. The layout of the page proofs, however, makes for some ambiguity as to which author is speaking at particular points in the text. Where it is almost certainly Percy Molteno himself, I have inserted quotation marks at the start of each paragraph. RM, Editor]

Hercules Jarvis's early days at the Cape

"Meanwhile my grandfather Hercules Jarvis had been furnished with letters of introduction to the Colonial Secretary at the Cape. The boy was then only thirteen or fourteen years of age. Happily Lord Charles Somerset, the Governor of the Cape, took a fancy to him, and eventually he was taken into the firm of Donaldson, Dickson, and Co. They were the chief English merchants in Cape Town, their main business being the exportation of Cape wines. These wines, like the Madeira wines, came into vogue during the Napoleonic wars, because the embargo levied by Napoleon on all goods from the Continent prevented French and German wines reaching England.

"Hercules Jarvis was able and energetic. He soon made his mark and was invited to become a partner in the business. He devoted himself to shipping, as many ships were then consigned to the firm. At that time there was no shelter in Table Bay from the north-west gales which frequently caused terrible havoc and destruction. He told me that the first

⁶¹ Col. Sandeman's daughter, Lil, married Wallace Molteno in 1907. You can read the enchanting Diary of her visit to the Cape, 1905—06, elsewhere on this website.

step taken when a ship arrived consigned to the firm, was to send out an immense hawser and anchor, so that the ship might have a secure hold and be able to ride out a gale. Realizing the importance of providing shelter for the ships, he became a strong advocate of a break-water, and got his daughter Elizabeth, afterwards Mrs Bisset ('Aunt Betty'), to make a sketch of the proposed break-water, showing its position and appearance. Of this sketch a copy has been preserved.

"In this connection I may mention that when my father,⁶² a little later, entered business at Cape Town, he too became a shipper of wines, then the only important export of the colony, and chartered ships to England in conjunction with Donaldson, Dickson and Co.

"During my grandfather Jarvis' early days at the Cape he was often invited to visit the large estates at Constantia, and would spend some of his Sundays there. The proprietors, mostly Dutch, lived in considerable affluence. They had plenty of slave labour to cultivate their vineyards, and they trained some of these slaves for private bands which performed in their grounds.

"At the age of nineteen my grandfather made a voyage to England, probably on the business of the firm. On that visit he stayed with an uncle who was clergyman somewhere in the Mendips. His uncle, he told me, was very fond of coursing, and even when going to Church on Sundays would take his dogs with him. One day on their way to Church they put up a hare. The Rector said he could not possibly leave his valuable dogs, so there was no Service that day in the Church!

Hercules marries Miss de Vos in 1825

"Among the principal wine merchants of Cape Town, with whom his business brought Mr. Jarvis into connection, were two brothers of the de Vos family. He fell in love with, and married, a daughter of Mr Hendrick de Vos, whose brother had been Chief of the Burgher Senate during the first British occupation,⁶³ and was presented with a piece of plate by the British Government for his friendly acts towards the British Forces. My grandfather married Miss de Vos on December 18, 1825. She was only sixteen and he twenty-one or twenty-two at the time of their marriage. They had a number of children but only five daughters survived. Percy's Aunt Sophia, the eldest, married his father's business partner Percy John Alport, after whom he was called. The second, Elizabeth, married his father (Sir) John Charles Molteno. The third, Annie, married Major Blenkins, the fourth, also Elizabeth (Aunt Betty) married James Bisset. The fifth, Emerentia, who was always called Emmie, remained unmarried.

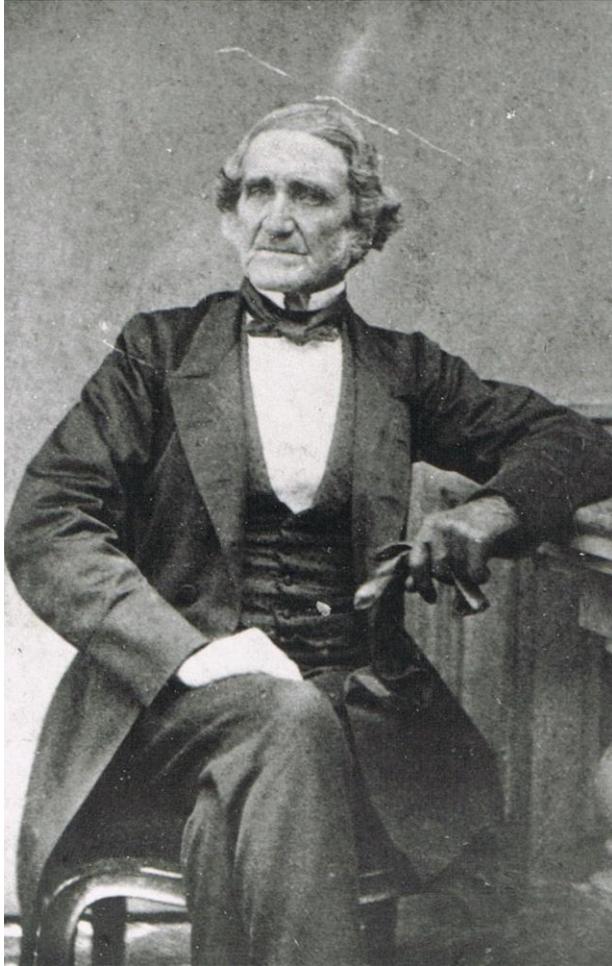
"Miss de Vos spoke Dutch and drew her husband into the Dutch Reformed Church; but as her name, like that of de Villiers, indicates she was partly descended from the French

⁶² John Charles Molteno, who arrived at the Cape in 1831, some 13 years after his father-in-law to be, Hercules Jarvis.

⁶³ About 1795.

Huguenots who made their way to the Cape to escape religious persecution between 1687 and 1689, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685.

Hercules Jarvis elected to Cape Town's Board of Commissioners



"As time went on [to resume Percy Molteno's narrative] my grandfather Hercules Jarvis, being well-established as a partner in the business, began to take an active share in the affairs of Cape Town. It was then the only town in South Africa which had a public body of any kind elected by the inhabitants. He was chosen a Commissioner of the Municipality on May 14, 1845 and was elected Chairman on May 3, 1848. In this office he continued until April 7, 1860, when he retired by his own wish from the Board. He took up all public questions with great vigour. Two of the most exciting and important in the whole history of the Municipality arose during his period of office.

"The first was the celebrated attempt by Earl Grey, Secretary of State for the Colonies (or rather of the War Office, which then had charge of the Colonies as well and was often called in jest 'the Office of War with the Colonies'), to establish a Penal Settlement at the Cape, like that which had been established in Australia at Botany Bay.

Hercules Crosse Jarvis, Chairman of the Commissioners of the Municipality of Cape Town (in effect, Mayor), c. 1860

Hercules Jarvis becomes a leader in the Anti-Convict agitation

"The first Whitehall proposal, in May 1841, was that the Cape should be made a convict station for European soldiers condemned (chiefly in India) to long terms of imprisonment. They were to serve their terms on Robben Island,⁶⁴ and at the expiration of their sentences

⁶⁴ 'Seal Island'. The Island is situated in Table Bay, within sight of Cape Town. It served at times as a high security prison, especially during the decades of political resistance to the apartheid regime from the 1960s to the early 1990s.

they were to be liberated in Cape Town. This project provoked many remonstrances and petitions, and its dangers were so strongly represented to the home authorities by the Governor, Sir George Napier, that it was abandoned. In the following year however, the idea of establishing a Penal settlement at the Cape was revived by a proposal that fifty convict boys should be sent there to be apprenticed, but this too had to be abandoned owing to the strength of the local opposition.

"Finally in November 1848 – the year of the Irish Famine⁶⁵ – the Governor of the Cape, Sir Harry Smith (after whom Harrismith is named) announced to the Cape Legislative Council that the Secretary of State intended to make the Cape a Penal settlement, and on March 21 of the following year it was reported that a ship with prisoners convicted of agrarian offences in Ireland was on its way to Cape Town. Thereupon a pledge was drawn up by the Editor of the *Commercial Advertiser*, John Fairbairn, to the effect that all the signatories would refuse to employ in any capacity any convicts landed at the Cape, and calling on the Governor in the exercise of his discretionary powers to refuse to receive the convicts on shore when they arrived. The pledge was placed for signature in the Commercial Exchange. A boycott of all who might employ convicts was also resolved upon, and many officials resigned their offices in order to create a deadlock.

"On September 20, 1849, the *Neptune* arrived with the convicts on board. A letter signed by my grandfather, HC Jarvis as Chairman of the Commissioners, and Mr. Maskew, Chairman of the Ward Masters, was immediately dispatched to the Governor. It stated that the *Neptune* with her cargo of convicted felons, having arrived in Simons Bay, the Commissioners and Ward Masters of the Municipality of Cape Town once more addressed His Excellency to inform him that the people were determined that the convicts 'must not, cannot and shall not be landed or kept in any of the ports of this Colony', and they relied upon the Governor for protection. The Governor, while regretting the tone and style of this communication, promised that the *Neptune* should remain at anchor in Simons Bay for a few weeks until the dispatch which he had addressed to the Secretary of State could be answered. The moderates in Cape Town were satisfied with this concession; but a more determined section, including Mr Jarvis, remained defiant. Other difficulties also cropped up. A Kaffir war⁶⁶ had broken out and trouble followed between the Municipality and the Government in connection with the garrisoning of the town. The anti-convict disturbances led to a quarrel between the Police and the Commissioners.

"Meanwhile a petition of remonstrance was drawn up by the Municipality and addressed to Queen Victoria protesting strongly against the introduction of persons of evil character into the Colony. It was signed by HC Jarvis as Chairman, and a similar petition was addressed to both Houses of Parliament. Interest in the struggle spread from South Africa to London, and Charles Adderley, an MP (afterwards Lord Norton), took up the cudgels for the Colony and made known in Parliament the course that was being pursued by Earl Grey. Eventually the protest was successful. Thereupon my grandfather called a meeting of the Commissioners,

⁶⁵ Percy Molteno is slightly wrong in his dates here; the Irish Famine began in 1845.

⁶⁶ 'Kaffir wars' was the term often used by white South Africans of a previous generation to refer to the long sequence of Frontier Wars that periodically broke out in the Eastern Cape as white settlers moving northeastwards seized land that Nguni-speaking black South Africans were already in occupation of.

which resolved to convey their thanks to Adderley, and it was decided to change the principal street of Cape Town, then known as Heerengracht, to Adderley Street.



“The public interest excited by the anti-convict agitation stimulated to an enormous degree the demand for popular institutions, and a Parliament at the Cape.⁶⁷ Jarvis was by nature and conviction one of the strongest supporters of this measure and gave the movement all the assistance in his power. Before retiring from his municipal work he had the satisfaction of seeing the grant of representative institutions and the birth of the first Cape Parliament in 1854. He stood for Cape Town and was elected Member at the head of the poll. After some years of service in the House of Representatives he was elected to the Legislative Council and remained in that position until he retired from public affairs.

Adderley Street as Hercules Jarvis knew it in the 1850s and '60s

⁶⁷ cf. the account of these events in Professor Eric Walker's *History of South Africa*, pp.249 sqq.

Tributes to Hercules Jarvis



Hercules Jarvis, shortly before his death in 1889

"On the occasion of my grandfather's death in 1889, Mr. Charles Fairbridge wrote of him: 'For more than half a century he was perhaps the best known and most energetic citizen in Cape Town. A zealous supporter of municipal institutions, he was for many years in succession a most efficient Chairman of the Municipality. Mr. Jarvis was also an ardent supporter of the measures adopted to make Table Bay a safe harbour, as well as to open our mountain passes, and introduce railways and tram-ways. Finally he was strenuous in the endeavours to secure Parliamentary government. He was a director of many public institutions, and a man of general and useful activity.'

"Another well-known citizen of Cape Town has written to me: 'I had hoped to be able to command the time to jot down something about the life and labours of Mr. Jarvis.' With great regret, he had abandoned this intention, but added: 'His services to the Cape Colony for years before the grant of representative institutions were indeed great – how great only those may know who were his associates during the years of labour he devoted to the cause of the people of this land. When tyranny was still strong, and military law superseded the

legal tribunals, his own life and liberty were often in great peril. Few are now alive to know this. New generations have sprung up who have other fish to fry, and care little about ancient history or how the rights they now enjoy were fought out by their predecessors.'

Hercules' bankruptcy and retirement

"When the wine export trade, with which my grandfather was associated, came to grief as a result of the commercial legislation of 1860, when the duties on light Continental wines were lowered, he wrote a useful pamphlet on the subject, pointing out the injury which was unintentionally being done to South Africa by tariff changes which, in effect, were fatal for a time to the chief export of the colony. Fortunately, as I have shown in my *Life of Sir JC Molteno*, the development and export of wool in increasing quantities were then beginning, and were of the utmost assistance in maintaining the solvency of the Colony until diamonds were discovered and then gold, to the great financial benefit of the Cape Treasury.

"In the same year, 1860, when these business misfortunes befell him, Hercules Jarvis retired, as we have seen (on April 7th), from the Board of Commissioners. An address was then presented him by the Board which ran as follows: 'In the opinion of this Board the retirement of the Honorable Hercules Cross Jarvis as Member thereof will be sincerely regretted by every well-wisher of this Municipality; and this Board feels called upon to place on record their due appreciation of the many eminent services by him to this City during the time of his Commissionership, extending over a period of nearly twenty years, which services, by inaugurating and maturing measures calculated to promote the public good, entitle him to the lasting gratitude of those who have reaped in gold the benefits therefrom.'

"It was further agreed that the Resolution be engrossed on parchment and presented to Mr Jarvis by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Board. Mr Jarvis' career was one instance in many of a young Englishman transferred to entirely different surroundings from those of his old home, who, at an early age and with few advantages, by innate ability, courage, and energy, rose quickly to public positions in which he enjoyed the confidence of his fellow citizens. It is interesting to recall that in the seventeenth century, Sir Humphrey Jarvis⁶⁸ did much the same when he went to Ireland and rose to be Lord Mayor of Dublin.

"I may add that the Town Council of Cape Town recently asked my brother, Sir James Molteno, if he could provide them with a portrait of his grandfather, who was Chairman of the old Municipality from 1848 to 1860."

Admiral Sir John Jarvis, Earl St Vincent – His Life and Views

Percy Molteno's interest in the Jarvis (or Jervis) family derived another incentive from his hero-worship of Earl St Vincent, whose life he studied with more and more delight and approbation as his brother Barkly rose in the naval service. After the Battle of Jutland and the conclusion of the Great War⁶⁹ he would often enlarge on the character and exploits of St. Vincent; and his marked copies of the lives of St Vincent by Brenton and Tucker convince me that he intended to write something about that great Naval Commander and reformer.

⁶⁸ Percy Molteno draws this parallel, believing that his grandfather was related to Admiral Sir John Jarvis, Earl St Vincent, and his wider family.

⁶⁹ The First World War (1914-18). The great naval clash between the Royal Navy and Imperial German Navy, the Battle of Jutland, took place in May 1916. Percy's brother, Barkly Molteno, commanded one of the ships involved in this engagement.



Admiral Sir John Jervis, 1st Earl of St Vincent

Percy's enthusiasm may be explained partly by family pride, and partly by patriotic feeling for the Navy – enhanced during the Great War by his brother's exploits. He was much impressed by St Vincent's magnificent work as a naval reformer as well as by his sturdy Radicalism, and also by his appreciation (after Waterloo) of the need for public and private economy to repair the devastation and misery and suffering left behind by the Napoleonic Wars. He found moreover that St Vincent's political opinions, which harmonized with his own, were expressed with an amazing vigour and boldness, at times when it was dangerous to express Liberal opinions.

It is well-known that by reforming the dockyards, repairing ships, improving the diet of the sailors, resisting all forms of corruption and favouritism, and appointing officers by merit, Lord St Vincent not only won the great battle with which his name is associated, but made Nelson's victories of the Nile and Trafalgar possible. He was indeed, as Nelson wrote, the Father of the Fleet.

It is not so well-known that while St Vincent was always for efficiency and discipline during the [Napoleonic] wars, he was also anxious for an honourable peace; or that after the peace he pressed for a policy of retrenchment, combined with a clear perception of social needs, very similar to that advanced by Percy Molteno and his friends after the Great War. A few extracts from letters written by Earl St Vincent from his country place, Rochetts, to intimate friends will illustrate his post-war opinions:

September 4, 1815

[Crisis in rural England when the post-war slump at the end of the *Napoleonic Wars* was just beginning] (Subheadings are my insertions, RM, Editor)

"Our crops of every description have been most abundant, and are all housed except beans, which being in the sheaf for the most part, are not liable to injury. The memory of man does not recollect so prosperous and cheap a harvest! Nevertheless all the cultivators of land complain most grievously of low prices; and many are failing, for they have been living up to the full extent of their profits. Their sons and daughters are getting far above their condition, and instead of working at the churn, cheese-press, and other domestic concerns, are playing upon their *pi-a-nos*, and flaunting about in shawls, while every female in a market cart carries a parasol in a languishing form. But the country banks, which have in a

great part been the cause of these events, are in a tottering state, and will not make any advances, so that the foundation of our outward and visible sign of prosperity appears to me very hollow."

November 12, 1816

[Urgent need to reduce taxation and lower expenditure on the Army]

"We hear of nothing but the distresses of the people, who can only be essentially relieved by the reduction of taxes, and especially of the Army Ordnance expenditure to the scale on which it stood in the year 1790; and Parliament ought to be assembled immediately to carry this measure into execution; and this language ought to be expressed at every public meeting in the kingdom; for it is by this voice alone that we can be relieved from the approaching evil of military despotism."

May 15, 1818

[Call not to abandon measures to improve the health of Royal Naval seamen]

"Mr. Delhunty is here and confirms all my statements touching Naval hospitals, and also my late apprehension that all the systems I established (and vainly hoped would endure for ever) to preserve the health of our seamen are wearing out fast; sick berths where they continue, altered for the worse, and applied in some instances to other purposes. It may not be amiss to moot this to Sir George Cockburn (for, of all the services I lay claim to, the preservation of the health of our fleets is my proudest boast) taking care to keep Delhunty's name out of sight, or the Guardship Surgeons will roast and devour him."

July 8, 1818

[Oppose an enormous standing army]

"Believing that you are governed by sound good principles, opposed to enormous standing armies, and that you will exert your utmost abilities to rescue the Navy from the degraded state it is now in (merged in the Army), I am always your zealous friend."⁷⁰

Dudbrook, July 17, 1818

[The Admiralty must control the Royal Navy]

"It is of great importance to our country that the public should be kept alive upon the subject of our monstrous Army... The ordnance and appurtenances for His Majesty's Fleet should be vested in the Admiralty and entirely taken away from what is termed the Ordnance Department. The futile employment yeleft [typographical error in original page proofs? RM, Editor] *Staff* should be totally done away with, and all the frippery of the Army sent to the devil."

⁷⁰ At this time, Earl St Vincent was well over 80 years old.

At Rochetts, the country seat where St. Vincent spent his last years, he loved to entertain congenial friends, and was generous to the poor. Edward Pelham Brenton, a Captain in the Navy who knew him well, states in the biography, that he was 'beloved and respected by all classes in his own neighbourhood and throughout the county. He knew the history of every family, particularly those who were in any pecuniary distress; and to these, if they were deserving, his purse was ever open; but he drew a strong line between industry and idleness.'

He built two good cottages on his estate and let them to two poor people of good character who had brought up large families without ever applying for parochial relief. 'A brass plate on their doors stated this fact.' That some of his ideas were eccentric may be inferred from his reason for disapproving of vaccination. The smallpox, he said, was intended by nature to check a redundant population – a rather extreme example of the influence exerted at that time by Malthus. One other anecdote deserves reproduction, for it shows that from the Jarvis connection as well as from the Moltenos, Percy drew inspiration for his own favourite doctrine, which he assiduously applied, of economizing time and money, though no-one was more generous with both when he thought they could be usefully employed for public or private purposes:

"I never knew anyone who was at once so great an economist both of money and time as Lord St Vincent, and yet so liberal with both. It was this seasonable parsimony, which enabled him to spare so much for the good of his fellow creatures. His life was extended to a great length, and yet, according to the average mode of taking rest, he may be considered to have lived nearly twice as long as most other men of the same age. Of the time he gave to sleep I have overstated the amount when I say that he rose at four o'clock. In summer time he was very commonly on his grounds at half-past two, always before his labourers, and the man who was the first to join always received half-a-crown for his industry and early rising. At five o'clock in the morning both in summer and winter, the coachman was regularly dispatched on horseback to Brentwood (two miles off) for the letters and newspapers.... When he had 'made up his post', as he called it, and franked all his letters, he would ask what privilege there was remaining, in order that he might know how far he could accommodate his friends."

After getting the post, St Vincent wrote his letters and read the morning and evening papers, which occupied his time till breakfast was announced at nine o'clock, when he would exclaim: 'I have got through all my work and the day is my own'. He was not pleased if his male guests delayed their appearance after six o'clock in the morning: to the ladies he was more indulgent; but he was a severe host to guests who offended against his rule of punctuality. He used to say there were very few really independent men in England, because they all wanted something or fancied they wanted something, either for themselves, or their children, or their dependents. 'Every person, sir,' said he, to Brenton, 'lives beyond his income: three servants are kept where there should be only two. If a man has but a shilling a day, he should live upon tenpence, and lay by twopence.'

His political and economic opinions were a large part of his religion, and it was probably a difference of political opinion with the neighbouring parson that prevented him from attending the Church; but he was neither an atheist nor a Roman Catholic, though he was accused of heresy for favouring the cause

of emancipation,⁷¹ which he believed would strengthen the Empire and the Monarchy. In line, he was a staunch and consistent Whig, firmly attached to the Lansdowne interest and a great friend of Charles James Fox.⁷²

I have no doubt that Percy's habits of early rising, and his insistence on punctuality and his zeal for public economy, were fortified by his admiration for the greatest member of his mother's family.

The Vos ancestry of the Moltenos

During the excitement over the Raid Inquiry, Tom Anderson, who was very much of a Loyalist, became very hot against the Cape Dutch, and especially against Schreiner on account of his evidence at the Inquiry, and Maria, always loyal to her husband, wrote to Percy from Kalk Bay on March 29, 1897: 'I daresay just at present you and Betty are very indignant with Thomas.'⁷³

She held that the only way to deal with an obstinate, wrong-headed old man like Kruger was for England to deal firmly with him and Dr Leyds.

However, she thought that the Dutch and English at the Cape were beginning to understand one another better:

"Thomas, who was so much opposed to all the Dutch, is now anxious through me to prove he is connected with the Dutch. Did I tell you Emmie says we are not Dutch at all? One set of our ancestors came from Osnaberg in Germany and the other from the French Huguenots?"⁷⁴

Percy, who was always in search of information about his ancestors, was much excited on hearing of the sale at Christie's at the end of January 1924 of a silver cup which had been presented by the British military authorities at the Cape in 1797 to Jacobus Johannes Vos, who was President of the Burger Raad

⁷¹ Emancipation of slaves. The opening decades of the 19th century saw the British Government, after long domestic controversy, first decide to use the Royal Navy to halt all continuing trafficking in slaves worldwide, and then in 1837 to abolish the institution of slavery throughout the British Empire.

⁷² His Whig attachment placed Earl St Vincent on the left of what was still an aristocratic controlled parliamentary political spectrum in Britain. Hence he was critical of the emerging Tory party and the political positions it championed.

⁷³ Maria was one of Percy's elder sisters and married to the Cape Town businessman and shipper, Tom Anderson. The Raid referred to was the Jamieson Raid of December 1895 which had been instigated illegally by Cecil John Rhodes, diamond and gold millionaire, and Prime Minister of the Cape Colony at the time. This covert policy was in pursuit of his dream of expanding the British Empire and incorporating the two independent Boer Republics, in one of which, the South African Republic, huge gold fields had been discovered ten years earlier. The British Government was forced into a humiliating public enquiry. The Raid marked a decisive turn in white South African politics towards an intensification of British-Boer hostility and the rise of an increasingly extremist Afrikaner nationalism that marked the next century of South African life.

⁷⁴ Emmie Jarvis was Maria's aunt and a daughter of Miss Vos who had married Hercules Jarvis. Here Maria is trying desperately to justify her husband's hostility to Dutch-speaking South Africans by distorting what her Aunt had told her of all the South African Moltenos' Boer ancestry on their mother's side of the family. Afrikaners in South Africa were a complicated mixture of Dutch, Javanese, French Huguenot and German descent.

during the British Occupation. The cup, which was described as 'elaborately ornate', was sold for £146 3s. to Solly Joel. Molteno tried hard to buy it afterwards, but without success. Fortunately the Vos family shield, crest and plate remained with the Vos family in Cape Town, who were direct descendants of the original Johan Hendrick Vos of Osnaberg, who married Christina Bouman, daughter of a Captain of the Burger Militia at the Cape. This Osnaberg Vos died in 1719 in Batavia. His son returned to the Cape and had two sons. One, Jacobus Johannes Vos, born in 1756, was the President of the Burger Senate to whom the silver cup had been presented. His elder brother, Johan Hendrick Vos (1749-1810) married Elizabeth Rousseau, a great-granddaughter of a French refugee, Pierre Rousseau, who had come with the other French Huguenots to the Cape in the middle of the eighteenth century.⁷⁵ Elizabeth's mother, however, was a Cape Dutchwoman, Johanna Bok, and her son, Hendrick Daniel Vos, born at the Cape in 1783, married another Dutchwoman, (with Huguenot blood), Anna Jurgens, who lived until 1853. Their daughter, Elizabeth Maria Vos, married in 1825 Hercules Cross Jarvis, whose daughter, Elizabeth Maria, in turn married John Charles Molteno and was Percy's mother.

This pedigree was furnished by Graham Botha, curator of the Archives in Cape Town, who was himself descended from the Vos family. Percy's aunt, Miss Emmie Jarvis, was applied to soon after the sale of the cup, and wrote:

"The President of the Burger Senate was a brother of my great-grandfather. My grandfather, Hendrick A Vos, married Anna Elizabeth Jurgens. She was of Huguenot extraction, the name I believe was de la Porte, or Delporte as they write it now."

In 1931, when Percy was still in pursuit of the cup, his niece, Miss Kathleen Murray, wrote to him:

"Solly Joel told me in October 1930 that he purchased the cup at Christie's and that he would send me a copy of the inscription. The cup was in its original leather case. He had intended presenting it to General Smuts if the South African Party had won the last Election."

These documents, carefully preserved by Percy Molteno for the family history which he had designed, prove that half of his mother's blood was German, French and Dutch. Being fond of heraldry, he also noted that on the shield of the Vos family there was a red fox (vos) beneath the crest, but there was no family motto.

⁷⁵ Francis Hirst mistakes his dates here. The arrival of the French Huguenots at the Cape dates to the late 17th century, following their sudden persecution and expulsion from Bourbon-ruled France.

4. Sir John Charles Molteno, K.C.M.G.

Percy worshipped his father's memory, and his filial piety found expression in the chief literary labour of his life. As a boy he had been more and more impressed by the strong, commanding personality of his father, the master of Claremont House, who rose to be the first Premier of Cape Colony in December, 1872, when Sir Henry Barkly, the Governor, asked him to form an administration. At that time Percy was only eleven years of age, but he soon acquired a keen interest for something in African politics which lasted to the end of his life.

Percy Molteno's biography of his father

His father's zeal and public spirit descended on him in full measure, and he resolved early in life to sweep away the tissue of misrepresentation – due to ignorance or a deliberate falsification of the records which the friends of Carnarvon, Froude and Sir Bartle Frere had woven round the Molteno administration. This long and arduous task was accomplished in 1899, and early in 1900 Smith Elder published, in two volumes: *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno, KCMG, First Premier of Cape Colony, Comprising a History of Representative Institutions and Responsible Government at the Cape, and of Lord Carnarvon's Confederation Policy, and of Sir Bartle Frere's High Commissionership of South Africa*. By PA Molteno, MA, LL.M, Trinity College, Cambridge. 1900.

In this work Percy undertook not merely to describe John Charles Molteno's character, career and achievements, but to prove by chapter and verse, after a painstaking study of the official records as well as of private letters and contemporary newspapers, that his father as Prime Minister directed the policy of Cape Colony with great wisdom and success and that in his famous controversy with Sir Bartle Frere, Carnarvon's "prancing pro-consul", he was wholly in the right and Frere wholly in the wrong.

With these volumes before me I shall endeavour to give in as brief compass as possible a portrait of the statesman, and some account of his remarkable career. In so doing, I feel certain that I am fulfilling his son's wishes as well as a biographer's duty; for it was the most important by far of all his writings. It was, as he knew, an important contribution to history, and by the correction of error he was not only establishing the truth, but conveying a lesson that has borne and should still bear good fruit. Moreover, this and my two succeeding chapters will serve to introduce a later South African tragedy in which Percy was to play a notable part.

In addition to filial loyalty, I cannot doubt that the parallel between Sir Bartle Frere and Sir Alfred Milner – and a well-justified fear that the train of disasters started by Sir Bartle Frere would end, as they did, in another racial war between the English and Dutch – inspired Percy in the five years' arduous task of preparing his father's *Life*. It was significant of his motive that he insisted on publishing the book in 1900,⁷⁶ though the war and war-feeling were at their height, and were certain to ensure an

⁷⁶ I.e. Percy's biography was published shortly after the Boer War between Britain and the Boer Republics had broken out. The War would have been looked on with horror by his father, Sir John Charles Molteno, if he had been alive at the time. Both Britain's encouragement of anti-Boer jingoism amongst English-speaking immigrants in the Cape and Natal and its resort to war in order to force the incorporation of the Republics into the Empire were utterly in contradiction to Sir John's fundamental approach to politics in Southern Africa.

unfavourable reception from reviewers in most of the leading newspapers, which would at any other time have welcomed it as a valuable contribution to South African history.

John Charles Molteno is born in London, 1814

John Charles Molteno was born on June 5, 1814, a year before the Battle of Waterloo, and three months before Holland ceded the Cape to England. Catholic disabilities had not then been removed, and probably for that reason his father, John Molteno, who retained the religion of his Italian ancestors, had the boy's birth registered at the Bavarian Ambassador's Chapel in Warwick Street. Despite his religion and foreign origin John Molteno entered the Home Civil Service at Somerset House, and rose to be Deputy Controller of Legacy Duties before his death at an early age in 1828.

His widow, Caroline Bower, whose family, as we have seen, held various offices in the Bank of England, was a fine character and a devoted mother. Though her eldest son John Charles had been baptised a Catholic, she brought him up in her own Protestant faith; and he was educated in the Old Rectory at Ewell, where he was well-grounded in Latin and Arithmetic, and won several prizes. He left school young, and entered a ship-broker's office next door to that of the Castle Line, where he was brought in contact with vessels from South Africa and other countries, and acquired a passion for the sea which never left him.



Caroline Molteno (nee Bower), John Charles Molteno's mother – painting

Emigration to the Cape, 1831

Inspired by love of the sea, love of freedom and love of adventure, probably also by the hope of making a fortune, the boy when only 17, in defiance of his mother's wishes – in her eyes South Africa was a barbarous country swarming with blacks – embarked for Cape Town. The voyage then took three or four months. His first job was as assistant at the Cape Public Library. Then he found a place in the office of JB Ebdon, where he picked up a knowledge of local business; and in 1837, at twenty-three, he started on his own account under the style of Molteno & Co. as a merchant shipper. Two years later he was able to buy a block of land in Roeland Street, Cape Town, where he built substantial warehouses. Unfortunately the price of wine, his chief export, began to fall in the European markets, and eventually trade became so unprofitable that he decided to close down his business and sold his warehouses to the Government.

During these early years he was described as a young man of prepossessing appearance with regular features and a clear complexion, the envy of the young ladies in Cape Town. He was of slight build, a little above the medium height, and had the blue eyes which distinguish the Moltenos and other old Lombard families. There is evidence that the Moltenos were a particularly handsome family; the portraits of several of them, engraved by Bartolozzi before their migration to England, were handed down by JC Molteno to his children.

Going Sheep-rearing, 1840s

From mercantile pursuits, young Molteno turned his attention to farming. Vineyards were no longer profitable. Wine, the principal export of the Cape, was failing; another must be found, and he decided to try wool. In 1840, he had made his way with some others to Beaufort West, where the Beaufort Grazing Company was selling a large tract of land. There were then no roads into the interior, and no bridges over the rivers. "Twenty days by ox wagon were passed on a journey which is now accomplished in as many hours by the railway subsequently authorised by Mr. Molteno's Government."⁷⁷ With the capital saved from the wreck of his business, Molteno acquired a large property in the Beaufort district. He appointed one Alexander Ross as his manager, imported Saxon merino rams to improve the native sheep (hairy animals with broad fat tails), married a wife and left with her for Beaufort in 1843.

In the previous year, he wrote to his mother of his disappointment that he had not been able to return home. The prospect now seemed more distant than ever. In this letter, he added: "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." Before leaving for Beaufort, he wrote to his mother that she was mistaken in her notions about 'the wilds of Africa'. At the Cape, they had an excellent library of 30,000 volumes. With his choice of a wife, he had every reason to be satisfied. He had known Miss Hewitson for eight years.

"Although she never resided out of Cape Town, she is perfectly happy and contented with our country life; and depend upon it, 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 Karoo around Beaufort West

The district of Beaufort West was then as wild as his mother supposed the whole Colony to be. It is well described by Percy in the *Life*⁷⁸ of his father:

"At the foot of the Nieuwfeld Mountains, indeed entangled partly among their spurs, lies Nelspoort, the farm which had been purchased by Molteno. It is situated on the Salt River, a torrent which runs for a short period during thunder showers, and loses itself in a marshy level, the Salt River Vlei, fifteen or twenty miles away... The whole country is covered with low-lying scrub, comprised chiefly of Mesembryanthenums and species of Compositae, which are of a uniform dull brown until the thunder shower gives its infrequent moisture,

⁷⁷ *Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno*, Vol. 1, p. 13.

when they suddenly bloom with the most gorgeous colours, and all Nature lives again so rapidly that it would appear to be touched with a wizard's wand."



Nelspoort – the house built by John Molteno, painted by his granddaughter, Joan Molteno, late 1920s

At that time the country round this family property of the Moltenos swarmed with game. There were all kinds of antelopes, from the huge eland to the small klipspringer, which frequented the rocky heights. "To this day," wrote Percy in 1900, "large herds of graceful springbucks may be seen grazing on the plains, and the wild ostrich is still to be found in considerable numbers." When JC Molteno settled there, the region "harboured a greater variety and a greater number of the largest animals in the world than any other continent".

The carnivorous animals were led by the king of beasts, the lion himself. Next to him was the fierce leopard, locally called a tiger from its cunning vindictiveness and strength. Below them came smaller leopards, with wild dogs, wild cats, wolves, hyenas and jackals. When Molteno and his wife arrived, the lion was just emigrating from the district. "It may easily be imagined," wrote Percy, "what formidable difficulties the presence of these wild animals presented to the stock farmer."

The climate was healthy and invigorating. During the summer heat "man as well as Nature rests from 11 to 4". The air is dry and quite free from germs of decaying vegetable matter. The winter is bright and pleasant:

"The nights are cold and the water takes a coating of half an inch of ice, which is rapidly melted by the sun. When the healing properties of the warm, dry, highly ozonised air are better known, this district would seem to have advantages as the sanatorium of the world for those who suffer from lung complaints, or from nervous exhaustion brought on by excessive work in impure air. Each session of Parliament [this is to anticipate] JC Molteno returned with renewed energy and vigour from the bracing air [of Nelspoort] to the hot and exhausted atmosphere of the small hall which housed the Legislature in Cape Town."



Nelspoort – looking eastwards today (house just visible in the righthand section of picture; and cenotaph erected to Wallace Molteno in foreground)

Next to the solitude, and lack of society, and the depredations of wild animals, the greatest drawbacks to farming in these parts were the stupendous and destructive thunderstorms which from time to time in the hot season burst over the table lands of South Africa. A few specks of cloud suddenly appear; they swell and extend over the sky; the sun is obscured by an inky mass of darkness; then comes a cannonade of thunder; the rain falls in torrents, lightning flashes, and at times instead of rain comes a shower of huge hailstones six inches in circumference, spreading death among game and sheep and ostriches.

"No summer passes in South Africa without its quota of men killed by lightning; and at times a whole span of sixteen or eighteen oxen may be seen lying dead, the fluid having

apparently passed along the chain to which the yokes were attached, so killing each couple in succession."

In this country John Charles Molteno spent the best part of twenty years. 'The area of the district in which he settled was about twice that of Ireland, with a population of some 15,000 all told.' The farms were large; your nearest neighbour might be five or ten miles away. Here the South African Boer could realise his ideal; 'he was lord of all he surveyed and his eyes were not offended by seeing even the blue column of his neighbour's smoke'.

Though shut off from society, there was no danger of rusting. Molteno's active, enterprising, combative nature, keen intelligence and physical energy found plenty of work in warring against the wild animals whose depredations on his flocks and herds could only be arrested or prevented by unceasing watch and ward.

Death of his first wife and baby, 1845

Within a year, a terrible blow fell upon him. In 1845 his wife and her young child died.⁷⁹ He wrote in despair to his mother. He had not lost his religion, but he had given up the hope of worldly happiness. "The Christian's life is but a struggle, a warfare, and this is not his home".

Though desolated, he found consolation in work. He threw himself more energetically than ever into the development of his estate by constructing irrigation works, building sheepfolds, erecting dwelling houses, or the excavation of water furrows and dams. He was an early riser and all about him had to be the same. His servants would complain that they were being worn out by his energy. "His was a nature which delighted in trials of strength of all kinds; he battled with Nature and grew stronger from the contest."

The force of his willpower and commanding presence made him an influence among his neighbours and impressed the natives, who yielded him ready obedience. His physical courage and endurance were as remarkable as the moral courage and consistent adherence to principles which afterwards inspired his whole political life. No hardships deterred him in this period when, like so many contemporary farmers in America, he was a pioneer on the frontier of civilisation. He often rode alone to Cape Town on horseback, a distance of 360 miles.

On commando during the Frontier War of 1846

In 1846, a Kaffir War suddenly burst out. His manager Alexander Ross was commandeered. Molteno preferred to leave him on the farm and volunteered himself to join the Commando of Beaufort Burghers

⁷⁹ His wife, Maria, died in childbirth on the farm at Nelspoort. When things went wrong, John Charles Molteno had ridden off to Beaufort West some 30 miles away in a desperate attempt to get help, only to discover her and the baby dead on his return. To compound the tragedy, the agonising decision he had had to make forced to leave her bedside and she died with only a farm servant or two to tend her. Little wonder that, when he started a family again some years later, he was determined his new wife, Elizabeth Maria, should not give birth on the farm itself. Instead, he bought a house in Beaufort West where she and their children were based. When a decade later he settled in Cape Town in the early 1860s, their subsequent children were always born there.

– attracted, no doubt, by the peril and novelty of the adventure. Taking four horses and two armed retainers, he marched with the Commandant, Andreas Du Toit, for four hundred miles. His fellow-burghers elected him Assistant Commandant, and on their arrival at the frontier the Commandant-General Sir Andries Stockenstrom appointed him full Commandant. The Kaffirs who had invaded the Colony were destroying property and carrying off cattle and sheep.

This, the seventh of the great Kaffir Wars, had opened with reverse[s] to British troops, whose officers from this time onwards displayed over and over again extraordinary ignorance of colonial warfare and lack of adaptability to colonial conditions. In his account of the seventh Kaffir War, Percy Molteno tells of surprises which should have been avoided and retreats which were unnecessary. These, as he puts it, 'were minor disasters in the series which eventually led up to that terrible mistake of Isandhlwana'.⁸⁰



British Army regulars storming the Amatola Heights in the Frontier War after the one John Molteno fought in, 16 June 1851

Flushed by successes over the regulars, the whole of Kaffirland had risen against the colony. Describing the operations in his autobiography, Stockenstrom bestowed high praise on his five Commandants – Joubert, Du Toit, Groepe, Pringle and Molteno. They stormed the Amatola fastnesses and eventually struck such terror into the great chief Kreli that he treated for peace. Molteno was deeply impressed by these experiences and by the terrible losses of life and property due to the inexperience, incompetence and mismanagement of the regular forces. After a campaign of several months, he returned to Beaufort resolved to prevent, if he could, the recurrence of the treatment which he and his Commando had received. In his son's words:

⁸⁰ Isandhlwana was the spectacular defeat of British troops by Zulu regiments nearly a generation later.

"He would never consent to the Colonial forces being placed under the military, of whose incompetence he had been an indignant witness... Let our readers re-peruse the above story when they read of Mr Molteno's resistance to Sir Bartle Frere's purpose of placing the Colonial forces under military officers!"⁸¹

Returning to Beaufort, he devoted himself for five years to developing the great area of land, extending over nearly a hundred thousand acres, which he had acquired. By 1851, he had got the farms into order, and had entrusted their detailed administration to competent managers. Then, retaining a general control, he established himself in the township of Beaufort West, the capital of a large district, which had for many years – since 1837 – enjoyed municipal institutions. He soon became an active member of the Council; but before settling down, being now in affluent circumstances, he revisited England after an absence of nearly twenty years. Bronzed by Karoo suns and 'adorned with a powerful beard', the 'Lion of Beaufort', as he was soon to be called, was hardly recognisable by his mother and the friends who remembered 'the fresh-complexioned youth who had left them in 1831'.

John Charles marries Elizabeth Maria Jarvis, 1851

On his return to Cape Town, he married Percy's mother, Elizabeth Maria Jarvis, whose father Hercules Cross Jarvis held political views in complete harmony with his own. They valued their English birthright to self-government, and were equally determined to establish it in their adopted country, the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope. The large family of this happy second marriage started with three girls – Betty, Caroline and Maria – who were followed by seven boys – Charles, Percy, Frank, James, Victor, Wallace and Barkly. Only the first four of the children were born at Beaufort West – which, however, was constantly visited in their boyhood by the younger sons, from the family home at Claremont [House] on the outskirts of Cape Town.

Family life on the Karoo

Some recollections of Beaufort West by Caroline Murray, his second daughter, may here find a place:

"John Charles Molteno had entered into a business partnership with Percy John Alport, his brother-in-law, who had married Sophy Jarvis. The farms were pastoral and they frequently depastured as many as forty thousand sheep. There was very little society for the two sisters. Mrs Molteno, my mother, was almost twenty years younger than my father.... I wonder now, as I think of what it must have meant to her, with her gay sunny nature and attractive beauty, to be suddenly transported from her happy environment (at Cape Town) into the heart of the desolate, almost awesome Karoo, which in those days of long and comfortless ox or mule wagon journeys seemed like the very end of the world. No wonder that she and Aunt Sophy (Mrs Alport) were almost overwhelmed by the terrific wilderness around them, but she had wonderful power of sunshine within her, and life with Papa could never be dull."

⁸¹ See for this most illuminating narrative, *Life and Times of Sir J.C. Molteno*, Vol. 1, cap. iii, pp. 26-51.

Then there was always the yearly visit to Cape Town, to which the family looked forward, when John Charles Molteno left his farms and his constituency for the parliamentary session. He had been a member from 1854, when a representative legislative assembly was established in Cape Colony; and he was foremost in pressing for the system of responsible self-government; and when it was conferred in 1872 he became the first Prime Minister. That position was due not only to his energy and public spirit but to the fact that he always kept clear of racial jealousies, and made no distinction in business, politics, or society, between English and Dutch.

Though Percy was born at Edinburgh after the family home had been removed to the neighbourhood of Cape Town, he often visited his father's farms at Beaufort West and had experience of travelling through a still wild and primitive region. His sister Caroline's description of the journey from Beaufort West to Cape Town before the building of the railway deserves to be put on record:



Ox-wagon inspanned and ready to go

"Much preparation was necessary for this 12 to 14 days' trek, as there was no way on the bare and lonely route of supplying anything that might be forgotten. The selection of mules or oxen and of drivers had to be most carefully considered. Provisions for the journey were all packed into a large basket with a cover, called a 'cos mantje'⁸²; for there were no hotels, and the few farms we passed were of the most primitive description. Inside the wagon was stretched a trestle of cane framework, on which mattresses were laid. On these my mother and the children slept, while the men slept on the ground. When at last the eagerly looked-

⁸² Food basket. The Afrikaans word today would be spelt differently.

for day of departure arrived, the long tent-wagon with its team of twelve to sixteen animals, would be standing ready in the wide straggling street in front of our house, the drivers looking proud and smart, with wild ostrich feathers stuck in their felt hats, and in their hands the long bamboo-stick whips which they could crack with a sound like the report of a pistol. My father himself saw to the packing, which had to be done with scrupulous care and economy of space. After anxious moments, when some forgotten but necessary luggage was being smuggled in, it was a relief to hear the crack of the whip and the shout to the oxen as we creaked and rumbled slowly through the little village out into the lonely veldt."

Caroline well remembered how she longed for relief from the monotony of the limitless Karoo, with its bare-level plains, sparse low brush, and too plentiful stones, stretching away to mountains on the horizon which seemed to promise something new, but which, when reached, only disclosed a higher plateau of the same, featureless expanse. Such scenery could not appeal to a child who longed for trees and flowers, but it created in Caroline's mind long afterwards, 'a memory that now no other scenery can stir with quite the same emotion'. The stages, or 'outspans', of their journey were determined by the important consideration of water. They had to take the rare chance of pools in a river bed for a wash, and often depended for drinking water on the *vaatje*, a little fat cask, which was filled whenever possible and had to last till the next water was reached. When this meant a long stage in thirsty heat, the travellers were severely tried.

As for food, there was only room for a few necessaries. Butter and milk were then unknown luxuries in the Karoo, and the smell of black coffee – so Caroline wrote – 'still brings before me the flowered *commetjes* handed round before the first inspan at the earliest gleam of daylight'. But despite hardships these journeys were always a joyous adventure:

"I can remember lying awake sometimes at night in the wagon, listening with a creepy feeling through the immense stillness to the weird cry of the jackals, while close to us, the friendly munching of our animals feeding at the 'disselboom' [the wagon's shaft] to which they were tied gave a welcome sense of familiar companionship."

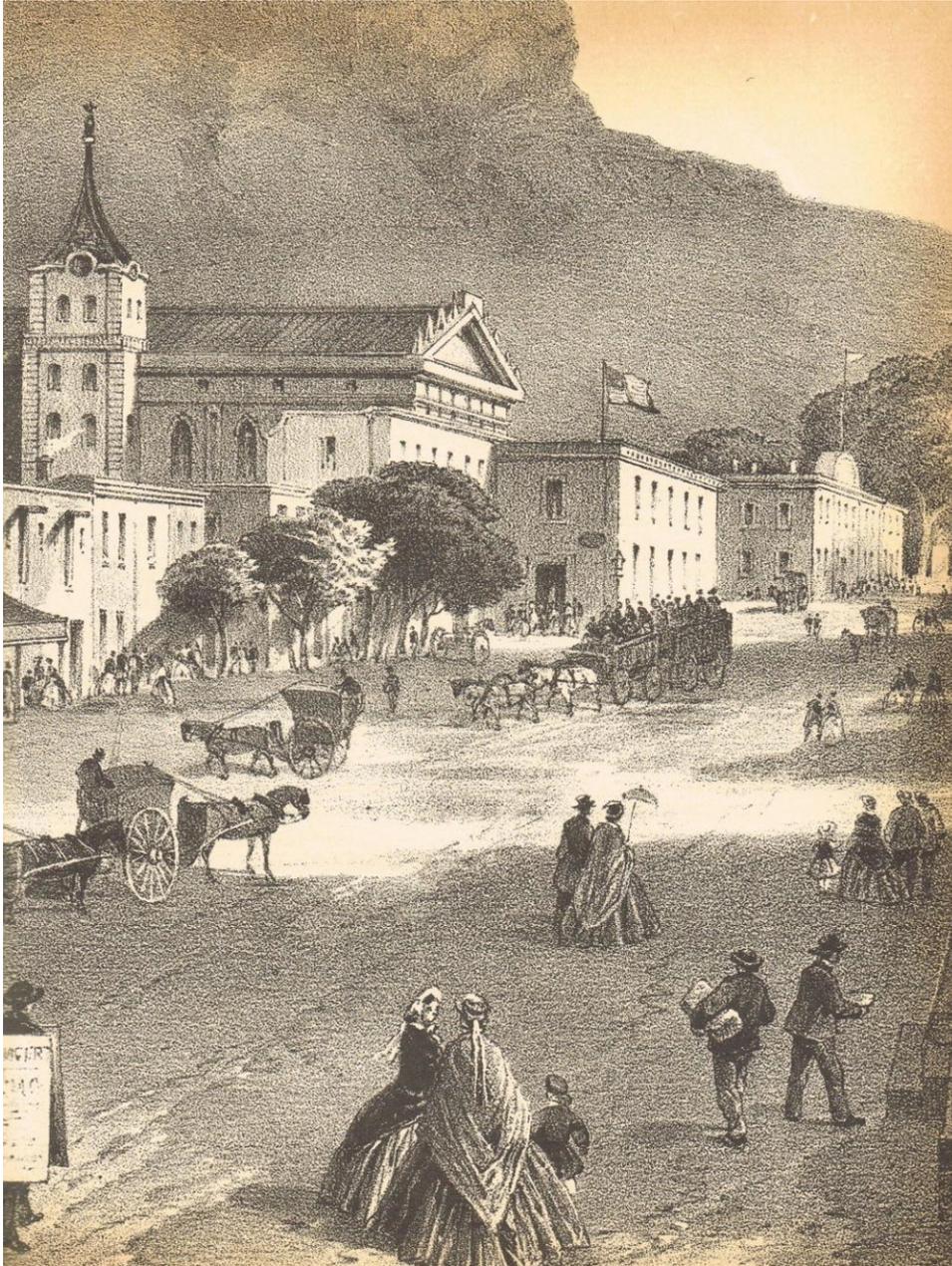
Sometimes the party took the route through Bains Kloof and Wellington, sometimes through Ceres and Mitchell's Pass and thence through Montague Pass, George, and Mossel Bay by sea to Cape Town. On this latter route they passed the little inn of Furney and Swain, which, after the Karoo, seemed an oasis of comfort, and the meal of bacon and eggs, for which they were famous, an unbelievable luxury.

On one occasion at Mossel Bay, they were hospitably entertained by Mr and Mrs Vintcent, old friends of both Mr and Mrs Molteno, whose little daughter afterwards married that famous statesman John X Merriman.⁸³ At Wellington their grandfather Hercules Jarvis, who had a house there with vineyards, used to meet them with a nephew – Bazett.⁸⁴ His cart would join the Moltenos, and then they would all

⁸³ John X Merriman served in John Charles Molteno's Cabinet as a very young man. A generation later, he was still active in Cape politics and had become an inspiring figure for and close colleague of John Charles's sons, James and Charlie Molteno, both of whom were also Members of Parliament. Along with their sisters, Betty Molteno and Caroline Murray, they and Merriman were part of a small, but very active, circle opposed to the Boer War.

⁸⁴ Bazett Blenkins whose mother, Annie, was one of Hercules Jarvis's daughters. Bazett was therefore one of Hercules' grandsons (not a nephew), and a first cousin of John Charles and Elizabeth Maria Molteno's children.

travel on together to Cape Town, and the caravan would make its way 'with as much dash as possible' up through the welcome gate to their house in Somerset Road.



Adderley Street, the main street in Cape Town, along which John Molteno and his family travelled on arrival from the Karoo to get to Hercules Jarvis's home in Somerset Road, 1860s

It seemed to me amazing that John Charles Molteno and his wife could have accomplished this journey from Beaufort West to Cape Town and back, with all their small children, annually without mishap, for eight or nine years. Reflecting on this, his daughter said by way of explanation: "I think that difficulties had quite an exhilarating effect upon Papa; certainly they never for a moment deterred him from pursuing any end he wished to attain."

John Charles Molteno widens his business interests

As a member of the Beaufort Municipal Council, Molteno had proposed that the Crown Lands in the district should be leased by public auction. The proposal was carried. It proved a great

success, and thanks to his efforts the town of Beaufort acquired the great area of common land which it now enjoys. He also turned mercantile experience to account. In 1852 he had started a business at Beaufort, a large store, which subsequently became the firm of PJ Alport & Co. There was no bank in the town, though it was the capital of a district twice as large as Ireland. For some time he met the difficulty by issuing his own notes, payable at Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Mossel Bay. Then he started a bank

with Percy Alport, his brother-in-law⁸⁵ – which, like the store, proved very successful – and the operations of the two extended to Victoria West and other small towns in the district.

The agitation for representative government at the Cape, early 1850s

While he was thus establishing his position and founding a fortune which made him independent for the rest of his life, his father-in-law, Hercules Cross Jarvis, and a growing number of active reforming spirits in the colony, were agitating for representative institutions. In England after the War of American Independence, Adam Smith, Bentham and the Philosophical Radicals had prepared British statesmanship for the grant of self-government to the colonies; and their political arguments were backed by economists like Joseph Hume, who held that it was the business of colonies like Canada, South Africa and Australia to defend themselves instead of relying on English garrisons maintained at great cost to our taxpayers. So late as 1855 Sir William Molesworth, who had made a special study of the Colonies, could state in the House of Commons that our military expenditure at the Cape alone amounted annually to between £400,000 and £500,000, without counting a series of Kaffir wars which had cost us on an average a million sterling a year.

To supplement the practical lessons he had learnt from his father, Percy read widely in the leading books on colonial policy – from Hutchinson's *History of Massachusetts* down to Merivale on Colonisation, Lewis on Dependencies, Adderley on Colonial Policy, and others; after perusing these and many official documents including the Despatches of our Colonial Secretaries, he came to the conclusion – embodied in an excellent chapter (Chapter IV) of *The Life and Times of Sir JC Molteno* – that British colonial policy falls into three periods or phases.

In the first, which lasted down to the War of American Independence, the colonies mostly governed themselves. "In everything except their foreign trade", wrote Adam Smith, "the liberty of English colonists to manage their own affairs in their own way is complete." There was no Colonial Office. In the case of war, the War Office would intervene, but commercial business with the colonies was transacted by the Board of Trade. The second period of Colonial policy, wrote Percy:

"opened with our fatal imposition of the Stamp Act, and led to our tampering with colonial self-government. As a consequence we lost the American colonies, almost all we then had; and we sought to hold those few that remained, and the new colonies which we subsequently acquired, by governing them from home, taking no service from them but the expense on ourselves. It was in this period that we occupied and acquired the Cape."

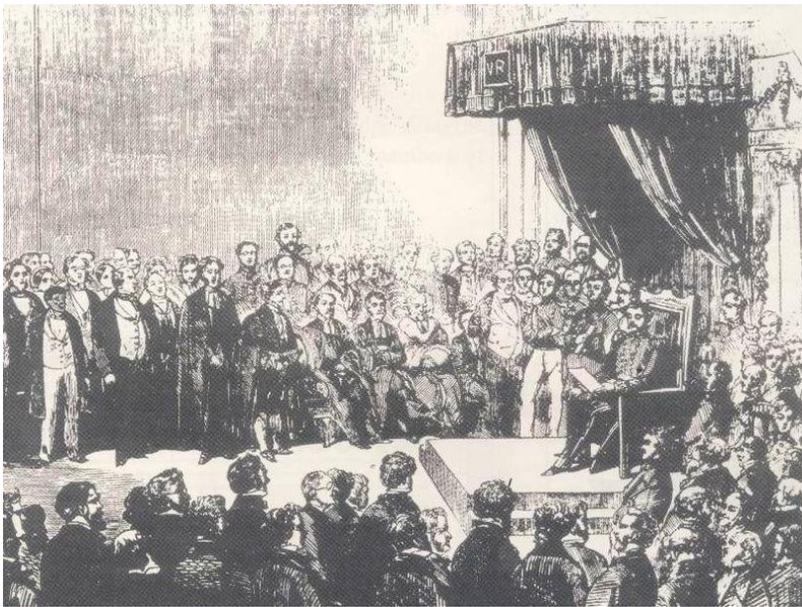
We applied the prevailing ideas of imperialism, made ourselves responsible for the Government, and paid the cost in a series of Kaffir wars, for which, notwithstanding the sacrifice of blood and treasure, we received no gratitude. Our official methods alienated the Boer farmers, many of whom left the colony, preferring 'to abandon their property and go out into the unknown wilds (to the north) rather than remain under so uncongenial a rule'. The Cape had become an expensive luxury, and after the Reform

⁸⁵ After whom Percy Alport Molteno was called.

Bill,⁸⁶ British Parliaments and British governments began to revise their opinions about these troublesome dependencies.

Thus came 'the third period of our colonial policy, in which the principle of colonial self-government recovered itself'. For this salutary change, we were largely indebted to the action of Canada, Australia and South Africa in refusing to submit to any terms of citizenship inferior to those which we ourselves enjoyed at home. It is to them, backed by the rising spirit of liberal reform in England, that Great Britain owes the emancipation of her colonies and the creation of a free self-governing Empire, now rightly known as the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Until 1854, the Cape Constitution vested the power of legislation in a Governor appointed by the Crown, assisted by an Executive Council and by a Legislative Council, also appointed by the Crown. From 1841 onwards, petitions were forwarded by leading inhabitants and the municipal authorities in Cape Town to successive Governors and Secretaries of State for an elective legislature and a responsible executive. At last, in 1854, an elective legislature was granted. Two seats were assigned to Beaufort, and JC Molteno was elected head of the poll. He represented this constituency for a quarter of a century until his resignation in 1878.⁸⁷



**The opening of the first Cape Parliament in 1854
(Hercules Jarvis and John Molteno were both
elected Members)**

After being elected member for Beaufort West, Molteno still carried on his sheep-runs and was described by a well-informed writer in a Cape Town journal as at that time: 'undoubtedly the largest and most successful stock-owner in the western provinces'. Fortunately for political progress at the Cape, Sir George Grey – one of the finest colonial administrators of the time – with great gifts of sympathy and imagination, was transferred from New Zealand – where he had done wonders for a peaceful and just settlement with the Maoris – to be Governor of Cape Colony.

The next political struggle – for Responsible Government at the Cape

From the first, Molteno worked steadily and consistently with Hercules Jarvis and other reformers for the transition to complete and responsible self-government. It was a severe and strenuous struggle, but

⁸⁶ The Reform Act of 1832 which took the first very modest, but decisive step in widening the franchise, a process that ultimately transformed Britain into a democracy.

⁸⁷ J. H. 'Onze Jan' Hofmeyr stood against him in 1857 and was unsuccessful.

the change – which was resisted, strangely enough, by Jan Hofmeyr and John X Merriman, then a brilliant freelance Conservative – was made easier by the democratic statesmanship of Sir George Grey, who rapidly became a friend of Molteno and remained until his death a hero of the Molteno family.

The difficulty of combining a Representative Legislature with an unrepresentative Official Executive is almost insuperable in a country where the people are as competent to manage their own affairs and as fond of political liberty as the English and the Dutch. Gibbon Wakefield once compared representative institutions without a responsible executive to a fire in a room where the chimney is closed. In such cases, the reform party very often resorts to purely obstructionist tactics, as Parnell⁸⁸ did at Westminster between 1880 and 1885. But Molteno threw himself into Parliamentary work as a constructive reformer, and succeeded in carrying some very useful legislation, including an important Act governing the relations between master and servant. He was also successful in amending a bad bill which would have enabled the Governor to call out at his discretion burgher forces (selected by ballot) for the defence of the Colony, or for any other purpose, including expeditions beyond the frontier. Molteno helped to amend the bill in committee, at the same time pressing for the creation of an effective police force. This principle was approved by Sir George Grey, and an act was passed for the better organization of a mounted police force, which afterwards proved of the utmost value to the Colony.

Molteno also co-operated with Sir George Grey in his endeavours to extend civilization and order by peaceful means among the barbarous tribes on the frontier. Towards the end of Sir George Grey's life, Percy Molteno visited the veteran administrator, and Sir George Grey told him of 'his great indebtedness to the constant and energetic support which he received in the Cape Parliament from Mr Molteno in carrying out this policy, as well as improving communications and providing facilities for trade and commerce'. Molteno also supported Grey when he denuded the colony of British troops for India during the Mutiny.⁸⁹ He never made any distinction between the Dutch and the English, but always kept on good terms with both, making due allowance for the difficulties of the Boers in the Transvaal during their wars with the Basutos. His criticisms explored the field of public expenditure and finance, and induced the Government in the session of 1859 to abandon their habit of introducing estimates so late in the session that the House was unable to exercise a proper control.

In 1860 began the final chapter in the movement for responsible Government. Molteno moved a resolution affirming its necessity. It received support from two official members of the Government, and an amendment that they should await the verdict of a new [British] Parliament was only carried by two votes. Meanwhile, the Government of the Orange Free State made proposals for union with Cape Colony. Sir George Grey recommended them to the home Government, and laid the proposals before the Cape Parliament. But Bulwer Lytton, who was then Colonial Secretary,⁹⁰ disapproved of the policy and recalled Grey. Before Sir George reached England, the Conservative Government was replaced by a

⁸⁸ The famous nationalist leader who led a large block of Irish MPs in the British Parliament. He campaigned, in the end unsuccessfully, for responsible government in Ireland. This Home Rule movement would have meant an elected all-Ireland Parliament with an executive responsible to it.

⁸⁹ The Indian Mutiny of 1857. Britain was forced to rush troops to India, by sail of course, from wherever they could be found in order to regain control of what was by far the most important jewel in its imperial crown. The Cape Colony, being over half way to India from England, was a useful source of more speedy reinforcements.

⁹⁰ The Secretary of State for Colonies, always a Cabinet Minister in the British Government, was responsible for all senior colonial appointments, including the post of Governor.

new administration, that of Lord Palmerston, and Grey was reappointed. But difficulties having arisen in New Zealand, it was soon afterwards found necessary to send him back to that Colony, and he was succeeded in 1862 at the Cape by Sir Philip Wodehouse, an autocrat who objected to responsible government as strongly as Sir George Grey favoured it.

In 1861 Molteno had visited Europe, and had spent some time with his relatives in Scotland and in the circle of Dr John Brown at Edinburgh where his son, Percy, was born. His return coincided with the arrival of Sir Philip Wodehouse and the commencement of a constitutional struggle which was to last nearly ten years. At the General Election of 1863, he was returned unopposed for Beaufort.

At this time a critic and opponent in the *Cape Argus* wrote of Mr. Molteno in a Parliamentary sketch:

"I select this gentleman first of the elected members because he is put forward as the leader of the Party with whom he is associated, and because it appears to be taken for granted that, if a change of Government took place, he would occupy the first place on the Treasury benches."

Some years previously the writer had described the representative for Beaufort as 'good-natured with everybody and everything but the Government and the Eastern Province people'. He was easily amused and took a very active share in the business of the House. His off-hand, ready-made speeches were full of practical remarks. He was a consistent denouncer of abuses, outspoken, vigilant, attentive, and by comparison with others a Parliamentary star of some magnitude. In the Parliament elected in 1863, Molteno had developed other qualities:

"He is marvellously patient and painstaking. He never leaves his seat from the moment the Session opens till it closes; and he loses no opportunity in the House or in Select Committee to serve his party. He seldom speaks without saying something, or hinting something, about representative government."

As Leader of the Opposition, Molteno had against him not only Sir Philip Wodehouse, the Governor, and a very efficient Colonial Secretary, Richard Southey, but also a hostile press. Nevertheless he was able to defeat official measures for making Grahamstown, a tiny little place, into a rival political capital.⁹¹ The year 1865 was a year of commercial disasters, bad crops, falling prices of colonial produce, and an unbalanced budget. The Government – and the system of government – became more and more unpopular. At last, in 1867, Sir Philip Wodehouse proposed a new constitution which would have actually abolished the existing representative institutions, substituting a small legislative chamber. Thereupon Molteno moved that the time had come to introduce responsible government. His resolution was lost, but the Government had to withdraw its proposals for altering the constitution.

In the following year Parliament was dissolved, and a new Parliament was elected in 1869 in which John X Merriman was returned for Aliwal North. The Governor's speech admitted a serious deficiency of revenue, and proposed to meet it by an income tax of three pence in the pound, a most unpopular project which led to protests from many parts of the Colony and to a demand for extensive

⁹¹ The sheer distance between the western and eastern parts of the huge Cape Colony, slowness of communications in the age before the railway, and the very different circumstances between the long settled western districts and much less developed expanding frontier in the east, meant a long simmering tension between the two parts of the Colony.

retrenchments. Retrenchment resolutions were passed in the House, to which the Governor objected. Eventually the controversy was terminated by a sudden prorogation⁹² which created a dangerous conflict between the Crown and the Popular Assembly. Though it was the first session of the new Parliament, the Governor announced that he would appeal to the country to decide on what principles the Government of the Colony should be conducted.



Cartoon attacking the two leading advocates of Responsible Government for the Cape – Saul Solomon and John Molteno

At last the issue was joined. As Percy put it, in Chapter VIII of his book, "The Parliament that met in 1870 marked the crisis". But the battle was by no means over. Molteno, Solomon and Porter, the leading speakers for responsible government, started the fight in January 1870, on the estimates, demanding that the expenditure should be placed under the control of the representatives, and they carried their demands by a large majority. Then the Governor brought forward his 'Reform' Bill, which aimed at weakening the popular character of the Legislature, and so increasing the power of the Government. Molteno

denounced Government by Downing Street, asked how the Colony was to be governed when British troops were removed, and declared that 'if taxes and contributions were to be wrung from the Colony by a government with whom the people were not in sympathy, they would not endure it and only overwhelming force could compel them'. On this, his son remarks that, had these warnings and wise counsels, which ultimately prevailed, been attended to and followed in the case of the Transvaal – instead of the uninformed opinions of officials imported from abroad not conversant with the people or their character – there would not have occurred the practical illustration of Mr Molteno's warning words in the rising of 1881.⁹³

Meanwhile, Lord Granville, Colonial Secretary in the Gladstone Ministry, wrote to Sir Philip Wodehouse that if the government could not command the co-operation of the legislature, the legislature must be enabled to ensure the co-operation of the government – in short, in Cape Colony: 'Responsible

⁹² Prorogation in this context was an arbitrary act on the part of the Governor who dismissed the elected legislature, thereby violating the recently expressed democratic will of the electorate.

⁹³ This refers to what is sometimes called the First Boer War. Britain tried at this early date (1877) to take control of the two independent Boer Republics that had sprung up following the Great Trek of 1838. But it suffered a significant military defeat at the hands of the Boers at Majuba, and this led to its reluctant recognition of their substantive independence in 1881.

government should be established as in other colonies of equal importance.' The government's reform bill was defeated, and the session ended in further disputes between the House and the government on taxation and finance. Molteno's health broke down under the strain of the session, and he was incapacitated for six months.

Happily for the Colony Sir Philip Wodehouse, the autocratic Governor, left the Cape on May 20, 1870, and was succeeded by Sir Henry Barkly, a liberal-minded official friendly to responsible government, who was ready to co-operate with the home government and the colonial legislature for the introduction of a full system of self-government. With Lord Kimberley, who had succeeded Granville [as Colonial Secretary], he now began to discuss the changes that would be necessary in connection with the removal of Imperial troops and the defence of the frontiers. Kimberley was ready to allow a regiment to remain for a reasonable time, but wished it to be plainly understood that a responsible government must be responsible for the defence of the colony. This correspondence between Lord Kimberley and Sir Henry Barkly is a landmark in constitutional progress; nor can it be ignored by the historian who has to assess responsibility for the series of disasters that ensued when [subsequently] two Colonial Secretaries and two High Commissioners at the Cape, with a high hand, revived the interference of Downing Street in South African affairs, and overruled the responsible Government of Cape Colony. Percy Molteno's comment may be put on record:

"These despatches are of great importance, inasmuch as they settle the responsibility of the Colonial Government for the conduct of military operations in the defence of the Colony, whether inside or outside its borders. At a subsequent period Sir Bartle Frere, on his own initiative, declared the policy of allowing the colonists to defend themselves an 'insane' one, and dismissed a Colonial Ministry (that of Percy's father in 1878) because they acted on Lord Kimberley's despatch, and endeavoured to carry out their responsibilities by conducting the operations themselves and relying entirely upon colonial forces."

When the Cape Parliament met in 1871, Sir Henry Barkly opened it with a speech pointing to the desirability of establishing responsible government, and clearly stating his opinion that self-government for the Cape should precede any attempt to bring about a scheme of Federation⁹⁴ in South Africa. Molteno thereupon moved, adopting the words of the Governor's speech:

"that the time had arrived when the system of Parliamentary Government in this Colony should be carried to its legitimate consequence by rendering the executive responsible – through the medium of its principal officers – to the legislature."

To conciliate the eastern members, an addendum was added for the appointment of a commission to consider the expediency of a Federation. In the debates which followed, the diehards – including strangely enough a Dutch element, inspired by young J H Hofmeyr ('Onze Jan'), afterwards leader of the Bond – put up a desperate fight during which several able men insisted on the dangers of democracy. Among these John X Merriman, who was soon to be converted to Molteno's views, insisted on the risk

⁹⁴ The perennial issue, once again, of how, if at all, the four settler-dominated states in South Africa – two of them British colonies and the other two run by their local Boer populations – should associate with one another in a region where their white populations were heavily outnumbered by the indigenous people, not entirely secure military terms, and potentially vulnerable as the European powers carved the continent up during the Scramble for Africa in the years following 1884.

of corruption and the ignorance of the voters, quoting from Australian papers to illustrate the mischiefs of popular government. He was answered by Henry de Villiers, and the Colonial Secretary – Southey, a connection of the poet - was answered by Porter. The resolution was carried with enthusiasm by 32 to 25, and the Constitution Amendment Bill was introduced by Molteno on July 30.

In winding up the debate, Molteno denied the existence of the antagonism alleged by one of the speakers between Afrikaners and Englishmen. The citizens of the Cape, he said, were no longer English, Dutch, French, or German, but colonists desirous to do their best for their common country. He lived to see a tragic growth of ill-feeling between the Dutch and the British as a consequence of Sir Bartle Frere's policy,⁹⁵ which ended in the First Boer War. Then after the Majuba peace, antipathies died down, only to be inflamed by the Jameson Raid into the bitter feud that culminated in the Boer War, under the auspices of Chamberlain and Milner.



Saul Solomon, John Molteno's close friend and political colleague, who refused ministerial office in order to preserve his independence of action

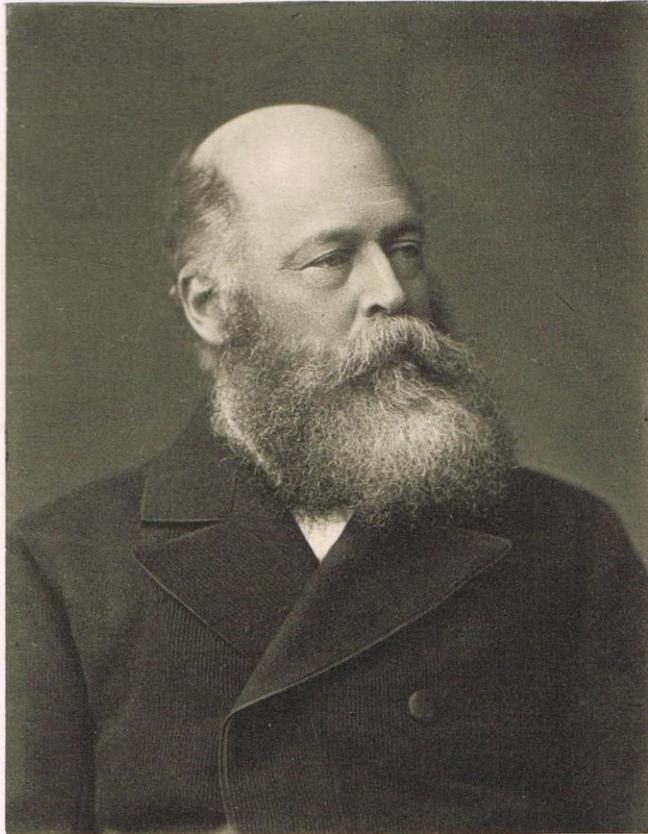
Molteno's Reform Bill was carried by 34 to 27, but was rejected in the Legislative Council, and for a short time the triumph of responsible government was postponed. J. C. Molteno took advantage of the interval for a tour of Britain and Europe, partly for the benefit of his health, which had never fully recovered from his illness the previous year. Taking with him his wife and daughters, he made quite an extensive tour of the Continent, and also visited Egypt. At Edinburgh, his second son Percy was born in September 1873.⁹⁶ In the following April he returned home for the opening of the Cape Parliament, when his Reform Bill was at once introduced without any change of form. It passed the house by 35 to 25, and was then sent again to the Legislative Council, where, after some delay, it was carried by 11 to 10. The Opposition Party in the Eastern provinces was conciliated by a bill to equalize representation. It was supposed that the establishment of responsible government would bring about a union with the Orange Free State, the Transvaal Republic, and Natal; but a series of unfortunate events disappointed these expectations.

When the Responsible Government Bill was carried, and the electoral question settled, a

⁹⁵ Sir Bartle Frere was the Governor who succeeded Sir Henry Barkly, and who took a very different line towards both respecting the spirit of Responsible Government, and to the two Dutch republics.

⁹⁶ Francis Hirst makes a rare mistake of dates here. This trip of John Molteno's to Europe, following this parliamentary defeat, takes place in 1871-72. His son, Percy Molteno, had in fact been born eleven years earlier in 1861 during his *previous* trip to Britain.

Cape Town journalist wrote, on the day when the Members of Parliament separated to return to their homes: 'Mr. Molteno was there, as joyous and jaunty as if the weight of coming responsibilities were not on his shoulders at all.'



J. C. Molteno
ætat 58.
From a photograph taken in 1872.

London. Published by Smith, Elder & Co. 15, Waterloo Place.

John Charles Molteno – official portrait on his becoming Prime Minister, aged 58, of the Cape Colony in 1872

important questions had the moral courage to retract a vote previously given, when he found that his conclusion had been based on false premises. An idea, however, once clearly fixed in his mind, he will fight for it and repeat the attack again and again... He probably thinks like Cobden that it is more important to read the newspapers of the day than all the tomes of learned law ever written."

As soon as the home Government's confirmation of the Act establishing Responsible Government reached him, Sir Henry Barkly, the Governor, began to consult leading Reformers, Porter, Molteno and Solomon with a view to the formation of a Cabinet. Porter declined for reasons of health and Solomon preferred to stand aside; so Molteno was charged with the construction of the first responsible administration at the Cape. This was in conformity with general expectation, and Sir Henry Barkly himself said subsequently that Molteno had been called to office by the almost unanimous voice of the country. Of all the leading Englishmen he was the most popular with the Dutch farmers, who respected him, not only as a successful pastoralist, but also as one who kept a vigilant watch on extravagance and yet favoured a generous expenditure on railways and public works of a useful and remunerative character. When he was called to form a Government, *The Standard and Mail*, then an important newspaper, which had often criticized him, declared that there was 'very much' in the public character of our future Prime Minister which we can admire and respect:

"He is steadfast in pursuit of any object he sets before him; but he does not seek to obtain it by chicanery and double-dealing. At times rash in debate... he is fair and manly, and has more than once upon

But, added the writer, nothing passing round him in the world, least of all in South Africa, escaped his notice. Strong, sound common sense served him in the place of philosophic speculation, and he could

express with force and fluency in sentences, vigorous if wanting in ornament, the ideas that were in his mind.

First Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, 1872

The new Prime Minister formed a good Cabinet which included J Henry de Villiers, afterwards Chief Justice, as Attorney General. Charles Brownlee, who understood better than any other available administrator in the Colony the language and the customs of the natives on the eastern frontier, and Abercrombie Smith, who had opposed responsible government on the ground that it was premature, but was now ready to help in making it a success.

Molteno, as Premier, took the all-important post of Finance Minister. He had carried the day, as Sir Henry de Villiers said long afterwards, not only by an indomitable energy and force of character, but by infinite faith in the good sense of the people of his adopted country and in their ability to manage their own affairs. The new Government took office on December 2, 1872, when Percy Molteno was eleven years of age.

5. The Molteno Ministry 1872-1878

The first years of Responsible Government

Percy Molteno's boyhood was spent in the exhilarating atmosphere of a Prime Minister's home where questions of politics, business and finance were discussed with the utmost freedom. Hence his studies at school were supplemented and invigorated by a first-class education in public affairs. By the time Percy was eleven, his father had fought and won the battle against autocracy and Downing Street Government.⁹⁷ Sir Henry Barkly understood the functions of a constitutional Governor, and was on the most friendly terms with his Prime Minister.

Prime Minister John Molteno's approach

Molteno at once started 'to make good his reiterated statement that the Colony was able to manage its own affairs'. In his father's life, Percy has described, in a series of well-documented chapters, what remarkable success the Molteno administration achieved before South Africa was thrown into turmoil by Carnarvon, Froude and Bartle Frere.⁹⁸ Having formed, as we have seen, a representative Cabinet, which showed that he bore no ill-will against those who had opposed self-government, he reformed the abuses and wasteful inefficiency of the old regime and gave a practical demonstration of statesmanship by combining balanced budgets and low taxation with the development of the colony by public works, carefully planned and economically executed. In the late fifties, Sir George Grey,⁹⁹ while he was trying to encourage the development of the Colony's material resources, had often consulted Molteno, who was then vigorously attacking the problems presented by his own district of Beaufort.

⁹⁷ The author is referring to the struggle which took place at different times in the various British colonies to achieve an executive responsible to the elected legislature. The key change this made was that the Governor of the colony and the Colonial Secretary (in the British Cabinet in London) no longer made policy or other decisions relating to the territory, except for foreign affairs and declarations of peace and war. Such colonies as a result became self-governing under a system of parliamentary government with cabinet responsibility. This was referred to as Responsible Government (as opposed to Representative Government, involving only an elected legislature). John Charles Molteno had been the most prominent Cape Colony politician pressing for full Responsible Government in the years leading up to the British Government conceding it in 1872.

⁹⁸ Much of this chapter deals with this hugely important constitutional controversy, which inadvertently resulted in a sharp deterioration in British-Boer relations and, eventually, to the two Boer Wars.

⁹⁹ The Governor of the Cape Colony following the introduction of a fully elected legislature in 1854.



The new Parliament Building of the Cape Colony, 1884

From Grey's wise and liberal conceptions, Molteno had learnt much. They both understood the natives and knew that they would respond to firm, just and humane treatment;¹⁰⁰ and they were both alive to the importance of maintaining good relations between British and Dutch. It is no small testimony to the public character and reputation of the new Premier that he received on December 27, 1872, a letter from Thomas Burgers, President of the South African Republic, congratulating him on the 'auspicious assumption of office by the first responsible Cabinet of Cape Colony', and adding:

"I feel assured that the change brought about in this respect by the united action of her Majesty's representatives and the representatives of the people of the Cape Colony, will tend to the good of South Africa at large as well as the Cape Colony in particular; while at the same time I am confident that it will direct the spirit of the nation in that proper channel which will ultimately lead to a closer union between the different colonies and states of South Africa.

"Accept the assurance, Sir, that nothing will give me greater pleasure than to see an intimate and friendly relationship maintained between our respective Governments."

For a time, all was plain sailing. A liberal, progressive and yet economical policy was inaugurated. In all branches of government, the new spirit was felt. The colony was behindhand in education. Sir George Grey had set a fine example. To encourage study among the farmers of the north he had founded the

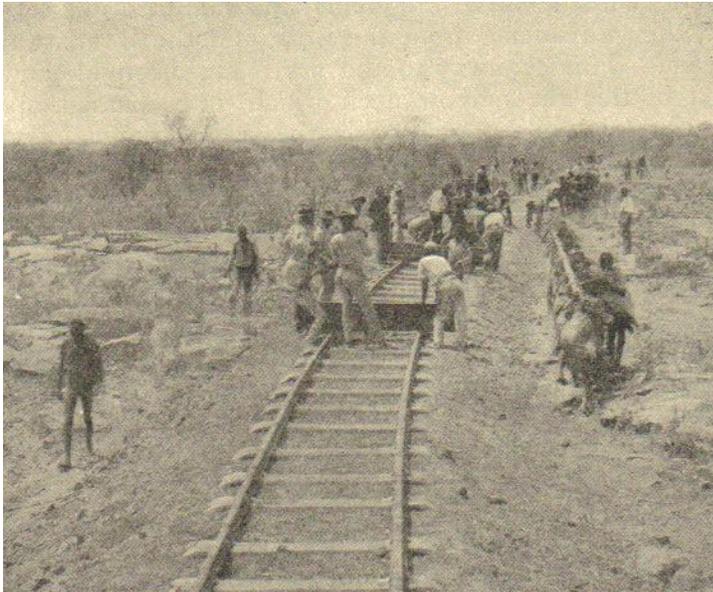
¹⁰⁰ Francis Hirst is writing as an elderly man in the late 1930s. Throughout this chapter, you will notice the unconscious racism of language and white settler-centric perspective that were still near universal among the British population at home and in the colonies.

Grey College at Bloemfontein; to civilize the black races he had founded Lovedale and other educational and industrial institutions where they could learn useful arts which would raise them gradually from barbarism.

A University for the Cape

Molteno had actively supported Grey; and now on taking office as Prime Minister he at once appointed a commission to consider the establishment of a University for the Cape. In the first year of his government this scheme was converted into a Bill and the Bill into an Act; and grants were also made to schools in the rural districts. In 1874 further assistance was given to colleges in various parts of the Colony, and in 1875 these colleges were admitted to the advantages conferred by the University. It was one of those cases in which the supply creates the demand. In 1874 there were only seventy candidates for the higher examinations; there were 786 in 1884 and 3,877 in 1895. Before he died Molteno had the personal gratification of seeing two of his own sons, Percy and James, take their degrees at the Cape University.¹⁰¹

Railways and other achievements



Building the first railways in the Cape Colony

Material progress kept pace with intellectual. The Wellington railway was purchased and was extended from Wellington to Worcester, and from Port Elizabeth to Buschman's River.¹⁰² Competent engineers were attracted from Europe, and surveys were made for further developments of railway communications and other transport facilities. The telegraph system was extended and projects were introduced for a bridge over the Orange River and other public works. The electoral system was reformed; the police forces of the Colony were improved; native troubles on the frontier were settled; much of the antagonism between the eastern and western provinces¹⁰³ was composed. After ten years of stagnation and

¹⁰¹ This institution eventually became the University of Cape Town (UCT) that exists today.

¹⁰² Perhaps from not knowing South Africa's geography at first hand, Francis Hirst omits by far the most important railway development that John Charles Molteno initiated – namely the first line to get up through the escarpment on to the platteland and which went through the Karoo to Kimberley and eventually beyond to Johannesburg.

¹⁰³ The western and eastern regions of the Cape Colony had very different histories of settlement and ethnic composition. The distance between them was great and communications poor. Since South Africa's democratic transition in 1994, the huge territory of the original Cape Colony has been divided into three provinces – Western, Eastern and Northern.

depression, a great all round advance could be recorded.

Dutch-English relations

In one of his speeches to promote unity between East and West and co-operation between Dutch and English, Molteno urged that they should all mix together and act together as representatives of a common country. His friend Porter, in supporting the University Bill, went out of his way to praise Holland for its literature and learning. He saw no reason why both races should not cultivate the two languages that existed side by side in most parts of the Colony. Fortunately for the administration trade and revenue were expanding, and fortunately also the Premier was careful not to spend up to the hilt.

Economic management

"I am not one of those... who think we should rush madly into every kind of expenditure without considering what we are about. That is not my character and temperament, although no-one can say that I am averse to any reasonable measures for pushing on the progress of the country... A cautious policy is best. I do not agree with those who cry, 'Spend, spend, spend, - do anything as long as you get rid of the money'. I want to see that we shall get something for our money. I do not want to see it recklessly thrown away."

Consequently the prosperity that came from the opening of the Diamond Fields,¹⁰⁴ and from a great rise in the price of wool between 1870 and 1873, was turned to good use. The railways and other works undertaken were constructed efficiently and economically, and so contributed to maintain the revenue. Surpluses were carefully husbanded. It was largely due, as Percy points out, to his father's able administration and prudent finance that at a time when financial disaster overtook the Australasian colonies through the over-mortgaging of their resources, 'Cape credit stood in the proud position of being second only to that of England herself'.

A new mail boat service between the Cape and England

Besides the addition to new roads and railways, in the first session of Parliament a subsidy was voted to Donald Currie's new Castle Line, which accelerated the mail service to Great Britain and promoted an expansion of overseas trade. At the end of the Session the Governor Sir Henry Barkly reported to the Secretary of State that there had never before been such harmony between the Executive and the Legislature, and that business had never been carried on so satisfactorily and expeditiously.

After the close of the session the Prime Minister paid a visit to the Eastern Provinces, and was very well received at Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown and other centres. In replying to the toast of his health at Grahamstown, he made this the keynote of his speech:

¹⁰⁴ Diamonds had been discovered in 1869 in what was, from a colonial point of view, a kind of no man's land not administered by either the Cape Colony or Boer-controlled Orange Free State. Britain manoeuvred fast to take control of the valuable territory, for a time treating it as a separate colony, West Griqualand, in order to prevent the self-governing Cape from running it.

"The Ministry has sought to promote the interests of all parts of the Colony alike. I could say much with regard to the past; but let bygones be bygones; let us look at the present and act towards each other as if we were at the commencement of a new era."



SS Grantully Castle leaving Cape Town Docks with the first consignment of grapes, 1889

the old Dutch proverb, 'Gedane zaken nemen geen keer'.¹⁰⁵

An era of good feeling seemed to have been established; and Percy here puts on record some characteristics of his father which, as we shall see in the course of this biography, descended in full measure to his son:

"His desire was to let the dead past bury its dead, and to start afresh with the old habits and sorrows entirely forgotten. This was a trait eminently characteristic of his frank and generous disposition, which never dwelt upon old injuries or upon a past which is dead and gone. He believed in using one's powers to the full in the present, and wasting no strength on a past which could no longer be altered. He often used

At King Williamstown, Beaufort, Craddock and Queenstown, the Premier recalled the time twenty-seven years before when he was a commandant of burghers engaged in the defence of the frontier, a time when the country was being overrun and devastated by Kaffirs.

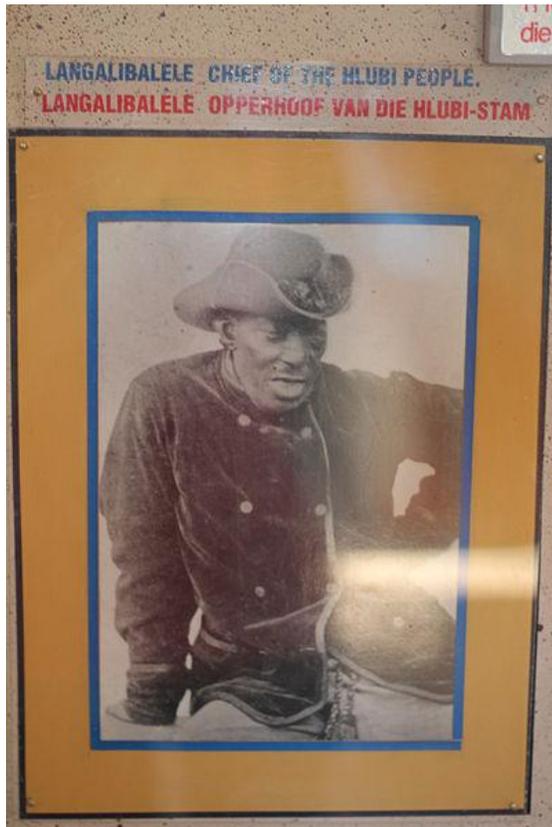
So much for the successful establishment of colonial self-government at the Cape. Until 1874, all went well, though an important measure for reforming the electoral system was very nearly defeated by the opposition of Sprigg, Pattison and Merriman. But in 1874, Molteno lost two friends. Ill health compelled Porter to leave the Colony for Europe, and for the same cause Sir Christoffel Brand resigned the Speakership. Molteno did not make friends easily, and the loss of these two dealt him a severe blow. Far worse, as it turned out, was the change of Government in England after the defeat of the Liberal Party at the General Elections of 1874, when Disraeli took office. It proved a disaster for South Africa; for Lord Kimberley's successor at the Colonial Office, Lord Carnarvon, started a new kind of interference in the affairs of South Africa, which not only arrested progress but embittered the relations of the two white races and led not to the Union (which was his object), but to the disunion of South Africa. A series of native wars, with two or three disastrous defeats, and a conflict with the Boers of the Transvaal, were

¹⁰⁵ Meaning, in effect, it's no good crying over spilt milk.

the direct consequences of ill-advised and ill-contrived efforts to override the Cape Ministry and to mould unwilling communities into an artificial union.

The first crisis – Chief Langalibalele’s banishment to Robben Island

At the beginning of 1874, all looked well. The house tax had been abolished and loans for works were unnecessary, as there was a surplus of £400,000 which could be put into the construction of railways, telegraphs, roads and bridges. Unfortunately about this time a native chief named Langalibalele, famed as a magician and witch-doctor, came to blows with the Government of Natal. The Cape Mounted Police co-operated with the Natal forces; and Langalibalele was handed over to them. He was tried and sentenced to banishment on Robben Island, in Table Bay, where recalcitrant chiefs had previously been imprisoned.¹⁰⁶ This, however, required legislation, and the Molteno Government passed an Act for the purpose, against the protest of Saul Solomon, who held that the trial was irregular and that the Colony should have left the matter alone. Langalibalele, however, found another - and more powerful - champion in Bishop Colenso, who excited humanitarian sentiment in England against the Natal Government. Articles appeared in *The Times* and the *Spectator* and other newspapers condemning the colonists and demanding that Langalibalele should be set free. Molteno, foreseeing the danger of interference and the risk of a native war, wrote on December 24, 1874 to Sir Henry Barkly, stating the facts and adding that interference by the Home Government might make it 'impossible for us to preserve peace'.



Langalibalele, chief of the amaHlubi, captured in 1873 following his refusal to register with the Natal colonial forces guns bought by his tribesmen

The note was forwarded to Lord Carnarvon, but Theophilus Shepstone (an expert in Kaffir dialects) had already been sent with despatches to the Cape and Natal Governments, announcing that Langalibalele must be removed from Robben Island to another location in Cape Colony. This was the first of a series of decisions affecting the vital interests of the Colony, arrived at by the new Secretary of State without previously consulting the responsible Government of the Colony. The despatch stated that the Cape Act providing for the custody of Langalibalele in Robben Island would be disallowed by Her Majesty Queen Victoria, but Carnarvon had forgotten that there was

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¹⁰⁶ Islands have long been a favourite place where political opponents can be 'buried' and forgotten. Robben Island's history as a prison, including for political prisoners, thus goes back over a century and a half.

responsible government at the Cape and a Prime Minister with a mind of his own. Eventually a compromise was reached, and a new Bill was introduced under which the Chief could be transferred to the mainland.

In reply to Sprigg, who denounced him for giving way, Molteno said it was a case of practical common sense, and that there was no reason why they should quarrel with the British Government unnecessarily or refuse small concessions. Eventually, as Sir Henry Barkly wrote to Carnarvon, 'thanks to the firm and conciliatory attitude of Mr. Molteno and his colleagues' the Bill was carried, but not without serious difficulties and sharp criticism from the Conservative opposition, which for the time being had taken up the cudgels against Downing Street interference.

Among Lord Carnarvon's friends was a famous man of letters, J A Froude, who as historian had proved himself more brilliant than accurate and was soon to display as politician a lack of discretion which only political inexperience could excuse. To him, Carnarvon entrusted a mission to South Africa of a highly delicate nature. Froude paid a short visit nominally as a tourist to Cape Town in the autumn of 1874. But after his return to England he wrote (on February 9, 1875) to the Cape Premier about the difficulties with Langalibalele and the importance of paying attention to public opinion in England on the native question. 'It is not unlikely', he added, 'that in a few months you will see me again in Cape Town'.

The Prime Minister saw that there might be trouble ahead. But the sky was still bright and the Colony flourished. A decision had just been taken to build the new Houses of Parliament in Cape Town and Sir Henry Barkly, the Governor, was invited to lay the foundation stone. The Prime Minister in his address expressed a fervent hope that the edifice would be 'a monument to the memory of buried prejudices and of all local jealousy prejudicial to the true interests of the land, and also a visible sign of our progress and social advancement'.

After paying a fine compliment to the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Barkly exhorted the Legislators to follow the example of England by combining freedom of speech with order, and to cherish their connection with a great and generous nation, which had voluntarily relinquished all idea of selfish profit from its Colonies¹⁰⁷ and had been the first to accord to its Colonial subjects the amplest powers of self-government without seeking to diminish the advantages they already enjoyed as citizens of a mighty Empire.

In the biography of his father, Percy Molteno improves the occasion by eulogizing the Governor for what he had done:

"The fatal policy of Lord Carnarvon and its disastrous results obscured and caused to be forgotten the splendid services which Sir Henry Barkly had rendered to the Cape and to the Empire in giving peace, contentment and good government to the Cape Colony."

Another achievement of the year 1875 was an important Audit Act which reformed the old system of public accounts, under which it had been impossible to ascertain the exact balance or deficit as between revenue and expenditure. This was a very valuable and permanent reform.

¹⁰⁷ A gloss on British imperial history that historians today would not accept!!

It was objected by some of his critics, who admitted his financial skill and the success of his economic policy, that Molteno's views were too narrow and that he thought only of the special interests of Cape Colony.

Were this criticism true, it might well be retorted that 'Little Englandism', or its counterpart at the Cape, is a safer, sounder and more salutary policy than the flamboyant imperialism of a Kipling, or those other forms of expansionism in South Africa, leading to costly wars and racial bitterness, which were commenced by Carnarvon and Bartle Frere and continued after an interval by Cecil Rhodes, Joseph Chamberlain and Milner. That 'the fool hath his eyes on the ends of the earth' was a favourite text of Percy Molteno when he began to think for himself. But his father, far from being a man of narrow vision who shut his eyes to the dangers that enveloped the colony, was well aware from long experience on the frontier of the dangers that had to be provided against by a humane yet firm native policy.

Extending the Cape Colony's boundaries north and east

In the biography that forms the basis of this chapter Percy Molteno shows how the Prime Minister, from his first assumption of office, foresaw that the boundaries of the colony must inevitably be extended and the wild tribes brought peaceably and gradually under civilizing influences. On the eastern borders Residents were placed with the principal native chiefs. On the north-west, between the mouth of the Orange River and the Cunene, the coastline was unoccupied, though there were two harbours – those of Angra Pequena¹⁰⁸ and Walfisch Bay – which afforded a safe haven for shipping. Along the coast were islands rich in guano. Two of them – which had already been christened facetiously Roast Beef Island and Plum Pudding Island – were annexed, and in 1875 Molteno induced the Cape Parliament to pass a resolution for the annexation of Walfisch Bay and the hinterland.

This was negated very stupidly by Carnarvon, who wanted to convert Griqualand West into a Crown Colony as leverage for his grand scheme of confederation, and imagined – so little did he know of physical geography – that Walfisch Bay would form an excellent harbour for Griqualand West.¹⁰⁹ Thus the ignorance of Disraeli's Minister prevented the Cape Colony under the far-sighted leadership of Molteno from annexing a territory which Germany afterwards acquired, and so, made possible 'the subsequent German intrigues for supplanting British influence in South Africa, and very nearly led in the first days of 1896 to a European war'.

German South West Africa, as we all know, is now a troublesome mandate of the Union of South Africa.¹¹⁰ However, Cape rule was extended over Fingoland and other territories in the direction of Natal without difficulty. Instead of being dragged under our rule, the tribes themselves begged for admission as a boon, and submitted of their own free will to British protection. Had Molteno's policy been carried

¹⁰⁸ 'Little bay' in Portuguese; subsequently known as Luderitz Bay. It and Walvis Bay were the only two potential harbours along the entire 1,000 mile long Namibian coast.

¹⁰⁹ Lord Carnarvon did not realize apparently that Walvis Bay lay some 1,000 miles northwest of Griqualand West on the other side of the Kalahari desert.

¹¹⁰ The newly formed (1910) state, the Union of South Africa, was requested by Britain to conquer German South West Africa following the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Two members of our family, Dr Kenah Murray (Caroline Molteno's eldest son) and John Molteno (her brother, Victor's, son) were both involved in the six-month long campaign in 1915. At the end of the War the League of Nations gave South Africa, ostensibly on Britain's behalf, what was called a mandate over the former German colony.

out by peaceable means and persuasion, there would have been not a series of cruel wars, but a gradual civilization of barbaric tribes under the general authority of the British crown. Their position would have been like that of Basutoland; for it was not intended to incorporate them in the political community of the Cape Colony.

At the same time religious denominations were establishing missions in these territories, and Dr Stewart was preparing to start his institution on lines similar to Lovedale. The surrender of Langalibalele had broken up a dangerous movement, and all was going well with native affairs, both within and without the Colony, until Downing Street interference began and an unconstitutional governor in the person Sir Bartle Frere¹¹¹ succeeded Sir Henry Barkly.

A comparison of his father's "patient, careful and conciliatory methods with the dragooning of Zulus, and disarming of Fingoes, and the administration by ultimatums pursued by Sir Bartle Frere, must," wrote Percy Molteno, "lead all impartial men to a preference for the policy pursued by the first responsible government of the Cape".¹¹² Within the Cape Colony itself, it was open to any native possessed of the requisite qualifications to obtain and exercise the franchise. Molteno's native policy, wrote Sir Henry De Villiers - the Chief Justice - to Percy in 1899, "was one of justice and firmness combined. He was opposed to any policy which would oust loyal natives from the land occupied by them and their fathers before them."

A new crisis – Colonial Secretary Lord Carnarvon's Confederation scheme

It is one of the tragedies of South African history that all this good work and steady progress were to be arrested or frustrated by Lord Carnarvon, a well-intentioned visionary who thought to win honour and glory by welding South Africa into a great federation - a task which, in his simplicity, he thought could be achieved almost by a stroke of the pen. Before Carnarvon's advent to office in February 1874, wrote Percy in 1899, peace had prevailed in British South Africa for a quarter of a century. His policy and the methods by which it was pursued caused the troubles of South Africa from 1875 onwards. "All the wars since that period are directly due to the policy of federation, which owed its initiation to him."

It is true that in 1859, under far more favourable conditions, it had been suggested by the popular Governor Sir George Grey, when the Orange Free State had passed a resolution in favour of union with Cape Colony. At that time, curiously enough, Carnarvon was Under-Secretary of the Colonies in a Conservative government which promptly vetoed the proposed union and federation. In 1867, however, he had adopted the policy for Canada, and helped to pass an Act which carried out the resolutions passed by the Provincial Assemblies at Quebec. The case of South Africa was quite different from that of Canada; for in 1875 the communities concerned were not seeking union. So far as it had been rescued from savagery,¹¹³ South Africa consisted of the self-governing Colony of the Cape, two British

¹¹¹ Hirst means that the new Governor, Sir Bartle Frere, acted unconstitutionally and in contravention of Responsible Government in going along with Lord Carnarvon's interference in Cape Colony affairs.

¹¹² **From *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno...*, Vol. 1, p. 286 sqq.**

¹¹³ Francis Hirst means by this phrase that there were still a significant number of unconquered African chieftancies and territories within Southern Africa, including beyond the Cape's eastern frontier, Basutoland (Lesotho today), Swaziland etc.

dependencies – Natal and Griqualand West – and two independent Dutch Republics – the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

In population, wealth, civilization and extent of territory, the Cape Colony outweighed all the other states put together. Its history as a white man's settlement extended over two centuries. It had passed through all the stages of development from a trading station and a Crown Colony to the status of a Government with a Legislative Council and finally, in 1872, to full responsible government. It possessed most of the sea coast, and its revenues were four times those of the four other states which Carnarvon was determined to federate.

Natal was under the control of imperial officials, and its handful of white colonists, who were chiefly concerned to protect themselves against the Zulu power, had been incensed and alarmed by the action of the British Government in the case of Langalibalele. Griqualand West had come into existence only in 1871, and had been annexed on account of the diamond fields. Its turbulent mining population of about 10,000 whites and 15,000 natives was governed by officials with a local council. Of the two Republics, the Transvaal, or South African Republic, had then a population of only about 15,000 whites, consisting of Boer farmers who had emigrated to get away from British rule. Its area of 100,000 square miles was about half that of the Cape. Thomas Burgers, its President, had fairly progressive views; but the state was poor and undeveloped. The Orange Free State had become independent in 1854. It had had a hard struggle for existence, owing to the mass of barbarism on its eastern border, and its relations with the British Government had been embittered by the seizure of the diamond fields, over which it had a claim.

From the above account, condensed from Percy Molteno's biography of his father, it will be seen that Carnarvon's project of Confederation must conflict with the Molteno policy of gradual unification with Cape Colony - the original mother-colony from which the other four colonies and republics had sprung.

It was unlucky for Carnarvon that the missionaries were at loggerheads with the Dutch, and that by supporting the missionaries in the case of Langalibalele, Downing Street had revived its unpopularity with the Dutch and English farmers - besides irritating the strongly pro-British population of Natal. Lord Derby's witty description of the Colonial Office as 'the Office at war with the Colonies' was now again to become applicable to South Africa, after an interval of friendly co-operation.

Those who wish to ascertain the merits and consequences of the great dispute between the Molteno Ministry and Lord Carnarvon - who worked first through the instrumentality of JA Froude and afterwards of Bartle Frere - will find an exhaustive record, with ample quotations from speeches and documents [and] interspersed with acid comments, in the chapters (X to XXXII) which Percy Molteno devoted to the subject in the *Life* of his father. They cover nearly six hundred pages, and constitute in my judgment a complete vindication of Sir JC Molteno's policy throughout the period and a complete refutation of the not very formidable charges and minor complaints made against him and his colleagues by Carnarvon, Froude and Bartle Frere at the time, and later by their biographers.

John Molteno's fundamentally different approach to South African unification

Very noteworthy is the fact that both Froude and Bartle Frere afterwards recognized the folly of Carnarvon's policy, when experience and knowledge of its disastrous consequences were unfolded before their eyes. All this is clearly set forth and duly expounded in Percy Molteno's narrative. The pity of it is that the controversy was not one of ideals in so far as the ultimate desirability of a Confederation

(or Union) of all the British and Dutch settlements in South Africa was concerned. What Molteno saw was that it could only be attained by a very gradual process, and that the attempt to enforce it by such means and instruments as Carnarvon's would fail, and destroy that growing harmony which was being

achieved by Molteno's happy co-operation with Sir Henry Barkly and Lord Kimberley.¹¹⁴



PAUL KRUGER
President of the Transvaal Republic
Photo by Elliott & Fry, London

Paul Kruger, 1879. He led the resistance to Britain's annexation of the South African Republic in pursuit of Lord Carnarvon's confederation policy

On April 3, 1899, when the last phase of the tragedy was being hastened by Milner's acrimonious correspondence with Kruger, while the Schreiner Ministry¹¹⁵ was attempting in vain to mediate between the Colonial Office under Chamberlain and the two Boer republics, Sir Henry de Villiers wrote to Percy Molteno, describing Sir JC Molteno's attitude to Confederation:

"Mr Molteno was a firm believer in the future federation of all South African colonies and states under the British Crown; but he desired that it should come as a natural growth and not be forced upon the country. His determination was to make this Colony a kind of object lesson to the independent states, in order that the people of these states might see that it is possible for a country to govern itself and prosper, although not nominally independent of the British Crown; and his firm belief was that they would in [the] course of time voluntarily ask to be admitted as members of a confederation of South African states.

"Unfortunately a series of blunders for which he was not responsible, and into which I do not wish to enter, prevented the realization of his hopes; and federation now seems further off than it was during the first year of the first

¹¹⁴ The previous Governor and Colonial Secretary, with both of whom John Charles Molteno got on very well.

¹¹⁵ The last Cape Ministry in the old tradition John Charles Molteno had pioneered of political amity between English and Dutch, and a principled assertion of the Cape Colony's right to self-government free of British interference. It was led by W. Schreiner, brother of his more famous sister, Olive Schreiner, novelist and feminist. Olive and Betty Molteno were very close friends from the 1890s on, and comrades in arms both in opposing the Boer War that broke out in 1899, and in asserting the political rights of women.

Molteno Ministry. He held very strongly that this Colony had no right or duty to interfere in the internal affairs of the independent states, and that a Colonial Ministry had quite enough to do in administering their own internal affairs."

Sir Henry de Villiers concluded his letter with a eulogy of his old friend's work in sweeping away abuses and reforming all departments of the Cape government. His energy and determination bore down all the opposition of the officials reared under the old system, 'and surprise was often expressed by friends and foes that a man who had been without official experience until past middle-age should have accomplished so much in so short a time'.

Carnarvon blunders on

Sir Henry Barkly had warned Lord Kimberley and his successor Lord Carnarvon against raising the question of Confederation, or summoning a conference for the purpose; and he informed Carnarvon that his views were shared by Molteno. In the teeth of this advice from a constitutional governor on the spot who knew the ground, Carnarvon embarked upon the project, and towards the end of 1874 despatched his friend, the historian JA Froude, on a secret mission, undertaken ostensibly as a pleasure trip.



Lord Carnarvon, Secretary of State for the Colonies in a Conservative Party cabinet, 1874-78

Froude had fine qualities. I well remember his distinguished appearance and manner when I met him at Oxford shortly before his death. But he was not very accurate as a professional historian, nor very truthful in this, his first and last adventure in politics as an amateur. He travelled for sixty days through the states which Carnarvon intended to unite. He was welcomed at the Cape as a distinguished Englishman, and everywhere denied that he had come out for any public or political purpose.

At Bloemfontein, he said: "I am a mere private man of letters, travelling for my own amusement." If any of his words had created the impression that his trip was official, then "I am a most arrogant impostor". At Port Elizabeth and at Kimberley, he repeated that he was only travelling for his own instruction and amusement. Yet somehow or other, it leaked out in the newspapers of Natal and the Cape that he was [a] confidential adviser of Lord Carnarvon, a private commissioner from the Colonial Office sent out to report, and sure enough, early in 1875 - soon after Froude's return - Carnarvon, under Froude's inspiration and advice [and] without consulting either

Governor Barkly or Premier Molteno, drafted a despatch desiring that a conference representing the colonies and states of South Africa should meet at some convenient place within the Cape Colony. Then to crown the folly, he nominated all the members of the conference, and divided the Cape Colony for his purpose into two provinces, one to be represented by the Prime Minister and the other by Paterson, a member of the Opposition.

This amazing despatch was placed before the Prime Minister by Sir Henry Barkly on May 4, 1875. It was accompanied by a letter from Froude to Molteno explaining briefly 'as I am myself in part responsible for Lord Carnarvon's resolution, the reasons which led me to advise it'. In this Froude stated that he had offered Carnarvon his services 'to travel through the different states and to ascertain what the real obstacles to Confederation were, and by what means they could best be removed'. He would himself return to the Cape in June, and expressed a hope that the Prime Minister would not conceal his opinion 'if you think I have [been] interfering presumptuously in the affairs of a country of which I know so little'.

It was a specious and disingenuous letter; for it pretended that Carnarvon's real object was to extend and enlarge self-government so that 'the British Parliament could then abandon all its pretensions to interference'. The 'hope' that Molteno would not be afraid of expressing his views about so presumptuous an interference was not disappointed, and the personal flattery with which the letter was interlarded did not help. A suggestion made by Froude to Molteno in a conversation after his arrival 'that there was nothing in the way of personal honours which he might not have if he agreed to support with his influence Lord Carnarvon's policy' was a blunder of the worst kind.

When Percy Molteno was at work on his father's life, Sir Henry Barkly wrote to him with reference to this 'famous letter', in which as Carnarvon's envoy Froude hinted at the personal advantages that might accrue:

"I well remember how angry Mr Molteno was when he showed it to me, and how contemptuously he alluded to the fact that a similar missive had been addressed by the same mail to John Paterson."¹¹⁶

The Cape Government's response

The Prime Minister saw the danger of publishing the despatch, and urged the Governor to withhold it until representations had been made to Lord Carnarvon of the injury it would cause. But Carnarvon had requested the Governor to give it the fullest publicity without delay, and to send copies of it to the Presidents of the two Republics and to the Governors of Natal and Griqualand West. Thereupon the Ministry composed a minute declaring its opinion that the interests of the Cape Colony 'would not be promoted by pressing forward at the present time such a Conference as the Secretary of State proposes'.

¹¹⁶ John Charles Molteno was not the kind of man to be suborned by offers of patronage. Ironically, he was knighted three years later, but only *after* he had been dismissed as Prime Minister by the Governor, Sir Bartle Frere, on 3 February 1878. His unconstitutional ousting was precisely because of his refusal to go along with Lord Carnarvon's plan to force the Boer Republics into the Empire by means of his Confederation Scheme.

On June 9, 1875, the despatch was laid on the table of the House with the ministerial minute attached. The Clerk of the House, Mr Noble, read the despatch, and when the name of Froude was mentioned there was derisive laughter. Every sentence of the minute of the Cape ministers was punctuated with cheers. A resolution approving the action of the ministers was moved by Sprigg, a Conservative, who afterwards became the most obsequious of Colonial Prime Ministers, and was carried by a large majority. Even the minority did not recommend a conference, but merely proposed soapy amendments thanking Carnarvon for the interest he had taken in the Colony. The Premier spoke with the utmost moderation, and after hearing him Sprigg said that he had made a noble stand for the honour and dignity of the Colony and for its rights and liberties.

J A Froude tries to rouse white public opinion against the Cape Government

Unfortunately this was only the beginning, not the end of the trouble. Three weeks later Froude arrived. He was terribly chagrined on finding that Carnarvon's instructions to avoid delay had brought about this adverse decision of the Cape Parliament. Froude had courage, eloquence and enthusiasm. A weaker and wiser man might have thrown up the sponge; but he was encouraged by a number of journalists including a very able Dutchman, Jan Hofmeyr, who was afterwards to play a leading part in South African politics.

Instead of yielding, Froude plunged into the fray and stumped the country for confederation. In some places he took the side of the Dutch against the English, and in others he revived the controversy between East and West. He played skilfully upon the advantages that might accrue from Confederation to local communities, and contrived to set up an agitation which led, to quote Percy Molteno's words, 'to a prolonged and fatal disturbance of South African society'.

Throughout this semi-official campaign Froude was, in a false position, as he indeed admitted in letters to Molteno. In one of these, for example, June 21, 1875, he wrote:

"In the ambiguous position which I hold, it would be improper for me to do anything which would have an unconstitutional semblance."

Partly owing to this, partly to a liking for the Boer farmers with whom he stayed during his brief visits to the two republics, he quite misrepresented his chief's intentions. While declaring that Lord Carnarvon was an intimate and honoured friend, and that he knew his mind thoroughly, he asserted:

"So long as the people of the free states desire to retain their freedom, the English statesman is not born who will ever ask them to surrender it, or endeavour to entice them back under the British flag, unless they are willing to come back and consider it would be for their own benefit."

By these assertions, and by his insistence that 'Lord Carnarvon is sincere and must not be suspected of sinister designs', he won over the Dutch Press and humbugged JH Hofmeyr, who spoke at a Cape Town dinner in favour of the Carnarvon policy. Froude's own story, told in the admirable English of which he was a master, of the events following his arrival at Cape Town, was embodied in a report which is still worth reading.

It seems amazing that the agent of an Imperialist Colonial Secretary, who afterwards annexed the Transvaal,¹¹⁷ should have played for all it was worth the nationality card, and induced the Dutch all over South Africa to believe that a self-governing South Africa, predominantly Dutch, was being planned by the British Government. He was welcomed and feted at all the Dutch centres. As he stated in his Report:

"The feelings of the people had been excited by your Lordship's speech in the House of Lords... Deputations waited upon me wherever I went with words of welcome... I was followed into the towns by strings of carts and carriages half a mile long... I was entertained at dinners and I was compelled to speak. Everywhere I enquired the cause of so much excitement; everywhere I received the same answer, that for the first time since 1806 an English Minister had shown a disposition to do justice to the Dutch."

On finding that Molteno could not be cajoled by bribes or coerced by threats, Froude resorted to a new move; and it was arranged that meetings should be held to agitate for the summoning of a special Session of Parliament at which it was thought the Molteno Ministry would be defeated and a more subservient one installed in office. At Grahamstown, to please his audience, he favoured a compulsory system of native apprenticeship, and hinted at a separation of the eastern provinces of which Grahamstown was ambitious of being the capital. He predicted that 'Mr Molteno's following (ie the responsible Government of Cape Colony) will find that they will be unable to thwart Lord Carnarvon's efforts to bring about a scheme of confederation in South Africa similar to that in Canada'.

Froude indeed stuck at nothing. He described himself as 'the unworthy representative of Lord Carnarvon, and actually wrote to Sir Henry Barkly, the Governor, pressing him 'to use his constitutional powers and re-assemble the Cape Parliament without delay'. He stamped opposition to Carnarvon's policy as disloyal, and justified his speeches by saying 'it was only when the ministers appeared inexorable that I was constrained to ask the people if they consented to the action of their representatives'. Finally the Premier [John Charles Molteno] told Froude that it was useless to continue political communications, though he was ready to maintain and did maintain friendly personal relations and social intercourse.

The constitutional issue at stake – British refusal to accept the reality of self-government

Froude and Carnarvon had grossly violated the convention that where responsible government has been established the Colonial Office, to quote Lord Blatchford, an experienced administrator, 'shall not attempt to outflank or undercut the Colonial Government by direct appeals to the people of the Colony'. At last, after a rowdy meeting at Uitenhage and a controversy with Merriman,¹¹⁸ Froude desisted from further public speaking and returned to England to write his Report and explain his conduct.

By this time (in November 1875), opinion in the Colony began to react pretty strongly, and the Prime Minister felt that he must bring the constitutional issue before Parliament. He therefore advised the Governor to summon a special session, which was accordingly called for November 10. Meanwhile, the two Boer republics had replied to Carnarvon's invitations that they could not take part in a conference

¹¹⁷ In January 1877, little more than a year after J A Froude's extraordinary political attempt to influence white public opinion in South Africa at the behest of his master, Lord Carnarvon.

¹¹⁸ **John X Merriman had joined the Molteno administration.**

for Confederation, which would involve the surrender of their independence as states, and thus Carnarvon's grand scheme was shattered at its inception.

Froude's sanguine hopes that the Molteno Ministry would have to give way were also doomed to disappointment. When the Prime Minister laid on the table of the House the ministerial minute and memorandum showing how seriously the principles of responsible government had been infringed by Carnarvon and Froude, the constitutional party put forward and carried after a debate of eight days by the decisive majority of 36 votes to 22 a resolution condemning an agitation - which had been fostered by the Imperial Government in opposition to the Colonial Government - as unconstitutional and calculated to make the successful working of self-government impossible. It added that the interests of the Colony 'would not be promoted by pressing forward at the present time such a Conference as the Secretary of State proposes'.

This was the end of the Froude mission. Froude himself became aware that he had made a mistake; for he frankly admitted in his Report that 'with respect to myself, an opinion began to prevail that my zeal had gone beyond my discretion'. At a meeting in Cape Town, Fairbridge - one of its members and a staunch conservative - after appealing to all colonial patriots whether of English, Dutch or French blood, to stand by their constitutional rights and refuse to bow down to the dictation of Lord Carnarvon, wound up by saying:

"I do not grudge John Paterson a fortune if he should make one, nor shall I envy him if they make a baronet of him, of which it is said there is a chance. But there is one on whom I think we can count to do his duty to the Colony, and that is John Charles Molteno."

The Prime Minister, who dealt severely, but not too severely, with Froude, was supported by Solomon and Sprigg as well as by the Dutch members. On three previous occasions during the Governorship of Sir Philip Wodehouse, he had parried assaults on the constitutional privileges of the Cape. He had now again repelled another attempt to overthrow self-government.

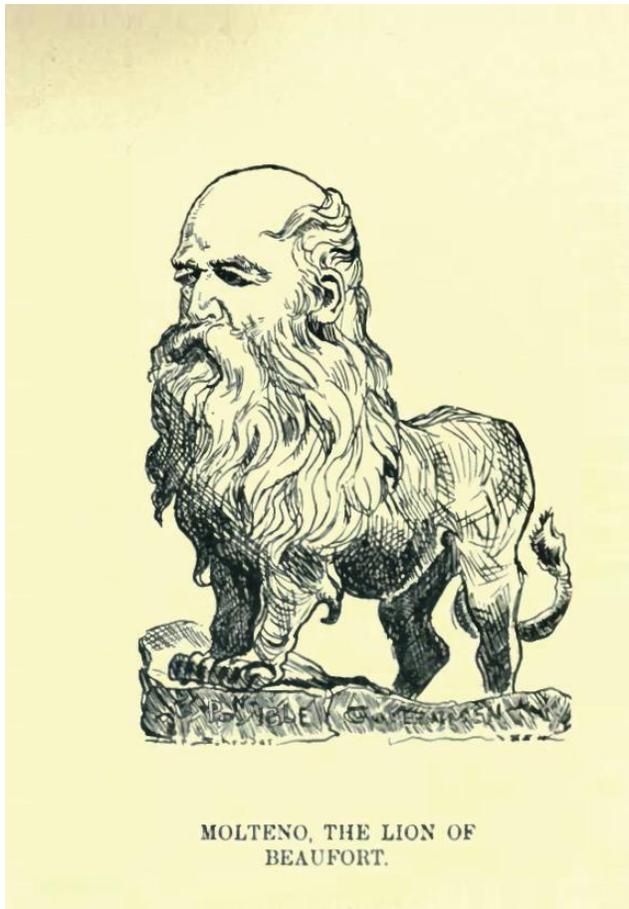
It is creditable to Froude that after doing much mischief in South Africa he had learnt something; for in the final paragraph of his Report he had the courage and good sense to tell Carnarvon that 'plants of slow growth endure the longest; and the final consummation, however devoutly it be wished, can only be brought to wholesome maturity by the deliberate action of the South African communities themselves'. Four years later, in January 1880, after the annexation of the Transvaal, Froude went even further in a lecture at Edinburgh, saying that if he were Secretary of State he would "try a hazardous experiment. I should try what justice would do. I would give back the Transvaal to the Dutch."

Unfortunately for South Africa and for himself, Lord Carnarvon had gone too far to retreat without loss of face. He could not wait for the plant of federation to grow; for the Premier had referred to it at the Guildhall in November 1875. "There is every prospect", said Disraeli, "that another federation of colonies and states which will add power to our Empire and confer immense advantages on the world in general, will be established in South Africa."

When the report of the debate in the Cape Parliament arrived in London, *The Times* admitted that a mistake had been made by the Colonial Office and by Mr Froude, and that the course taken had been unconstitutional. It was a 'flagrant error'. In the House of Lords also, Lord Granville reprimanded the Colonial Secretary for a series of mistakes 'which might have been avoided' if there had been 'a little more communication with the Governor of the Colony and the local authorities'. Having gone so far,

however, Carnarvon determined to go forward towards his goal, though he had to change his course. His policy had been defeated in the Cape Parliament, and his hope of ousting Molteno by an adverse vote, or by a dissolution, had been frustrated.

With regard to Froude, it need here only be added that his object had been to bring pressure upon the Molteno Ministry and not to displace it. That is clear from his Despatch and also from a private correspondence with the Prime Minister in the autumn of 1876, towards the end of Molteno's visit to England, when Froude invited him to dinner. "In spite of appearances", he wrote, "I have never wavered in the regard which you taught me to feel for you on my first visit to the Cape." And we shall see later, when Percy went to Cambridge, the friendly intercourse of the Moltenos with the Froudes had not been interrupted. Froude's letter of September 30, 1876, concluded "with a hope that you may long continue to hold the high post in Her Majesty's Service which you have hitherto filled with so much distinction".¹¹⁹



John Charles Molteno who consistently stood up to British Government pressure during his premiership

The abortive Confederation Conference, 1876

This hope was not shared by Carnarvon; but he now tried another move, and announced that he would open his Conference of nominees in London, where he thought to launch his Confederation project in a more favourable atmosphere. By this time, however, he had aroused the suspicions of the Dutch at the Cape and in the two Republics. Even Bishop Colenso, the champion of the natives, was turning against him. In March 1876, wrote the good Bishop, Carnarvon had evidently "made up his mind to sacrifice truth and justice to political considerations", and again: "He seems infatuated about this Confederation scheme, which is quite premature, and will end, I strongly suspect, in a complete fiasco."

Eventually, while refusing to attend the Conference, Molteno agreed to proceed to England to confer with the British Government on South African questions; and he left for this purpose on July 7, 1876. On his arrival he found that Carnarvon had settled with President Brand of the Free State by a payment of £90,000 for its claims on the diamond territory, and had saddled it as a debt on the Cape Colony without consulting the Cape Ministry!

¹¹⁹ Ten years later in his book on the West Indies, Froude remarked: "I had observed in South Africa that the confusions and perplexities diminished exactly in proportion as the Home Government ceased to interfere."

Eventually Molteno agreed to accept the responsibility for the incorporation of Griqualand West with the Cape Colony, but declined to be drawn into a discussion about the annexation of the Transvaal, which Carnarvon was now planning. In London though Molteno had a number of personal interviews with Carnarvon, he steadily refused to attend the Conference of his nominees - Sir Garnet Wolseley, Sir Theophilus Shepstone, and Froude. President Brand of the Free State was also there, but only to discuss the native question. There were two other informal nominees from the Crown Colony of Natal, and Froude was designated to represent Griqualand West, though he had no authority to do so from the local community. The Transvaal Republic, now doomed, was not represented.

The Conference was a mere shadow. Carnarvon opened it on August 3, 1876. Thereupon President Brand said he would have to withdraw at once, if there was any attempt to negotiate a Confederation, by which the independence of his State might be endangered.

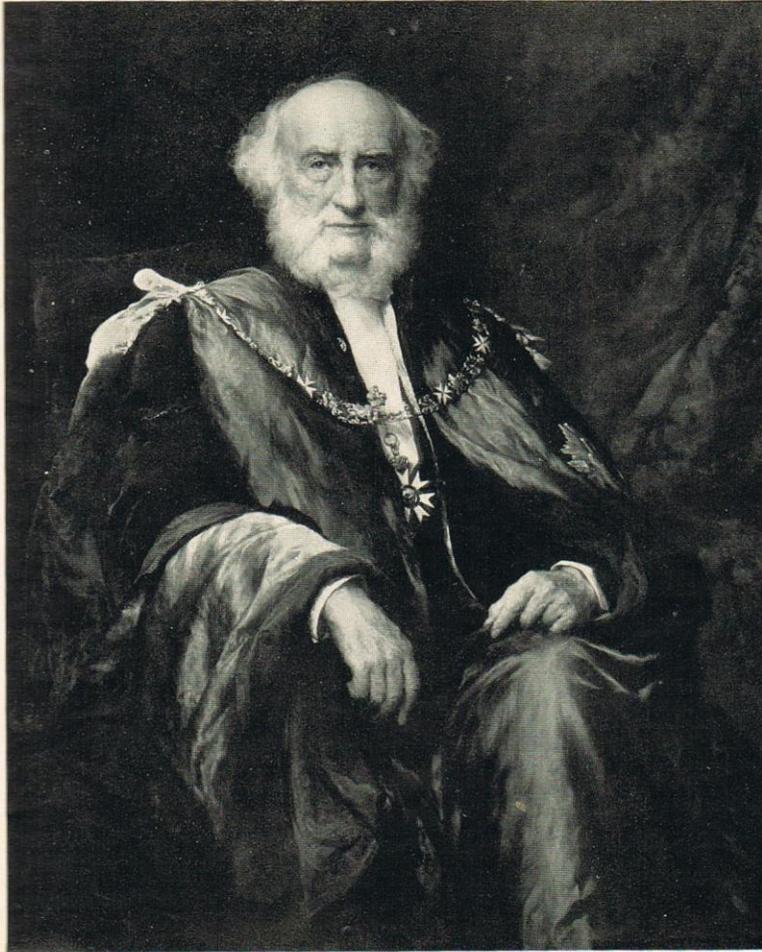
After the passage of a few resolutions and recommendations about native questions, which were never made public, the Conference expired. Molteno had no reason to regret his visit to London, for he was able to make preliminary arrangements for fast steam communication between England and the Cape - a subject, as Percy Molteno writes, to which he had given great attention and attached great importance. Parliament had authorized him to contract for the conveyance of mails with the two companies then serving South Africa, the Union Company and the Castle Company, dividing the service between them. By far the ablest and most enterprising of the shipowners with whom the Premier negotiated was Sir Donald Currie, who afterwards amalgamated the two lines in the famous Union Castle Line.

The negotiations were prolonged and sharply contested. The companies wanted a service of forty-eight sailings in the year; but Molteno was determined to have a weekly service. "He was ready", his son wrote, "to pay for rapid communication, which he thought so essential to the prosperity and advancement of the Colony". He had his way. "It was arranged to give a large subsidy and premiums for speed above the contract maximum."

These successful negotiations brought about an intimate friendship between the Curries and the Moltenos, which - as we shall see - was to end very happily for Percy in a marriage and a business career which diverted him from Cape Town to London, and eventually made him an active politician at Westminster, while two of his brothers, Charlie and James, became prominent members of the Cape Parliament.

10. Sir Donald Currie and his family

Next to the influence exerted by his father Sir John Charles Molteno upon Percy's character and life comes that of his father-in-law Sir Donald Currie, one of the ablest and most successful shipping



SIR DONALD CURRIE

Sir Donald Currie at the height of his eminence - portrait

magnates of the nineteenth century. When Percy first visited Great Britain as a boy in 1876, the friendship between the Moltenos and Curries was already established, and Percy - as we shall see - visited them at the house which Sir Donald Currie had rented at Cluny.¹²⁰ There for the first time he met Bessie Currie, who afterwards became his wife; and as the connection thus formed gave a decisive turn to fortune's wheel, converting him from a lawyer into a businessman and from a Colonial to a British career, we shall now introduce the reader to Donald Currie.

Early youth

Like Gladstone's father, Donald Currie was a Scotch lad who found his way to Liverpool and made a fortune. He was born at Greenock in 1825; but in the following year his parents moved to Belfast. There the boy was educated at the Academy. The headmaster, Reuben Bryce, and his brother James (father of the famous James, Viscount Bryce),¹²¹

¹²⁰ It was only somewhat later that Sir Donald Currie became sufficiently affluent to purchase three estates in the Highlands, each destined for one of his three daughters.

¹²¹ James Bryce became an important public figure – Professor of Civil Law at Oxford, Liberal Member of Parliament for nearly 30 years, Ambassador to the United States of America in the years before the First World War, and a writer on history and current affairs, including South Africa, the Boer War (during which he was very critical of Britain's role), and the Armenian Genocide.

who also taught in the school, were both remarkable men. Donald Currie showed proficiency and won prizes, but he was best known among his schoolfellows for possessing the largest collection of toy boats in the Academy.

In shipping from the start

At fourteen he returned to Greenock, and worked there in his uncle's office for four years. At eighteen he left for Liverpool, and worked his way up to a good position in the Cunard Company until in 1862 he was able to set up on his own account.¹²² He then started the Castle Line of sailing ships from Liverpool to Calcutta, and attained such success that in 1871, he was invited by merchants at the Cape and by the Molteno Government to start a line to South Africa. In the next year, 1872, he formed a company for that purpose and began to compete against the Union Line, which then held the field with a service which was not giving satisfaction.

The Castle Line went ahead. In 1900, however, the two companies were amalgamated under Sir Donald Currie's direction, and named the Union Castle Mail Steamship Company. When Sir Donald died in 1909, the company's fleet consisted of 47 steamers of 295,000 gross tonnage.

The South African connection

Donald Currie had started, like his younger contemporaries Andrew Carnegie and James Mackay (Lord Inchcape), without capital or influence. He was a self-made man, with great gifts for business. But next to his own ability, enterprise and industry, he owed his fortune to John Charles Molteno who, as Prime Minister, had brought him into the South African trade by arranging a mail contract between the Castle Line and the government of the Cape.

In addition to the profits from the Castle Line, Donald Currie augmented his fortune by successful investments in South Africa, including a large holding in the Bultfontein Diamond Mine which was eventually bought by Cecil Rhodes and amalgamated with de Beers. Apart from the valuable services which his Line rendered to the Cape, Donald Currie proved a good and wise friend to South Africa as a whole. Had his judicious counsels and friendly suggestions been adopted by the British Government, both the Boer Wars would almost certainly have been averted. In 1875, he mediated successfully between the British Government and the two Boer Republics, and later on he helped to settle the Diamond Fields Dispute.¹²³ In that affair he inspired so much confidence that the two parties left him to define the boundary and draw up the terms of the agreement. For these services he was rewarded in 1877 with a CMG and the thanks of the Orange Free State.

In the same year – after Shepstone's unhappy annexation of the Transvaal, when Paul Kruger and two other leading Boers came on a deputation to England to demand the restoration of the Republic – they

¹²² Donald Currie was employed by the famous Cunard Line for almost 20 years before setting up his own shipping company.

¹²³ When diamonds were first discovered at Hopetown in 1869, the area lay in an undefined region beyond the effective borders of the Cape Colony and the Boer republic of the Orange Free State. The British Government wanted to control the lucrative new territory.

asked Donald Currie to help them in negotiating with the British Government, as they and all the Dutch in South Africa trusted him. Currie did his best. He told the British Government that an absolute refusal of the Boer demands would lead to disorder and bloodshed. Unfortunately the deputies heard a speech in the House of Commons by Sir Michael Hicks-Beach¹²⁴ which convinced them of the hopelessness of their errand.

If the Government had listened to Currie's wise counsels, the Boers would probably have accepted self-government (promised them by Sir Bartle Frere) under the British flag. As it was, they remained sullen and discontented until at last they broke into open revolt and regained their independence after Majuba Hill.¹²⁵ It is quite reasonable, therefore, to say as Mr. Clement Jones says,¹²⁶ that: "Had Currie's statesmanlike proposals for dealing with the Boers been adopted, two wars¹²⁷ might have been avoided".

Currie in fact took most of his views on South African questions from his friend Molteno. Like him, he tried to persuade the British Government to annex what afterwards became German South West Africa, now a most uncomfortable mandate administered by the Union of South Africa.¹²⁸ Percy Molteno used to recall a conversation he had with Lord Wolseley at the time of the [Second] Boer War, when Wolseley remarked: "If they had sent out Sir Donald Currie instead of Sir Alfred Milner, we should have got all we wanted from Kruger, and we should not have had to fight."¹²⁹

For his services in connection with the settlement of the disputes about the Diamond Fields and the Orange Free State boundary, Currie received, as we have said, in 1877 the honour of CMG, and in 1881 he was made a KCMG for the assistance he had rendered in the transport of troops during the Zulu war, and especially in connection with the relief of Eshowe.

Parliament

For some years Sir Donald Currie had a seat in Parliament, first as member for Perthshire from 1880 to 1885, when he was a zealous supporter of Mr Gladstone, and afterwards as Liberal Unionist member for West Perthshire from 1886 to 1900. No doubt his objections to Home Rule dated from his boyhood in Belfast, and his sympathies with Protestant Ulster; but his personal admiration and friendship for Gladstone were unaffected.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Colonial Secretary in the British Cabinet, following Lord Carnarvon and his ill-fated attempt to pull the Boer Republics into a South African confederation within the British Empire. This was a scheme that Donald Currie's friend, John Charles Molteno, strongly opposed as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony.

¹²⁵ In the battle of Majuba British forces suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Boer commandos.

¹²⁶ Clement Jones, *Pioneer Shipowners*, Liverpool, Journal of Commerce and Shipping Telegraph, 1935.

¹²⁷ British forces engaged in two offensives against the South African Republic, the first (1880-81) ended in a series of defeats while the second, much more serious war (1899-1902) resulted in eventual British military success, but was followed by political defeat with the rise to power of Afrikaner nationalism in the 20th century.

¹²⁸ Francis Hirst is writing in 1939.

¹²⁹ Lord Wolseley meant that if the British Government had appointed Sir Donald Currie as High Commissioner to South Africa, he would have negotiated a peaceful resolution of British disputes with the South African Republic instead of, in effect, looking for a *casus belli* as Sir Alfred Milner did in 1899.

¹³⁰ The Liberal Party split over the question of whether Ireland should have Home Rule – i.e. a government its own Parliament and Irish ministers responsible to it. The Liberal Unionist wing, to which Sir Donald Currie belonged,

During the later years of his life he was the recognized leader and dominating influence among the able ship owners who formed the South African Conference. Once, during a discussion of the thorny problem of shipping rebates, the Chairman of the South African Merchants Committee characterized him as a 'great diplomatist'.

What manner of man...



**Cartoon in *Vanity Fair*, June 1884,
entitled 'The Knight of the cruise of Mr
Gladstone'**

Sir Donald was an excellent employer and landlord, very popular with his captains and with the tenantry on his Scottish estates. He has been well described by Mr Clement Jones as "a man of shrewdness and sagacity; a man of large ideas and great energy with which to carry them out; tenacious of purpose and pious; a staunch friend and a genial companion". Always kindly and generous in private life, he was also a munificent donor to hospitals, universities and colleges in London, Edinburgh and Belfast.

Sir Donald Currie was not only the most sociable of men and the best of hosts, but a wonderful organizer of pleasure as well as of profit. He might have claimed to be the inventor of cruising holidays. In his book on *Pioneer Shipowners*, Mr Clement Jones says that if in a shipping examination paper the question set was: 'Describe briefly the origin of pleasure cruises giving names and dates', he would, if examiner, give full marks to the following answer: 'Passenger, Mr Gladstone; ship, *Grantully Castle*; owner, Sir Donald Currie; date, 1880'.

It was I think in connection with this cruise that a wit wrote:

"The seat's engaged, the cabin's booked;
We all to sea are hurried.
The common people all are cooked;
The Grand Old Man is Curried."

eventually merged with the Conservative Party. In personal terms, however, Sir Donald and William Gladstone remained friends, and the great Liberal leader (four times Prime Minister) used to holiday with the Curries on their steam yacht in the Western Isles.

Currie had his share of harmless (and in his case amiable) vanity. Probably of all his exploits, the one that gave him most gratification was a cruise to Scandinavia in the *Pembroke Castle*. On that occasion he entertained at Copenhagen twenty-nine royalties, and the autograph book in which his distinguished guests signed their names was a cherished possession. Mr Gladstone was a favoured friend. His last voyage with Currie was after his resignation, on the *Tantallon Castle* at the opening of the Kiel Canal in June 1895.

Friends – Donald Currie and John Charles Molteno

The friendship between Donald Currie and John Charles Molteno, springing from a bargain equally advantageous to (the interests of) the Colony and the shipping firm, was based on a wide measure of political agreement – for both were liberals of the old school – and upon a business knowledge which extended in both cases to an enterprising foresight of the future expansion of South Africa, coupled with a keen perception of the value of commerce between nations – not merely as a source of profit, but also of peace and goodwill. Both men were inspired by an enlarged patriotism and an enlightened imperialism which saw a splendid future for South Africa through the harmonious co-operation of British and Dutch in the development of the country's agricultural and mining resources. So, the two co-operated heartily, well knowing that the progress of wealth and welfare depends largely upon the readiness of governments to facilitate the exchange of goods by the extension of transport and traffic. From these ideas of his father and father-in-law, Percy Molteno drew no small part of his philosophy of life.

Donald Currie's views on defence

When Sir Donald Currie had made a success of his line to South Africa, he soon became known in London as a shipowner with exceptionally wide views, and as an authority on sea communications between Great Britain and Africa. He had already gained many friends in official society and in the Services, and his opinions were sought on problems not only of commerce, but of national defence. In March 1877, he was invited by the Council of the Royal United Institution to lecture on maritime warfare, and the importance of coaling stations and graving-docks in various parts of the world, in view of the geographical dispersion of our colonies and dependencies. Sir Garnet Wolseley took the chair for him, and Sir Donald Currie surveyed the whole situation, illustrating the needs of imperial defence from our naval history, with special reference to the Ashantee campaign.¹³¹ During that affair, he had frequent communications with the Admiralty, and much time was lost in despatching troops from England, owing to lack of telegraphs and the irregularity of steamers employed on the Gold Coast.

After a discussion which still merits the attention of those interested in naval warfare, Sir Garnet Wolseley in summing up complained that "the wind has been completely taken out of my sails; for Mr Currie in his very able lecture has referred to every one of the topics I had intended dwelling upon".¹³² It

¹³¹ As chance would have it, Dr C F K Murray, who married John Charles Molteno's daughter Caroline, had been involved in this campaign. This was the third Anglo-Ashanti War of 1873-74. Dr Murray's ship on which he was serving as a Royal Navy surgeon was deployed from Simonstown to the Gold Coast in support of the British military.

¹³² General Wolseley had actually been the commander of the several thousand British troops in the Ashanti campaign. A few years later he served as British High Commissioner to Southern Africa.

is curious today to read Wolseley's observations on powerful nations under despotic rule "which have what they call manifest destinies to carry out", and hold that "there are certain portions of the world which ought by right to belong to them, and of which they intend sometime or other to possess themselves".¹³³

[Wolseley went on to say that] on all sides there were rumours of war, and the world's affairs seemed so unsettled that a great war might begin at any time, from which England might not be able to keep aloof. Past experience, he thought, showed that when a great despotic power thinks it has found a fitting opportunity for acquiring what it wants and believes it ought to have, it invariably avails itself of the opportunity "quite regardless of the means to be employed". He thought therefore that the precautionary and preparatory measures suggested by Currie were of the greatest importance. That was in 1877. Happily, the great nations allowed many years to go by before the armaments race began, and for more than thirty years Great Britain and the British Empire, with the one unhappy exception of South Africa, enjoyed peace and prosperity.

Donald Currie's views on the future of South Africa, 1877

It happened that a few months afterwards the Royal Colonial Institute – disappointed in arrangements it had made for a paper on South Africa – persuaded Donald Currie to fill the gap with a discourse entitled 'Thoughts upon the present and future of South Africa and Central Africa'. His reason for accepting the invitation, though he had no personal knowledge of the Dark Continent, was that he felt it very important that the attention of the public should be drawn to African problems by an enlightened discussion.

Starting with the establishment of responsible government in Cape Colony under the Premiership of his friend JC Molteno, "an independent advocate for its liberties", he asked those who had doubted the capacity of the Cape Colony to manage its own affairs whether they would not agree "in this month of June 1877, after the troubles and disputes connected with Confederation, with Diamond Fields and the Transvaal, that responsible government for the Cape had been a good thing". Happily an honorable settlement of the Diamond Fields had been arrived at with the Orange Free State, and the question was at rest. Of Thomas Burgers, President of the Transvaal, Currie spoke with respect "as one with whom I had the most intimate relations when he lived with me in England". But Burgers, after his return to the Transvaal, had been less successful.

Currie, however, was now hopeful that Confederation or Union might be brought about between the States and Colonies of South Africa. He said a good word for missions and missionaries, like Moffat, Livingstone and Stewart. He would encourage every effort to develop not only commercial enterprise, but suitable education for the natives. Policy should aim at peace and justice, and should not be impelled merely by love of gain. Currie associated Providence with progress:

"The gold mine has played a remarkable part in the history of the world. It seems as if Providence employs the attraction of gold to draw men to people distant and neglected

¹³³ Hirst is writing here on the eve of the Second World War and is referring to Nazi Germany.

portions of the globe. Hence the prosperity of California, the advance of Australia and the probable advance of South Africa."¹³⁴

But he also believed that material progress required something more than Providence, namely industry and enterprise. From Molteno, he had learnt that irrigation was required for the greater development of South Africa. In many parts, rain ought to be collected and stored to provide against drought.

Immigration was also much needed.¹³⁵ The Cape Colony had often subsidized immigration, but many of the immigrants, instead of settling there, had made their way to the Transvaal. Then, there was the native question. The Kaffirs were 'capable of improvement, and it is our duty to treat them fairly'. He paid a tribute to the enlightened policy pursued by the Cape Government towards the coloured races.

In the discussion that followed, JA Froude, who happened to be present, was led by Currie's references to JC Molteno to make a personal explanation which appears as follows in the report of the proceedings:

"On his (Mr Froude's) first visit to the Cape, Mr Molteno was exceedingly kind to him – indeed, much more than kind – and afforded him every opportunity of seeing and hearing everything to be seen and heard, besides giving him the benefit of his (Mr Molteno's) large knowledge of the Colony. He certainly thought he had understood Mr Molteno. But there had been points left imperfectly explained.

"When he went out again to the Cape, there was a certain degree of misunderstanding which led to disagreements. When, however, Mr Molteno was in England last year, he and Mr Molteno came to a thorough understanding that there had been mutual mistakes... There he would now wish to leave the matter with the words which Mr Molteno used in parting with him, 'All's well that ends well'."

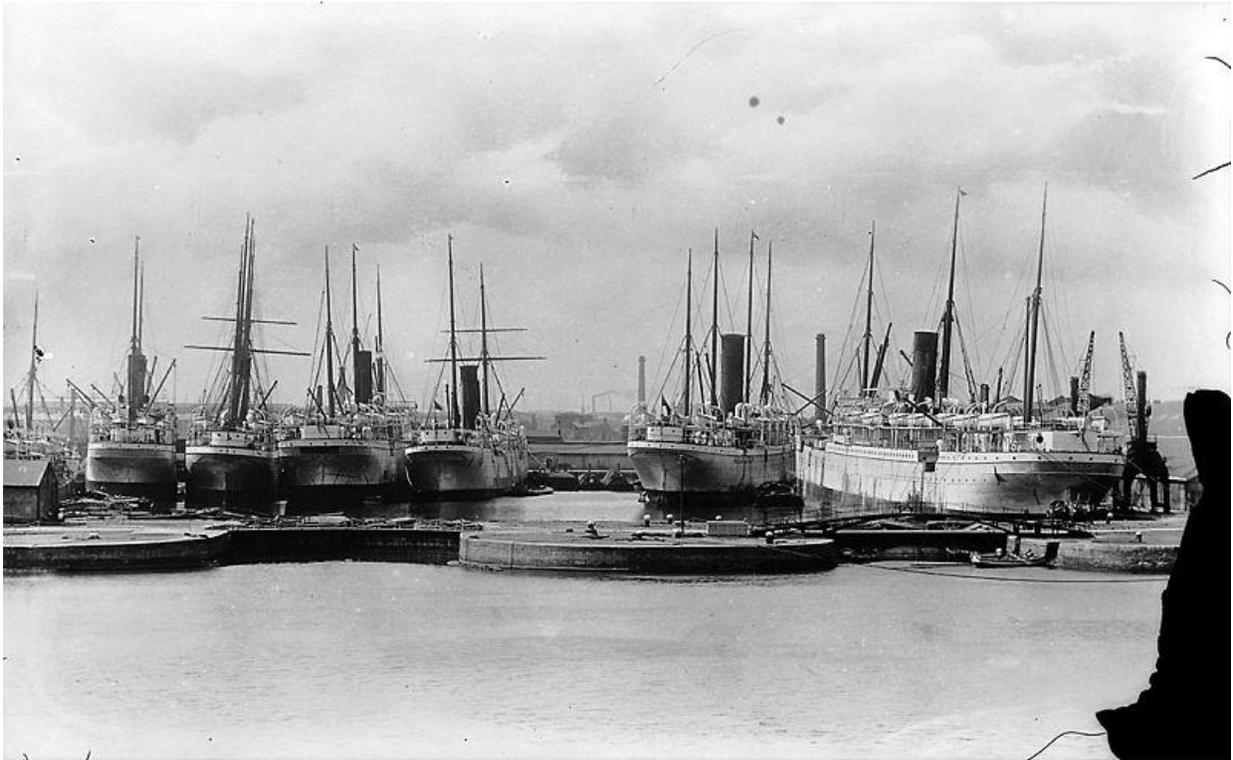
Of the native races – and especially of the Zulus – Froude spoke wisely and generously. They must not be allowed to perish. To do their duty to them, though difficult, would be more honorable to our colonists than if they piled up great fortunes or showed more diamonds than ever grew in the garden of Aladdin. Anthony Trollope,¹³⁶ who was about to entrust himself, as he said, to the tender mercies of Mr Donald Currie – whose ship was to carry him to Cape Town – also pleaded for the natives and dwelt on the sad fate that had befallen the Aborigines of Australia and the Red Indians in North America. Vintcent, a member of the Cape Legislature, speaking of Confederation and Lord Carnarvon's policy, warned them that it was a mistake to suppose that Confederation was an accomplished fact. The colonists would like to

[ENDS – the remaining galleys of this chapter, sadly, were missing at the time of preparing these edited chapters. Editor, Robert Molteno's note]

¹³⁴ Donald Currie was speaking nearly a decade *before* the discovery of gold on the Reef in 1886. This transformed the South African economy from being primarily agricultural into a globally important source of gold, diamonds and other minerals.

¹³⁵ Immigration in colonial parlance, meant immigration of Europeans, in particular British settlers.

¹³⁶ The famous novelist was also a senior official in the Royal Mail and was going out to the Cape to advise on the organization of postal services there.



Union Castle liners in London's East India docks, 1902

9. Kimberley and the diamond fields in 1889

Cecil Rhodes buys Sir Donald Currie out; Percy Molteno appointed arbitrator

Percy must have heard that he would be called upon before his marriage to revisit the Cape. Sir Donald Currie was the principal shareholder in the Bultfontein Diamond Mine at Kimberley, which was an important competitor of De Beers. As competition depressed the price of diamonds, Cecil Rhodes, with his friend Alfred Beit of Hamburg, had been bent for some time upon creating a diamond monopoly by a great amalgamation. To accomplish their purpose, it was essential to get control of the Bultfontein.



Rt. Hon. CECIL JOHN RHODES, P.C.

Photo by Elliott & Fry, London.

De Beers therefore approached Sir Donald Currie, and by the spring of 1889 – the parties having agreed to the principle of purchase – it only remained to settle the price. Sir Donald was a shrewd businessman, and it is evidence of the high opinion he had formed of his future son-in-law's ability and acumen that he decided to appoint him as arbitrator for the Bultfontein and to send him out to Kimberley with the arbitrator appointed by De Beers to make the award. This meant a very handsome fee for Percy, and proved to be the profitable conclusion of his practice at the Cape and English Bars.

When a big brief arrives in the chambers of a young barrister, whose professional income has not yet overtaken his expenditure, he feels a glow of satisfaction which only members of the profession can fully appreciate. This Percy must have experienced on opening a letter, which arrived in his chambers at 2 King's Bench Walk, Temple, on June 5, 1889. It ran:

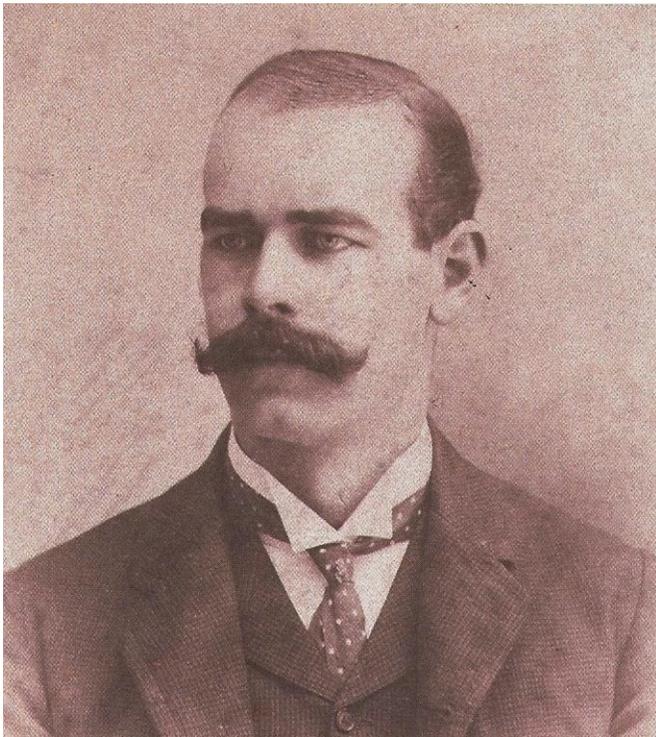
*The Bultfontein Mining Company, Ltd,
16 Holborn Viaduct, EC,
June 4, 1889.*

Dear Sir,

I beg to inform you that at a meeting of the Directors of the Bultfontein Mining Company, Ltd, held today, it was unanimously agreed to request you to act as Arbitrator in the matter of the arbitration between the De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd, and this company for the fixing of the amount of the annual payment which is to form the basis of the consideration to be given by the De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd, for the purchase of this company's property.

The letter was signed by the secretary of the company, W Cecil Stronge. In reply Percy acknowledged the receipt of 'your favour' and begged the secretary 'to inform your company that I am prepared to accept the position'. The difference between an arbitration and a lawsuit was originally that an arbitrator in his award strives to effect a compromise which will leave the parties in friendly relations, whereas a judge is expected to decide strictly in accordance with the law. Percy was associated with Francis Oates, who represented De Beers, and the instructions were headed: 'Friendly Reference between De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, and the Bultfontein Mining Company, Ltd.'

A great deal of correspondence had passed between the two companies, and the arbitrators were requested in case of difficulties 'to apply for advice and recommendations to the Right Hon. Lord Rothschild, Sir Hercules Robinson, or Mr Leigh Hoskyns, as they may be able to arrange'. It was settled at the end of June that the two arbitrators should proceed immediately to the Cape.



Percy Molteno, late 1880s

Before starting they took evidence from expert witnesses as to the value of the Bultfontein mine. Percy had no difficulty in persuading Sir Hercules Robinson (who wrote that 'the remuneration you specify for my services appears very liberal') to act as umpire. Just before leaving he had to correct a serious misstatement which De Beers had imported into the draft agreement, and wrote a rather stiff letter on the subject to the secretary of De Beers on July 9, when he was on board the *Drummond Castle*.

Percy's fat brief was a pleasant windfall for a young man not overburdened with money on the eve of his marriage; it also gave him an opportunity of showing his capacity in dealing with a highly complicated question of law, valuation and business bargaining. It was fortunate for him that he knew South African conditions so well and had visited Kimberley previously. He applied himself with his usual industry to the task, which was accomplished

successfully and amicably to the satisfaction of both parties.

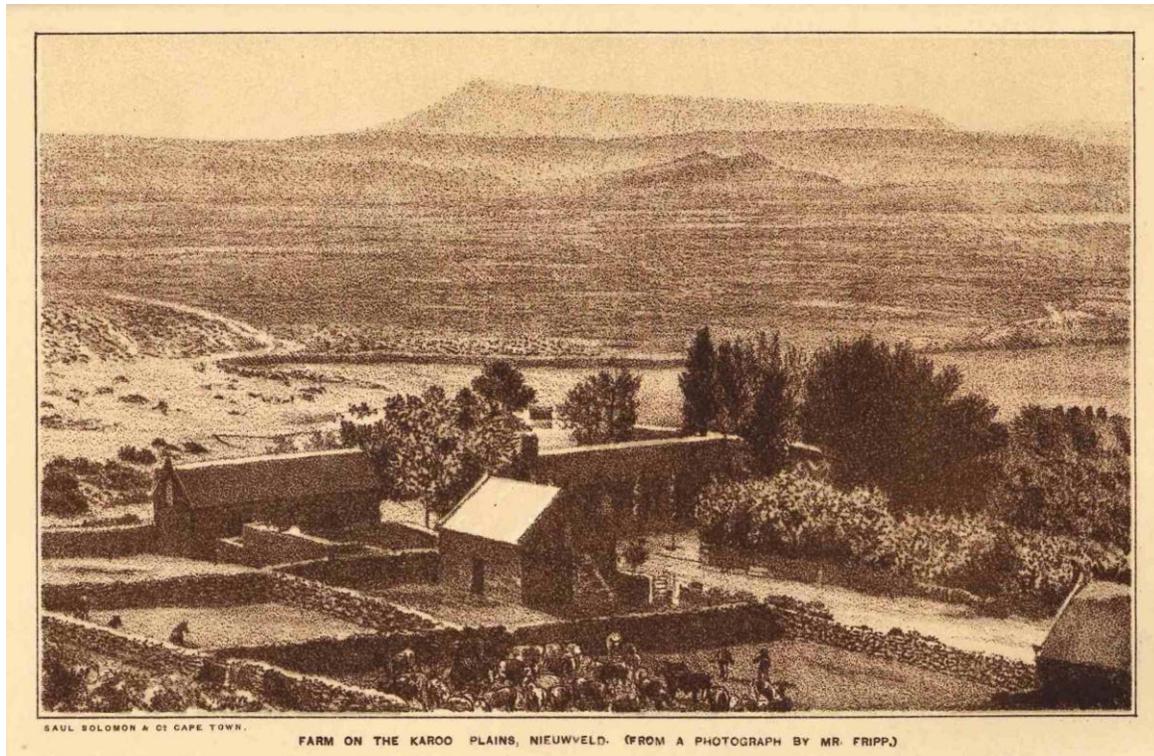
It was a characteristic of Molteno that whatever he took in hand, he did thoroughly. Most men would have been content to get up just as much of fact, finance and law as the arbitration inquiry demanded; but he seized the opportunity of acquiring a complete and up-to-date knowledge of mining conditions which proved invaluable to him afterwards as a director of companies; and not content with this he extended by new observations and researches his previous knowledge and experience of South Africa.

His faculty of observation was naturally strong. He was a keen, patient, scientific observer of nature, and of the mechanical methods by which man was learning to extract its riches and treasures for the enlargement of human wealth and welfare. And he was equally interested in the problems of politics, economics and finance that were awaiting solution in the Cape Colony, Natal and the two Boer

Republics. His gift for mechanics had been developed by scientific training at Cambridge, nor had work at the Bar diminished his lively interest in the technical improvements and inventions that were revolutionizing mining and agriculture. During his preparations in London, as well as during his stay at Kimberley, he made careful notes and eventually embodied them in the shape of a lecture, or address, which he probably used at some private gathering. These unpolished notes, which I have corrected and compressed for the purpose, form the present chapter. He places himself in the position of a guide conducting a party of travellers from England to Kimberley:¹³⁷

To Kimberley by train through the Karoo

After a fine weather passage of about nineteen days, we arrive in Table Bay dock. Without delaying there, we take our seats at once in the train for a journey of about 650 miles. The train is very comfortable, being so arranged that you may walk from end to end and take your meals at leisure. Its speed is about 18 miles an hour, and it accomplishes the journey to Kimberley in 37 hours. Thanks to the slow rate of progress, one is free from the jolting and jarring that are incidental to the high speed of express trains at home. Hence the journey is far less fatiguing than a journey of similar length in Great Britain.



Typical Karoo scene and farm house past which the railway to Kimberley ran, latish 19th century

I well remember as a boy counting skeletons in thousands of oxen, horses and mules which had perished on this very same journey, when it had to be performed by coach, or more

¹³⁷ Note that the rest of this chapter is actually written by Percy Molteno, not Francis Hirst.

commonly by ox-wagon, taking some thirty to forty days, ie. about as many days as it now takes hours.

Of this journey, the chief feature is a rapid ascent through splendid scenery to about 3,500 feet above sea-level, past bold and jagged mountain chains, until we reach the great plateau of the Karroo - a dry country lying on the backs of these mountain ranges. As we rise higher and higher, the appearance of the country changes. The green grass and dark bush of the coast gives way to a dry, arid, stony land, meagerly clothed with low scrub. This continues to be the general character of the country until we reach Kimberley. To the uninitiated it seems a barren and worthless region; but in fact it is splendid pasture land, supporting countless flocks of sheep celebrated for the fineness of their wool and the flavour of their mutton.

Ascending yet further, our train passes the great Orange River, which crosses Africa at this point, and we eventually arrive at Kimberley, which has an altitude of 4,300 feet. On the way, we have occasionally had glimpses of the graceful springbok, the chief game of the country. The arid plain seems interminable until suddenly you see irregular yellow masses and white specks beneath them. Coming nearer you find that these are artificial hills of debris; the white specks are the houses of Beaconsfield and Kimberley. So at last we have reached our destination, but before I take you through the town I must tell you a little, just a very little, of the history of the country.

The beginnings of diamond mining

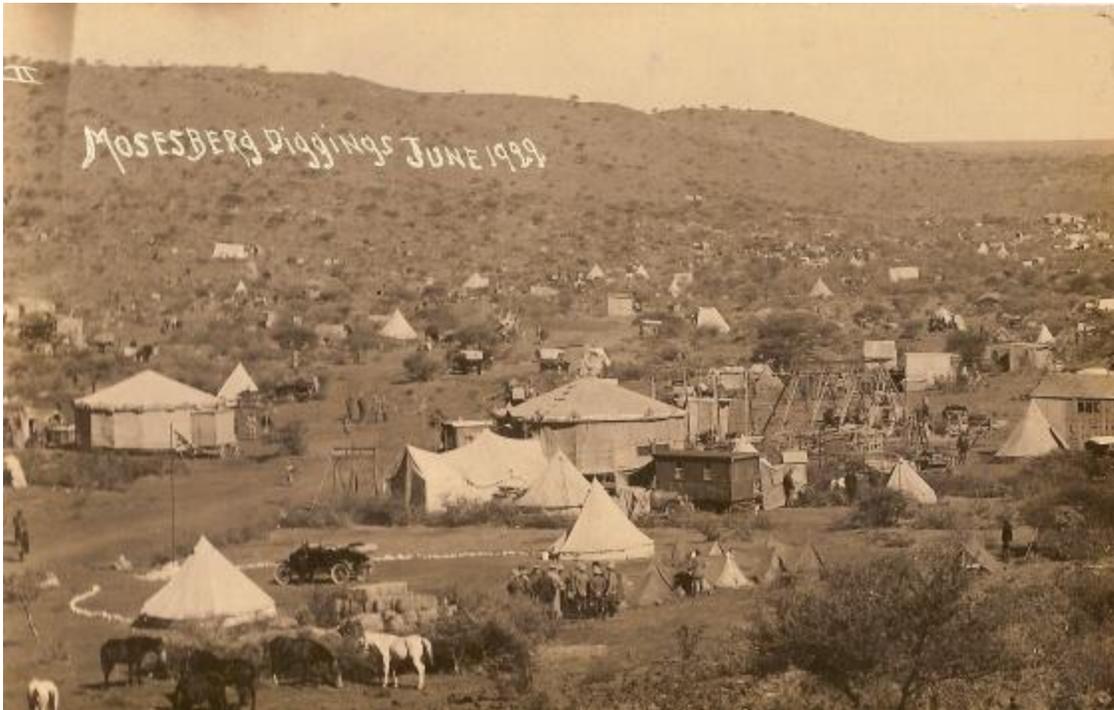
In 1867 a farmer of Hope Town in Cape Colony, when calling on a neighbour, observed that his children were playing with a remarkably brilliant pebble. The mistress of the house, when he admired the stone, made him a present of it without hesitation. Shortly afterwards a trader came to the farmer's house, and the stone was shown him as a curiosity. Believing it to be a diamond he obtained possession of it, and had it examined. It was pronounced to be a diamond, and was sold to the Governor of the Cape, Sir Philip Wodehouse, for £500, and was eventually exhibited.

Diamond searching was immediately commenced in the district of Hope Town, a good name for a place where people were hoping every moment to find fortunes. Soon afterwards a second diamond was found, and then another, but this, the third, was on the bank of the Vaal River, and attention was thus drawn to another district. In 1868 more diamonds were found, and in March 1869, the Star of South Africa was obtained from a native witchfinder, who had possessed it for a long time but valued it only as a powerful charm. This diamond, a magnificent brilliant of eighty-three carats, was sold for £11,000 and now belongs, I understand, to the Countess of Dudley.

As yet, however, people did not believe in the existence of diamond mines. They thought that these gems had been accidentally lost, or that ostriches had brought them from the far distant interior. This was the opinion of an expert, who was sent out at the time, by an English diamond-merchant to inspect the country about Hope Town. However, towards the close of 1869 diamonds began to be found in considerable numbers along the north bank of the Vaal River. They were obtained by sorting and washing the debris of sand and mud

among the great boulders. More and more companies of diggers arrived, along with mechanics, clerks, professional men, farmers, merchants, and labourers. Everyone, in short, who did not see his way to a fortune elsewhere within the next day or two, rushed away over the burning desert.

Camps of canvas tents rose as if by magic. When a diamond was found in a new locality, the next day saw a tent there, the ground marked out, and diggers at work. Early in 1870 diamonds were discovered on the east side of the river, and in June, a party of men set to work on the mission station of Periel. The missionary ordered them away, but the ground turned out to be very rich and he was compelled to allow the diggers to remain.



A South African diamond digger's camp (Mosesberg, 1922)

The rush to Kimberley

Hitherto I have not mentioned Kimberley; but a little later in the year 1870 the children of a farmer residing near a depression called Du Toits Pan picked several small diamonds from the plaster mud of their house. At once search was made in the place from which the mud had been taken, and diamonds were found. A rush of diggers followed, but several farmers, friends of the proprietor, were already at work, and they were refused permission to dig. However, the farmer, like the missionary was compelled to come to terms, and so began what are called the 'dry diggings' as opposed to the 'river diggings'. This was the origin of Du Toits Pan, the least rich of all the great mines.

Bultfontein was then discovered, and about the same time the great De Beers. Nature was gradually disclosing her treasures, and she kept the best to the last; for it was only in June 1871, that the first diamond was found on the spot where the mine now known as the Kimberley Mine exists. It had been examined twice previously and abandoned.

When first laid out in claims the Kimberley Mine was a gentle swell of ground above the general surface. Seven hundred claims or plots, each 900 square feet, were marked off and immediately taken possession of. But many of these afterwards proved to be beyond the reef of rock which contained the diamond-bearing soil, and were therefore of no value. Even of claims within the reef, many were soon found to be not worth working. Less than seven acres is the area whose yield was so amazing as to reduce the price of diamonds throughout the world to a mere fraction of their former value.¹³⁸

Twelve roadways across the mine, each 15 feet wide, were made under a regulation which required each claim holder to reserve one-quarter of his plot for that purpose. Between these roads great trenches were opened, and the soil taken out was conveyed beyond the reef and there carefully sifted. Mounds, or tumuli, of sifted earth rivalling in size the natural elevations of the country rapidly rose round the mine, which was now changing its form to that of a crater.¹³⁹

These newly-made hills and roads and trenches swarmed with human beings. In that narrow space I saw on my first visit to Kimberley 30,000 men, white and black, working at once. Reports of the enormous quantities of diamonds found there had attracted strangers from all parts of the civilized world and there too were congregated blacks from every tribe in South Africa, lured by the prospect of obtaining guns and ammunition with the very high wages offered. The river diggings were almost deserted. Men who by mere chance had secured rich claims for nothing when they were first allotted, could now readily get £1,000 for half their ground.

A great camp of canvas tents of all shapes and sizes covered the space on one side of the mine. Soon streets and squares were laid out, and iron buildings rose along them. Churches and schools, banks and newspaper offices, concert rooms and theatres, stores and shops, diamond buyers' offices, hotels, canteens, and gambling houses, were all to be seen before the close of the year. Along the streets passed a constant stream of wagons, carts, carriages, and pedestrians.

On a smaller scale but similar in character were the camps at Du Toits Pan, Bultfontein, and De Beers. All four mines were within a circle, having a radius of rather less than two miles. Life at the camps in those early days was full of excitement, but far from pleasant. Water was scarce and bad. For a long time there was no drainage and the air was offensive. The dust storms were terrific. Violent gusts of hot air caught up the sifted ground and loose materials, whirling them about until the atmosphere was darkened. During the dust storms it was difficult to breathe. An amazing abundance of insects added to the discomfort of life, and in the summer there was an alarming amount of sickness brought on by filth, bad water, dust, and vermin. Such was the condition of the diamond fields in their early days.

¹³⁸ **One is reminded of the influx of cheap Spanish jet which ruined the Whitby jet trade after the middle of the last [19th] century. F.W.H.**

¹³⁹ **When I was in Kimberley soon after the Great War the inhabitants boasted that the mine was 'the biggest hold in the world.' F.W.H.**

I cannot enter into the political history beyond saying that the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, and the British Government were all contending for the ownership of this Eldorado. Eventually the British Government took possession and paid the Free State £90,000 for its claims to the territory, which proved a troublesome possession, as the diggers were an unruly people and set the local government at defiance until a regiment of soldiers arrived and restored order.¹⁴⁰

The 4 great mines today (1889)

I will now try to give you some idea of the present appearance and working of the four great diamond mines – Kimberley, De Beers, Du Toits Pan, and Bultfontein. They are situated in a semi-circle, with Kimberley at one extremity and Bultfontein at the other. These two are about four miles apart.

The canvas tents have given way to substantial houses of brick and stone in many instances; but some of the old galvanized iron houses remain to remind one of the early stage in the development of Kimberley. There is now a splendid club, an excellent public library, tramways, electric lighting, and a railway station which keeps the town supplied with fruit and luxuries, and provides rapid communication with the outer world.

Each mine is a vertical crater with sharply defined vertical walls. So far as is known these craters are bottomless; i.e. they descend to an unknown depth. At first they become narrower as you descend; but eventually they seem to reach a constant diameter, or even expand a little again, as in the case of the Kimberley Mine.

The difficulties multiplied

When first worked, they were covered with mounds of yellow sand, in which the diamonds were found; but soon a black rock was met which contained no diamonds, while in other parts the sand gave way to a sort of blue rock. By this time the mound had become a crater, shaped like a cup, with an area, in the case of Kimberley, of about seven acres.

When the blue rock was first met with, there was great consternation; for it was assumed to contain no diamonds, but very soon it was found to be also diamondiferous.

At first the yellow sand covering the mine was removed in carts and wagons of all kinds along narrow roads left for the purpose; but as the depths increased the roads, being unsupported, began to collapse, and many fatal accidents resulted. This trouble led to the introduction of aerial wire trams. The wires were fastened below and above and upon them were run goatskins, or wooden buckets, and eventually iron buckets.

¹⁴⁰ See the *Life of Southey*.

At this time one person could not possess more than one claim (a claim being 30 feet by 30 feet), and often one claim was owned by five or six people. Consequently every working



The dangerous chaos of the early workings at the Kimberley Big Hole, 1870s and 1880s

owner of a claim had his own gear, and at one time there were 1,100 of these gears at work, drawing earth up to the sides of the mine.

This state of things could not last long; for as the depth increased a claim was too small to be worked by itself; so the law was changed in 1876 to permit several claims to be amalgamated.

Then a new difficulty had to be surmounted, which requires further explanation. The rock forming the outside of the cup or crater is called the reef. At first this reef is very hard; but on exposure it crumbles very rapidly. When each digger was working for himself all the rich ground was removed as quickly as possible, and no common action was taken to leave supports for the reef. After a time it began to crumble and fall upon the workers below, burying their machinery and tools. This really made all the difference between paying and not paying, between ruin and a fortune. The evil became worse and worse; thousands of tons would fall, bringing down engines and gears and overwhelming claims with vast quantities of worthless debris, all of which had to be removed before a digger could again reach the valuable ground, only to find, very likely, just as he was re-starting, his work interrupted by another reef fall.

While I am telling you of this terrible danger – terrible it was and even now is – I must mention a very curious fact about it. The large amount of pyrites in the rock makes it burn on exposure to the air, when it gives off a smoke composed of noxious fumes and also causes great heat. Here was another very formidable hindrance to work. At Bultfontein and

Du Toits Pan they are still struggling with this difficulty; how it was got I over at De Beers and Kimberley I will tell you presently.

A handful of large companies emerge

These difficulties caused a more or less complete fusion of the claims into a few large companies. However, at a depth of about 300 feet in the Kimberley mine, the nature of the surrounding rock was found to be different. The mine had narrowed and a sort of throat was found of a rock that did not crumble and fall on exposure. Here I may add that originally the yellow sand found to be diamondiferous by the first diggers was sifted by the method known as 'dry sorting'. The sand was put on a table, and a small piece of wood or iron was used to spread it out. This process was very imperfect and many diamonds remained in the sand, as was afterwards proved when the water process was applied to the refuse and the unobserved diamonds were found.

Kimberley, as I have said, was the richest of the four mines. For a time the rest were almost abandoned in its favour, but by degrees they were taken up. In 1882 Bultfontein was proclaimed a public mine; and when I saw it last year it was a huge open mine with workings at a depth of 530 feet from the surface.

I have now brought you up to date from the discovery and development of the mines to the present time, and I will proceed to describe the actual working of De Beers as I saw it. This is the most interesting for our purpose as it is the most advanced in organization and technical efficiency.

How the de Beers Mine actually works

At De Beers the reef falls had become so bad that a new plan was devised to overcome the mischief. At some distance from the edge of the mine shafts were sunk, in some cases vertical, in others inclined; and a tunnel was run from them into the adjacent portion of the mine. The blue was extracted from below and carried out into the tunnel. When this plan was first introduced (in 1885) there was no united action, the mine being in the hands of different parties. This divided possession involved serious dangers; but finally the mine came into the hands of one great company, or rather two, as there is one for De Beers and one for Kimberley.



Underground workings in one of the Kimberley diamond mines, 19th century

In the case of De Beers at some distance from the edge an inclined shaft is run down into the mine, and the mine is divided into sections of 100 feet in depth. A series of tunnels are run in the blue ground itself and are all connected with a main tunnel which again is connected

with the main shaft. The work is carried on at different levels, being now at 500, 600, 700 and 800 feet. Supposing we want to work the blue at the 500 level, we go to 600 and work upwards and gradually draw away the ground from below, beginning as far from the entrance to the tunnel as possible and gradually allowing the roof to crash down with all its reef and debris. The system is so perfect that only about five per cent of the blue is lost. The mine, it must be remembered, is for practical purposes one solid mass of valuable blue, though there are embedded in it one or two foreign masses called 'floating reef'. The shaft contains a set of two huge buckets, worked by a great 80hp engine, which moves up and down incessantly. Attached to the skip are two compartments, one for white persons and the other for Kaffirs.¹⁴¹

Let me read you an impressionist description by a recent visitor of the work of the engine and of the descent:

We are at the top of De Beers – at present the best organized of all the mines. What a change from the early days when the ground was hauled up by a Kaffir at a windlass or a horse at a whim. Here is an engine of 1,500 Kaffir power, which has sometimes hauled out as much as 9,000 tons a day – a record unequalled anywhere else on or under the earth, as I am proudly assured by Mr. Nicholl, the underground manager, who has come here from a crack Tyneside coal-mine. Up and down, like a jack-in-the-box, pops the great skip, dashing down 700 feet at every journey to return with six tons of 'blue', which at the top with a prodigious somersault it tips over into an attendant line of trucks.

¹⁴¹ It is remarkable how the racial heterogeneity and inequality of South African society immediately gets reproduced even in new economic and technological settings.

As I stand watching, there suddenly appears beside the skip a case like a very large double coffin in which are packed like figs in a box three or four damp, hot and soily figures. They emerge. It is a party of young English Peers who are visiting the diamond marvels. When my turn comes to be coffined, I have to descend alone; and a queer sensation it proves. I lean back in the slanting shaft, taking care to protrude neither hand nor foot. A caution, a signal, then gentle motion, and the brilliant sunshine fades away. Once or twice on the way down, my eyes are startled by a glimpse of dim-lit chambers with darkling figures mysteriously toiling; or my ears deafened by the rattle of the ponderous skip as it plunges up and down past the slower lift at headlong speed.

At length I stood 700 feet beneath the ground where the skip is loaded for the ascent. There the passages of the mine converge at a sort of oblong hell-mouth, tapering funnel-wise to discharge into the skip below. The skip's jaws are four trucks wide, four trucks going to a load. Here stand four Herculean shapes; and as the stream of the full trucks from the various tramways reaches them, each of the four seizes a truck and forces it against the lip of the hole and altogether with a shout upset the weighty convoy. Instantly they drag back the empty trucks, to be pushed away each by its own Kaffir, for refilling in the dark and sloppy labyrinths.

Meanwhile a sign has throbbled to the engine room above and the skip has hardly touched bottom when it is on its upward race again with six tons on board. The dusky giants – strong, cheery, docile, sweltering naked or half naked at their pauseless task – the cries, the shifting flare and gloom, the whole strange scene of a struggle in the bowels of the solid earth, made for me a tableau vivant of Virgil's famous picture of Vulcan with his monstrous ministers singing and swinging hammers in the mountain's heart.

Another shaft was destroyed by the terrible fire in July 1888 (a year before Percy Molteno's arrival at Kimberley). It commenced in an engine shed and was due, it is thought, to the neglect of a native who had gone to sleep there leaving his light too near some timber. The flames spread with lightning rapidity through a wooden gallery to Number 1 shaft. Number 2 shaft was under repair at the time and could not be used as a means of saving life. Some of the men in the lower levels succeeded in making their escape. With remarkable presence of mind they retreated before the fire, blowing up the timber work with dynamite as they went along, and finally found an outlet through some old workings. In this catastrophe twenty-two white men and three hundred and sixty blacks perished. Since then another shaft, called the Rock Shaft, has been constructed.

The 'skip', mentioned in my quotation, which is hauled up the shaft, has a capacity of four loads. The 'load' at Kimberley is a technical term meaning six cubic feet. The skip carried four loads, i.e. forty-eight cubic feet. When I was there, they were hauling up as much as six hundred loads per day by means of this great engine.

The surface workings

Having now described the interior working of the mine I will return to the surface which is very full of interest. The skips moving up and down, as you have seen, so fast, bring a gigantic quantity of blue to the surface. No tram worked by animals, or even by locomotive, could cope with such a quantity. But a very splendid system of mechanical haulage has been devised by a friend of mine. A stationary engine works an endless wire which runs for

several miles, and moves along a set of double rails two sets of trucks, one coming and the other going continuously. There are several hundreds of these trucks always moving up and down hills, turning corners and passing far out of sight. Thus, with a minimum of hand labour, the vast quantity of blue brought to the surface by the skip is moved to the 'floors'. These floors are vast fields on which the blue is laid out to a depth of from nine to fifteen inches.

This blue is so hard that it needs dynamite to crush it when *in situ*. But on being exposed to the air, it becomes pliable. It is spread out on the floors, turned from time to time, and watered. After three or four months of this treatment it becomes a comparatively fine, sandy gravel in appearance, but of a blue colour. It is then taken to the washing machine and there placed in a round cradle such as is used for washing coprolites. The water dissolves the blue mud; the stones are left at the bottom; and these heavier parts are



**Africans on their way to work on the mines,
late 19th century**

passed into a receiver in which they are sifted into different sizes (all under lock and key), until eventually they are brought out and sorted, as was the yellow sand, with a little piece of wood or iron, and the diamonds are picked out by hand. The water is drained off and is used over and over again, while the liquid mud is carried by a mechanical appliance to a higher level and allowed to run away by gravity. In this way, vast mounds of mud are formed which rival in height the natural hills and form a striking feature of the landscape near Kimberley.

The longer the pulverizing process goes on the better; for the washing is easier and more diamonds are found. De Beers have vast fields – thousands of acres – spread out near the mine, containing sufficient reserves to pay off all their liabilities; and this stock is even now being increased to allow of the blue being

exposed to the air for a very long period. The blue is harrowed with large harrows and sometimes, as you see in the photograph,¹⁴² a large steam roller is used. De Beers now employs about 214 white men and 1,350 black in the mine. There are also 180 whites and 1,400 blacks on the floors, making a total of about 400 white and 2,750 black employees.

The diamonds are spread with such remarkable uniformity over the blue ground that the return is practically constant, and each load of sixteen feet is looked upon as yielding so many carats. As the diamonds are small and easily secreted they are also easily stolen; and this was a serious loss to all owners. It can never be entirely got rid of, but it has now been very much reduced by what is called the compound system.

African workers in compounds

Under this plan the natives are engaged for a certain period, generally two months, and are placed in an enclosure called a compound, which communicates directly with the mine. They cannot leave on any pretence whatever while their term of service lasts. Everything necessary for their existence is contained in their enclosure, including dormitories, a store for provisions and clothing, and generally also a chapel, a school, a hospital, and a large bath in which the natives are very fond of bathing. A guard is placed over them as they go to and from the mine, and when they are working on the floors they are always under the eye of some white. At the end of their engagement the natives, before they are allowed to leave, are segregated for four days and closely watched. They have to wear leather gloves which are padlocked, to prevent them handling a diamond. Finally, they are carefully searched and dismissed.

For the last four years Kimberley has been worked underground, and now, when looking at the two mines of Kimberley and De Beers you see two vast excavations, both of about eight acres in area. The Bultfontein and Du Toits Pan mines look quite different. Both are worked on the open system, which is far cheaper where it can be used, but their yield per load is much less than that of the two great mines. The yield from Kimberley is one and a quarter carats per load, which, at 40s per carat, is 50s per load. The cost of working is estimated at 8s, so that there remains a profit of about 40s per load. In the case of De Beers, the profit is about 4s less. The yield of the two other mines is only from one-third to one-quarter of a carat per load, which until last year was insufficient to make underground work profitable. On the other hand – and this is a curious fact – the price of the Du Toits Pan and Bultfontein diamond is higher than that of Kimberley and De Beers, the explanation being that the workings give a larger proportion of fine, large, white stones.

Calculations of the Profitability of the Mines

I now go on to give you some idea of the present yield and prices and profits of these four mines.

Number of claims registered:

¹⁴² Unfortunately the photographs and lantern slides with which he illustrated the lecture have been lost.

Kimberley, 308
 De Beers, 594
 Du Toits Pan, 1,550
 Bultfontein, 1,037

Between September 1, 1882 and December 31, 1888, Kimberley produced 6,050,490 carats, worth £5,960,898, while the product of De Beers in the same period was 4,444,421 carats, valued at £4,385,782. Du Toits Pan produced 3,651,961 carats, worth £5,060,341, while Bultfontein yielded 3,771,981 carats of diamonds worth £3,765,074.

The total production of diamonds in this region during the past 18 years is estimated at forty million carats, which, at present prices, would be worth about £80 million pounds.

I have mentioned the danger of over-production and various difficulties in the mines themselves which tended to promote a fusion of interests. Hence was evolved a wonderful idea – that of controlling the diamond output of the world by placing the whole mining industry in the hands of one large company.¹⁴³ First a race began between the two great mines, Kimberley and De Beers, as to which should swallow the other. Eventually they joined together and formed a new company styled De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. This company has a capital of £3,950,000, divided into £5 shares, and debentures of £2,250,000 to pay the debts of the constituent companies.

Thus the two greatest diamond-owning combinations were united; but there still remained Bultfontein and Du Toits Pan. These also had been amalgamating; but during the last year they have been absorbed by De Beers,¹⁴⁴ so that all these great mines are now in the hands of one company, which controls the diamond market. There are, however, in the Free State, Jagersfontein and Koffiefontein, two mines which produce a few very fine diamonds, and there are the river diggings of Barkly, formerly Periel. It is estimated however that De Beers now holds five-sixths of the whole amount produced.

You may ask what has been the effect on the price of diamonds. Has this combination, by forming a monopoly or quasi-monopoly, been able to raise it?

Yes: certainly it has. All last year [1887 or 1888? probably 1888. Note by F W Hirst], the price rose steadily from about 20s at the beginning of the year to 40s at the present time. Thus the price has been doubled, and though the output will be very much reduced, the same amount of money will come in for the smaller output.

The world spends about £4 million per annum on the luxury of diamonds; and of this total about £3,500,000 must come from De Beers. At the present price of £2 per carat a yield of 1,750,000 carats, after paying the cost of working expenses and debentures, will leave a net

¹⁴³ Here is a young Percy Molteno, only 26 years of age, lauding the virtues of monopoly! How interesting it would have been to question him in later years and see if his espousal of Cobdenite market economics had caused him to distance himself from his early enthusiasm.

¹⁴⁴ This sentence makes clear that this account by Percy was not written for Sir Donald Currie and his fellow directors of Bultfontein, but written after Percy had completed his arbitration assignment.

profit of about 2½ millions sterling, ie. about 60%, on a capital of four millions.¹⁴⁵ The two mines of Bultfontein and Du Toits Pan will in all probability be closed to be held as a reserve; and eventually they will be worked underground when the price of diamonds admits.

Will it be possible to maintain this monopoly? There are other deposits of similar 'blue' near Kimberley, such as Otto's Kopje, the St Augustine's Mine, and the North-Eastern Bultfontein. But nothing serious in the way of competition is to be anticipated from them; and it seems little likely that a second set of productive mines will be discovered. In any case it has taken all these years to bring the mines to their present condition; so that it would take a long time and enormous expense to bring any other mine into operation.

In the mines thus controlled by De Beers, with a reduced output, there are now about 1,500 white employees and from ten to twelve thousand blacks. The whites receive from four to eight pounds per week, and the blacks from twenty-four to twenty-eight shillings.

Here, Percy Molteno's manuscript ends rather abruptly. I have omitted some details which are of no present interest and have polished and pruned the language here and there without of course altering the sense in the way that he himself would have done in preparing it for publication.

¹⁴⁵ An annual return of 60% on capital. One can see both the extraordinary profitability of diamond mining in South Africa at this time, and how monopoly can increase that profitability still further.