

9. Hercules Crosse Jarvis – The Rock on which the South African Family stands

Hercules Crosse Jarvis, John Molteno's father-in-law, was in his prime at the time his daughter Elizabeth and John got married in 1851.¹ A successful businessman, Chairman of Cape Town's elected Board of Commissioners (in effect, the Mayor), and one of the leaders of a popular mobilisation to block the British Government's intention to turn the Cape Colony into a penal settlement. It is no exaggeration to say that the example of public service he set led John Molteno in a wholly new direction in life. Hercules introduced him to the possibility of political engagement. And with it, gave him new perspectives – the obligation to get involved in the affairs of one's local community, the necessity to stand up to the British colonial authorities when necessary, and the principle of the Cape Colony being a shared society with no distinctions in law between Dutch and English, or 'Whites' from Europe and the Colony's other inhabitants who were of more diverse ancestry. Hercules was not just John's father-in-law; he became his friend and political colleague in their shared commitment to the political and economic development of the Cape. Without that relationship, John might not have started on the path that ultimately led him to becoming the first Prime Minister of a self-governing Cape Colony.

There is another reason why Hercules is so important a figure in the South African branch of the family. He and his wife, as a result of their daughter Elizabeth's marriage, are the oldest South African ancestors of all the Moltenos, and Murrays related to them, in that part of the world. And because their other daughters, except for the youngest, Emmie, also married, this created the tightly knit network of Molteno, Blenkins, Alport and Bisset families, all related to one another, that grew up in the second half of the 19th Century.

The Jarvis Family

Hercules Jarvis was born in London in 1802 and baptised at the church of St George the Martyr.² He was the second son of John Jarvis, a Regular Army officer who had begun his career eight years earlier when he was posted in 1794 as a Cornet to the 10th (or Loyal) Essex Fencible Regiment of Cavalry.

John Jarvis, and Hercules after him, always believed they were relatives of the famous Admiral Sir John Jervis (or Jarvis) who served in the Royal Navy for over 60 years, rising to be Commander-in-

¹ This chapter relies very heavily on the following sources: Hercules' own recollections, his daughter Emmie's memories of her father which she prepared for Percy Molteno (Hercules' grandson) in 1894, Percy's own further research, Caroline Murray's recollections of her grandfather, and Dr R. F. M. Immelman's draft account of Hercules' life, in the preparation of which in the late 1950s he examined the Minutes of the Cape Town Board of Commissioners, newspaper reports of the time, and many secondary sources. His 25,000 word unpublished account, along with my Introduction to it, can be read in full on the web at www.moltenofamily.net I am also grateful to Patricia Greenway for sharing her remarkable collection of information about Hercules in 2012. I have not been able to consult the following materials: Hercules Jarvis's Journal, 1870, 464pp; his Diary, 57 sheets (clearly only a fragment); and a file of letters from him and other Jarvis family members, papers about him and the Jarvis family history (462 sheets). UCT Archives.

² Baptismal record in the possession of Patricia Greenway. His tombstone at St. Saviour's, Claremont records his birth date incorrectly as 1803.

Chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet during the early years of the Napoleonic Wars. It was he who defeated the Spanish Fleet at the Battle of Cape St Vincent and became First Lord of the Admiralty in 1801. His subsequent blockade of the French Navy prevented the invasion of England and led to his being made Earl St Vincent by a grateful government. Addressing the House of Lords, he referred in a wonderful turn of phrase to the significance of the Royal Navy's victory: 'I do not say, My Lords, that the French will not come. I say only they will not come by sea.' He died without issue in 1823 and the Earldom of St Vincent became extinct. Two generations later Hercules got his grandson, Percy Molteno, to try and find out in London how close his relationship was with Earl St Vincent. It became clear that, if they were related at all, their common ancestor would have been several generations earlier and that no precise genealogical relationship could be established.³

Hercules' father was listed on the muster roll of the Royal Montgomeryshire Militia as its Quartermaster. This was one of many units raised from volunteers, but led by Regular Army officers, to defend England during the Napoleonic Wars. He was promoted to Lieutenant quite soon and made the Militia's Paymaster, a job he held until his death. In 1803 the detachment was sent to Maker Heights near Plymouth and a few years later transferred further east to Shoreham in order to help ward off a renewed threat of French invasion. It was during this march along the coast that John Jarvis was taken ill and died in June 1808; he was 47 years old.⁴ Although of respectable origin, his widow, Ives Dunmore Jarvis (nee Pike), was in a difficult financial situation providing for their two daughters and four young sons, two of whom died roundabout the time of their father's death.⁵

The eldest surviving boy, John Henry Jarvis, eventually got a place in the English East India Company's Military Academy at Addiscombe House. This was where officers were trained before entering its service. The Company had conquered and now ruled over much of India, but had to rely in doing so on its own armed forces financed from taxes levied on the Indian peasantry. John Jarvis, after graduating, was appointed to the Bengal Artillery and sent to Dum Dum. In April 1832 aged only 33, he got seriously ill. The Company granted him two years sick leave.⁶ But he died in Mauritius as he was making his way to the Cape to join his younger brother, Hercules.⁷

Hercules Jarvis comes out to the Cape, 1816

Hercules was only six when his father died. He was taken as a young boy of thirteen or so to the Cape Colony by a friend of the family in 1816. His granddaughter, Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), has told the story:⁸

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

³ This only became unequivocally clear years much later in a correspondence between Percy Molteno and a member of the Jarvis family in the 1930s. PUT IN PRECISE DETAILS IF I CAN FIND THEM AGAIN.

⁴ Percy Molteno found John Jarvis's tombstone in 1890, facing the West entrance to the church in New Shoreham Churchyard. These details from Patricia Greenway's files.

⁵ Percy Molteno wrote that 'the Jarvises had never been wealthy'. Quoted in Francis Hirst, unpublished biography of Percy Molteno.

⁶ Ships at this time often took four or five months to make the trip between Bengal and England.

⁷ Hercules Jarvis to Percy Molteno, 16 March 1886.

⁸ *Chronicle of the Family*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Dec. 1913.

even knew of its existence.⁹ He replied that, his father and 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 and naval doctor, Assistant Commander Brown, was ordered out to the Cape [in 1816], Grandpapa's mother was persuaded to allow him to go out under his care. He was then only 12 years old.¹⁰

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 Rump¹¹ and, gazing there over the sea, have a good cry.

Dr Brown seems to have been very good to him, and to have taken him with him wherever he went. Once when the Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, was going round the coast to Algoa Bay,¹² Dr Brown accompanied him, and Grandpapa was also invited to be one of the party.... At Algoa Bay there were then only two houses, one a farm and the other a military station. On their arrival Dr 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 Dr 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 impression on the Governor for, at the end of the return voyage, he offered him a commission in the Army.... 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; but the spell of Africa seized him again.

When Hercules returned to Cape Town in 1820 or '21 as a young man of eighteen, the Colonial Secretary, Henry Alexander, introduced him to Daniel Dixon of the import/export firm, Hudson, Donaldson, Dixon & Co.,¹³ and he got a job with them. Its main business was the export of Cape wines to England. He worked his way up, eventually becoming its manager, a position he kept until he retired from business owing to his financial difficulties in 1864.

Caroline Murray continued her account of what happened to Hercules on his return to the Cape:

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.¹⁴ Its streets seemed wide and silent with no high buildings, few shops, but many fine old

⁹ Although Britain had temporarily seized the Cape during the Napoleonic Wars, it was only in 1806 that it occupied and annexed it permanently. Hercules was one of the very early Englishmen to make their home there at a time when the Dutch community still dominated not only agriculture but commerce too.

¹⁰ Hercules thought (wrongly) that he had been born around 1804. He was actually 13 or 14 when he first arrived in Cape Town.

¹¹ A separate high point just to the west of Table Mountain that, with Signal Hill, runs down towards Table Bay.

¹² Lying several hundred miles east of Cape Town, Algoa Bay is where the city of Port Elizabeth is situated today.

¹³ James Tennant Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanderdom*, London, Methuen & Co., 1923.

¹⁴ Caroline Murray was writing this in 1913.

dignified houses with large cool halls and rooms and high *stoeps*¹⁵ 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.

In his early days at the Cape, he would often be invited out to one or other of the large Constantia estates a few miles outside Cape Town to spend his Sundays there. The Sabbath did not, however, as his daughter Emmie commented, seem to be very strictly observed: 'These families lived in considerable affluence. They had so many slaves that they were able to select and train suitable ones for their private bands which performed in their grounds for the gay parties frequently held.'

Caroline continued:

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.

At nineteen Grandpapa married a Miss Vos.¹⁶ She was only sixteen and was a relative of Mrs de Jongh.¹⁷

The Vos family

Elizabeth Vos's family was exemplified the links between the Cape under Dutch rule and the East Indies. Her ancestor, Johan Hendrik Vos, had been born in Osnabruck in Germany in 1676. He came out to the Cape as a soldier in the Dutch East India Company's service in 1703 and married a local woman, Christina Baumann (Bouman in Dutch). He was soon transferred to Batavia (today's Djakarta) in Java where their son Jan Hendrik Vos was born in 1715. He died there and his widow,

¹⁵ Verandahs.

¹⁶ They married on 18 December 1825; Hercules was 23 at the time of his marriage.

¹⁷ This is how John Molteno, following his marriage to Hercules Jarvis's daughter, Elizabeth Maria, came to be related to both the de Jongh and Vos families.

Christina, returned to Cape Town where their son grew up. Jan was in his thirties when he married Johanna Bock in 1748. They had a son the following year who, in accordance with family tradition, was also christened Johan Hendrik Vos. The young lad was apprenticed to a silversmith and founded what became the well-known Vos family of silversmiths in Cape Town. His wife, Elizabeth Roussouw, was of Huguenot extraction, her family having fled France and come to the Cape in the wake of the Protestant persecution. It was their son, Hendrik Daniel Vos, also a silversmith, who was Elizabeth's father;¹⁸ and it is their lovely home in Upper Strand Street that Caroline Murray described. Elizabeth's great uncle incidentally, Jacobus Johannes Vos (1756-1829), had been President of the Burgher Senate¹⁹ in Cape Town at the time of Britain's seizure of the Cape in 1806.

All the Molteno and Bisset descendants of Hercules Jarvis and Elizabeth Maria Vos, as a result of this genealogy, have some German, Dutch and French ancestry, in addition to their Italian, English and Scottish antecedents. This is yet another illustration of how the movement of people that took place during the Age of European Empires led to so much of today's heterogeneity of ethnic origins. One factor propelling this was often a gender imbalance in a particular community in one or other part of the world. Just as John Molteno's brother, Frank, married an indigenous Hawaiian because there were almost no English women on the islands there in the 1840s, so there were very few English women at the Cape when Hercules married his young Dutch wife in 1825.

The cultural implications in this instance were significant. As Caroline Murray recorded, Dutch was the language of Hercules and Elizabeth Maria's home. Die Groote Kerk in Adderley Street was the church where all their children were baptised and the family worshipped. Their eldest daughter was also married from that church to Percy Alport in 1846.

Hercules Crosse Jarvis and Elizabeth Maria Vos's Children

Birth	Christian Names	Marriage	Spouse	Death
1826	Anna Elizabeth Sophia			January 1827
1828	Sophia 'Sophy' St Ives Mary	8 October 1846	Percy John Alport	?
1831	Elizabeth 'Maria'	1851	John Charles Molteno	8 April 1874
1832	John			March 1833
c. 1833	'Annie' Elizabeth	1850	Major Blenkins	1914
c. 1836	Georgina Charlotte			1847
1841	Elizabeth 'Betty' Magdalena	1862	James Bisset	1927

¹⁸ R. F. M. Immelman's, 'The Vos Family', typescript, 6pp. Also Emmie Jarvis's recollections of what she had been told about her Dutch grandparents.

¹⁹ A kind of consultative council the Dutch East India Company had set up.

	Christina			
c. 1848	Emmerentia 'Emmie' Gerharda			1936

Jarvis Family life at 15 Somerset Road, Green Point

Caroline continued the story:

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.²⁰ 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.²¹

It was the spot on earth that, to my child-mind, seemed most like Paradise. As I think of it now, in the light of my older experience, I know that there was ground for that feeling. The memory of that home deserves to be valued and loved by all its descendants; for when I think of the great divergences of character, age, relationship and nationality combined in it and reflect that I have not one memory connected with it of anything but kindness, sympathy and the most generous hospitality, then I realize that it was something quite unique. It is only with the memory of a child that I can recall my Grandmother who presided over this home with a quiet dignity and authority that never seemed to press or jar, yet was the source of its harmonious working. We loved to follow her about as she busied herself with her household duties. There was never bustle or disorder, but there were always faithful old servants and always a bountiful table where an unexpected guest was sure of welcome.

I never remember Grandmama speaking anything but Dutch to us, although in her children's education and environment the English language and ideas had the preponderating influence. 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 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

²⁰ More than a century later in 1956, Hercules' great granddaughter, Kathleen Murray, went in search of its exact location. Turning off the Main Road in Green Point up De Smidt Street towards Signal Hill, she found a narrow street to the left actually called Jarvis Street, and there was the long building that had been the Jarvis family home, very run-down now and divided into tenements. Her note, dated 18 Dec. 1956.

²¹ Caroline was remembering it as it had been in the late 1850s and early '60s when she and her elder sister Betty spent much time there.

with its overpowering canopy that struck real terror when the thunders of the preacher echoed from beneath it.

Caroline also remembered the servants who worked in her grandparents' home:

There was old Meme Hannah and her husband Tat Simon²² who had been slaves in the family but who, after the liberation, had returned as servants and remained till their death with Grandpapa and Grandmama. I don't remember what their duties were but they regarded themselves as privileged members of the household. They had a daughter named Meitje who afterwards became our nurse and she had a little girl, of about our own age, called Honey. The staid capable housemaid's name was Louisa, and there were some fine native 'boys' of whose dignity and faithfulness I have often heard Uncle Alport speak with great admiration and affection.

Hercules Jarvis – combining business with civic commitment

Hercules' business life was not confined to running Hudson, Donaldson, Dixon & Co. Over the years he developed other business interests, at various times owning some coal yards, a farm in the Boland and a small mine. The coal yards nearly brought him to grief politically. When standing as a candidate for the Colony's first elected Legislative Assembly in 1854, he actually missed the declaration of the poll. As he explained in a letter to the papers, 'at noon, one of my large coal yards ignited by spontaneous combustion and ... I had not been able to leave the spot. The previous night had been cold and wet, and through the whole of it my exertions had been used to quench the fire.... [in which] I fully succeeded. I, however, caught a severe cold, and that, together with the coal dust which had settled on my chest, made it very difficult for me to breathe, and quite impossible to address you.'²³

At the height of his commercial career, Hercules encouraged the formation of the South African Life Assurance Society and became one of its first directors, a position he held for nearly 20 years from 1845 to 1864. He was a director of the Cape Town Railway and Dock Company when it was formed in 1858 to build the Colony's very first railway from Cape Town to Wellington and Stellenbosch. He was also a director of the company that built the Cape Peninsula's suburban railway from Salt River to Wynberg. His association with these two companies only ended when the Cape Government, under his son-in-law John Molteno as Prime Minister, took them into public ownership in 1873 in preparation for its ambitious plans to extend the railways into the interior. Hercules was also a director of the Cape of Good Hope Savings Bank until shortly before his death.

He, however, was never just a businessman. During his long life, he took up all sorts of issues and played a variety of public roles. As early as 1829, he became one of the original subscribers who

²² R. F. M. Immelman explained in his notes to Caroline Murray's *Reminiscences* that: 'Tat was the abbreviation for Outa, ie old man, and the form of address used by children speaking to elderly Coloured men. It was a term of respect, in the same way as they applied Oom and Tante to all older men and women. Parents were very strict in enforcing the use of these terms so that no white child would have dreamt of addressing a Coloured person by Christian name only.... Meme was an appellation applied to old Coloured midwives and in the course of time to most old Coloured women.'

²³ *Commercial Advertiser*, 20 May 1854.

contributed the funds necessary to start the South African College (SACS), which for many years was the Cape's only institution of higher education. In 1851 he was appointed to its Council where he played an active part until 1868.

As early as 1830 he became a member of the Commercial Exchange, a body of merchants. He played some role in its affairs but was never on its executive. Local businessmen were apparently not very satisfied with how it represented their interests and in 1841 a new Mercantile Association replaced it, to which Hercules was elected as one of a reserve list of committee members. This body also proved ineffective and a decade later the Chamber of Commerce was founded with Hercules, who by this time was Chairman of Cape Town's Board of Commissioners, being elected to its committee. It was in that context that he made his most important civic contribution.

Cape Town's Board of Commissioners – Mayor of the City

During the first 50 years of British rule, the Colony was run on authoritarian lines with all power vested in the Governor who was appointed by the British Government. However an ordinance was passed in 1836 that allowed Cape Town to set up its own municipality, which it did in 1840 under an elected Board of Commissioners. This was, in effect, the town's City Council and its Chairman the Mayor.

Hercules who had already been a prominent local businessman for 20 years became a member of the first Board on 14 October 1840.²⁴ Of the 11 Commissioners, seven were Dutch, including the Chairman, Treasurer and the Secretary. Eight years later Hercules was elected Chair, a post he held continuously for 12 years until he resigned in 1860. No subsequent Mayor of Cape Town has ever held office for such a length of time.

Every Wednesday the Board met at the Town House at 10 a.m., its deliberations being open to the public. The Municipal Offices were downstairs and the Council Room upstairs. Dr R. F. M. Immelman painted a picture of the scene:

Hercules Jarvis was at the zenith of his career about 1854. At the age of 50 he had been Mayor of Cape Town for some six years and had recently been elected to Parliament with more votes than any other Cape Town member of the House of Assembly. Two struggles into which he had thrown himself heart and soul and in which he had, by virtue of his chairmanship of the Board of Commissioners of the Municipality, taken a leading part, had not long before been brought to a successful conclusion ... the anti-convict agitation and that for self-government. His prominent and energetic championship of the citizen's cause in these movements was still fresh in the public memory.

As he walked up Adderley Street – recently so named at his suggestion – he would in very truth, as his fellow Capetonians greeted him, have been looked at as their First Citizen. They respected him and felt pride that among them dwelt such a man. Dignified, dressed in sober black frock coat and top hat, the very epitome of a successful businessman and man of affairs, he would raise his hat to the men he knew, similarly attired, and to the women in

²⁴ This account follows closely R. F. M. Immelman's draft biography.

crinolines who accompanied them. Proceeding from his own business premises, he had called in at the Town House to attend to some details of municipal affairs and was now proceeding to the Good Hope Lodge on Stal Plein to be present at a sitting of the House of Assembly. He looked what he was, a man who had started from poverty and worked himself up until he achieved prosperity. Thereafter he could afford to devote some time to public affairs, where his sound commonsense, practical grasp of affairs, experience, vigour, energy and integrity soon caused men to trust him and to respect his opinions. Undoubtedly in a small community such as Cape Town was at mid-century, there were men who disliked his progressive ideas and cavilled at his predominance in the city's council chamber.²⁵

His fellow Commissioners would probably have agreed with this description. When in April 1860, he decided eventually to retire as Chairman, two of the Dutch Commissioners, De Korte and Louw, proposed a resolution which was unanimously passed: 'That in the opinion of this Board, the retirement of the Honourable H. C. Jarvis will be sincerely regretted by every well wisher of this Municipality.' The Board recorded its 'appreciation of the many eminent services rendered by [him] during the time of his Commissionership, extending over a period of nearly 20 years, by inaugurating and maturing measures calculated to promote the public good.' It further decided to 'engross' its resolution upon parchment and for a deputation led by the new Chairman to present it to him.

Hercules was greatly touched. In reply, he said: 'When this resolution was adopted in my presence, I was so taken by surprise and so deeply moved that at the moment I could not find appropriate language to express my feelings.'

The Cape Town Docks – the long saga

The issue he took up throughout his life and most passionately – in Emmie's words, 'with what heart and soul he entered into everything' – was the construction of modern port facilities in Table Bay in order to facilitate the Colony's overseas trade. From his earliest days, he would go down to the shore whenever a ship arrived with stock for his company and get a boat to row out with an extra strong hawser and anchor in order to give the boat a little extra protection in case a storm should sweep into the Bay.

For decades he relentlessly pressed a foot-dragging colonial administration to build a proper harbour. He collected information from experts in England about the details of construction. He wrote endless letters to the press. When elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1854, he at once proposed a motion, which was adopted, to put the building of a breakwater and harbour in the new Parliament's hands instead of the Governor's. Construction did begin a few years later and, as a member of the Harbour Board, on 7 July 1860 he attended the ceremonial dumping by Prince Alfred of the first load of rocks into the Bay during his royal visit. And as the work proceeded, Emmie, who was a little girl of twelve at the time, described how 'Everyday as children, we walked with Papa down there and watched the work. . . Papa was so full of the idea that he got Betty [Emmie's elder

²⁵ How far this portrait of Hercules is based on evidence, as opposed to the author's own interpretation and imagination, is not clear.

sister] to make a drawing, as he thought it ought to be, and had it framed, and it is still hanging in the room he used to occupy.’²⁶

No sooner had the breakwater been built than Hercules took up the cause of adding a dry dock so that major ship repairs could also be done in Cape Town. On 3 February 1862, he wrote to John Molteno, who was in England at the time, that the Harbour Board had agreed to commission the consulting engineer, Sir John Goode, who had designed the breakwater, to prepare the plans. Almost ten years later, he was overjoyed to get the news that the British Treasury had at last been persuaded to contribute ‘£30,000 for the Table Bay Graving Dock, on condition of its being 400 feet long, 70 feet wide and 25 feet deep’ – ie. a facility that could handle all the ships of that time.

Between 1854 and 1881, Hercules served 20 years on the various boards responsible for the management of the Cape Town harbour, always in an unpaid capacity. Indeed, as Emmie Jarvis wrote, ‘only when it was decided that they should be paid for their services, was a tremendous effort made by new people to come on the Board, and his name amongst others fell out. I suppose they would say new blood was required, but to me it looked very like “self and pelf”.’

Percy Alport marries Hercules Jarvis’s eldest daughter, Sophia

The eldest of Hercules and Maria Elizabeth’s daughters to survive into adulthood was Sophia, or Sophie. Born in 1828 and only sixteen, she was the first of the children to marry. A very young man, Percy Alport, had fetched up at the Cape. Although his parents were English and from London, they had emigrated to Nova Scotia in the early 19th century and Percy had been born there. James and Mary Alport, however, unlike most emigrants, decided to return to England around 1830. Young Percy came out to the Cape from England having spent a couple of years first in Madeira. Somehow he found his way into the hospitable home of the Jarvises where he met Sophie. They soon fell in love and were married two years later in 1846. ‘With small means but undaunted affection’, as their niece Caroline Murray described it, they settled into a little cottage on the slopes of the Lion’s Rump (now Signal Hill) just above her parents’ house in Somerset Road.²⁷

It was five years later in 1851 that Sophie’s sister, Elizabeth, married John Molteno from the Karoo. The two brothers-in-law hit it off at once and became lifelong friends.²⁸ Percy and Sophie moved to Beaufort West at the same time as John and Maria settled there, and ‘to the great joy and relief’ of Maria, made their home right next door. The two men started on a lifetime of business together. Sophie never had children of her own, possibly as a result of having had rheumatic fever when she was twelve.²⁹ But she ‘seemed born with all the gifts of creating a home and understanding the care of little children’. And her husband was an extraordinarily kind man and became the Molteno children’s ‘dearly loved Uncle’. Indeed for Betty and Caroline Molteno, the Alports became ‘like second parents, sharing all our interests’. The two families remained inseparable to the end of their lives.

²⁶ Emmie Jarvis to Percy Molteno, 27 June 1894.

²⁷ Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), ‘Early Recollections’.

²⁸ John Molteno appointed Percy Alport as the executor of his will in due course.

²⁹ Sophie Jarvis suffered from the ill-effects all her life.

Percy came to love the Cape so much that he began inviting relatives to join him. The first to come was his young nephew, Charles Augustus Alport. Born in 1843 he and his brother happened to be visiting some cousins in Canada at the time, and had gone on a fruitless adventure to make their fortune in the Yukon gold rush. Charles wanted to take up his uncle's invitation as soon as it arrived, but was in love with 16 year old Emily Bate of Nanaimo, Victoria, in British Columbia. In a great rush, he married her by special licence on 10 July 1873 and the two of them then dashed off across the Canadian prairies to take ship for the Cape. Emily's father set off in pursuit and caught up with them, but relented finally and allowed them to catch the next boat. When the couple got to Cape Town, they travelled up to Beaufort West to join Uncle Percy whose businesses were now well established. Charles and Emily's baby, Blanche Emily Alport, was born in the little village soon after their arrival in April 1874.

The next to arrive was Charles's brother, Arthur Alport, who had stayed behind in Vancouver. He also settled in Beaufort West where he married a local Dutch girl, Katherina Bantjes, in 1879. Two other nephews followed in the 1880s.³⁰

The interest of these anecdotes is how they are yet one more illustration of the common migrant story. One person ventures abroad and becomes the first to settle in some new country. If it works out, they then encourage other family members to join them. And as one would expect, the newcomers settle, at least at first, in the precise locality where they already have relatives. To this day there are still Alports in South Africa, some in Beaufort West.

The Cape of Good Hope to become a Penal Colony?

This issue had first arisen in 1841 when the British government proposed sending British people in India who had been convicted of serious offences, to the Cape to serve their prison sentences there. Having done their time on Robben Island, the bleak and wind-swept little island in Table Bay that became so notorious a political prison in the apartheid era, they were to be released to live out their lives in Cape Town. This early attempt to turn the Cape into a penal settlement like New South Wales was seen off as a result of widespread public protest.

But a few years later in 1848, the Government suddenly announced that it was going ahead with its plans in any case. This time it wanted to send people who had been sentenced to terms of imprisonment as a result of their involvement in political disturbances in the United Kingdom. Presumably these were Irish nationalists and, in England and Scotland, Chartists demanding the vote and a radical makeover of the British parliamentary system. The fact that they were in reality political offenders, not criminals, was explicitly referred to in a Petition the Commissioners and Wardmasters of Cape Town, signed on their behalf by Hercules Jarvis, sent to 'Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen' on 20 November 1848.

³⁰ These stories are told by Arthur's son, Arthur Cecil Alport, in his memoirs, *The House of the Curious*, Hutchinson & Co., c. 1930.

Dr. Immelman tells the dramatic story of how various prominent men in the Cape, led by the pioneering and courageous newspaper editor, John Fairbairn, and including Hercules who had just become Chairman of the Cape Town Board of Commissioners, took the lead and formed the Anti-Convict Association. They fought a relentless and uncompromising campaign, involving widespread public mobilisation – petitions, a mass meeting on the Grand Parade, and even threats to boycott employers who used convict labour.

It fell to Hercules, as Chairman of the Board, to be the front man signing the repeated letters of protest and petitions to the Governor and Queen Victoria herself. It was courageous of him to stand up to the British authorities so publicly for over a year.

Remarkable also was the alliance built between the tiny middle class of Cape Town and the population at large. On 31 May 1849, '38 of the leading commercial men and prominent citizens of Cape Town ... established the Anti-Convict Association', among them Hercules. A few weeks later a public meeting was organized to protest the decision to turn the Cape into a penal colony. Most shops closed in order to allow people to attend, including Hercules who announced that his premises would not open on the day. Some 5,000 to 7,000 people turned out. It was the largest public meeting ever held in the Colony. The respected businessman John Ebdon, who had been John Molteno's employer in the 1830s, presided. Hercules seconded a resolution praising the Governor and encouraging him to defy the 'imbecile anger' of the Secretary of State, Lord Grey. In the months that followed, he regularly attended meetings of the Anti-Convict Association and aligned himself with the more militant section that continued its boycott of the Cape Government and pledged not to employ any convicts that might be landed until the British Cabinet reversed its position.

The arguments put forward objecting to the Cape becoming a penal settlement are politically rather significant. In the petition to the Queen, the following points were made:

The labouring population of the Cape consists chiefly of Emancipated slaves and their children, between 30 and 40 thousand in number; Natives of Southern Africa, Hottentots, Bushmen, Fingoes and others generally in low states of civilisation; and Prize Negroes and Liberated Africans, found in vessels unlawfully employed in the African Slave Trade, and captured by British cruisers;

Amidst this assemblage of poor ignorant people, drawn suddenly and forcibly from all the barbarous and savage tribes of the African Continent and Islands, [Your] Memorialists have seen with much satisfaction the progress of knowledge and good conduct springing evidently from the influences of regular government, the impartial administration of justice, the example of the Christian churches, the labours of the Missionaries, our excellent Public and Charitable Institutions for the Education of all classes, *without distinction of rank or colour*, and from the efforts of individuals in their families, to instruct and enlighten their simpleminded domestics in moral and religious duty;

... Cape Society, instead of the promising appearance it at present exhibits, would have sunk into a depth of vice and misery ..., had this heterogeneous and impressible mass of ignorance and simplicity been exposed to the teaching and example of depraved associates from the jails of corrupt cities in Europe;

...Dangerous and fatal to the morals, industry, civil obedience, and very existence of the native population of southern Africa as would be the introduction of adult convicts from Great Britain ...

While thus endeavouring to protect the labouring classes of this community from so great an injury, [Your] Memorialists regret that the Right Hon. the Secretary for the Colonies should have thus dealt with the most vital domestic and personal interests of the Colonists, without communicating his designs to the Executive Council of Government, or to the Legislative Council of the Cape of Good Hope.

This explanation of why the Cape Colony did not want to have thousands of convicts – ‘the depraved associates from the jails’ of Britain – dumped on it throws light on an emerging consensus among the Cape’s inhabitants of European origin. The petition had nothing in common with the kind of ‘Swart gevaar’ (Black danger) rallying cry that dominated ‘white politics’ in South Africa in the next century. Quite the opposite. The danger perceived was what impact the dregs of society in Europe might have on the ethnically diverse population of the Cape. The Petition articulated an optimism that a common society was successfully emerging at the Cape, albeit on the assumption that it would be on terms set by European culture. It explicitly asserted equal treatment of people ‘without distinction of rank or colour’. These attitudes had a huge impact on the form self-government at the Cape took a few years later, as we will see.

As for the outcome of the anti-convict agitation, eventually in early 1850, as the first convict ship, *Neptune*, still lay at anchor in Simon’s Bay – where it had been ever since the preceding September – the British government gave in and ordered the vessel to sail on to New South Wales. It was a decisive victory.

Unexpected Arrivals and Departures, 1850-52 – The Blenkins story

No sooner had Hercules played his part in seeing off the danger of convicts being dumped on his ‘adopted motherland’, as he called the Cape, than a ship from India came into Table Bay in April 1850 carrying a Major William Bazett Goodwin Blenkins and two small girls.³¹

Like Hercules’ elder brother, Blenkins was an army officer in the employ of the English East India Company. This indicated a different social background from officers in the British Army who were almost all members of the upper classes – often younger sons who would not be inheriting the main family property but still commanded a certain independent income, and went into the Army for something to do. Those Englishmen, however, who wanted an army career but needed a proper income, chose the Company’s service; and they usually came from a less elevated social class. In Blenkins’ case, he had been born on the remote Atlantic island of St Helena in 1809; his mother,

³¹ In telling this story, I rely on Caroline Murray’s account in her *Reminiscences*, 1913, supplemented by the excellent detective work done by Craig Allan in tracking down genealogical details on the Internet. In addition, Patricia Greenway, a distant relative of Hercules Jarvis, shared with me the detailed research she had done into Major Blenkins and his family, as did Martin Twycross who examined the India Office records held in the British Library.

Mary Bazett, was a St Helenan (Bazett being a name peculiar to the island) and his father, George Blenkins, an employee of the Company. Until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, St Helena was an essential stopover for water and fresh supplies for all the Company's ships plying between Europe and the East.

William Blenkins, like his father, had married a local girl, Margaret Sampson, in 1834. Her father was an Irishman who had run away from home, taken the name of Sampson, and landed up at the age of 16 or 17 on St Helena where he had signed up in the Company's St Helena Regiment. He had subsequently fought, and been severely wounded, in the Battle of Muizenberg when Britain first seized the Cape from the Dutch East India Company.³² Twenty years later and back home in St Helena he was one of the soldiers guarding Napoleon during his exile there after 1815. This is how his granddaughter, Minnie (later to become Lady Molteno), possessed 'a fruit service of many pieces which had belonged to Napoleon [and which] had a border of ivy leaves and was specially designed and made by Wedgwood for Napoleon.' Minnie related how it had been purchased by her grandfather at the sale of Napoleon's effects following his death on the island. Unfortunately it was lost when her house burned down at the Cape.³³

Minnie's father, Major Blenkins, was serving in the 6th BNI (presumably the Bombay Native Infantry) where he had won some renown for efficiently provisioning the Company's troops stationed at 'Khurachee' (Karachi), having saved many of them from death by disease or scurvy as a result of the big regimental vegetable garden he developed. His commanding officer, General Sir Charles Napier, described the situation. 'When I first landed at Kurrachee, there was bad bread and bad meat, and not a vegetable could be had; a board of medical men reported that six out of every seven men of the 22 Regiment were infected with scurvy.' He went on to relate how he brought his commissar, Blenkins, down from Hydrabad (sic). He was 'one of those Robinson Crusoe fellows gifted with the power of turning a wilderness into a paradise.... In two months he had a magnificent garden which supplied the whole army with vegetables.'³⁴

Because of this achievement, Blenkins was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath in 1843; the Gazette entry stating that he had 'displayed activity and zeal' in his commissariat duties and on the battlefield.³⁵ An original oil painting of him in full dress uniform, following this honour, survives to this day.³⁶

A few years after receiving this award and now in his early 40s, he decided to take home leave. He and Margaret, and their three children (their tiny baby, Sarah, was born only five days before their departure) boarded ship in Bombay on 7 February 1850 bound for England via the Cape. But tragedy struck. The little baby died six weeks into the voyage on 21 March and was buried at sea. Margaret died too, for Major Blenkins arrived in Cape Town, a widower, and with only his two small daughters and an Indian Ayah in tow.

What could he do? He had no relatives in Cape Town with whom he might leave the children. India in the age before modern medicine and hygiene was quite literally a deadly place for Europeans.

³² Notes made by Rev. S. J. Twycross after a visit to St Helena, c. 1998.

³³ Information from Eric Rosenthal to Kathleen Murray, 17 June 1959.

³⁴ William Francis, *The Life and Opinions of General Sir Charles James Napier, G.C.B.*, 1854, pp. 280-1.

³⁵ *The London Gazette*, 4 July 1843. Further details supplied by Martin Twycross.

³⁶ In the possession of a descendant of Hercules Jarvis, MacEoin Bisset, Cape Town.

Blenkins seems to have resolved that the only solution was to find a new wife, and immediately. In any case, 16 weeks later, on 18 July 1850, he and 17-year old Annie Jarvis, who was less than half his age, were married by Special Licence in the Dutch Reformed Church in Cape Town, and sailed back to India.³⁷ Their first son, Bazett Jarvis Blenkins, was born 11 months later on 20 June 1851 in Rajkot in Gujarat. A year after that, on 12 June 1852, death struck once more: Major Blenkins himself died. Annie was heavily pregnant again; her second son, William Bazett Blenkins, was born just a month after his father's death.

What was Annie to do? She was only nineteen. Marooned in a country where she had been only two years, a country moreover where disease or other illness had already taken her husband, his first wife, and one of their children. Responsible now for her own two baby sons and two stepdaughters – Minnie aged six and her younger sister Margaret.³⁸ [POSSIBLE CONFUSION HERE I MUST SORT OUT – Footnote 38 says Minnie had an older sister called Mary Rosina Blenkins. ie I CONTRADICT MYSELF HERE] With no means of support. Annie took the only course of action she could, taking ship for Cape Town and arriving in late 1852, little more than two years after she had departed. The first her parents heard of what had happened was when a ship sailed into Table Bay and a letter from the Captain arrived, informing them that he had their widowed daughter on board with her children and their nanny.³⁹ Annie and all the children were welcomed into her parents' home. Fortunately Hercules was a prosperous man and the house a spacious one.

Annie never remarried. And misfortune continued to afflict her. Her stepdaughter, Margaret Blenkins, grew up in Cape Town, but developed some kind of wasting disease, probably TB, in her late teens. She died in 1862 at the age of 18 on the very day that had been set for her wedding to Christian Watermeyer.⁴⁰ Bazett Blenkins, Annie's son, went off as a young man a few years later in 1874 to try and make his fortune in South Africa's first gold rush, but was killed in a rockfall at Pilgrim's Rest.

His younger brother, Willie, wanted right from boyhood to pursue a military career, like his father, and set his sights on getting into Sandhurst, the British Army's prestigious officer training institution. Annie arranged for him to go to London in 1868 for coaching by Mr Bingle at his school in Richmond, but after a year of trying Mr Bingle had to admit defeat and tell Annie that Willie simply would not be able to pass the necessary exams. Willie returned to Cape Town and in 1871 at the age of nineteen got into the Cape civil service. Things turned out well and he had a most interesting life, mainly as a magistrate in various districts of the Cape. From time to time, he was appointed to various other posts, including Special Commissioner to the Transkeian tribes in 1875, Acting Chief of Police in Cape Town, and Special Commissioner on Agricultural Distress in the Northern Districts of the Cape during the Boer War in 1899. On retirement, he took a slow boat along the African Coast on the eve of the First World War, and wrote a fascinating account of putting in at various tiny ports in Angola and West Africa on the way to Europe.⁴¹ This trip was in the wake of his mother, Annie's,

³⁷ *South African Commercial Advertiser*, 20 July 1850.

³⁸ Sobella (or Sibylla) Maria 'Minnie' Blenkins had been born on 8 June 1847 in India. She had also a much older sister, Mary (also called Margaret) Rosina Blenkins, who had been born in Surat in 1835 and was only two years younger than her father's second wife, Annie Jarvis. Mary Rosina was 17 at the time her father died, and seems not to have come with Annie and settled in Cape Town. She married Stephen Jervis Twycross.

³⁹ Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 'Reminiscences of the old Cape', op. cit.

⁴⁰ Phillida Brooke Simons, *Apples of the Sun*, op. cit., p.23.

⁴¹ See his account, *Chronicle of the Family*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Aug. 1914.

death in that same year, 1914. She had always been, Percy Molteno wrote, 'such an institution and such a source of love and thoughtfulness.... A real Christian character in all its best meaning – charity, kindness, hospitality, kind thoughts to all.'⁴²

Aunts Sophia and Georgiana arrive from Hong Kong

The year before Annie's return to Cape Town, there had already been an unexpected addition to the Jarvis household. Hercules had had older two sisters. One of them, Sophia, had married Nicolai Duus, who became a merchant in Hong Kong, and the Danish consul there, in the 1830s. Sophia's unmarried sister, Georgiana Jarvis (called Georgina), was living with them. Sophia's sons, Edward and John Duus, were born and grew up there.⁴³ This was at a time when Japan was still closed to contact with Europe and the United States. But the Western powers were already successfully compelling the Imperial Chinese government to let them set up trading enclaves in various ports along the coast.

Although the huge distances involved meant there had been no face to face contact between Hercules and his sisters, there had been, as Caroline Murray recalled, 'constant pleasant reminders of their existence in the shape of presents; no ship arrived from China without bringing Grandmama boxes of tea, of preserved ginger, chow-chow, and our favourite little preserved oranges – also cabinets, ornaments and all kinds of interesting and pretty things'.⁴⁴

When her husband, Nicolai Duus, died, Sophia decided to leave Hong Kong and, with her two boys and Georgina, set off for the Cape to join their brother Hercules. 'But as there was no way of letting Grandpapa know, it was a complete surprise when one day a cab drove up to the gate at Somerset Road and the two little old ladies stepped out and walked up the garden path to the door.' They arrived in 1851 just before John Molteno and Maria Jarvis got married.⁴⁵

Hercules and his wife, Elizabeth Maria, made them welcome and, accompanied by their 'precious Eastern carpets' and 'camphor wood chests and numerous belongings, [installed them] in a room that seemed made for them, called the Long Room ... that opened just off the dining-hall. Inexhaustible treasures seemed to be stored there and when we would be seized with a craze for 'dressing-up' or making tableaux, Aunt Georgina would dazzle us with the wonderful satin dresses, jewellery, etc., which she would produce and in which we delighted to deck one another.... Amongst the treasures the aunts brought with them from China were some very beautiful things from the Palace at Pekin – carved ebony tables and chairs and a tall vase of most wonderful workmanship and colouring, said to be hundreds of years old.'

Sophia died a few months after her arriving, but Georgina became a permanent member of the Jarvis family. Her niece, Emmie, remembered her as intelligent, well read, and 'having been about so much [geographically], full of information'. She died in 1873.

⁴² Percy Molteno to Betty Molteno, 6 March 1914.

⁴³ Emmie Jarvis to Percy Molteno, 27 June 1894. Emma recalls that both men returned to the Far East, Edward as a businessman in Shanghai and John eventually in Japan.

⁴⁴ Caroline Murray's *Reminiscences of the Old Cape*, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Emmie Jarvis remembered the date of their arrival in Cape Town incorrectly as 1853.

The Struggle for Representative Government – Jarvis takes the lead

The anti-convict struggle had taught the people of the Cape two important lessons. One, that the British government would often put its own interests ahead of the needs and wishes of the Colony's inhabitants; the other that those living there could on occasion take on the Imperial Government and win. These lessons inspired the next political struggle Hercules involved himself in – the Cape colonists' efforts to win a measure of self-government in the 1840s and early 1850s.

From today's perspective, Britain's decision, following the Second World War, not to use its armed might in order to retain its colonies in Asia and Africa – unlike France, the Netherlands and Portugal's attempts to do so – can make it appear as though Britain had always been willing to accede to its colonial subjects' demands for self-government. But as its war with the American colonies in the 1780s had already shown, things were not that clear-cut in the 19th century. At the Cape it took many years of argument, petitions, pressure, and playing off the alleged commitment of Queen Victoria to listen to her 'loyal colonial subjects' even when they were trying to stop the British Government backtracking on earlier commitments to self-government. This was the process in which Hercules now played a prominent part.

Persuading the British Government to agree to representative government took many years. It started long before the anti-convict agitation. But the role Hercules played was similar in both campaigns and grew out of his chairmanship of the Board of Commissioners.⁴⁶ In late 1848 he signed the Board's petition 'praying for a voice in the management of their own affairs' which the Governor sent on to the Secretary of State for Colonies.⁴⁷ A year later, in January 1850, a committee of the House of Lords reported favourably on the draft constitution for the Cape that an official, William Porter, the Cape's Attorney General, had drawn up. But the Government continued to drag its feet. In response, a public meeting was eventually held on 8 October 1852 in the Town House which chose a committee, of which Hercules was a member, to draw up yet another petition. A few weeks later it became even clearer that London would still not concede any measure of self-government. Hercules called a special meeting of the Board on 3 November which criticised the further postponement in no uncertain terms: 'This Board considers such a course extremely injudicious and pregnant with the most serious consequences, as calculated to cause a great irritation amongst the Coloured classes, and to create discontent, excitement and alarm in the minds of Her Majesty's other well-disposed subjects.'

A general agitation ensued throughout the Colony, and only with a change of administration in London was the draft constitution ratified on 11 March 1853 and came into effect.

Even with this concession that the Cape legislature would in future be elected, executive power, largely unaccountable to Parliament, still remained in the Governor's hands. And the Imperial Government often proved itself tempted not to respect local political opinion. It retained the right to station its own troops in the Cape Colony. It insisted on these troops playing the leading role, as John Molteno found out during the 1846 Frontier War, in the succession of wars against the Xhosa-

⁴⁶ Dr R. F. M. Immelman tells the story in considerable detail in his draft biography of Jarvis.

⁴⁷ P. A. Molteno, *The Life and Times*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p.59.

speaking tribes who were resisting the encroachments of land-hungry British settlers in the Eastern districts of the colony. Nor did it allow the Cape administration to determine what its relations should be with the new Boer republics that emerged in the wake of the Great Trek.

‘The Coloured Portion of Your Majesty’s Subjects’ and ‘The Privileges of Free Representation’

The reference by Cape Town’s Board of Commissioners in its proceedings to ‘a great irritation amongst the Coloured classes’ pointed to the other important issue that had arisen, namely who should be able to vote for the new Cape Parliament. At this point in history there was no question of a universal franchise either in Britain or any of its colonies. But the British Government also opposed the breadth of franchise which the Cape’s political leaders regarded as both just and fundamental to good governance. Hercules and his colleagues rejected London’s desire for very restrictive voting qualifications which would exclude the ‘Coloured’ population (meaning South Africans of colour generally). They made clear this was unacceptable. Hercules put it in these terms: ‘Is taxation without representation lawful? Or is it in the spirit of, or in accordance with, the principles of the British Commonwealth?’ And he put forward a motion that explained in unequivocal terms what was at stake over the franchise:

That this Board wholly repudiates any distinction for political purposes, as between the British, Dutch, and Coloured portions of Her Majesty's loyal subjects....

In the Colony Proper, excluding British Kaffraria Victoria, Tambookie country, there were in 1850 about 77,000 Coloured inhabitants, of whom at least 49,000 were Residents in the Western Districts, a large comparative proportion of whom had fought and bled for their Sovereign during the present war,⁴⁸ and whose loyalty remains unimpeached...

This Board is also satisfied, notwithstanding the assertions of a small but malicious faction opposed to the Coloured classes generally ... that at no time during this wicked rebellion on the frontier, did the rebels, out of a Coloured population of 28,000 persons, scattered along a wide border, and in daily contact with the Kaffirs, much exceed 1,000 in number...

This struggle over how wide the franchise in the Cape should be went to the heart of what kind of political future the Colony would have. On the one side, most the Cape’s leaders – English and Dutch, but entirely of European origin at this date – wanted franchise qualifications set low enough to give the vote to a large swathe of the population regardless of where they came from or their colour. On the other side was a British Government which had only quite recently conceded the 1832 Reform Act which had given a narrow extension of the franchise to its own people. The Act had been a very tardy response to the hopes of democracy prompted by the French Revolution and the radical shift of economic and financial power away from the landed aristocracy to Britain’s new industrial and trading classes. The Act extended the franchise, however, to a much narrower stratum of people in Britain than Hercules and his colleagues were demanding for the population of the Cape. Both sides took it for granted that all women should be excluded, and that only men with a

⁴⁸ The 8th Frontier War that broke out in 1850.

certain level of income or occupation of property were to qualify for the vote. The Cape's constitution set this at a minimum income of £50 a year (or half that sum if board and lodging were provided), or occupying a property worth at least £25.⁴⁹ No minimum educational standard was required, in part because the great majority of the Cape's inhabitants had had little or no formal schooling.

What is fascinating is that the leaders of the Cape political community succeeded in getting the Imperial Government to accept this much wider franchise. The petition of the Cape Town Board of Commissioners, signed by Hercules Jarvis on 12 March 1852, had explicitly objected to the exclusion of 'the Coloured portion of Your Majesty's subjects' from 'the privileges of free representation'. For Hercules to espouse this position is all the more remarkable, given the fact that, for the first 20 years of his life at the Cape, slavery had still been lawful and most employees of colour had been slaves.

Hercules elected to the Cape's first Parliament

The elections that followed give a fascinating picture of how Hercules was regarded in Cape Town and the political platform he stood on. The new Cape Parliament had two houses, like the British Parliament on which it was modelled. Hercules decided to stand for the less powerful upper chamber called the Legislative Council. A Committee was formed in August 1853 to secure his election. Its Secretary was P. H. Woutersen and when one looks at the surnames of its other members – Berning, Louw, Blore, de Jongh, Daneel, van Breda – one sees how rooted Hercules was in the still preponderant Dutch section of the Cape Town community. He was standing for the Western Province division but failed narrowly to be elected, perhaps because he was less well-known in the rural areas outside Cape Town.

He then decided to stand in the elections that followed for the more influential lower chamber, the House of Assembly. Here there were more seats and constituencies much smaller. Hercules stood for Cape Town and Green Point which comprised just the town and that part of the Cape Peninsula where it was situated. A more serious effort was mounted to make sure he was elected. Over 50 people, most of them well-known names, formed his Committee. It was five times the size of most of the other candidates.⁵⁰ It issued a public statement on 10 April 1854 explaining why they supported Hercules' candidacy: 'For a long time we have witnessed your zeal and energy in promulgating useful measures towards improving this city and harbour, and your constant readiness to lend your time and personal services to public affairs, with a most liberal spirit. We have also appreciated your independent and fearless attitude, first, at a time when the Colony itself, and later the Constitution, now safe, were imperilled'

⁴⁹ T. R. H. Davenport and C. Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History*, Macmillan Press, 2000, p. 104. These qualifications excluded most, but not all, farm labourers like John Molteno's shepherds. In Britain farm workers were only enfranchised in 1884.

⁵⁰ This account of the election relies entirely on Immelman's draft biography.

At the formal nomination process that took place in the Old Supreme Court, Mr Christoffel Brand⁵¹ proposed Hercules and spoke of how ‘the public know with what energy and zeal he has applied himself to promote the welfare of the inhabitants in that capacity [as Chairman of Cape Town’s Board of Commissioners]. He is a merchant, and a member of a mercantile house that has been long engaged in the trade of the Colony He has shown his warm interest in everything that tends to the improvement of the port..... In our various local institutions, we have always found him ready to afford his services for the public benefit.’

The Editor of the *Commercial Advertiser*, John Fairbairn, who was one of the main leaders in the struggle for freedom of the press at the Cape, enthusiastically seconded his nomination. He pointed out that Hercules ‘By his long residence among you, and by the public offices he has filled, by the election of his fellow citizens, often repeated, is sufficiently known to all. He has been many times weighed and never found wanting.’

Hercules replied and made his radical political platform abundantly clear. He spoke of his commitment to ‘the future government of ourselves on liberal and enlightened principles’. ‘I hold that every class of our community should be fairly and equally represented.’ He presented a very modern-sounding programme of development: ‘our Harbour, Roads and Public Works should meet due attention; the Electric Telegraph and Railroads should be encouraged; ... extended powers should be conceded to Municipal Institutions; [and] that the due development of our mineral and other resources ... should be prosecuted.’

He then went on to address the Malay section of his supporters:

‘I cannot conclude, however, without publicly expressing my thanks to some of my fellow citizens, who do not generally take part in our proceedings, and of whom I am happy to see so many in our midst. I allude to the imposing array of Malay priests [sic], who have so much influence among their adherents, and who I feel assured are here today to give me their support. I will only say that it will ever be my wish to support them in anything they may wish to bring forward in the future Parliament, should I have an opportunity of doing so. [Cheers and murmurs.]’

The sizeable Cape Malay community (Muslim by faith, Javanese by origin, and now largely Dutch by language) was an important part of the Cape Town community, and hence of the new electorate. It is fascinating to see its religious leaders involving themselves in these first elections, and Hercules singling them out and thanking them for their political support.

The polls closed at 5pm on the Saturday. Great excitement attended the declaration. The court room was ‘crowded to excess’ and ‘the upper part of Adderley and Bureau Streets leading to it were filled by hundreds of those who could not obtain admittance.’⁵²

Hercules Jarvis and Saul Solomon narrowly headed the poll with 1,848 and 1,803 votes each out of just over 8,000 votes cast. Meanwhile, hundreds of miles away in the Karoo, John Molteno was also

⁵¹ C. J. Brand, a lawyer, was elected Speaker at the opening of the first Parliament and remained in the post until 1874. He became a close friend of John Molteno. His son, J. H. Brand, later became President of the Orange Free State.

⁵² *Commercial Advertiser*, 16 May 1854.

elected. In this way, the new 25 member Parliament⁵³ contained from the beginning a band of elected representatives who were actively committed to a non-racial society and who set about holding the Governor's administration of the Colony to account, demanding more active measures of socio-economic development, and pressing for full self-government with executive authority also in the hands of the elected MPs, what was called 'responsible government'.

Hercules served in the Assembly only one term. In 1858, he chose to stand for, and was elected to, the upper house, the Legislative Council. In the early 1860s, although no longer Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, he continued to play some role in politics, notably in the growing demand for full self-government. By this time, John Molteno was very much in the lead, but Hercules worked with him closely in support of his efforts. So in 1860-61, during John and his family's extended trip to Europe, Hercules kept him regularly up-to-date with political events at the Cape – see his lengthy 8-page letter to him on 20 September 1861 (signed, incidentally, 'With very kindest love and remembrance to you all.')

This was only one of a number of letters Hercules wrote John at this time, in addition to having given him letters of introduction to various people in England.

A new son in law, James Bisset, 1862

By the beginning of the 1860s three of Hercules and Maria Elizabeth's five daughters had married – Sophy Alport, Maria Molteno and Annie Blenkins (but now widowed). In December 1858 a party of engineers arrived from Britain to build the Colony's first railways, a 55 mile long Cape Town to Wellington line, and a short suburban line from Cape Town to Wynberg. Among the party was a young Scottish engineer, James Bisset. He and Betty Jarvis (Elizabeth Magdalena Christina, to give her full names) met and married in 1862, the service taking place, as with all the Jarvis girls, in Die Groote Kerk at the top of Adderley Street. Their marriage was the start of yet another branch of Jarvis descendants, second only in number to the Moltenos and one that would lead to a web of relationships between Bisset and Molteno cousins in future generations.

James Bisset was a product of the new technological age that was taking hold in the 19th century. The son of a local City Councillor in Aberdeen, he was born in 1836 on the eve of the railway era. He moved south from Scotland and began his engineering training at London University in 1853. He joined the famous engineering firm of Fox, Henderson & Co. of Birmingham and London as an Assistant Engineer and was put in charge of works at the new Crystal Palace Sydenham Station. He did various other projects in England, and then moved to the Continent to work on bridges for the Swedish Government and railways in Switzerland and Italy.⁵⁴

On completion of the Cape Town to Wellington railway, James started his own business, what today would be called a professional practice, as an engineer and architect. Interestingly, there was no clear line of distinction then between the two professions, and James designed and constructed all sorts of things from roads, mills and buildings for other kinds of machinery, as well as churches, notably the Dutch Reformed Church in Graaff Reinet and rebuilding the DRC Church in Beaufort West, and a Town Hall for Port Elizabeth.

⁵³ The Western Province of the colony had 15 Members of Parliament, of whom 8 were Dutch, and the Eastern Province 10, of whom 4 were Dutch. *Graaff Reinet Herald*, 21 December 1853.

⁵⁴ James Bisset, Justice of the Peace, Member Institute of Civil Engineering, 'Memoir', 5 pp., written in 1913. UCT Archives, BC 601, Box 3.

He had a long and distinguished career, including a spell as Harbour Engineer in Port Elizabeth and then being made responsible for the construction of several Eastern Cape railway lines in the 1870s during the time his brother-in-law, John Molteno, was Prime Minister and spearheading a huge programme of railway construction. When he retired professionally, he threw himself, like his father in law, Hercules, before him, into various civic roles. He became a member and Chairman of Hospital, School and Municipal Water Boards, as well as Mayor of the Wynberg and Claremont Municipality in 1886.

He and Betty had six sons and one daughter; four of the boys became barristers or attorneys, and two government land surveyors. Their most famous son was Murray Bisset who was born in 1876. He played international cricket for South Africa, fought in the Boer War, became a lawyer, got elected as a Member of Parliament for the South Peninsula in 1915 and, after retiring on health grounds, was made Chief Justice of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1927, and knighted.

The failure of Hercules' business, 1864

Hercules was 62 when the year 1864 turned into a traumatic turning point in his life. His wife of 40 years standing, Elizabeth Maria, died; she was only 57 and Hercules remained a widower for the rest of his life. His wine business collapsed in the same year. And their beloved home on Somerset Road, from where he had looked out over Cape Town and Table Bay for so many years, had to be sold lock, stock and barrel. He withdrew from political involvement in the Legislative Council. And while not plunged into outright poverty, he was no longer an affluent man and depended henceforth in part on the generosity of his sons in law. Although he lived another 25 years and was looked after devotedly by his youngest daughter, Emmie, who did not marry as a consequence, he never regained his commercial confidence, prosperity or political pre-eminence.

Years later Emmie explained to her nephew, Percy Molteno, what had happened to her father in the wake of his bankruptcy:⁵⁵

‘I was only 17 when his active or business, and political, life was brought to a close by his failure in business. At the time worry had brought on such a serious illness (the effect of which he never quite lost and from which he died eventually) that your father [John Molteno] and others thought he must not take up business again . . . I think [that] a great mistake. At the time I was too young and Grandpa too ill for me to question it . . . I think he was quite able afterwards to do work again for we have an instance of that when he undertook the management of the Manganese mine...’⁵⁶

Dr Immelman explained the probable cause of Hercules' firm going under: ‘The export of wine continued to be the main export of the country until the heavy duties put on wines of considerable alcoholic strength differentiated so severely against the wines of the Cape, which were strong as compared with the lighter wines of France and the Continent, that the export ceased almost entirely.’⁵⁷ While we do not know the precise nature of the financial difficulties Hercules got into,

⁵⁵ Emmie Jarvis to her nephew, Percy Molteno, 27 June 1894.

⁵⁶ Situated at Paarl, near du Toit's Kloof, in the 1870s. References to this mine occur in his Journal.

⁵⁷ In his unpublished draft biography of Hercules Jarvis. UCT Archives.

the collapse of the wine trade must have been at the heart of them. Certainly this is what he believed; Emmie wrote: 'In '64 Grandpapa failed in business. His business troubles he attributed to Mr Gladstone raising the duty to two shillings and sixpence, ... so the cheaper duty on French and Continental wines made our Cape wine nowhere, impossible to compete with the Continental ones.'⁵⁸

In 1868 Hercules left Cape Town which had been the site of his humiliation and went and lived in England for three years. The family party included his only surviving sister, Georgiana Jarvis; two of his daughters – Emmie, who was now in her early 20s, and Annie Blenkins, who been widowed nearly 20 years earlier and had not remarried; and Annie's step-daughter, Minnie Blenkins. They were accompanied by a servant, Sarah Peper.⁵⁹

While in Britain, he spent some of his time lobbying the government to alter its tariffs on wine by levying a uniform one shilling a gallon tariff irrespective of alcohol content, a measure which would have created a level playing field for Cape wines to compete with its Continental rivals. But Gladstone, the Prime Minister, got an official to write to Hercules from Downing Street on 30 August 1869 rejecting the proposal, not on the grounds that stronger wines might increase drunkenness, but because of 'the risk which such a measure would occasion to the important revenue to be derived from spirits'.⁶⁰

Hercules' last years

On returning to the Cape in 1871, Hercules and Emmie lived first near John Molteno's home at Claremont House for about 18 months, and then moved to nearby Wynberg where they stayed for the next six years. Roundabout 1880 his eldest daughter, Sophy Alport, got ill. Hercules and Emmie moved in with her and her husband, Percy Alport, at their home Beaufort Villa in Kenilworth, in order to help nurse her. There they stayed until Hercules' own death on 8 February 1889. He was 86 and was buried in the same churchyard (St Saviour's) where his son-in-law, John Molteno, had been laid to rest three years before.

'Lest we forget'

By the time of his death, Hercules had become a largely forgotten figure. Almost no one remembered the leading role he had played in the two seminal political struggles with the British government in the 1840s and '50s, the outcome of which fundamentally shaped the history of the Cape Colony for the rest of the 19th century.

One man who did remember his extraordinary record of public service, however, was Charles A. Fairbridge, a well-known Cape Town lawyer:

⁵⁸ Emmie Jarvis to Percy Molteno, 4 July 1894.

⁵⁹ Records in the English census of 1871.

⁶⁰ C. Rivers Wilson to Hercules Jarvis, 30 August 1869.

‘For more than half a century Mr. Jarvis was perhaps the best known and most energetic citizen of Cape Town. He was a zealous supporter of municipal institutions and for many years in succession a most efficient Chairman of the Municipality of Cape Town. He was also an ardent supporter of measures adopted to make Table Bay a safe harbour, to opening our mountain passes and introducing railways and tramways. And finally, he was strenuous in his endeavours to secure parliamentary institutions to the Colony.’

Another well-known citizen of Cape Town, J. C. Silberbauer, who had been a personal friend of Hercules Jarvis, wrote:

‘None may know, except those who were his associates, what years of labour he devoted for the cause of the people of this land. When tyranny was still strong and military law often superseding the legal tribunals, his life and liberty were often in great peril. Few are now alive to know this. New generations have sprung up [who] care little about ‘ancient history’ or how ‘the rights they now enjoy were fought out by their predecessors.’⁶¹

The same can be said of younger people in every generation. Yet without remembering the past, we are at sea in coping with the present. And to know about the qualities and actions of those who have gone before can prevent us perhaps from making similar mistakes, or at least give us inspiration in how to lead our own lives. Hercules Jarvis may be the forgotten ancestor of his many Molteno and Bisset descendants,⁶² but his memory deserves to be recovered.

The example Hercules Jarvis set John Molteno

It is also important to recognise how crucial was the example Hercules set John Molteno. Only a dozen years separated them in age. Both men had succeeded in becoming reasonably prosperous at the time of John’s marriage to Hercules’ daughter, Maria, in 1851. But Hercules was by far the better known of the two at that time, being at the height of his powers as Chairman of Cape Town’s Board of Commissioners and a prominent leader in both the recently successful anti-convict struggle and the continuing demand for representative government.

There can be little doubt that John, who had been away farming in the remote Karoo for the previous decade, learned much of his politics from his father-in-law. At all times between 1851 and 1866 Hercules supported and assisted his son in law to the best of his ability. Even in old age, he wrote frequently to John, keeping him abreast of developments.⁶³ John came to share many of

⁶¹ J. C. Silberbauer to Percy Molteno, grandson of Hercules Jarvis, June 1895. His reference to Hercules’ ‘life and liberty’ being in peril may refer to the dangers attendant on clashing publicly and repeatedly with the British authorities.

⁶² Hercules had 18 grandchildren – two boys, Bazett and Willie from Annie’s marriage to Major Blenkins in 1850; seven boys and three girls from Maria’s marriage to John Molteno in 1851; and five boys and one girl from Betty’s marriage to James Bisset in 1862. In the next generation, this huge extended family grew even larger; Hercules lived long enough to know several of his great grandchildren.

⁶³ In the years 1868-78, for example, when he was in frequent touch with the former Governor, Sir George Grey, Hercules’ Journal records their discussions in London, usually noting tersely ‘wrote Molteno’. Both John and Hercules greatly admired Grey for his advocacy of self-government, ‘fair and firm dealings with all races’, the development of natural resources and the provision of educational and cultural facilities. R. F. M. Immelman, *Sir John C. Molteno, 1914-1886, A Biographical Sketch*, unpublished, Ch. 5.

Hercules' political convictions. They were both actively committed to the social and economic development of the Cape Colony. They both believed in the urgent necessity of its people governing themselves rather than continuing to be subject to the imperial diktat of London. Both of them built their politics around a close and harmonious integration between English-speakers and Dutch-speakers, something that grew naturally out of their home life and their circle of friends and business colleagues. And, as we know of Hercules, his conception of the Cape community specifically incorporated the 'Coloured' population. Both he and John lived in an era before the conflictual rise of English jingoism and Afrikaner nationalism in the late 19th century, let alone the racism of most White South Africans towards all other South Africans of colour which dominated the country's 20th Century history.