

13. The Next Generation – growing up in the Cape

John Molteno's Last Years

John Molteno's last years after his final retirement from politics in 1882 passed quietly. He and Minnie, and their four little children, spent some time in England. They arrived from the Cape in March 1885 on what turned out to be his last trip and stayed initially at 41 Bernard Street, Russell Square with John's second eldest son, Percy Molteno, who had just finished at Cambridge. Percy was alarmed to find his father suffering from fainting fits (these increasingly frequent episodes had started the previous year) and rushed him off to see a London specialist.

Living in Percy's cramped flat did not work out – 'my father does not like small lodgings', Percy told his sister Caroline. So the family moved to Richmond where they could be near John's sister, Nancy Bingle, and then settled in a house in North London between Regents Park and Muswell Hill. But they soon moved again, the cost of London accommodation perhaps prompting this further move. By the summer they were living in Wales, and then spent some time in Ireland. But by the end of the year they were back in London and Percy felt his father had become tired of being so far removed from all the people and places he was familiar with.¹ He certainly seemed glad to have four of his grown up sons quite near him now, in addition to seeing quite a lot of Nancy. Percy had been called to the Bar at the Inner Temple and was trying to get established as a barrister. Victor had arrived in London in the middle of the year in order to cram in preparation for going up to Cambridge to study medicine in September. James had also come from the Cape to go to Cambridge where he was to study law, and accompanied by the youngest of the seven brothers, Barkly, who was now thirteen and going to be a Royal Navy cadet. They all had Christmas together, including Nancy, her husband and Eliza Bingle who had come over from Paris to join them. Despite this, John was not really happy in London. Early in the New Year, he was already planning to return to Cape Town accompanied by Minnie and the children, and by Percy who had decided to return home.

On arrival John settled at his beloved home, Claremont House, and there followed three joyful months. 'He was so very happy to be back among us,' Caroline wrote, 'and always looked so cheerful and gave us such a warm welcome. He had said to Lady Molteno [Minnie] several times lately that he had such a very happy satisfied feeling.' And it was there, as the first warm days of Spring arrived, that he slipped away very suddenly on 1 September 1886, having just arranged for £10 to be sent to Nancy in anticipation of Barkly spending his holidays with her in Richmond. Caroline, who with her superb memory and evocative way with words has left us with by far the most absorbing accounts of the family,² described what happened in a letter to Aunt Nancy giving her the news of her brother's death.

¹ Percy Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Murray), 13 Dec. 1885.

² My website, www.Moltenofamily.net, reproduces the wonderful wealth of recollections, autobiography and other materials so many members of the family, in particular the women, wrote in the period, 1860s to 1950s.

'He was very well that morning... and in particularly good spirits. He had got up earlier than usual that he might go with Frank to look at some ground a little distance off at the back of the house. There he spent a great part of the morning sitting under a tree watching Frank³ surveying the ground. Grandpapa [Jarvis] joined him there and talked to him for some time. He got home at about 12 o'clock and spoke to some of the workmen about the grounds before coming in to change his coat for midday dinner. Lady Molteno left him for a few minutes changing his clothes in his room and when she returned she found him lying down. He said he did not feel well and asked for some soup. But when she brought it, he could not take it, and after making an effort to take a little soda water and brandy, he went off immediately into a sort of heavy sleep from which he never awoke. He died at 9 o'clock that evening so quietly that it was just ceasing to breathe. Lady Molteno and Frank and I were in the room. Percy had just left for we had no idea that the end was so near, though the doctors had told us he might never awake. Death seemed to have been robbed of all its terrors in his case. There was no painful illness, no parting, no struggle; and even after death, not the usual painful look of death. He looked much younger and there was the old look of power in his face.'⁴

Maria also wrote to Aunt Nancy, 'I think if he could have chosen how to die, it could not have been better. It was such a peaceful end, no suffering and no pain of parting, just as if he had fallen asleep.'⁵

The funeral, for which Betty managed to get down just in time from Port Elizabeth where she was teaching, and Charlie from Beaufort West by train, took place the following Saturday at the nearby St Saviour's Church. It was entirely in keeping with their father's unostentatious way of life. 'The coffin was covered with the choicest and most lovely flowers and everything was done for him by those who had cared for him and knew him and whom he had been interested in. It was carried to the grave by the men of his own place and ours and Maria's. We had no hearse or processing coaches and I think everything was done as he would have liked best.'⁶

'The funeral arrangements were of the simplest character,' wrote the *Cape Times*.⁷ 'From the residence of the deceased gentleman to the cemetery, which is but a short distance, the coffin was borne on the shoulders of the male employees on the estate, while the mourners and friends followed on foot.' The eight pall bearers included several of John's oldest friends and colleagues – Sir J. H. de Villiers (whom he had appointed as the first South African-born Chief Justice of the Cape), Sir Thomas Scanlen (in whose Cabinet he had served his last stint of political service only four years earlier), the Hon. J. X. Merriman (the young man he had made a Minister), and Abercrombie Smith (whose appointment by him as Auditor General had proved so successful). The Right Rev. the Bishop of Cape Town and Sir David Tennant, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, were in the procession.

³ Frank Molteno had quite recently qualified as a land surveyor.

⁴ Caroline Murray (nee Molteno) to Nancy Bingle, 15 Sept. 1886.

⁵ Maria Anderson (nee Molteno) to Nancy Bingle, 8 Sept. 1886.

⁶ Caroline Murray (nee Murray) to Nancy Bingle, 15 Sept. 1886.

⁷ 5 Sept. 1886.

Minnie (Lady Molteno) was 'quite broken down with grief for she certainly made Papa the one centre of her life'.⁸ The mourners included his three daughters Betty, Caroline and Maria, and seven of his ten sons. The two oldest members of the family were also there – Hercules Jarvis, in his 80s, and Percy Alport, his brother-in-law and lifelong business partner. Also, of course, his two sons-in-law, Dr Murray and Tom Anderson.

Only Victor, James and Barkly – all in England – were not able to be present. Barkly happened to be spending his holidays with Aunt Nancy. In fact, the Bingles and he were in Kew Gardens on a lovely late summer's day reading peacefully when Aunt Nancy caught sight of the notice of her brother's death in the papers. One can only imagine what a great shock it must have been for the young boy, suddenly now parentless. As for James, he was away spending his summer vac travelling on the Continent. When he heard the news, he immediately worried about 'poor little Barkly. I wish I were with him' and lying under the trees somewhere in Germany, 'recalled so many of Papa's ways – his intense interest in all we did' and felt terribly homesick for the Cape.⁹ In another letter to Caroline two weeks later, he recalled how their father had gone to Kalk Bay shortly before he died; his going there 'was just like going to say goodbye.... I feel so very thankful that latterly he had been free from worry and seemed contented in doing things about the place.'¹⁰

The funeral service was 'full choral'. Before the Lessons were read, the congregation sang the hymn, 'A few more years shall roll, a few more seasons pass', and after the readings, 'Now the labourer's task is done'. And as his body was borne from the church, the organist rang out The Dead March from Handel's oratorio, *Saul*. The coffin was of plain teak. Its brass plate simply bearing the inscription: 'Sir John Charles Molteno Born 5 June 1814 Died 1 September 1886'. And on the lid amid all the other flowers there now lay 'a wreath of rare beauty', consisting of '150 white azaleas, a number of banksias and other roses, together with white stocks and maiden-hair fern' from his lifelong political comrade in arms, Saul Solomon, whose deep commitment to non-racialism he had shared.

So passed this ancestor from whom all the Moltenos in South Africa, and Murrays related to them, are descended. A man who spent 'a strenuous life for 72 years, most of which was given in unsparing aid of the public affairs of his adopted country.'¹¹ He was 'indeed the most representative man that the country had yet produced, whose name will ever be associated with the history of the Colony; his public career may always serve as a model for men, possibly possessed of more superficial brilliance, but you will never outshine him in the sterling qualities of political honesty, sound judgement and common sense.'¹² And in his son Percy's words, 'His death was the occasion of a

⁸ Caroline Murray's words.

⁹ James Molteno to Caroline Murray, 11 Sep 1886.

¹⁰ James Molteno to Caroline Murray, 29 Sep 1886.

¹¹ *Men of the Times, Old Colonists...* Johannesburg, Transvaal Publishing Co., 1906. p. 457.

¹² *Cape Argus*, 3 Sept. 1886.

unanimous and sincere expression of sorrow from the whole of the country who felt that they had lost a great and a good man.’¹³

John and the making of the South African Moltenos and Murrays

John and Maria had had a very large family – ten children in all. Each of them in turn, except for their eldest daughter Betty, married and had children and it is from their 29 grandchildren that the South African branch of the family are all descended. Most of their descendants today still live in South Africa, but a large number have over the generations settled in England and Scotland, Kenya, Australia and New Zealand, and other countries. It was John’s decision as a boy to emigrate to the Cape that led to this huge branch of the family.

His decision to take up farming – he was the only grandson of the original Anthony Molteno who had settled in London in the 1780s, to earn his living from agriculture – had a huge impact on the choices his descendants made. Many of his sons and grandsons became farmers. His farm at Nelspoort remained in the hands of the family for a hundred years; and today there is still one branch of Moltenos raising sheep on the Karoo. Indeed scattered across South Africa several of his descendants continue farming today.

John’s success in becoming a prosperous man also had its impact. He could afford to send many of his sons to Cambridge. A university education became the norm in the family from then on – which made it possible for Moltenos and Murrays to establish themselves across the widening range of modern professions. Each of his children also inherited some independent income from the Nelspoort farms and the gradual selling off of plots around Claremont House – which helped set them up in life.

The values John stood for in his public and personal life were absorbed by his children and not forgotten in subsequent generations. No Molteno fell for the anti-Boer jingoism that permeated English-speaking white South Africans in the decades after his death. No Molteno embraced the racism of whites against their fellow South Africans of colour that took over the country in the 20th century. And so many of his descendants have followed the example he set of hard work, doing to the best of your ability whatever task you set your mind to, public service when called upon, and probity in one’s working and personal life. [And likewise some of his passions – love of the countryside, and of the sea. EXPAND? OMIT?]

Winding up the Estate

By the time of his death, Betty, the eldest of all the children, was independent and earning her own living, albeit a modest one, as a teacher in Port Elizabeth. Caroline and Maria had long been married and with children of their own, although they were still living next door to Claremont House in the

¹³ P. A. Molteno, *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno*, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 457.

houses their father had bought for them. Most of their brothers were also grown up by this time, even if considerably younger and none yet established financially. Charlie was farming at Nelspoort. Percy was just starting to try and build up his practice as a barrister at the Cape Bar. Frank had recently qualified as a surveyor and gone up to the South African Republic to find work on the gold fields there. James and Victor were studying at Cambridge. The second youngest, Wallace, was sixteen and about to finish school, after which Maria got a job for him in her husband's firm, Anderson & Murison, where he began to learn about business. And finally Barkly, the youngest (apart from Minnie's four children), had just started as a Royal Navy cadet.

The immediate issue facing them was how to handle their father's estate. He had made enough money to buy the lovely family home they had grown up in, and to devote more and more of his time to political activity. He had been able to see them all well educated, including sending seven of them to Cambridge¹⁴ – an advantage he had not enjoyed. But the Nelspoort farms were always a sharply fluctuating source of income. In the years when drought struck or wool prices fell on the world market, he had had to worry about money, even in old age. The family letters of the early 1880s were full of the need to economise and when Victor went overseas to study medicine, there was a question whether there was enough money to send him to Cambridge rather than some less expensive university.

John did not die a wealthy man in the sense of being able to leave each of his fourteen offspring with significant independent incomes. He had however inculcated some business sense in his sons. Their letters following his death were full of details about managing his estate. Charlie, Percy, Frank, and later Wallace, seem to have taken to a business frame of mind quite easily, just as several of them also took to politics in the 1890s. But their entrepreneurial activity was quite narrow – more to do with buying and selling land, and hoping its value would increase, than engaging in commerce or starting up new productive enterprises such as a mine or a factory. And like their father, none of them was interested in getting rich for its own sake. Indeed when they died, their widows usually could not afford to stay on in the family home. Lucy Molteno sold Sandown in Rondebosch after Charlie's death in 1924; Ella likewise disposed of Claremont House after Frank's death two years later; and Mildred did the same with Fir Lodge in Wynberg when Victor died in the same year. The only exceptions were Ted and Harry Molteno. They were only little boys when their father died, never married, and instead devoted their lives to building up an ever larger and more profitable fruit-farming enterprise in Elgin in the first half of the next century.¹⁵

In John Molteno's will dated 27 May 1878, he had appointed two executors – his beloved brother in law and business partner, Percy Alport, and his friend and fellow sheep farmer, George Wilmot. The will instructed them to administer all his property in trust for his heirs. It was up to them – but only 'should they deem it expedient' – to realize the whole estate and turn it into cash. In that case, John

¹⁴ All three of Minnie's sons – Ted, Clifford and Harry – also went to Cambridge, but long after, of course, their father's death.

¹⁵ Their story is told in wonderful detail in Phillida Brooke Simons' book, *Apples of the Sun: being an account of the lives, vision and achievements of the Molteno brothers, Edward Bartle Frere and Henry Anderson*, Fernwood Press, 1999.

required them to treat his sons and daughters equally – the money to be ‘divided... in equal shares’ among them – another illustration of his rather advanced views on gender equality, which was not something to be taken for granted in the Victorian age! There was no question of only his sons inheriting his landed property, let alone primogeniture favouring the eldest boy. Until such time as the estate was wound up, Minnie was to be paid the very large sum of £1,200 a year and Caroline and Maria, both being married, each £300 annually – a heavy financial burden on the estate. John also made Minnie, Uncle Alport, and his eldest son Charlie joint guardians of all his minor children, and Betty was to act with them with ‘the powers of a superintending guardian’. But knowing his eldest daughter’s weaknesses as well as her strengths, she was ‘not to be charged with the administration of the minors’ property’.¹⁶

A dozen years passed with few decisive steps being taken by the executors. This was partly because of the vagueness of the will as to when the estate should be wound up and the proceeds distributed. It also became clear that Uncle Alport was too elderly to cope with the complexities of the task. Eventually Percy, who had not got involved as much as he would have liked because he had settled in Britain following his marriage to Sir Donald Currie’s eldest daughter, concluded in 1898 that the process had been badly handled, ‘to our sorrow and pain’. He ticked Betty off in no uncertain terms. ‘The feeling of giving trouble to Uncle Alport led Charlie and you and others to weakly allow things to drift along in the matter of the estate... with the eventual result that poor Uncle has broken down under the strain and his life has ended with a sense of failure.... The *weak* sentiment alluded to was the cause of his not receiving that aid to his resolution, which was wanting in him and which it was our right and duty to afford him.’¹⁷ Charlie as the eldest son eventually had to sort things out, even while Uncle Alport and Mr Wilmot continued to be paid a large commission by the Estate despite not doing very much.

Apart their father’s share in the P. J. Alport & Co. business in Beaufort West, the main assets were the farms at Nelspoort and Claremont House and its grounds. The urgent priority was to provide the income mandated to be paid John’s widow, Minnie (Lady Molteno), and her four young children. As to how much capital the brothers and sisters might inherit, that could only be resolved when the estate was finally realized.

Another thing further complicated matters: most of the family felt strongly that Claremont House, the home in which they had grown up, should not be sold. In 1891 Betty had the idea of turning it into a Ladies College to provide women with a higher education.¹⁸ But this would have required a lot of capital and might not have been commercially viable. Nor did it address the problem of providing John’s offspring with their patrimony – in Percy’s words ‘all the capital we may ever possess’.¹⁹ Betty must have been disappointed at Charlie and Percy’s reactions. And a year and a half later, these two eldest brothers wanted to sell off Barkly House and Greenfield House (Caroline Murray and Maria

¹⁶ *Cape Times*, 22 Sep 1886.

¹⁷ Percy Molteno to Betty Molteno, 7 Mar 1898.

¹⁸ Percy Molteno to Betty Molteno, 23 Sep 1891.

¹⁹ Percy Molteno to Betty Molteno, 9 Apr 1893.

Anderson's former homes) as well as Claremont House itself, although without the land at the back. This was already being divided into lots and sold off, finding a ready market as the area began to be built over and become the new suburb of Kenilworth.

A further difficulty was how to continue farming at Nelspoort. The farms were the key to generating significant income. The Moltenos' Jackson cousins, notably Arthur, were still involved in managing them on a part-salary, part-partner basis. The difficult question was how to share out the profits. Eventually a Molteno Syndicate was formed in which Minnie and seven of John's grown up sons and daughters became shareholders. Charlie, who loved the Karoo, involved himself heavily in running those farms at Nelspoort which were not sold off on behalf of the Syndicate. All his brothers and sisters, except for Caroline and Maria who had married, had to earn their own living.

Claremont House was rented out for a time, but it was an old-fashioned building and stood empty for a number of years. Meanwhile Frank Molteno, who was a surveyor, handled sub-dividing the grounds into plots and selling them off. In the end, he bought the house itself – which remained in Molteno hands until his death.

James Molteno – an 'altogether exceptional member of the family'

Those were the words of his elder brother Percy written shortly after James's death in 1936, Percy adding that he was 'quite unlike the others'.²⁰

At school and university he was not only proficient in examinations, but excelled at games and took a leading part in the social life of Trinity [College, Cambridge] and in the debates of its Union, of which he became President. 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'.

And yet, and yet... A brilliant man no doubt. An active debater – as he told Betty within weeks of going up to Trinity, he spoke at a Union debate for a solid 40 minutes! 'I think it of great importance to learn to speak in public easily and fluently.'²¹ And in addition to his other intellectual attributes, he had a prodigious memory, more so than any of his brothers and sisters. He loved sport, in particular cricket, and when the rail link between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth was finally completed in 1884 had been a member of the Western Province team that played in the first inter-colonial cricket tournament to mark the occasion. But his life was also marred by much sadness and even failure. He and his wife, Clare, were trapped in a disastrous marriage which he entered into when he was only twenty-four. His relations with his children were distant because Clare took them off to England when they were still very young. And since his whole life became bound up with politics in the Cape, he had very little to do with them thereafter or even once they had grown up; indeed his youngest daughter, Audrey, never wrote to him and Monica hardly at all.

²⁰ Reproduced in Francis Hirst's life of Percy Molteno.

²¹ James Molteno to Betty Molteno, 22 Jul 1884. UCT Special Collection, BC601, Box 4.

In politics, too, he was seriously disappointed. He was principled, and indeed courageous, during the first 18 years of his parliamentary career, but because of the descent of Cape politics into prejudice against Afrikaners, British jingoism and anti-Black racism, he was never able to hold ministerial office. Recognising this, or simply exhausted by his struggles during the Boer War (1899-1902) and always being hard up, he withdrew from active politics in 1908 and accepted the Speakership of the Cape Parliament. This meant he opted out, when still in his early 40s, of the critically important struggles that dominated politics as the four British colonies that formed the Union of South Africa in 1910.²²

He lost his parliamentary seat in the 1915 elections. This brought an abrupt end to his role as first Speaker of the South African Parliament. It was a huge shock and early in 1916 he had a stroke. Betty, who was in South Africa at the time, immediately took care of him. But Wallace felt she was too intense to be James's sole company during his convalescence and came down to Cape Town and took him off to the farm at Kamferskraal. Betty was hurt at Wallace not suggesting she go too and carry on looking after James; and she returned to England shortly afterwards. By March James could walk a bit and his speech had become less slurred. But he tired easily and his eyesight remained a problem, so Wallace read to him constantly. He didn't care for novels or light reading, but remained, as one might expect, very interested in politics and the course of the First World War in particular. He wanted the British papers, in particular *Reynolds Illustrated News* and the *Contemporary Review*, and his mind remained clear and his memory excellent.²³ But despite continuing to improve, he showed no signs of wanting to return to Cape Town. By late October Wallace got impatient and felt he was quite better enough to get back to some work.²⁴

But there had been another problem and that was alcohol. In June Wallace told Percy that: 'So far he has not shown the slightest craving.'²⁵ And three months later, writing to Betty: 'With regard to drink, if he sincerely wishes to have done with it, he has now been away from it for a considerable time, and well knowing the danger to him, it should not present the same temptation as by this time all trace of it should be out of his system.'²⁶ Parliamentarians are often susceptible to drinking too much. It has to do with endless hanging around waiting for the division bells to summon them for a vote, sittings frequently going on late into the night, and the boredom of seldom getting an opportunity actually to speak in the House. In James's case, his unhappiness at the failure of his family life may have been another factor. Following his recovery in 1916, however, he never drank again. His niece, Carol Williamson (nee Molteno), is quite clear on this point. She came to know him well because, not having his own children around him, he found great solace in his elder brother Charlie's family. As early as 1906 when Carol was only five years old, James had handed over to them

²² His papers, as well as some of his brother Percy, were given to the South African Library. I have not been able to consult them.

²³ Wallace Molteno to Betty Molteno, 18 Mar 1916.

²⁴ Wallace Molteno to Betty Molteno, 23 Oct 1916.

²⁵ Wallace Molteno to Percy Molteno, 14 Jun 1916.

²⁶ Wallace Molteno to Betty Molteno, 23 Oct 1916.

the Welsh pony, Lady Bang, and cart, side-saddle and harness which he had imported from England for his own children. And after Clare's departure, he spent much of his free time at weekends with Charlie and Lucy's family. 'He was devoted to children and wanted always to have a child sitting on his knee or close to him.'²⁷

Following recovery from his stroke, he must have realized that South Africa's greatly changed political landscape, in particular the predominance of Afrikaner-run political parties that was now entrenched, meant a return to a political career was impossible. But, despite being only 51, he did not look for some new way of earning a living. Instead he retired on his Speaker's pension and lived quietly, much of the time in a cottage in Elgin where five of his brothers²⁸ and his sister Caroline and her husband were based. In his later years, various members of the family gave him a pension to supplement his meagre resources.

He loved living in the Elgin valley surrounded by mountains and found it conducive to writing his political reminiscences.²⁹ 'I am an early riser, breakfast at eight, a walk through the oak avenue past the apple orchard and on to the summit of the hill crowned by forest. It is an inspiration, clears the mind and aids the memory.'³⁰ But both the volumes he wrote lacked any serious or insightful analysis of the country's deep divisions and the wave of racially discriminatory laws and policies that engulfed the South African people after the formation of the Union.³¹ He also included frustratingly little personal information. He made no reference to Clare and only a couple to his two eldest children, Clarissa and Vincent. Nor did he mention the roles his brothers, Percy and Charlie, and sisters, Betty and Caroline, played alongside him in opposing Britain's war against the Boer Republics.

More surprisingly, he was silent about his own remarkable role during the War as a defence counsel. The Cape Parliament was prorogued much of the duration (October 1900 to May 1902) and the rule of law in abeyance. He spent endless time travelling to remote rural districts and defending the so-called Cape Rebels – Afrikaners who were classified as British citizens because they lived in the Cape Colony and who were accused before special tribunals the British military authorities set up of high

²⁷ Carol Williamson (nee Molteno)'s Recollections. These can be read on-line at <https://www.moltenofamily.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Carol-Williamson-Reminiscences-pdf.pdf>

²⁸ His half-brothers, Ted, Harry and Clifford, and Frank and Ella Molteno, and Victor and Mildred Molteno.

²⁹ James Tennant Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom: Recollections Pleasant and Otherwise*, London, Methuen, 1923. This deals with his political life before and during the Boer War. His *Further South African Recollections*, London, Methuen, 1926, carried the story on after 1902 up to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. Publication was arranged by his brother, Percy, who, unacknowledged, also gave him advice and edited at least the first volume for him. Both books are available on-line.

³⁰ James Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom*, op. cit., p. 16.

³¹ For example, he mentions the fact that Dr Abdurahman, J. Tengo Jabavu and W. P. Schreiner came to London in 1909 to lobby for the extension of the Cape's non-racial franchise to all South Africa, but engages in no analysis of how significant for South Africa's future trajectory was their failure to persuade the Liberal Government to change its mind on the issue. *Further South African Recollections*, op. cit., p. 196.

treason for supporting their kin on the other side of the Orange River in the Boer Republics.³² James doggedly carried out this arduous, largely unpaid and on occasion dangerous work; indeed he took to sleeping with a pistol next to his pillow. PUT IN SOURCE Another indication of the hostility jingoists whipped up against him emerged at an exhibition in London which was patronised by the British High Commissioner in South Africa, Sir Alfred Milner. On display was a shooting gallery with three heads portrayed as traitors for members of the public to use as target practice – alongside President Paul Kruger were James and his political mentor and friend, John X. Merriman.³³ FIND SOURCE Although expressing an intention to write about his experiences during the Boer War, sadly he never did.

Percy had referred to James making many friends during his life. But there is a world of difference between superficial interactions – whether it be political colleagues, playing bridge or betting on the horses (all of which he did) – and deep friendships that nourish. While his brothers and sisters, and his niece, May Murray Parker, remained loyal to him and he greatly valued the warmth and homes they provided, in the end he was a profoundly lonely man.

Early years

James was the fourth son of John Charles and Maria Molteno and born in Cape Town in January 1865. Unlike his younger brothers, he had his loving mother around for the first ten years of his growing up. He was educated, like all his brothers, at the Diocesan College where, like his sisters at the schools they attended, they were all ‘day boys and day girls’, not boarders. ‘All brought up in the home ... was the family custom..., 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.’³⁴ And he revelled ‘as a youngster ... [in] the open life after hounds [hunting jackals on the Cape Flats], upon the cricket field, and upon the plains of the Great Karoo after springbok.’

But there was another side to James which on one occasion he tried to make clear: ‘This is not the whole truth about my early days. I suppose there is something in us all very elusive, indefinable, very private and partly melancholic. At such times one withdraws oneself, goes apart, seeks privacy and introspection. My horse was then my only companion, and my thoughts.’ And he explained how he would go off riding on his own across the sand dunes of the Cape Flats and, coming back only after night had fallen, ‘the scenery, the atmosphere, the ranges of mountains, the long sandy stretches of the coast, the moonlight and my beloved horse ... smothered all melancholy and made me dream dreams of things to be.’³⁵

His father had become Prime Minister when he was seven years old and his grandfather, Hercules Jarvis, although long retired as Chairman of Cape Town’s Board of Commissioners, was still greatly interested in the City’s affairs. As a result, James grew up in an intensely political atmosphere and

³² ‘Molteno, Sir James Tennant’ entry in *Dictionary of South African Biography*, p. 481. CHECK TITLE

³³ *South African National Biography*???????

³⁴ James Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom*, op. cit., p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

was deeply formed by the politics of both men. Indeed he corresponded with Grandpa Jarvis all his life and in early 1882, just before his father finally retired from politics, he was taken out of college, aged 17, and became his private secretary. This was precipitated by Charlie feeling the need to cease serving his father in this role and going overseas. James was very clear how his close contact with his father 'moulded my views of the men and problems of South Africa'.³⁶

Three years later, in 1885, he was awarded his first degree through the University of the Cape of Good Hope. Following his elder brother Percy who was just finishing at Trinity College, Cambridge, he got a place at the same college where he completed the Law Tripos with honours in 1888, becoming a College prizeman in the process. He was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple in London early the following year.³⁷

James greatly enjoyed his life at Cambridge. What Percy described as his 'taking a leading part in the social life' of his College meant plunging into every kind of activity – sports, the College debating society, serving on the Committee of the Cambridge Union, and even forming a literary society with some fellow students in order to improve their knowledge of English literature and 'keep ourselves out of mischief on Saturday nights'.³⁸ In fact, he also did throw himself into the student parties and drinking engaged in by the young men from the very narrow and privileged stratum of English society that monopolised Oxford and Cambridge in the late 19th century. This was the social milieu where he met his future wife, Clare Holland-Pryor, who, though not a student, attended one of the May Balls that celebrated the end of the academic year.

Throughout his time at Cambridge, James was fortunate in having his father's sister, Aunt Nancy Bingle, living in London. He found her on his first arrival 'as cheerful as ever'. And she, as always, made him and her other nephews from the Cape welcome. But he was not able, because he had to attend his graduation ceremony, to join his brothers, Charlie and Victor, at the funeral of Nancy's husband, Mr Bingle, when he died in mid 1888.³⁹

The summer vacations James spent exploring the Continent, sometimes with Percy and, another time, with Charlie who was passing through London. He happened on one occasion to be in Paris and actually witnessed the French political leader, M. Ferry, being shot in front of the House of Deputies. On another trip, this time to Germany, he spent many days drinking beer with students at Bonn and Heidelberg.

It is interesting that neither James, Percy, nor Victor, who were all at Cambridge at this time, had any contact with anyone in those branches of the Molteno clan who had remained in England and not emigrated to other parts of the world. In particular, they had no contact with, or even knowledge of, their first cousins, Fred Molteno's children. James did encounter one of them when, happening to be in London, he spotted a poster in 1888 advertising, to his great surprise, the appearance of Agnes

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Molteno, Sir James Tennant, *Biographical Encyclopedia of South Africa*, p. 481.

³⁸ James Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom*, op. cit., p. 66.

³⁹ James Molteno to Betty Molteno, 27 Jun 1888.

Molteno who was performing in the West End.⁴⁰ Not knowing who she was and being a rather bumptious young man, he wrote home to his sister Caroline in a rather arch and dismissive tone: ‘*Entre nous*, I came across a Miss Agnes Molteno at the Strand Theatre.’⁴¹ MORE DETAIL IF POSSIBLE

Returning to the Cape

Following his admission to the Inner Temple, James returned to the Cape in February 1889. The country he found was very different from the one he had left four years earlier. On the diamond fields at Kimberley, the days of thousands of individual diggers each seeking to make their fortune were over, and a handful of huge, amalgamated mines now existed under the control of Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Beit. In the South African Republic gold had been discovered in huge quantities in 1886 on the Rand. Thousands of Whites and Blacks were pouring into the area and the economic centre of gravity of Southern Africa was beginning its fundamental shift away from the Cape Colony to Johannesburg. The rush for gold was in everyone’s minds. In James’s words, ‘A new language, a new set of ideas had taken possession of people.... The most prosaic and matter-of-fact no longer spoke in shillings and pounds, but in hundreds, thousands and millions.... The only words I heard were ‘options’, ‘shares’, ‘scrip’....’⁴²

He was called to the Bar within days of arriving in Cape Town and a week later was off with his fellow barristers on his first circuit of the Southwestern districts and the Great Karoo. In those days, the Supreme Court spent a lot of time travelling to small district centres and hearing cases rather than expecting litigants to come to Cape Town. James revelled in the experience. ‘The country people and villages and towns recalled happy days... I never felt a stranger, it was all home.’

On returning from six weeks on circuit, he decided to take several months off and get to know the whole of South Africa. His route was very similar to that Sir Donald Currie had undertaken only two years earlier.⁴³ Six hundred miles north to Kimberley by train, and from there on horseback or cart on largely unpaved wagon and mule tracks – to Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State Republic, Johannesburg where he was urged to settle and make his fortune, Pretoria where he met President Paul Kruger, and finally down to Durban and back to Cape Town by ship. He came across many of his old school friends and public men whom he had known as a youngster. He also made lots of new friends, both ‘Boer and Briton’, he said. He saw Olive Schreiner, one of his sister Betty’s closest friends and already famous for her *The Story of an African Farm*, which had come out six years earlier.

Becoming a Member of Parliament – ‘Baby’ Molteno

⁴⁰ See Chapter XXXX.

⁴¹ James Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 2 Feb 1888. The photostat of James’s letter is regrettably difficult to decipher.

⁴² James Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴³ See Ch. 13a. CORRECT CH. No.

Back in Cape Town, he settled down to establish his practice as a barrister. In October the following year, he was on circuit again. The Court had reached the village of George when a telegram arrived which was to change the course of his life. It was from John X. Merriman, who as a young man had been appointed by James's father, John Molteno, to his Cabinet in the 1870s. A general election had recently been held and Cecil Rhodes had taken office as Prime Minister for the first time. Merriman, who was now a minister in this administration, informed James that his fellow MP for Namaqualand (parliamentary constituencies each elected two members) had unexpectedly resigned. Would James consider standing in the bye-election?

James jumped at the opportunity. He immediately travelled up to the remote region of the Northwestern Cape where the huge and arid constituency of Namaqualand stretched up to the Orange River and the border with the new German colony of South West Africa. As luck would have it, no one else stood and James was elected without a contest. He was only twenty-five and, on arrival in the Cape Parliament as its youngest MP, was immediately nicknamed 'Baby' Molteno.

He revelled in his new role right from the start. The Cape House was small, only 76 Members, over half of whom were farmers, the next largest group being 'merchants'. James was one of only four lawyers in the House. He was nervous at first, he said, albeit proud to be an MP, and immediately took an active part. He soon came to feel that Parliament was 'the best club in the world'. Dress was still quite old-fashioned when he first joined: 'Clothing and head-gear were more austere and synodical. The bell-topper [a top hat with a bell-shaped crown], both black and drab, was much affected... Snuff was used more than nowadays.' Political parties, apart from the already established Afrikaner Bond, were only just coming into existence. James loved the feeling of solidarity – 'Voting together on the same side of the House is a wonderful thing, the relationship that it creates passes analysis.... The bond of loyalty to party and political friends is one of the most sacred of human experiences.'⁴⁴

He also thoroughly enjoyed the process of keeping in touch with his constituents. The role of an MP in those days was far less onerous than today, but, of course, there were no telephones, let alone emails or social media. He toured his constituency once a year, explaining the issues of the day at meetings and keeping in touch with farmers, the men working on the district's two copper mines which, for a time were the largest in the world, and also with missionaries. 'I looked forward to these annual excursions up to the Orange River, with hundreds of miles of travelling by sea, rail and mule wagon, with great zest. Wrapped up in a kaross, after a fifty mile trek over mountain and down valley, nothing amiss with the chops and the coffee, the clear-spangled heavens above, with youth, health and hope, what more could one desire?'⁴⁵

Marriage

He and Clare got married in December 1889, a year before he became a Member of Parliament. In his autobiography he makes only one laconic reference to it, merely mentioning in passing 'taking on

⁴⁴ James Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom*, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

matrimonial responsibilities'. The story of what actually happened has come down in the family.⁴⁶ Clare believed that James had proposed to her following the May Ball where they had met and that, in departing for the Cape, he would be making preparations for their marrying. Not getting on with her mother and determined to escape by marrying, she took ship for the Cape some months after him. Apparently, he was dumbfounded at her arrival and had certainly made no wedding preparations or found any accommodation where they could set up home. But marry they did, and in Cape Town without her mother or other relatives able to be present. Clare told her daughters years later that she always knew she should have got on the next boat and return to England. But she didn't.⁴⁷

They proceeded to have four children, the first three in quite quick succession. Their third child, Monica, was actually born in 1895 in England – in the district of Portsmouth and Southsea.⁴⁸

James Tennant Molteno (1865-1936) and Clarissa Celia 'Clare' Holland-Pryor's Children

Birth	Names	Marriage	Spouse	Death
'Clarissa' Celia Molteno	1890	1915	George Brabazon Newcomen	1946
'Vincent' Holland Pryor Molteno	1892	1915	Norah 'Eileen' Wilson	1972
'Monica' Celia Molteno	1895	c. 1921 CHECK	John Glascock CHECK Mays	1990
'Audrey' Courtenay Molteno	1904		--	1991

The marriage was disastrous from the start. As early as 1898, after just eight years, Clare moved back to England for a time with her three children – Clarissa being eight at the time, Vincent six and Monica only a baby. She was not a keen mother. Vincent was sent off as a boarder to Bedales as soon as he was old enough; it was a recently founded progressive school in Hampshire where a number of Murray and Molteno children were educated in the early 1900s. A few years later Clare

⁴⁶ Patricia Berridge (nee Molteno), James's only granddaughter, told me this story, having been told it by her father, Vincent Molteno.

⁴⁷ Vanessa Evans (nee Berridge), Clare's great granddaughter, was told this by her mother, Patricia.

⁴⁸ Certified copy of an entry of birth, General Register Office, dated 13 Dec 1895. This records a 'girl' being born on 4 Nov., but with no name given.

despatched Clarissa to live with her English grandmother, Mrs Holland-Pryor, much to the disapproval of Clarissa's grown-up cousin, May Murray.⁴⁹

Most of their lives James and Clare lived separately, she in London and he at the Palace Hotel, Kenilworth, in Cape Town. In addition to not getting on personally, Clare did not think much of Cape society and, in particular, looked down on 'the blacks'.⁵⁰ Getting divorced, however, seems not to have arisen; this was still an age when such a course of action was greatly frowned on and, in any case, impossible legally unless one or other party could prove physical unfaithfulness. There may even have been a brief reconciliation between them when James was elected Speaker of the new Union of South Africa Parliament in 1910. He came over to London the following year as leader of the South African parliamentary delegation to the coronation of King George V and, being Speaker of the newly established House of Assembly, was knighted. Clare liked her new status as Lady Molteno; her granddaughter, Patricia (Pat) Molteno, remembered how she would put on airs in London shops and expect to be served ahead of the other customers!⁵¹ She did go out to the Cape from time to time, her last visit being in 1917 when she was fifty, after which she returned to England for the duration of the First World War. She never visited again and died in London 27 years later in 1944.

Clare and James's separation had many consequences, particularly for the children. They grew up almost entirely in England. They hardly knew their father and, of course, lacked close contact with their South African cousins. And when Vincent, barely in his teens, wanted to become a doctor like his Uncle Victor Molteno and cousins Kenah Murray and Ernest Anderson, Clare put her foot down. She insisted instead that he apply for a cadetship in the Royal Navy and pursue a naval career. This, Vincent's daughter Patricia believed, was because that prevented him from returning to the Cape for his secondary schooling and getting to be with his father.⁵² At the age of twelve, Vincent went through the process of being interviewed as to his suitability. Several months then went by during which his hopes of being rejected soared, only to be shattered with the receipt at last of an official letter giving him a place at Osborne, the boarding school on the Isle of Wight which at that date (1904) was still the Navy's school for would-be officers.

Ironically as things turned out, Vincent, on eventually becoming an officer, was posted in 1913 to the Royal Navy base at Simonstown. This was located on the Cape Peninsula only a few miles from where he had been born. He was stationed there for the next two years, and it was at a ball given by his fellow officers on HMS *Hyacinth* that he met his wife, Eileen Wilson. She was the daughter of a Cape Town businessman in import-export. One part of her family came from Cornwall, the other was of Protestant extraction in Northern Ireland. Vincent and Eileen married in 1915 and settled in London at the end of the War. For whatever reason, they never visited Cape Town again – this despite Eileen loving the Cape and having a sister who continued to live there. Years later, she did

⁴⁹ May Murray to her fiancé, Dr Freddie Parker, 11 Apr 1907.

⁵⁰ Her granddaughter, Patricia Berridge (nee Molteno)'s, words.

⁵¹ Patricia, or Pat, Berridge (nee Molteno), in conversation with Robert Molteno, 4 Feb 2012.

⁵² All this detail was related by Vincent Molteno's daughter, Patricia.

plan a visit. This was in 1937, the year after her father in law, James's, death, but at the last moment Vincent got cold feet and cancelled the trip.

Only Clarissa, Clare and James's eldest child, felt strongly about her Cape identity. She married in the same year as her brother Vincent. The First World War was already raging and her husband, George Brabazon Newcomen (called Brab) was badly wounded on the Western Front. He had to be invalided out of the British Army in 1917. Clarissa took care of him in Cornwall. He was eventually able to return to active service and continued in the Army for many years after the War. When he retired, however, they moved to the Cape and settled there. James liked Brab, commenting: 'She has a really good husband and their married life is a fine thing.'⁵³ They did not have children (Clarissa did give birth to a baby girl, but she was still born) and it seems Brab had no hobbies – 'which more and more I believe are the basis of a contented life'.⁵⁴ He apparently worshipped Clarissa and when she died in 1946, he could not bear life without her and committed suicide, gassing himself in his car in their garage.

Monica, the third child, also married, but only after the War. Her husband, John Glascock Mays, was American, and they lived initially on the East Coast, before moving during the Great Depression to the West Coast. Monica lived out her exceptionally long life entirely in the United States. She did not feel close to either her mother or her father. Following her marriage, she usually wrote to James only once a year. He commented rather sadly: 'She is forming her own life and I hope that it may be a happy one – I believe her husband is an influential [?] man.'⁵⁵ She did take her first baby CHECK THIS IS CORRECT to see Clare in London on one occasion in the 1920s, but never took her family to see James at the Cape. Clarissa complained at the time of their mother's death that neither Monica nor Audrey (who was living in England) took any responsibility for Clare in her last years. And Monica hardly ever wrote to Clarissa because of 'fear of the past and [bad] memories of the Cape when last we were all together.'⁵⁶ The result of this emotional distance on Monica's part was that both her sons grew up not knowing any of their cousins in South Africa or Britain.

As for Audrey, she did not marry. And only towards the end of her life did she suddenly feel some interest in reconnecting with her childhood and the wider Molteno family.⁵⁷ In 1980 she ventured to the US and stayed with Monica and John Mays in California. And the following year, full of trepidation – 'after all these years I hardly know who is still alive and where any may be or their descendants' – she at last visited the Cape where she saw her cousin Carol Williamson (nee Molteno) and Carol's eldest son, Deneys. Back in England, she kept in touch a bit with her brother Vincent's widow, Eileen Molteno, and their daughter, Patricia, who had married Norman Berridge.

⁵³ James Molteno to his niece, May Murray Parker, 2 Dec 1923.

⁵⁴ Vanessa Evans (nee Berridge), James Molteno's greatgranddaughter. THIS SOUNDS LIKE WRONG SOURCE. FIND RIGHT SOURCE

⁵⁵ James Molteno to May Murray-Parker, 2 Dec 1923.

⁵⁶ Clarissa Newcomen (nee Molteno) to May Murray Parker, 14 Mar 1945 and to Kathleen Murray, 12 Jul 1945.

⁵⁷ Audrey Molteno, letters dated 17 Aug 1979 and 19 Aug 1981.

By this time (1981) she was living in a flat in Stow in the Wold only a few miles from Pat and Norman who, following his retirement, had left London for the Cotswolds.

In short, only Vincent, living in London with Eileen and their daughter Pat, stayed in touch with a number of his cousins. He was particularly close to his first cousin, Jervis Molteno. They were exactly the same age. They had both been at Bedales and Vincent often spent his school holidays at Parklands, the farm at Gomshall and Shere belonging to Jervis's parents, Percy and Bessie Molteno. Vincent never forgot how the servants would light a fire in Jervis's room, but not his! He didn't tell Uncle Percy because he didn't want to cause any trouble between him and Aunt Bessie. As a result of this connection, Pat, who was an only child, grew up seeing quite a bit of her Molteno cousins, in particular the families of her Great Uncles Percy and Barkly Molteno in England, and her cousins coming over from the Cape in the 1920s and 30s.

The Degradation of Cape politics in the 1890s

James had entered Parliament at the start of a decade that soon saw the utter transformation, indeed degradation, of Cape politics in ways unimaginable only a few years earlier when his father had been Prime Minister. The process threw up issues James had to deal with as an MP; it also limited, indeed defeated, what he was able to achieve.

The first change was the penetration of politics by big money. Cecil Rhodes, the dominant owner of the Kimberley diamond fields, became Prime Minister in the same year James was elected. James supported his administration for many reasons. He had known Rhodes ever since he had first run into him striding along the Muizenberg beach near Kalk Bay in 1881. The Cabinet included old colleagues of James's father – John X. Merriman and J. W. Sauer. Rhodes himself was an attractive and popular figure who in the beginning appealed to Afrikaners and was supported by the Afrikaner Bond. James also thought that Rhodes stood for two of the principles his father had articulated so strongly -- 'true Responsible Government' (ie self-government independent of London's wishes and priorities) and 'a broad South African platform' (meaning unity between Dutch- and English-speaking Whites).

Disillusion soon set in however. Rhodes had just extracted a Royal Charter from Britain giving his British South Africa Company, which was a commercial enterprise looking to make big profits, powers to raise an armed force, colonise and rule huge territories to the north of the South African Republic -- today's Zambia and Zimbabwe. It gradually became clear that he was determined that British imperial control should be established over all the diverse societies and states of Southern Africa, and would brook no opposition to his plans.⁵⁸

The first thing to shake James's confidence in him was a bribery and corruption scandal. In 1892 one of Rhodes's leading political allies and a minister in his government, James Sivewright, awarded an associate, James Logan, a 15-year catering monopoly on all the Cape railways. When it emerged that there had been no public tendering process and bribery had probably taken place, the resulting

⁵⁸ For an excellent account, see <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/cecil-john-rhodes>

Logan Scandal triggered ministerial resignations – Merriman, Sauer and James Rose Innes – and the collapse of Rhodes's first administration.⁵⁹ Young James was shocked at what had happened and that Rhodes stood by his minister. James knew Sivewright personally, having played cricket with him as a boy in Plumstead,⁶⁰ but this did not stop him being outraged and moving into opposition to Rhodes.

A few years after this, James had personal experience of being on the receiving end of big money in politics. Rhodes wanted to be Prime Minister again and in 1898 James was offered a large sum of money if he would change sides and take the Speakership of the Cape Parliament, which carried a very generous salary. Had he accepted, this would probably have removed the very slim majority held by the Afrikaner Bond and a new independent group of anti-Rhodes MPs called the South African Party (SAP), of which James was a supporter.⁶¹ As a result, William Schreiner, who led the SAP, would not have been able to beat Rhodes to the Premiership. James told Percy in London how he had unequivocally turned the bribe down.⁶²

A second element in the degradation of Cape politics were moves to manipulate the franchise to the disadvantage of people of colour – something James and his brother Charlie, following in their father's non-racial footsteps, strongly disapproved of. As more and more Xhosa-speaking Africans found themselves living within the boundaries of the Cape Colony, many had sufficient land to register as voters. John Tengo Jabavu, who had founded the independent newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu (Native Opinion)* in 1884 and was friends with and a political supporter of Charlie Molteno, estimated that African voters were an influential element in 17 out of the now 84 parliamentary seats.⁶³ In response, many White politicians, both English- and Dutch-speaking, especially in the Eastern Cape, worried about future electoral pressure on them to pay more serious regard to the interests of South Africans of colour. Gordon Sprigg, who was now Prime Minister, made the first move in 1887 with legislation to exclude communal (tribal) forms of land tenure from the property qualifications. This struck 20,000 Africans off the voters roll. The passage of this statute was a fundamental break with the policies of John Molteno who, when Prime Minister, had twice defeated opposition moves to restrict voting qualifications in 1874 and 1878.⁶⁴ Ironically, the 1887 law sparked an unanticipated but intense African effort to register thousands of rural Blacks who, despite the legislation, still met the property qualifications but had not registered on the voters roll; indeed the number of African voters reached its former level again as early as 1891.

⁵⁹ R. Davenport and C. Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History*, 5th Edn., Macmillan, 2000, p. 111.

⁶⁰ James Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁶¹ 'Molteno, Sir James Tennant', *Biographical Encyclopedia of South Africa*, p. 481.

⁶² James Molteno to Percy Molteno, 1898. South African Library, Percy Molteno Collection, MSC 17.

⁶³ J. Matisonn, *God, Spies and Lies – Finding South Africa's Future through its Past*, Vlaeberg, South Africa, Missing Ink, 2015, p. 40.

⁶⁴ Wikipedia, 'Cape Qualified Franchise', consulted 6 Nov. 2013, a detailed and excellent entry.

This sparked a second round of racially motivated, albeit ostensibly not racist, manipulation of the franchise in 1892. Cecil Rhodes was now Prime Minister again and he introduced a bill which tripled the property qualification from £25 to £75 and added an educational requirement – voters must also be literate. These measures, as well as the Glen Grey Act of 1894, further constrained the number of African voters. The immediate effect was to make whites in the Cape feel free to prioritise their own growing antagonisms within their community between English and Dutch speakers.

This led to the third ingredient distorting Cape politics – the emergence of ethnically defined parliamentary groups among the Cape’s white MPs – first the Afrikaner Bond, founded in 1881, which gave voice to Dutch-speakers’ sense of political and linguistic marginalization and, a few years later, the formation under Rhodes’s inspiration of an explicitly jingoistic, pro-British imperialist party calling themselves Progressives! This whipping up of hostility between Dutch- and English-speaking Whites was another development entirely contrary to the political tradition James and Charlie had learned from their father. As we will see when telling the story of how the Boer War impacted on the Molteno and Murray families when it broke out in 1899, this new division within the white community, as well as the growing hostility towards Black South Africans that both the Bond and Progressives shared, put paid to any hopes James and Charlie may have had of ministerial office or having a serious influence over policy.

These were all factors constraining what James was able to achieve in politics. Nevertheless, as a parliamentarian, he built up a considerable reputation as a fluent, witty and on occasion substantial figure in Cape politics. Following the end of the Boer War in 1902 and new elections in the Cape in 1904, his close colleagues, Merriman and Sauer, were not elected. In their absence, James was thrust on to the front bench as leader of the Opposition against Dr Jamieson’s, pro-imperialist administration. He ‘displayed, in conjunction with Mr de Waal, qualities of leadership the possession of which nobody had suspected.’⁶⁵ In this role he had to work closely with the Bond which was also in opposition. One commentator described him as ‘a “front-bench man” of the Afrikaner Party of the Assembly [in fact, he was never actually a member of the Bond]⁶⁶ ... In debate he is ready, witty and pungent, and delightfully candid with his political opponents who love both him and his powers of repartee.’

In subsequent chapters, we will see what happened to James both during the Boer War and afterwards.

Charlie and the mantle of succession

John Charles Molteno, or Charlie as he was known in the family, was the eldest boy and five years older than James although he only entered Parliament a few years after him. Born in 1860, he grew up at Claremont House and was the first Molteno to be educated at the Diocesan College (or Bishops

⁶⁵ *Men of the Times: Old Colonists of the Cape Colony and Orange Free Colony*, Transvaal Publishing Co., 1906, p. 503.

⁶⁶ James makes this clear in his autobiography, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom*, op. cit., p. 26.

as it was often known). He did not do particularly well at school and disliked sport. He and his brother Percy, who was only a year younger than him and who became the brother he was closest to all his life, spent much of their holidays on their father's farms at Nelspoort. Charlie developed a deep love of the Karoo. He revelled in all the riding and hunting he and Percy did there, along with their cousins, the Jacksons, and the Elliots, who lived on the neighbouring farms. There were still leopards in the kloofs and Charlie as a boy wrote to his eldest sister, Betty, how one day while out hunting he 'got a considerable fright, mistaking a large reddish dog which came rushing out of a krantz for a tiger which is said to be about.'⁶⁷ The railway from Cape Town to Kimberley had still not reached the Nelspoort area, and he and Percy spent time in 1878 going round the neighbouring farmers asking them to petition the authorities for a railway halt to be built there. Although their father had recently been dismissed as Prime Minister by the Governor, the petition was successful.

John Molteno's ten sons naturally differed greatly from one another. Charlie combined qualities and characteristics which could be seen in one or other of his brothers. To take one example, he had 'a rough kind of humour', albeit he became less prone to teasing people than James as he grew older. Maria remembered him when still a boy as 'a dreadful tease, always arguing with Papa about the War [the Franco-Prussian War of 1870] [and] taking the side of the French, [while] Percy and Frank took that of the Prussians, and Jamesie and Victor not very certain.'⁶⁸ And on board ship on one occasion when a young man, he could not resist, on making friends with a Mrs Ham, from introducing her to another shipmate who had an equally unexpected name: 'Mr Bacon,' said Charlie, 'you must allow me the pleasure of presenting you to Mrs Ham.'⁶⁹

Charlie was 'tall, handsome and rather unsociable', as Percy remembered him, and, like their brother Victor, a quiet and very private man. In his correspondence⁷⁰ with his siblings he discussed business matters and politics, but never dealt with himself. This reticence makes it next to impossible to do him justice or know properly how he felt in life. One thing we do know is that he deeply regretted never having had the opportunity, unlike most of his brothers, of going to university because his father, always a demanding man, relied on him so much.⁷¹

Nevertheless, having helped his father as his political secretary towards the end of his premiership in 1877-78, Charlie did take off, and went to Canada where he worked for the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company for three or four years. On his way back in 1882, he stopped off in London. Percy was already at Cambridge and the two of them spent a happy summer travelling on the Continent. Charlie also saw Sir Donald Currie who complained again about the mail contract John Molteno as

⁶⁷ Charlie Molteno to Betty Molteno, 9 Nov 1879.

⁶⁸ Maria Molteno to Aunt Nancy Bingle (nee Molteno), 21 Feb 1871.

⁶⁹ Percy Molteno's recollections, as related in Francis Hirst's biography of Percy Molteno.

⁷⁰ UCT Special Collections, BC330, Boxes 61 & 62.

⁷¹ His widow, Lucy Molteno (nee Mitchell), in MEMOIRS; and confirmed by his daughter, Virginia, in her recollections she told her niece, Selina Cohen (nee Molteno), March 1996.

Cape premier had signed with the main shipping lines.⁷² Charlie wrote to his father how ‘Sir Donald [asks me] to tell you that your terms for the new mail contract were very hard!’ and he was ‘very put out about the Dummond Castle [and the Quarantine Regulations] and said it meant a loss to the Company of over £5,000.’⁷³

Prior to arriving back at the Cape, there had been some anxious correspondence about what Charlie would do in life, but by June 1881 it was settled that he would be his father’s Secretary again.⁷⁴ There was a little tension between the two of them after his return. But John’s health was deteriorating and quite soon Charlie was taking over managing his business interests. These included the Nelspoort farms, the day to day running of which Charlie’s cousin, Harry Jackson, had taken over from his father, Arthur Jackson CHECK.⁷⁵ Charlie entered into a new profit-sharing partnership with Harry (CHECK), helped run the farms, put money into them, and lived at Nelspoort for some 15 years. At some point he bought the home farm, as well as XXXXXX, from his brothers and sisters. Basing himself in the Karoo was no hardship for he always, Percy recalled, ‘loved shooting and country life’, and ‘did not care for club life’ [in the city]. He didn’t even have his own house in Cape Town at this time, but simply stayed with Caroline and Dr Murray at Greenfield House, and subsequently their new home, Kenilworth House, when he needed to be in town. Only in 1898, following his marriage, did he set up home in Cape Town, and even then he continued to keep an eye on the farms for several years.

Following Sir John Molteno’s death in 1886, heavy responsibilities fell on Charlie’s shoulders in relation to his brothers and sisters as well as his father’s widow, Minnie (now Lady Molteno). In addition to keeping the family farms at Nelspoort going, he fairly soon had to take over winding up the estate. This was a difficult task which had to be carried through in a manner that generated some income and/or capital for each of the fourteen offspring while not breeding ill-feeling or resentment among them. Charlie settled into these roles and by 1891 Percy felt that he ‘has consolidated very much and inspires much confidence in his judgement when his attention is directed to any subject.’⁷⁶

Politics

Like Percy and James, and following in his father’s footsteps, Charlie felt a responsibility to involve himself in politics. He was never a career politician and his life in the Cape Parliament did not have the single-minded focus of his father, in part because self-government was now an established reality. Nor was there any real possibility, for the same reasons that blighted James’s political career, of Charlie ever achieving ministerial office.

⁷² For the full story of what happened, see Ch. XXXXXX.

⁷³ Charlie Molteno to his father, John Molteno, 1 Jun 1882.

⁷⁴ Percy Molteno to Betty Molteno, 15 Jun 1881 and 19 Mar 1882.

⁷⁵ Percy Molteno’s recollections, as related in Francis Hirst’s biography of Percy Molteno

⁷⁶ Percy Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 20 Aug 1891.

He only decided to stand for election in 1894 four years after James had become the Cape's youngest MP. The seat Charlie won, Tembuland, was not in the Northern Cape (like Namaqualand), nor in the Karoo, but in the Eastern Cape. In Percy's view, Charlie made a very good impression there and showed a remarkable knowledge of what in those days white South Africans called 'the Native Question'.⁷⁷

By this time, as already explained, Cape politics had become hugely different from in his father's day. Relations between South Africans of African and European descent had deteriorated greatly as a result of Britain and the Cape Government's wars at the end of the 1870s against the Xhosa chiefs in the Eastern Cape, Moshoeshoe's Basuto tribesmen in the Drakensberg and the Zulu kingdom, the outcome of which was the general disarming of all Black South Africans. Dutch-speaking Boers were now developing an overtly *political* consciousness, following the restoration of the Boer Republics and the establishment in 1880 in the Cape Parliament of a bloc called the Afrikaner Bond. And quite soon after Charlie's election to Parliament, Cecil Rhodes's supporters turned into a jingoistic, anti-Boer party.

Charlie, like James, supported the Rhodes administration at first, but only for a very short period of time. The year after he won his parliamentary seat, Rhodes tried to take control of Bechuanaland (today's Botswana). This huge, desert-prone area had not yet been occupied by would-be white farmers. It lay between the Cape Colony and the territories to the north of the South African Republic that Rhodes was in the process of seizing from their Ndebele and Shona-speaking inhabitants. Bechuanaland stood inconveniently on his supply lines to these new British colonies that soon came to be called the Rhodesias (the only colonies in Africa to be named after the imperialist who had seized them) and Rhodes now wanted his BSA Company to take over Bechuanaland as well. Charlie opposed this move.⁷⁸ An African deputation came to Cape Town in early July 1895 to try and get the Prime Minister to drop his demand. Charlie described to Betty what happened: 'The ... deputation was introduced by me to Mr Rhodes. A most respectable lot of men, and yet he adopted his most bullying manner to them, told them that they deserved to have their country taken away and given to white men etc etc – all because they made certain representations as to the hardship of the labour [on the mines] and taxes etc.' Charlie also spoke on the issue in the House: 'I did not mince matters in the least, and hear that what I did say has given great offence to Mr Rhodes.' But he felt most strongly on the issue and was fearful of 'the great harm Mr Rhodes is doing and the blighting effect his policy has upon Parliament.' The danger, in his view, was the Cape becoming 'a mere tool in the hands of De Beers and the Chartered Company'.

Chief (KING?) Khama of the Bamangwato, the main tribe in Bechuanaland, travelled to England later the same year to lay their case before the British Government. 'It does seem scandalous that Mr Rhodes should be allowed to take over his country,' Charlie told Caroline.⁷⁹ Surprisingly, given this was the era of the Scramble for Africa during which the European powers were carving Africa up

⁷⁷ Percy Molteno to Betty Molteno, 28 Jul 1894.

⁷⁸ Charlie Molteno to Betty Molteno, 12 Jul 1895.

⁷⁹ Charlie Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 20 Aug 1895.

amongst themselves following the Berlin Conference of 1884, Britain eventually sided with Khama. Charlie was very pleased: 'The Khama settlement is a most satisfactory one and a complete answer to [those] who said it was of no use appealing to the British Government.... The Settlement is practically the same as Khama offered to the British Government some ten years ago.'⁸⁰ Instead of handing over the country to Rhodes's BSA Company, Britain declared a protectorate in which the interests of the indigenous population were publicly stated to be paramount.

Charlie was a moderate, but at the same time inflexibly principled, man. At the very start of the Bechuanaland question, he had argued with his sister, Betty, over what he viewed as her unrealistically high-minded idealism: 'You must not set up too high an ideal of what one can do in the way of setting things right. The solution of the Native question is one of the most difficult problems imaginable, and what makes it so difficult, or rather impossible, ... is the race feeling [of white South Africans].... However it is one of those questions which [I] will have to face. One can only do one's best. If I did not intend to advocate justice to the Native races, then I should never have gone to what is to a great extent a Native constituency.'⁸¹ This difference in ambition between Charlie and Betty, however, did not in any way undermine the closeness they felt politically at this time; indeed when he stood for re-election in 1898, she contributed out of her very modest income £50 to his campaign funds.

The year after Rhodes had been blocked in Bechuanaland, he embarked on another attempt at territorial aggrandisement which led Charlie to break with him completely. This time he wanted to take control of territory ruled by whites, the South African Republic. His ambition was mastery of the goldfields on the Rand where he had growing investments. He employed a faithful acolyte, Dr Leander Starr Jamieson, to assemble a small military force in a remote part of Bechuanaland with the purpose of invading the Republic and overthrowing President Paul Kruger's Boer government. Within days of crossing the border, Rhodes's freebooters were captured in humiliating circumstances. Suspicion immediately fell on Rhodes himself – he had to resign as Prime Minister of the Cape – and also on the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, in London. The Jamieson Raid, as it came to be called, became the precursor of Britain going to war against the Boer Republics in 1899. This, in turn, ignited an uncompromising Afrikaner nationalism which had catastrophic consequences for South Africa in the century that followed.

Charlie and James now broke with Rhodes entirely and associated themselves loosely with 'Onze Jan' Hofmeyr's Afrikaner Bond. At the next election in 1898, Charlie stood in Tembuland again. Rhodes and his supporters did not forgive him. They played on white voters' fears with slogans like 'The British flag is in danger' and alleged that their opponents, Charlie among them, 'want to form a republic' in the Cape. Charlie told Betty that, of course, 'it is impossible to tell people, when you are wanting their votes, that you consider them a lot of fools.'⁸² In electoral terms, 'the pure-blooded

⁸⁰ Charlie Molteno to Betty Molteno, 16 Nov 1895.

⁸¹ Charlie Molteno to Betty Molteno, 25 Feb 1895.

⁸² Charlie Molteno to Betty Molteno, 31 Jul 1898. There is a rich haul of Charlie's political letters during this campaign which I have not been able to go through in detail.

Natives stood by me well, but the bastards were all bought over.’⁸³ He also met with Boer farmers and assumed he would get their support.⁸⁴ But in the end he was defeated and, although he suspected some dirty work by his opponents, could not prove it. ‘Of course, I knew when I “bab it” against the Government that I was jeopardising my seat, but that had no influence with me.’⁸⁵

Charlie was in no mind to give up. John Tengo Jabavu, Editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu*, told Betty Molteno, who was one of the paper’s subscribers, that African voters would support Charlie if he stood for another seat. When, the following year, a vacancy arose in the next door constituency of Jansenville, Charlie tried again. Like Tembuland, Jansenville had a considerable number of African voters, in spite of the various measures that had been introduced to reduce the number of Black voters.

Rhodes once again tried to secure Charlie’s defeat. One newspaper, almost certainly *Imvo*, commented that ‘Few persons, it would seem, Mr Rhodes dreads more than Mr J. C. Molteno in the House.’⁸⁶ Rhodes despatched one of the agents he employed, Mr Owen Lewis, who spread the word among the Jansenville voters that Charlie had no chance of being elected, so why waste your vote? What *Imvo* called ‘the hiring press’ spread the same message, as did a raft of other prominent Rhodes supporters who arrived in the constituency to campaign against Charlie. All to no avail. Charlie won the seat. And *Imvo* reported: ‘Natives rejoice and thank their fellow South Africans for putting in their former member with flying colours.’

Charlie held this seat until 1903, although the Cape Parliament was prorogued much of the time during the Boer War (1899-1902). In February 1904, there were new elections and he stood again, this time in Tembuland where he had first been elected ten years before. It was a two-member constituency and had a considerable number of African voters. Charlie and his co-candidate C. C. Silberbauer met frequently with these Tembu voters. Meetings typically lasted many hours, often starting around noon and going on til 4pm and Charlie was always impressed with how sharply attuned to, and informed about, the issues his African electoral supporters were.⁸⁷

The bulk of the electorate, however, were Whites. The Boer War had been over less than two years and the White population of the Cape had not recovered from its bitter internecine hostilities. It was in these circumstances that Charlie and Silberbauer issued their joint prospectus which throws fascinating light on their political beliefs. Calling themselves ‘The Unpledged’, they stood as ‘Independent Supporters’ of the South African Party. The SAP had been founded by Olive Schreiner’s brother, Will Schreiner, and occupied an uncomfortable position between the pro-imperialist Progressive Party Rhodes had founded and the increasingly nationalist Afrikaner Bond with which

⁸³ Charlie Molteno to Betty Molteno, 2 Sep 1898. Exactly who the ‘bastards’ Charlie refers to were, is not clear.

⁸⁴ Charlie Molteno to Betty Molteno, 16 Jul 1898.

⁸⁵ Charlie Molteno to Betty Molteno, 2 Sep 1898.

⁸⁶ This cutting unfortunately has no date or the newspaper’s name; but it sounds as though it was Tengo Jabavu’s *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Black Opinion).

⁸⁷ J. L. McCracken, *The Cape Parliament, 1854-1910*, Clarendon Press, 1967. I NEED TO LOOK AT THIS TEXT.

the SAP also disagreed on many points. Charlie and Silberbauer said they would 'enter a real Protest against the Country being torn apart by the Extremists of the Rival Sections in ... the Cape Colony'. They were also against 'Capitalistic Domination and Dictation' and 'Legislation based on antipathies of Class, Creed or Colour'. Instead they stood for 'the permanent Reconciliation of the Two Dominant Races upon a basis of equality and mutual esteem', 'True Progress ... for the good of all, and not the favoured few', 'Increased Educational Facilities for all classes of the population' and for 'Transkei Development' and 'the retention of the profitable and legitimate fields of labour for the large Native population in South Africa'. This was a non-sectarian manifesto that sought to put aside the hostilities of British versus Afrikaner, as well as White against Black South Africans. It was a courageous political attempt, and not successful. Neither man was elected.

When a few months later several more parliamentary seats were created, Charlie decided not to stand, explaining to Percy that, with his young family and the need to earn his living, he had neither time nor the money.⁸⁸ Three years on, however, with a new general election called in 1907, he changed his mind and stood again for his old seat of Jansenville. This time he did win. But the creation of a Union of South Africa almost immediately became the main political preoccupation, the intention being to bring the former Boer republics and two British colonies together in a single state. Charlie sought, but did not get, the nomination of the new Union-wide South Africa Party led by the former Boer War Generals in the Transvaal, Botha and Smuts, and he played no further part in South African politics.⁸⁹

The fact is that he had grown up and been shaped by a previous era. His political outlook and values ran contrary to the new political currents among white South Africans that were to dominate parliamentary politics in the country for the rest of the 20th century. Charlie was no English jingoist. Nor could he embrace Afrikaner nationalism. And, like his father, he regarded South Africans of colour as fellow citizens with a full right to share in all the opportunities that a growing economy and modern society could offer. In a 'normal' country, one might expect a politician to change with the times. But where democratic institutions do not fully exist and the issues at stake are fundamental – racism or non-racism, democracy or the permanent capture of the state by one ethnic section of the population, building a just society or going in the opposite direction – a person of integrity faces a difficult and lonely choice. Charlie was regarded as 'a man of moderate views'⁹⁰ when in Parliament, but he had now either to abandon his basic values or be excluded from political life.

His political outlook and principles were a direct continuation of his father's beliefs: Britain must not interfere in the affairs of South Africa, and must be opposed if it tried to do so. English-speaking White South Africans and Dutch or Afrikaans-speakers should not fall prey to communalism and mutual suspicion, or build political parties based on their differing linguistic and cultural origins. And the Cape was to be a common society in which South Africans of colour would have equal rights and

⁸⁸ Charlie Molteno to Percy Molteno, 27 Apr 1904.

⁸⁹ Charlie Molteno was a Member of the Cape Parliament for Tembuland (1894-98), Jansenville (1899-1903) and again for Jansenville (1907-10). He was never an MP in the South African House of Assembly. Lucy Molteno to Francis Hirst, 22 May 1939.

⁹⁰ *Cape Times*, Obituary, 24 Jan 1924.

opportunities with South Africans of primarily European origin. These were Charlie's fundamental beliefs, from which he would not be moved. Little surprise, therefore, that at the end of his life, newspapers from all sections of the population marked his death with kind words, but did not make clear to their readers the reasons why Charlie was no longer playing a part in the political life of the country. The *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus* ran short obituaries of little substance. An Afrikaner outlet, *Ons Land*, called him 'a man of firm principles and earnest convictions... [and] a man of character and a strong personality'. *Die Burger* described him as 'a man of deep convictions', 'one of the personages best known to Southern-Afrikanders', and a 'true lover of his fatherland [who] ever strove to do his best for land and volk.'⁹¹ Another paper reported a meeting of Africans in Simonstown which had been arranged to greet one of their most important early leaders and journalists, Sol Plaatje, who had just returned from a long tour of North America and Britain. On hearing the news of Charlie's death, the meeting instructed the chair, Mr Gamadi, to write to Charlie's brother, now Sir James Molteno, expressing their condolences over Charlie's death and 'conveying to the Molteno family the sympathy of local Natives, in common with the Native population throughout the land.' Courtesy and respect all round by these papers, but no admission that South Africa was now a place where no political leader could command support from across all its constituent communities. Therein lay the tragedy of the country throughout the 20th century.

Outside the parliamentary arena, one of Charlie's most important contributions was the active part he played in supporting a free press in the Cape. FOLLOWING SECTION IN ITALICS TO BE PROPERLY WRITTEN *He supported John Tengo Jabavu, CHECK the first African to found a newspaper in South Africa. Imvo Zabantsandu CHECK In the early years of the new century, his brother, Percy, put in money. In early 1905, Percy donated another £250 and Charlie made a contribution too.*⁹² NEEDS PROPER AMPLIFICATION.

.....By this time, Rhodes controlled almost the whole press in the Cape Colony. Charlie joined with others to found a non-jingoist newspaper independent of Rhodes. This initiative led to the founding of the XXX and Charlie became Chair of the Board of Directors of the South African Newspaper Company, a post he held right up to the time of his death. TELL THIS STORY.

Marriage at last

In spite of his preoccupations with farming and politics, Charlie did eventually marry, but only some years after his sisters, Caroline and Maria, and his younger brothers Frank, Percy, James and Victor. Being an MP from 1894, he had to spend the parliamentary sessions in Cape Town. An American family happened to pass through the city the following year. Mrs Sarah Mitchell had recently suffered the loss of her husband, Clarence, who had died in 1893. Being well off, she decided to take her three daughters⁹³ on a world tour for a couple of years! South Africa was on the itinerary

⁹¹ *Die Burger*, 24 Jan 1924.

⁹² Charlie Molteno to Percy Molteno, 12 Oct 1904.

⁹³ Lucy was the eldest, followed by Carol Mitchell who married the Rev. Anson Phelps Stokes from a very well-known and affluent East Coast family, and Nan Mitchell who did not marry and lived abroad much of her life.

because she had actually been born in Port Elizabeth in 1839. She was the daughter of the Rev. Daniel Lindley, an American Presbyterian minister who had been one of the first American missionaries to arrive in the region in 1835 – just before the Great Trek. He landed up in Zululand (later called Natal by the British) just three years after the Voortrekkers had arrived there. He opened a school for Boer children, and agreed in 1842 to be a pastor to the Boers in the belief that ‘the aggressive Dutch needed Christianizing as much as the Zulus’.⁹⁴ One of the young men he confirmed was Paul Kruger, later to become President of the South African Republic. A few years after this, Daniel changed direction. He resigned his pastorship and set up instead a mission station at Inanda working in the Zulu community. The huge tree under which he preached for many years was still standing a century later in 1947.⁹⁵ When he eventually retired in 1873, he returned to the United States where his daughter, Sarah, had just married Clarence Green Mitchell the previous year in New York.

By the time of Sarah’s visit to the Cape in the 1890s, her eldest daughter, Lucy Lindley Mitchell, was a slender and somewhat enigmatically attractive 21-year old. Charlie was greatly smitten, was turned down by her, but remained determined. His eldest sister, Betty, spotted what was going on and had a frank talk with him.⁹⁶ ‘He is very energetic – has at last done what I so hoped he would – got a riding horse and rides before breakfast. I think he is restless and must be thinking of marriage. Wants to marry and yet dreads curtailing his freedom in any way. He has a very sensitive and lovely soul and terribly needs his freedom.’ After telling their brother Percy this, Betty then went on about her own thoughts on the realities of married life: ‘Marriage must have a great danger of blocking [?] some of our finest sensibilities. Perfect marriage seems rapture almost more than one can bear; [but] ... I often think that marriage must be like the rest of life – a most tremendous discipline. To me the awful thing would be if anyone came in on me (?) in a way to really consciously check my growth. That I think would kill me. Or I would break away from it.’

Charlie was now 37 years old and did not take Lucy’s No for an answer. In late 1897, he upped sticks and pursued her all the way to the United States – which meant catching two different steamships and taking a month to get there. From London, he wrote to his sister, Caroline, telling her firmly that he would never marry someone not intimately acquainted with Cape life, but in his next letter dropped a bombshell.⁹⁷ ‘I hardly know how to write and tell you the news of my engagement for you will think that I have been misleading you. The fact is that before the Mitchells left South Africa, I wished to become engaged to Miss Mitchell. But as she didn’t see things as I did and had written lines to say that my coming to America would be of no use, you will see that it was truly a sort of forlorn hope that brought me over here.... As marrying was the last thing I thought of when I left the Cape, I of course made no arrangements for such an eventuality.’ But he went on to explain: ‘Miss Mitchell’s health is delicate; she can’t stay in this part of America long, and so the marriage is to go

⁹⁴ David M. Stowe, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998.

⁹⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 11 Mar 1940.

⁹⁶ Betty Molteno to Percy Molteno, 2 Aug 1896.

⁹⁷ Charlie Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 2 Dec 1897.

ahead with as little delay as possible.’ And before the month was out, Charlie and Lucy were married in Lakewood, New Jersey, just two days after Christmas.

As one can imagine, Lucy’s mother was a bit worried. Nearly a century later, Lucy’s daughter, Virginia, told a story only her mother could have been the source for. ‘She is delicate,’ Mrs Mitchell had apparently told Charlie, ‘she could not possibly thrive in that climate.’ Charlie, in response, promised to build Lucy ‘a house on a hill’.⁹⁸ And true to his word, on their returning to Cape Town in early 1898, he bought a five acre plot and commissioned the architect, Herbert Baker, to build a home for them. Baker was later to become famous, designing the Union Buildings in Pretoria after the Union of South Africa was formed and the Rhodes Memorial which still stands high on the slopes of Victoria Peak in Cape Town. The home he designed for Lucy and Charlie was called Sandown House. Admittedly it wasn’t quite on a hill – indeed Rondebosch Common over which it looked was flat as a pancake – but it did stand on a rise above the Liesbeeck River. And Lucy certainly thrived, only dying at the age of 97 more than half a century after her husband.

Family life at the Cape in the early 20th century

Lucy and Charlie’s marriage turned out to be a most happy one. She made an immediately favourable impression on her many Molteno in-laws. Percy first met her as she and Charlie passed through London on their way back to the Cape. ‘She seems very sincere and open – with a good share of American activity of mind and temperament, much more awake than most English women’s minds.’⁹⁹

She settled easily into the social life of upper class Cape Town. Through Charlie, she made close friends in what was still called the Dutch community, notably with Mrs Koopmans de Wet and her circle. She got to know many eminent Cape families involved in politics – the Hofmeyrs, Sauers and Merrimans. One of her closest and lifelong friends was the famous South African feminist and writer, Olive Schreiner. The large Molteno and Murray families provided the mainstay of her everyday social life. In addition, she had two South African cousins of her own – Marjorie Lindley who subsequently married Harry Blackburn and settled at Eikenhof, the farm in Elgin her husband ran; and Inanda Lindley who had been called after the name of her grandfather’s mission station and herself became a missionary in Japan.

Charlie was a devoted husband. He had a large rose garden planted in the grounds of Sandown House and was in the habit of picking Lucy a rose each morning before setting off for work. He was a kind father, too, in his youngest daughter, Virginia’s, recollection. He would deliver her to her nursery school each morning, always taking the reins from the coachman and driving the Cape cart himself when she was in it. Or sometimes the two of them would walk to school, in which case they tended to arrive late and Virginia came to be known as the 10 o’clock child.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Lucy’s youngest daughter, Virginia Molteno, told this to her niece, Selina Cohen (nee Molteno), in old age, March 1996.

⁹⁹ Percy Molteno to Betty Molteno, 15 Jan 1898.

¹⁰⁰ Virginia Molteno’s recollections, as related to Selina Molteno and Robert Molteno, 1996.

Lucy's was a privileged existence. Like all women of her class and generation, she was not expected to help earn the family living. Although Charlie was not a wealthy man, his farming, various public posts¹⁰¹ and other interests provided them with a most comfortable existence. As a result she, who had grown up in the States surrounded by servants (she had even had a French wet nurse to breastfeed her following her birth in Nice on the Cote d'Azur in 1874), continued to have all domestic work done for her. Her daughter, Carol, described their establishment at Sandown House. There was 'Henry [who] drove Mother in the perfectly sprung Cape cart [a two-wheeled, four-seater conveyance] used by Cecil Rhodes, who had had it built by Cooper, the well-known carriage builder. Henry wore a livery we thought very grand. The blue broadcloth coat was made to measure by a tailor and had large silver buttons. A cockaded black top-hat, black leather top boots and smart gauntlet gloves were the final touch of elegance.'

The household included a Miss Moxham, the rather classy Norland nurse who had been brought over from England to look after Virginia. 'All the bathing, putting to bed and feeding were done by this highly trained and very strict English nanny' while Lucy, in Virginia's recollection, would 'spend her time lying on the sofa looking beautiful and entertaining "callers".' There were also three maids, a cowman and presumably a gardener or two. Carol recalled an incident years later when she – by then a single mother, hard up and with three small children – was moving into a flat at Park Mansions, Rondebosch, in the late 1930s. Lucy arrived 'to help'. 'I remember,' said Carol, 'with a smile how Mother asked what she could do and I replied: "Please sweep the floor." Her answer? – "I have never swept before and doubt I know how to hold the broom".'

John Charles 'Charlie' Molteno (1860-1924) and Lucy Lindley Mitchell (1874-1970)'s children

Birth	Christian Names	Marriage	Spouse	Death
XXXX	Lucy Molteno	?	Bernard Armitage	
1901	Caroline 'Carol' Molteno	?	Arthur Williamson (dvd)	1989
1905	John Charles 'Long John' or 'Ching' Molteno	? ?	1. Angeline Brand 2. Zoe Holcroft	1971
1907	Christopher Jarvis 'Peter' or 'Little Ching' Molteno	?	Margaret Judd	2000
1911	Elizabeth 'Virginia'	? ?	1. Frederick Laws	

¹⁰¹ *Cape Times*, 23 Jan 1924. The dates of his chairing the Land Commission are unclear; but were probably in the wake of the First World War because it ran a scheme for settling ex-soldiers on the land.

	Molteno		2. Robert Moody	
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Charlie had been clear with Lucy that he would continue his political involvement. As he told Caroline, 'Of course, I would not allow my marriage to interfere in any way with that kind of work, and in this Lucy is quite at one with me.... She is full of enthusiasm for a useful life and all that kind of thing.'¹⁰² And when he opposed Britain going to war against the Boer Republics, which happened within 18 months of Lucy's arrival in Cape Town, she had no difficulty in supporting his stance. Perhaps her American background and having grown up in a republic that had fought its own war to seize independence from Britain a century before predisposed her in this direction.

They had five children. Only a couple of recollections survive about their father. One vignette was told by Carol about the ritual of afternoon tea in the family:

At home Daddy always made the tea. Hot water was put into a meths-heated silver kettle, which tilted to pour the hot water exactly as it came to the boil on to the tea leaves in a heated earthenware tea pot. The tea had to infuse for a timed three minutes before being poured. [My sister] Lucy and I were not allowed tea or coffee before we were sixteen years old, nor might we drink water at meals. The strict rules by which Lucy and I were brought up were relaxed later for the boys and Virginia.¹⁰³

Carol also remembered how important in their lives was the huge Molteno family circle. Here is a glimpse which has strong echoes of John Galsworthy's *Forsythe Saga* whose large extended family in Edwardian London were living at exactly the same time as Lucy and Charlie:

When we were young, Daddy often took us out to tea on Sundays to the homes of various elderly relations in Kenilworth and Claremont. Aunt Annie Bisset, Willie Blenkins and Aunt Emmie Jarvis always had wonderful teas – *konfyts* of watermelon, figs or gherkins and cakes of every kind loading the table. The Lindleys' home, Aunt Caroline's, Uncle Victor's, Uncle Frank's and others like Jim Bisset's were visited in turn, and everywhere we were received with hugs and many kisses and little murmurings of affection.¹⁰⁴

If we stayed at home, interesting guests were always invited to lunch or tea. Very often I would be asked to catch a horse in the ten-acre field. It belonged to Dr Murray. But we used it to inspan the dogcart to fetch the guests at the station and later take them back.

¹⁰² Charlie Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 2 Dec 1897.

¹⁰³ Carol Williamson (nee Molteno), *Recollections*, Ch 1, 'My Childhood', available at www.moltenofamily.net

¹⁰⁴ These were all members of the intimately related families of Jarvises, Moltenos, Bissets, and Murrays. The Lindleys were related to Carol through her grandmother, Mrs Sarah Lindley Mitchell, whose brother Bryant Lindley lived at the Cape. Caroline (Dr Murray's wife), Dr Victor Molteno and Frank Molteno were Charlie's sister and brothers.

Another of Carol's recollections¹⁰⁵ was how, after the Boer War had ended, Charlie would take Lucy and the children almost every year up to the Karoo:

One winter we spent at Nelspoort, the family farm.¹⁰⁶ Another year we went to Kamferskraal as Uncle Wallace and his family had gone overseas. A third year we spent at Bleak House as Mr Jackson and his family were away.¹⁰⁷ Daddy owned this farm with Mr Jackson, who ran it. We watched the ostriches being plucked for their magnificent tail feathers and a few wing feathers, the male being black and white and the female brownish. Sometimes I was told to keep watch on the ostrich chicks while they fed on a patch of young lucerne in the garden. The orange trees behind the house were irrigated by furrows from the dam. Daddy took us riding in the frosty mornings when my nose and gloveless hands almost froze. In the evenings he read aloud to us by lamplight from Walter Scott's novels or *The Newcomers*.

Our only visitors were the scab inspector to check the livestock, the police on their weekly round to the farms as there were no phones in those days, or perhaps an itinerant wool buyer or pedlar. All of them had to be invited to a meal, which didn't please Mother, but Daddy insisted, saying it would be an insult not to do so. I remember the delicious bacon-larded springbok saddles or legs and stews.¹⁰⁸ The wild turkey or *pauw* had by then become rare and was soon to be protected. Vegetables were very scarce and we usually had only pumpkin and sweet potatoes. Mother brought a lot of dried fruit with us.

Frank Molteno – 'the goodest of men'

Frank was the third of John and Maria's sons. He was born in 1863, a year before his father bought what became the family's home in Cape Town for the next 60 years. Frank so loved Claremont House that it was he eventually who bought it from his brothers and sisters, although with much reduced grounds, and his family lived there from the early 1900s.

Like all his brothers, he was educated at Bishops (the Diocesan College) which was only a couple of miles from Claremont House. Like his brother James, he was good at sport, in particular enjoying tennis and cricket. He chose not to go to university, but study instead to be a surveyor; he and cousin, Jim Bisset, both passing their exams in 1884. Immediately on qualifying he went up-country

¹⁰⁵ Carol Williamson (nee Molteno), *Recollections*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶ Nelspoort is where Carol's grandfather, John Charles Molteno, had started in the 1840s to build up several huge sheep farms. After his death in 1886, his son Charlie Molteno took responsibility for them. Shortly after the Boer War ended in 1902, his younger brother, Wallace, took over Kamferskraal and eventually the main Nelspoort farm itself.

¹⁰⁷ Bleak House was adjacent to Kamferskraal. The Jacksons were cousins of the Moltenos; John Charles Molteno's mother, Caroline Bower, had had a sister who married a Jackson and several of their sons came out to the Cape and settled on the Karoo at the invitation of John Charles. See Ch. 8.

¹⁰⁸ Wild springbok will still plentiful, not to say a pest, in those days; and so a crucial source of meat.

to a remote little place called Bitterfontein. This lay some 250 miles north of Cape Town and served the newly developed Okiep mine which for a time in the 1870s had become the richest copper mine in the world. His letters contain wonderful descriptions of his life there.¹⁰⁹ The nearest post office was 20 miles off. The local farmers made him welcome. He shot wild game for the pot and tried to bake his own bread in a home-made oven. After a couple of years, he moved up to the South African Republic in order to take advantage of the discovery of gold there. Arriving on the Reef in late 1887 he based himself at first in the brash new mining settlement of Johannesburg which was springing up on the veld. There he found his Uncle Bisset, the Scottish engineer and architect who had married Aunt Betty Jarvis, and who was Jim's father. Frank stayed in what called itself the Fountain Hotel. This was kept by a black man called Ely who, by extraordinary coincidence, had – before settling at the Cape – served in the Royal Navy on HMS *Rattlesnake*, the very ship in which Frank's brother in law, Dr Murray, had been ship's surgeon, and both men had taken part in the Third Anglo-Ashanti War of the early 1870s.¹¹⁰

On the Reef Frank earned his living as a surveyor and, like so many young men trying to make their fortune in the gold rush, came into possession of some gold claims.¹¹¹ His grandfather, Hercules Jarvis, reported that he 'tempted the family circle to take shares and participate'.¹¹² But deep-level mining (as opposed to alluvial deposits) required serious capital and, in any case, Frank's first love was the Cape and quite soon he returned there and got a job as assistant to the Surveyor General.

He was, as his brother Barkly described him, 'the steadiest and most conscientious member of the family. He was all virtue and had no weaknesses – a teetotaller, 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 was considerate and trusted and liked by everybody.'¹¹³ In many respects he was a chip off the old block – similar to his father in his approach to his work, his integrity and his disregard for the growing prejudice and hostility on the part of white people towards their fellow South Africans of colour. But unlike John Molteno, Frank was never interested in politics; indeed at the start of the Boer War in 1899 he disagreed with several of his brothers and sisters, regarding instead the British Government as having good reason for going to war against the Boer Republics.

Marriage

Frank married young; in fact, he was the first of the boys to marry. He got engaged to Ella Jones only a few months after his father's death. Several members of the family were not pleased. Percy jumped to conclusions even though he had never met Ella. He told Betty in March 1887: 'we must make the best of it as it has taken place.... Frank seems to want it to come off soon, but I do not see

¹⁰⁹ UCT Special Collections, BC330, Box 70.

¹¹⁰ Frank Molteno's letters from this period give a fascinating picture of life during the early days of the gold fields.

¹¹¹ His grandfather, Hercules Jarvis, to Percy Molteno, 28 Nov 1888.

¹¹² Hercules Jarvis to Percy Molteno, 6 Nov 1888.

¹¹³ This pen portrait written for Francis Hirst's biography of Percy Molteno.

how that can be as he has nothing fixed as yet.’¹¹⁴ And reflecting both the mores of the Victorian era as well as the ease with which youngsters can rush to judgement, he thought that Frank and ‘Miss Jones’ were seeing too much of each other and that her father should allow Frank only to come once a week!¹¹⁵ Another of Frank’s brothers, Victor, joined in: ‘I don’t think he is doing wisely, but I suppose it will be an engagement of some length’. Ironically, Victor subsequently married Ella’s cousin, Mildred Jones – both girls being granddaughters of Mr Rice Jones, a sworn appraiser and auctioneer from Port Elizabeth.

Frank Molteno and Ella Jones’ Children

Birth	Christian Names	Marriage	Spouse	Death
1889	Henry ‘Vyvyan’ Molteno			28 November 1911
1890	‘Frank’ Edmund Molteno			9 January 1899
1894	‘Brenda’ Emily Molteno		Gordon Thomas	1944
1900	‘Nesta’ Mary Molteno		i. John Syme ii. Harold Crosse-Jones	c. 1985

Contrary to these fears, Frank and Ella’s marriage proved an exceptionally happy one. They and their children ‘were a devoted and a most happy family’ – a reality which made the deaths of their two sons all the more tragic. Frank Edmund was only a little boy of eight when he was swept off the rocks at Kalk Bay while fishing and drowned in 1899. The second tragedy struck the family a dozen years later.

Vyvyan Molteno was the eldest of Frank and Ella’s children. Born in 1889, he proved an exceptionally intelligent young man. He took prize after prize at Bishops and got a place at Oxford. On arriving in England, Percy provided him, as he did with all his nephews and nieces from the Cape, with a home from home. More than that, Vyvyan became for both Percy and Bessie like another son. ‘He was so much beloved’, Bessie told Caroline Murray¹¹⁶ and Percy wrote Dr Murray how ‘all who met him were so charmed with him.’¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Percy Molteno to Betty Molteno, 4 Mar 1887.

¹¹⁵ Percy Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 4 Jun 1887.

¹¹⁶ Bessie Molteno to Caroline Murray, 30 Nov 1911.

¹¹⁷ As Percy Molteno told his brother in law, Dr Murray, 7 Dec 1911.

The tragedy of Vyvyan Molteno

In late November 1911, Vyvyan was staying over-night with Percy and Bessie on their farm, Parklands, near Shere just south of London. The proud possessor of the new-fangled invention of the motorbike, he took off next day – it was a Sunday and already the light was fading – and headed down the A3. Winter gales and exceptionally heavy rains had begun to sweep in from the Atlantic. Whatever the precise cause, his bike crashed just outside the Hampshire village of Petersfield and he was killed. Somehow Percy was informed. He at once cabled Dr Murray, asking him to break the awful news to Frank and Ella at Claremont House. Dr Murray and Caroline's daughter, May, who was Vyvyan's cousin, rushed over to be with them and, grief-stricken, Uncle Frank took her up to Vyvyan's bedroom and showed her all the prizes he had won.¹¹⁸

Back in England, when the news came through that Sunday evening, Betty Molteno rushed down to Parklands to comfort Percy and Bessie. She also sent a telegram to her partner, Alice Greene, who was staying with her family near Cambridge. Alice wrote a moving letter of condolence to Frank and Ella.¹¹⁹ She told them how she had been greatly struck by 'something singularly lovable and attractive about [their son].... He had that great simplicity and naturalness – boyishness even – which very gifted natures so frequently have. And with this ... a sweetness and kindness of nature and clearness of spirit which made him a great refreshment and delight.' She recalled an evening he had spent with Betty and her. They had compared life at the Cape with England. Vyvyan had been rather amazed by the comparative isolation in which English families seemed to be brought up, and contrasted it with his own experience in Cape Town where he was always surrounded by friends.

Alice describe the funeral Percy and Bessie organised. 'You know the beautiful little old spired church of Shere and the grave beauty of the churchyard.... The sun was shining with the cloudlessness of midsummer, and the dry bracken on the commons, russet brown of the beech woods, lacy leaflessness of most of the trees, and new furrows in the ploughed lands all over the sweet, up-and-down Surrey country.' She had come down by train and Betty had met her at the tiny station. The two of them had walked straight to the churchyard. There they found some village children standing quietly around the newly prepared grave, all lined with moss and fresh white chrysanthemums.

Other members of the family who were in England came down for the funeral. They included Barkly Molteno, now a fully fledged Captain in the Royal Navy, and Dr and Caroline Murray's youngest son, George, Percy and Bessie's daughter Margaret, and Vyvyan's sister Brenda – who were all still at school. At 3 o'clock they gathered in the village hall and collected the wreaths and crosses. They then drove down the steep village street to the Church past 'the villagers [who] stood with bared heads in reverent silence as we passed'. On arrival Alice saw to her surprise a number of young men whom she did not know; they turned out to be some of Vyvyan's fellow students from the Cape who were at Oxford with him, and she suddenly understood how, even in death, he was surrounded by the friends who meant so much to him.

¹¹⁸ May Murray to her fiancé, Dr Freddie Parker, 26 Nov 1911.

¹¹⁹ Alice Greene to Frank and Ella Molteno, 30 Nov 1911.

Afterwards everyone repaired to the big house at Parklands. And the following morning Betty and Alice walked down to the churchyard again where they found Brenda and Margaret standing by the grave. It was now entirely covered with wreaths of white chrysanthemums, lilies of the valley, Madonna lilies, arum lilies and white roses 'in such profusion that they had to flow down on the ground beside the grave'.

A man of faith

Frank was a quiet man and, unlike his brothers and sisters, deeply devout. He became very active in the life of the Anglican Church. When only 24 years old, he was a delegate to the Church's Synod and elected its Lay Secretary. At St Paul's, Rondebosch, which was his parish church, he served as a church warden. In ways not easily understood by those who do not have a religious faith, he was able to accept the deaths of his sons. Years after Vyvyan's death he told Percy: 'You must not think that I am rebelling against God's doing. Ella and I both feel that there is a higher power ordering these things for the best.'¹²⁰

Their son in law, John Syme, who had married their daughter, Nesta, in the early 1920s, saw Frank and Ella as 'kind and gentle people.... Mr Frank Molteno was one of the goodest of men, he was kind and gentle, most polite and upright. Everyone he ever met was a friend of his.... [And] he belonged to a very fine old Cape family who were well-known, [but] very clannish.'¹²¹

Frank became reasonably prosperous during the course of his professional life. Along with Charlie and Percy, he was one of the more business-minded men in the family, and his letters in the early 1900s are full of land prices, selling off plots, investments in the extension of the Suburban Railway to Muizenberg, and such like. He engaged in property development. In 1919 he built a house in Kalk Bay which, in both his and the next generation, remained the favourite holiday place by the sea for the Molteno, Anderson and Stanford families.

The farm, Applegarth – its beginnings

At some point before the First World War (1914-18), Frank bought a modest-sized agricultural holding in Elgin. It was situated just on the other side of the railway line from where Caroline and Dr Murray had a property and Ted and Harry Molteno were building up their large-scale farming operation. Ironically, this sparked one of the family disputes that Ted was prone to engage in. Frank's property was adjacent to Ted and Harry's farms and Ted started a fight in 1923 over the precise boundary. Percy could hardly believe it: 'it ought certainly to be made the subject of friendly arbitration and be settled on reasonable lines. It is always unwise to have these disputes proceeding

¹²⁰ Frank Molteno to Percy Molteno, 28 Nov 1924.

¹²¹ John Syme, *Story of a South African Boy*, his autobiography. This book-length reminiscence can be read on www.moltenofamily.net

in the family.’ That, however, was not Ted’s approach in life. And he kept up the dispute throughout the following year.¹²²

Frank, like so many of his brothers – Charlie, Percy, Victor, Wallace, and Ted and Harry – loved farming. He tried potatoes at Elgin, as Ted and Harry were also doing, and was in constant correspondence about how the farm was going with Percy, with whom he was particularly close. In part, however, because he continued working professionally in Cape Town and could not give his full-time attention to the farm, it never really became a paying proposition during his lifetime. That had to wait until his daughter Brenda’s marriage to Royal Navy officer, Gordon ‘Tommy’ Thomas. They got engaged in 1916, but only married at the end of the War. Immediately he was free to do so, Tommy resigned his commission and emigrated to the Cape. After spending their honeymoon at Nelspoort, he and Brenda settled on the farm which they called Applegarth. During the 1920s they turned it into a successful deciduous fruit farm as Brenda’s Uncles, Ted and Harry Molteno, were also doing with their farms, and her cousin, Kathleen Murray, with her parents’ farm, Palmiet River. Tommy and Brenda planted nectarines, Gaviota plums (a new variety with a rich golden-coloured flesh that had been recently developed in California) and Bon Chretien pears. In the investment necessary to do all this, they were greatly helped by Percy Molteno’s generosity when he gave £2,000 to Brenda on her marriage.¹²³

Elgin by the early 1920s had become a new centre of gravity for the family’s farming activities and its social life. In addition to the farms of Brenda and Tommy, Kathleen, and Ted and Harry, Dr Victor Molteno also bought a farm at Houwhoek, a few miles beyond the Elgin Valley. At the same time over the mountains, Percy and Bessie’s daughter, Margaret, and her new husband Lenox Murray, were farming at Tulbagh for a short while. Much more about what happened at Elgin will be told in a later chapter.¹²⁴

Victor Molteno – the quietest of the brothers

Victor was the 5th of John and Maria Molteno’s sons. Born in 1866 he was even quieter than his brother Frank. Betty, who had tried to fill the void for all her youngest brothers when their mother died in 1874, put it this way: ‘Touch was a language he understood. The inadequacy of words he knew. His words have ever been rare and few.’¹²⁵ He lived almost all his life in the Cape Peninsula and there was nothing he liked better than to go out walking on the Cape Flats on his own. He was fascinated by its richly varied bird life— wild fowl on the vleis, seagulls coming in from False Bay when storms threatened, and all the other birds. This was an interest he passed on to his youngest son, Charles Brunette Molteno, who, after he retired from working on the mines in 1969, also loved

¹²² Percy Molteno to James Molteno, 7 Jun 1923 and 4 Nov 1924.

¹²³ Frank Molteno to Percy Molteno, 6 Jun 1919.

¹²⁴ See Chapter 19 – GET CHAPTER NUMBER RIGHT.

¹²⁵ Betty Molteno, *Journal*, 12 Mar 1925.

tramping the veld on his small dairy farm in the Transvaal with binoculars looking for birds. And his sons in their turn, Christopher and Rodney Molteno, both of whom became doctors like their grandfather, came to love bird-watching.

Victor also loved shooting right from when he was a youngster barely in his teens. Staying at Nelspoort was therefore particularly special for him. He described one occasion – he was sixteen at the time – when he and his cousin Arthur Jackson ‘went up the mountain at the back of the house to try and shoot a tiger.¹²⁶ The night before two men working on the place heard him roaring and in the morning another man heard him. So we went up to the place he generally lived in when he visits this mountain and waited. But he did not come out.’¹²⁷ And Percy wrote of him: ‘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.’¹²⁸

Like all his brothers, Victor was a day scholar at Bishops. Strongly built and an all-rounder who played rugby and cricket, boxed and rowed, he became a fine sportsman. He was particularly good at rugby, gaining a place in the School XV and later playing as a forward for Clare College, Cambridge and then the St Thomas’s Hospital team in London. When he grew up, he wanted at first to become a professional soldier – he had been Captain of the Bishops Cadet Corps – but his father objected. Victor then decided to study medicine. Percy was already at Cambridge and it was assumed Victor would go there too. But another severe drought struck the Nelspoort area in 1884. Arthur Jackson lost half his stock¹²⁹ and John Molteno worried whether he could afford the fees – Percy was already costing him £400 a year, James had been accepted at Trinity College to do the Law Tripos, and there were also Barkly’s fees as a Royal Navy cadet to pay. John Molteno talked of a less expensive option for Victor – going either to one of the great teaching hospitals in London or to Edinburgh. Suddenly, however, in characteristically decisive fashion, he made up his mind. ‘Victor goes to England by Wednesday’s mail boat,’ Maria wrote to Betty. ‘It was all settled, thought of and arranged in a day. Papa suddenly thought it was no use his beginning at the Hospital here, and that he had better go at once.’¹³⁰ So Victor spent a year in a London hospital and then, in autumn 1885, he and James went up to Cambridge together; they even shared ‘digs’ for a time.

At Clare College, he concentrated on his medical studies and sport, mainly rugby and rowing, but also some boxing. He told Caroline that nothing much else interested him, in stark contrast to James who was throwing himself into parties, debating and various cultural activities.

Victor confessed to Caroline that: ‘For as long as I can remember I always felt relieved when I had finished my last letter – something like when I had learnt my last lesson in the evening.’ He certainly wrote fewer and fewer of them during the seven years he was in England, this despite getting less

¹²⁶ ‘Tier’, translated as tiger, was in fact a large leopard.

¹²⁷ Victor Molteno to Betty Molteno, 27 Aug 1882.

¹²⁸ Percy Molteno’s account of his brother, reproduced in Francis Hirst’s unpublished biography of Percy.

¹²⁹ Victor Molteno to Betty Molteno, 2 Mar 1884.

¹³⁰ Maria Anderson (nee Molteno) to Betty Molteno, 5 Jul 1884.

letters from the Cape as a result and feeling rather out of touch.¹³¹ By the time he returned to the Cape, Percy warned Caroline that he ‘must have become a complete stranger to you all as he never writes to anyone’, but he is a nice fellow, ‘a steady worker and has plenty of commonsense’.¹³²

Victor always quite reserved, to a point where Betty gently told him off for never saying anything about himself! But he did explain once, albeit very briefly, the pattern of his life at Cambridge. ‘I work in the morning til 2 p.m. Take exercise in the afternoon. See my friends and drink coffee til 8 o’clock and then do work about five nights out of the week, the others being variously taken up so that really there is not much to make a letter out of them’!¹³³ And he kept up his love of hiking. He and James spent their first summer vac at Cambridge walking on the Continent, and during his time in London hospitals he went on a walking tour in the Tyrol with a friend.

He had no interest in politics. And his attitude to business affairs was also completely different from Percy, Charlie and Frank. After their father’s death, he was quite happy to leave his interests in Percy’s hands and simply get on with his medical studies.¹³⁴

After three years at Cambridge, he completed his medical training at St Thomas’s in London before eventually returning to Cape Town in August 1891, accompanied by his brother Charlie, on board the *Dunottar Castle*. He started his own practice as a GP, and for a few years continued playing rugby for the Villagers Football Club as well as cricket for the Western Province Cricket Club.¹³⁵ He later joined the partnership that his brother in law, Dr Murray, had been running for many years with a colleague, Dr Wright. The latter was also the part-time District Surgeon for Wynberg. When eventually in 1912 the post was made full-time, Victor was appointed and he stayed in it until his retirement on government pension at the age of 60 in April 1925.¹³⁶

Marriage to Mildred Jones

It must have been as a result of Frank’s marriage to Ella Jones that Victor met Ella’s cousin, Mildred. She and Victor got engaged in September 1894. Victor conscientiously wrote to break the news to his eldest sister, Betty, adding ‘It is too late to ask for your consent but I am sure you will be pleased.’ He went on: for ‘myself, I can hardly realize it and feel almost weighed down by the responsibility, for to have the happiness of such a girl in one’s hands is a very serious thing.’ In this respect Victor was very like almost all his brothers and sisters, taking his responsibilities in life with great seriousness. As for Mildred’s parents, he felt they made him welcome and were very kind to him.

¹³¹ Victor Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 5 Apr 1887.

¹³² Percy Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 20 Aug 1891.

¹³³ Victor Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 5 Apr 1887.

¹³⁴ Victor Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 15 Oct 1889.

¹³⁵ *Men of the Times*, 1906. Printed by the *Cape Times*.

¹³⁶ *Diocesan College Magazine, O.D. Notes*, Obituaries, Dr Victor Grey Molteno (Bishops 1977-1884).

They got married midway through the following year. Rather typically, Victor told Caroline that ‘we would much prefer the absence of so many of my family and relations’ at the wedding. How far this reflected Mildred’s feelings of course, and not just his own, we will never know! But he did want Betty to be present. He also promised Caroline that he would ‘keep in mind as far as possible all your good advice’. Caroline was always a strong-minded woman and she could never quite put aside the fact that she was ten or more years older than all her brothers except for Charlie and Percy, and tell them frankly what she thought.

A rather discordant note was struck by James who had a sharp, not to say cutting, way with words. He criticised Victor for his slowness in proposing to Mildred. ‘His greatest drawback is his indifference to things. Caroline and Maria drove him into the engagement and we have to thank them. Vic would never have proposed, had they not egged him on and told him it was his duty.’¹³⁷ James’s wife, Clare, thought it was something more fundamental. ‘He is so painfully lethargic. I am very sorry for him for I really believe it is constitutional.’ And being a bit of a gossip, she urged her sister in law, Betty: ‘I hope you will not think of repeating anything I may say, for I only mean it in kindness, but repeated it might be taken otherwise.’¹³⁸ She hoped Mildred would be ‘a help to him for he *really* needs someone to fire his ambition and wake him up.’

Mildred, however, was a nice, sensible and warm person. She entered easily into the Molteno family circle and was wise enough to refrain from trying to change her husband’s nature. She and Victor started having a family right away. Their eldest, John Tennant Molteno, was born on 30 April 1896. They hesitated a few days before settling on these names, Victor having hastened to tell Betty ‘we ... will not go in for any fancy ones, I hope!’

Vic Molteno and Mildred Jones’s Children

Birth	Christian Names	Marriage	Spouse	Death
1896	‘John’ Tennant Molteno	1926	Gladys Jackson	1950
?	‘Mary’ Grey Molteno	Nil		1950
1900	Harold ‘Victor’ Molteno	Nil		1925
c. 1902	Mildred ‘Nance’ Molteno			1942 CHECK
1909	‘Charles’ Brunette Molteno		Runica Leinberger	1980

¹³⁷ James Molteno to Percy Molteno, 3 April 1895.

¹³⁸ Clare Molteno (nee Holland-Pryor) to Betty Molteno, 26 Mar 1895.

Victor and Mildred had five children. Both daughters were handicapped physically. Mary was profoundly deaf all her life and Nance more or less an invalid. Neither of them married. John was their eldest son. Both his younger brothers went to Cambridge as their father had done. But unlike all their uncles and cousins who had been educated there, they broke new ground by taking science degrees – young Victor studying Natural Science and Charles Geology.

Farming – from Korteshoven at Houw Hoek to Rocklands in the Karoo

In his mid 50s, Victor took an important step. He had never been a farmer himself of course, but his love of Nature and the farming way of life were as deeply ingrained in him as with the rest of his brothers and sisters. In August 1922 he bought Korteshoven. This was a small farm, only 282 morgen, and without much good land. It was situated a little way beyond Elgin where several members of the family were already established.¹³⁹

There was another reason for buying the farm at this time. His eldest son, John Tennant Molteno, had had a very rough time during the First World War as we will see, and he desperately wanted to go farming. Korteshoven could give him his start. John tried dairying, including making his own farm butter, and also planted oats and potatoes. But it was a difficult farm to make a living from and, in any case, John's heart was in the Karoo. The year after his father died, he was already thinking of selling up at Korteshoven and moving. He heard from his uncle, Wallace Molteno, that two farms adjacent to Nelspoort were up for sale, but he didn't win the bidding process. Instead, he bought Rocklands in the Loxton area about 50 miles north of Beaufort West and he and his wife, Gladys, were established there by 1929. It was quite flat ground and they could see their neighbour's farmhouse at Slangfontein five miles off. There was enough water to grow lots of vegetables as well as grapes, figs and peaches. And in their first winter, the snow lay several feet deep. They became the one branch of the Molteno family who are still farming on the Karoo nearly two centuries after Sir John Molteno bought his first farms at Nelspoort in 1841.

Barkly Molteno – the person behind 'the Admiral'

Barkly was the youngest of John and Maria Molteno's ten children. He grew up largely deprived of interaction with either of his parents. His mother died when he was only two. And his father arranged for him, because of his love of the sea, to go to England on a colonial cadetship to the Royal Navy training institution, HMS *Britannia*, when he was only thirteen.¹⁴⁰ He was examined on board ship at the Royal Navy base in Simon's Bay in June 1885 and departed almost immediately. He was away from home, therefore, at the time of his father's death the following year. Indeed he only

¹³⁹ Frank Molteno to Percy Molteno, 2 Aug 1922.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from the Private Secretary to the Governor of the Cape Colony, to Sir John Molteno, 8 Dec. 1884. This account of Barkly Molteno's early life comes from his correspondence. UCT Special Collection, BC330, Boxes 73 and 74.

heard of it while spending a holiday at his Aunt Nancy Bingle's in Richmond. She had welcomed him on arrival in London and provided a home for him; and she happened to notice the news of her brother Sir John Molteno's death in *The Times*.

Life as a Royal Navy cadet

Barkly was very lonely as an adolescent, and in fact much of his life. He was deeply upset by the bullying and coarseness he found around him at Dartmouth. He wrote to Betty, who, 20 years older than him, was more *in loco parentis* than a sister, almost immediately on going on board the *Britannia*. 'You cannot well understand how miserable I have been lately, the upper boys grind you down so much....They make you fag and may do what they like to you, and kick you, and you may do nothing in return.' He also 'hated being abused when I did things wrong out of pure ignorance' and subsequently took care once he was an officer, to 'always show them their errors without abuse.'¹⁴¹ The bullying and his unhappiness were clearly great shocks to him even if he did go on bravely to say 'but otherwise, I would like the life very much' and he enjoyed the seamanship side of things greatly.¹⁴²

He grew into being a conscientious officer, but with it a great worrier. As a young Gunnery Lieutenant on HMS *Galatea* in charge of her guns, he told his sister, Maria: 'I did not write last week as I felt so utterly overwhelmed and worried with all my worries and responsibilities.'¹⁴³ And many years later he told his sister, Caroline, how 'over-anxiousness has marred the happiness of my life more than anything.'¹⁴⁴ 'I know the foolishness of worrying, but one can't alter one's disposition.'¹⁴⁵

Worry was one thing; depression something more serious. Nearly a decade after joining the Navy he admitted to Betty how 'I often get fits of depression and wonder if the Navy is the right place for me; I have a great want of self-confidence and am easily appalled by the thought of difficulties, which is hardly a desirable disposition for a naval officer. I also find it hard to be continually finding fault and punishing [his juniors].'¹⁴⁶ And a few years later he told her again: 'You don't know how often and often I've longed to shoot or drown myself. Very really I think the thing that has prevented me has been that I've thought it would make you and Caroline and Maria so unhappy.'¹⁴⁷ He also developed a great power of self-mastery and didn't 'show my misery and how I hated life.' Indeed 'I was thought rather a great talker and cheerful person.'

¹⁴¹ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 22 Jan. 1895.

¹⁴² Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 8 Sept. 1885.

¹⁴³ Barkly Molteno to Maria Anderson (nee Molteno), 14 July 1896.

¹⁴⁴ Barkly Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 17 Oct. 1917.

¹⁴⁵ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 5 June 1898.

¹⁴⁶ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 30 June 1894.

¹⁴⁷ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 28 June 1897.

Another thing he hated was the way life in the Navy kept him away from his family at the Cape whom he so loved. 'I love the dear old place [Claremont House] as I can no other.'¹⁴⁸ And when his nephew Kenah Murray was thinking of following his father, Dr Murray, into the Navy in 1889, Barkly advised Caroline, Kenah's mother, against it because 'it means such a very long time away from home, which is very sad.'¹⁴⁹ And he told Betty the following year the same thing: 'What I always dislike so much about the Navy is that it takes one away so completely from all your friends; also it is a life in which you never have any privacy or quiet time for thought; these are really very great drawbacks.'¹⁵⁰ And he added, not for the last time, that if he saw a good opening, he would not regret leaving the Service. He did, however, make time for reading, and serious works at that – including Darwin's *Descent of Man* and the almost equally famous book, *First Principles*, by Herbert Spencer. He also loved paintings, as did his brother James, and when ashore paid many visits as a young man to the National Gallery, all the while decrying his ignorance of art.

Brothers and sisters

Barkly maintained a particularly close friendship with Wallace, the brother he was nearest to in age, and throughout their lives they kept up a regular, sometimes weekly, correspondence. And when Barkly's elder brother, Percy, began living in London following his marriage to Bessie Currie in 1889, he and Bessie gave Barkly a home whenever he was in England on leave.¹⁵¹ As Percy told Caroline, 'our house will be his home.'¹⁵²

Percy and Barkly were the only brothers to live all their adult lives away from the Cape, and make England their new home. As the years passed, Percy's relationship with Barkly changed from being an older brother (they were eleven years apart) to becoming the closest of friends, with great respect for each other's personality, career and views. And after the First World War and Barkly's retirement, their homes were not many miles apart.¹⁵³ They met constantly and Percy discussed all public questions, in particular foreign policy and armaments, with him.

During Barkly's boyhood, his sisters, Betty and Caroline, who were both a lot older, tried to fill the emotional vacuum for him as a result of his never having known his mother. He conducted an intense correspondence with them all his life and never forgot how much he owed them both. Even in his 50s, he told Caroline: 'I wish I could express all the gratitude I feel to you for your wonderful love and wide sympathy to me and to *everyone* you've come in contact with. I do feel how blest I've

¹⁴⁸ Barkly Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 30 July 1899.

¹⁴⁹ Barkly Molteno to his elder sister, Mrs Caroline Murray, 16 May 1889.

¹⁵⁰ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 21 Nov. 1890.

¹⁵¹ Francis Hirst, *A Man of Principle: The Life of Percy Alport Molteno, M.P.*, unpublished.

¹⁵² Percy Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 28 Oct 1891.

¹⁵³ Percy's farm, Parklands, was near the villages of Gomshall and Shere, and Barkly and Ethel's home, Gold Hill, on the outskirts of Farnham.

always been in having you for a sister. I've never turned to you without finding all I wanted in your sympathy and love.'¹⁵⁴

As a young man and indeed throughout his life, however, it was perhaps his eldest sister, Betty, who became his utterly trusted, emotional confidant. It is moving to read the letters he wrote her and hear how fully and sensitively she always responded. The two of them wrote with delightful frankness about their views on life, even when they disagreed. Betty was also deeply understanding of Barkly in his long love affair that began in the 1890s. Perhaps less obviously, it is also clear what a great comfort the young Barkly was to his older sister when she was having emotional difficulties of her own. 'Dear Betty, my heart does bleed for you when you say that I was a help and made life possible when your heart was breaking.'¹⁵⁵

Professionally Barkly climbed the Royal Navy career ladder steadily. In the summer of 1887 at the age of fifteen, he was off on his first naval voyage overseas. He served a short spell at Simonstown in 1890 which must have been a joy to him. Then returned to Greenwich for a course at the Royal Naval College. Was confirmed when he was 19 as a Sub-Lieutenant in August 1891 and promoted to full Lieutenant on HMS *Raleigh* a year later.¹⁵⁶ This appointment, which Sir Donald Currie kindly used his influence to obtain for him, meant that for the first time he no longer had to pay the Navy a fee of about £50 a year but began instead to earn a modest salary. And when he did a torpedo course, he came first out of 24 young officers.

Coming under fire

Barkly had his first experience of coming under fire in 1893 when he was serving off the East African coast and took part in the action of a small naval brigade at Witu on the mainland. Although slaving had been officially ended years earlier, the Royal Navy was still engaged in suppressing the trade. The Scramble for Africa was in full flow. And the European colonial powers did not shrink from using military force in order to take control. In the incident Barkly was involved in, the British Consul-General, 'Zanzibar Government', decided to declare a 'Protectorate over the territory of Witu'. The local chief, Fuma Omari, was branded a robber and the Consul-General requested the Royal Navy, along with General Hatch and 70 'native troops', to storm his fortified stronghold of Pumwani.

Some 150 seamen and marines landed, but found that Omari's men also had firearms which they used effectively from the fortified gate and rifle pits on either side of the approach which led through trees and millet fields. An hour and a half of heavy firing and a field gun having shelled the entrance, all to no effect, Captain Lindley ordered Lt. Molteno and Sub-Lt. Thorpe-Double to lead a storming party. They advanced under considerable fire and were not able to get through the gate until a naval gun party blew it up. The 'enemy' then fled and next day 'we destroyed the crops and

¹⁵⁴ Barkly Molteno to Mrs Caroline Murray, 1 Sept. 1926.

¹⁵⁵ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 4 January 1900.

¹⁵⁶ *London Gazette*, 10 March 1893.

pulled the town down', before setting fire to it. Barkly was mentioned in despatches and awarded the General Africa Medal, Gambia, 1894, with Clasp.¹⁵⁷

After this experience, he served a number of years in a Royal Navy squadron stationed off the Latin American coast, including patrolling off Patagonia and the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic. From 1900 to 1903 he served on the China Station where the Navy patrolled not just the China coast and Western Pacific, but had a flotilla of gun boats on the country's main rivers. These postings of Barkly in different parts of the world illustrate the extraordinary global reach of the Royal Navy in the late 19th century, something that only occurred again, and to a lesser extent, with the US Navy's deployments during the Cold War in the second half of the 20th century.

The speciality Barkly developed was in long-range firing. After his China posting, he was appointed Firing Commander of the Gunnery School at Portsmouth. He then spent some years, 1907-10, in the Controller's Department at the Admiralty before being promoted to full Captain. In the years that followed he was given command of various battle-cruisers and battleships, including becoming Flag Captain in the First World War of the *King George V*, one of the most powerful Dreadnought battleships ever built.

He became more used to the burdens of command. Even his voice grew deeper and more growly. One family member thought it was perhaps the result of having to bellow orders in the teeth of South Atlantic gales! Admiral Jellicoe, Commander in Chief of the Fleet, lost patience with him on one occasion: 'Barkly', he said, 'Get your voice oiled.' The real reason for his voice becoming louder was that he started going deaf quite young as a result of the constant thundering of the Navy's heaviest guns in which he specialised.¹⁵⁸

As the years passed, he reached a kind of peace with himself and life in the Navy. 'Of course in my life I can have no home. I must always be a wanderer. That used to be a great trouble to me once, but now I am more philosophical. I have reached the state when I *know* that life cannot be anything but a big work and a constant struggle.'¹⁵⁹ And he realized: 'I've gained self-confidence very largely, which is what I always lacked.'¹⁶⁰

'My sweet friend'

His life was not all naval. He had been in the Navy nine years, but was still only 22, lonely and prone to depression, when he met in 1894 the newly married wife of a naval friend of his. He saw them as 'almost an ideal couple' and knew she was 'fondly in love with her husband, and he with her'.¹⁶¹ After a couple of years of being merely acquaintances, however, his feelings for her turned into

¹⁵⁷ *London Gazette*, 12 Dec. 1893.

¹⁵⁸ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 4 Jun. 1895.

¹⁵⁹ Barkly Molteno to Caroline Murray (nee Molteno), 30 July 1899.

¹⁶⁰ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno 5 June 1898.

¹⁶¹ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 5 Jul 1897.

something more serious. It was at this point that Barkly told Betty all about it. 'I am far from despising women', he wrote. 'In fact one in particular has laid a powerful spell on me. She is however already safely married and has a dear little girl. We are very great friends. There are some people with whom one seems to be in perfect sympathy; only she is very bright and gay and pretty (in spite of having had a very hard life) and I am hardly a very cheerful sort of person. I have known and admired her very much for two years, but we have only very lately become great friends.... I know her through her husband who is a friend of mine. So there is my little romance, quite a cheerful one and perfectly satisfactory to me; I don't mind in the least to be anything but her friend.'¹⁶²

This friendship made Barkly feel much happier. He told Betty how his friend felt he was 'so young and fresh and innocent and different from the sin-stained men of the world one so generally meets.'¹⁶³ And for his part, and contrary to his usual view of life, 'I have rather taken to looking at the pleasant side of things.'¹⁶⁴ He even quite enjoyed being despatched to a State Ball at Buckingham Palace where, he teased Betty, he had 'elbowed all the British aristocracy with whom you are so very angry.' And he added: 'I do love her so intensely.'

The relationship had evolved into something much more intense, triggered by her husband having to go abroad and her feeling 'most desperately sad' as a result. And it deepened despite the fact that Barkly's own postings overseas meant they were almost never able to meet face to face. Instead they wrote to each other with great frequency – 'she gives me the greatest affection and confidence. I tell her everything about myself and so does she'.¹⁶⁵ For a year and a half, from mid 1896 to the end of 1897, Barkly told Betty how he seldom went to bed without writing a letter to her. He only told Betty how intensely he now felt 'if you promise not to tell *anyone*, [otherwise] don't read any more of this letter'.¹⁶⁶ But he really wanted Betty to know 'what I am and how I feel', and worried 'you'll misjudge my friend, which makes me hate telling you or anyone'. 'Why shouldn't she have me for a friend? We are the same age, same tastes and feelings. Who is harmed? Because she is married, is she never to know any other man really well? Our affection is absolutely pure. [And] I do want a little sympathy so badly sometimes.' And 'she is as delightful in letters as in person, and altogether has given me more joy than anything in this world.' But he did realise: 'It is a strange affair and, fortunately from a worldly point of view for me, I am perfectly content with the affection she gives me (only I should like to see her more).'

Things did get a little more complicated. Her husband returned from his posting abroad and she was going to accompany him on his next assignment. They were actually greatly in love with each other and Barkly, for his part, detested anything secret or underhand. 'The last thing in the world that I

¹⁶² Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 16 Aug. 1896.

¹⁶³ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 30 Aug. 1897.

¹⁶⁴ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 4 June 1895.

¹⁶⁵ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 5 Jul 1897.

¹⁶⁶ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 8 Jul 1897.

should want to do would be to cause the slightest bar between them.’ She was equally clear ‘she’d never do anything in the least that would cause him pain’.¹⁶⁷ At the same time Barkly wasn’t a fool and told Betty: ‘I know the world would condemn our friendship and correspondence.’ Caroline reacted in just that way initially when told about it and felt that both young people were culpable. But Barkly felt his conscience was clear. Also, his ‘sweet friend’ decided that she would always show her husband Barkly’s letters, although this inevitably constrained what he could write.

Her husband probably did not really understand how much she meant to Barkly.¹⁶⁸ She told Barkly ‘how he chaffs her about me because she talks about me so much and sings my praises to people who know me.’ Barkly explained to Betty: ‘[OMIT THIS FIRST SENTENCE?] I don’t think it possible for you to understand the reticence that men have in speaking of their feelings. I cannot in the least say how far he thinks I admire his wife. He knows that I’ve written to her regularly ever since she has been abroad and that men don’t write in that way to ordinary friends.’¹⁶⁹ But in fact, his naval friend wrote to Barkly and thanked him ‘for all I had done in the way of looking after her’ while he had been posted overseas, and Barkly had written back to say ‘I was quite in love with his wife and looking after her was a very pleasant task’. He replied in turn saying ‘Please go on being in love with X, she has appreciated all your kindness so much.’

It was a rather extraordinary situation. In late 1901 (Barkly was still on the China Station at the time), she wrote to tell him she was gravely ill and probably dying. As always, he turned to Betty for solace and his ‘sweet friend’ recovered. By 1903, it had been three years since they had seen each other. Another year passed before Barkly got the devastating news early in 1905 that she had died. He at once wrote Betty with the news: ‘I must open my heart to you for it is crushed by the bitterest blow I’ve ever yet known. My sweet lovely friend is dead. I only heard it today.... Everything was worth striving for to please her.’ ‘Life [now] seems too hard to bear alone. Tears are falling from my eyes as I write.’¹⁷⁰

In a touching twist, her husband in his grief wrote to Barkly: ‘I naturally turn to you where I know I shall get most sympathy; she loved you so much and so do I.’ For comfort, Barkly re-read one of the many poems she had introduced him to:

To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.
 If we still love those we lose, we cannot altogether lose those we leave.
 Love lives on and has a power to bless
 When those who loved lie hidden in the grave...
 We shall meet again where the harsh dividing years are swept into the past
 And parting is no more, nor grief, nor tears.
 In life our absent friend is far away

¹⁶⁷ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 9 Jun 1897.

¹⁶⁸ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 25 Feb. 1900.

¹⁶⁹ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 7 Aug 1899.

¹⁷⁰ Barkly Molteno to Betty Molteno, 15 Feb 1905.

But death can bring our friend exceeding near.

Barkly told Betty how she had already been ill for a considerable time. They had, however, by lucky chance been able to see each other the previous year – ‘it brought you here on a visit, dear old friend,’ as she had written to him on New Year’s Eve in the last letter he received. And he explained to Betty how ‘there was never anything that has marred or spoiled or jarred our perfect accord.’ And, as his friend said to him, ‘I’ve never had an unkind look, or thought even, from you.’

A few weeks later Barkly wrote to Betty again trying to explain how he had felt about her. ‘I have never felt in the least jealous about her, nor wished in the slightest to monopolise her affections. I’ve always felt I wanted everyone to love her so that she may shed her sweet influence as widely as possible.’ ‘I should not a bit have wished her *only* to be fond of me; it would have meant a narrowness in her. But this feeling [that I have had for her] I’ve never met in anyone else. All men and women I know say “if you are not jealous, you cannot really love!”’ Barkly profoundly disagreed.

He destroyed her letters as he had promised her, but not before copying them out so that in times of trial he could hear her voice again. We will never know the name of his ‘sweet friend’, nor whether Barkly’s future wife ever knew about her. But her influence – her outlook on life, the poetry and books she recommended to him, her qualities of personality, the solace and sensitivity and sensibleness she gave him, albeit at a distance – helped turn Barkly into one of the most attractive and admirable members of the Molteno family. She remained a vivid inspiration all his life. Nearly half a century later, only a couple of years before his own death in 1950, he told his niece Kathleen Murray how his friend ‘has remained the loveliest memory of my life’.¹⁷¹

Barkly in his 30s¹⁷²

By the early 1900s, Barkly had settled down in his career. His speciality in long range gunnery was entirely appropriate in an age where naval thinking was dominated by the idea of building ever larger battleships equipped with ever more powerful guns suitable, as it turned out, not for patrolling the Empire or keeping open the Atlantic sea lanes, but for pulverising an opponent similarly equipped. Some sense of the firepower of these ships is exemplified by Barkly’s last command during the First World War. HMS *Bellerophon*, completed in 1907, was the second of the new generation of super battleships, or Dreadnoughts, to be built. Her ten 12-inch guns used shells each carrying nearly half a ton of high explosives (850 lbs to be precise). They could be fired at the rate of twice a minute and penetrate wrought iron nearly four feet thick at 1,000 yards, while their effective range against other battleships was 15 miles.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Barkly Molteno to Kathleen Murray, 16 May 1950.

¹⁷² These observations come from reading his correspondence. UCT Special Collections. BC330, Boxes 73, 74.

¹⁷³ This battleship was the 4th Royal Navy ship of that name. Her predecessor had become famous for carrying the Emperor Napoleon into exile on St. Helena in 1815. Edward Fraser, *Bellerophon, ‘The Bravest of the Brave’*, London, Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1909.

Barkly's early tendency to worry greatly about every task had mutated into an efficient punctiliousness in carrying out his duties. But he still felt on the eve of leaving for the China Station in 1902 that: 'I know I shall hate the next 5 or 6 years of my life... I feel I am so foolish about it; I ought to ... not mind if I do get abuse or not promoted ...; but my spirit cannot brook rebuke or being found fault with or not succeeding.' And he also found that 'I have lately become absolutely rebellious and have refused to sacrifice myself and every moment of my time to the Service.'¹⁷⁴ He thought again of resigning, but how would he earn his living? So instead, he made more time for reading a wide range of non-fiction and poetry, found solace – albeit always at a distance – in his 'sweet friend' until her death, and valued his friendships. Even in these, however, there was a tinge of sadness: 'My friendships on paper are a great deal to me and really now I've grown so accustomed to being away from those I love that I'm almost satisfied with paper friendship.'¹⁷⁵

As for the world at large, his settled 'predisposition' was 'to see all that is bad, wrong, gloomy and hopeless in life.... It is quite beyond your or anyone else's power', he told Caroline, 'to alter my view of the badness of the world, the people in it, and all its ways. Ever since I could think, I've rebelled in spirit against it all, and my creed has finally resolved itself into doing my best and not worrying about it any more.'¹⁷⁶

[OMIT THE FOLLOWING? Perhaps as author of this book, I ought to refrain from overtly expressing my reactions to the people whose lives I have tried to give some sense of. But it is a most rare privilege to read a person's letters across many years and enter into their innermost thoughts and feelings. In Barkly's case, the more I listened to him, the more I fell in love with him – he was a man of such loving affection, such purity of heart, such growing wisdom about himself and the world around him, and constantly engaged in reaching some acceptance of the limitations and the sorrows of life.]

The other brothers and sisters

Readers may wonder what has happened to the other two brothers who have only been mentioned in passing in this chapter. Percy Molteno is a particularly important figure in the family story, both for what he tried to do in life, and for the new branches of Scottish and English Moltenos he and his wife, Bessie Currie, founded. His story has its own chapter,¹⁷⁷ and indeed he also figures prominently in most of the remaining chapters of this book. Finally, there is my own grandfather, Wallace Molteno. His life is related in Chapter 19 GET CHAPTER NUMBER RIGHT when he meets his wife to be, Lil Sandeman, in 1907.

¹⁷⁴ Barkly Molteno to Caroline Murray, 6 July 1902.

¹⁷⁵ Barkly Molteno to Caroline Murray, 13 Oct. 1905.

¹⁷⁶ Barkly Molteno to Caroline Murray, 4 Oct. 1900.

¹⁷⁷ See Ch. PUT IN RIGHT CHAPTER NUMBER.

As for John and Maria Molteno's three daughters – Betty, Caroline and Maria, I have already told the story of their growing up. In order not to extend the already excessive length of the present chapter, their story of their lives is taken up in the chapter that follows.

Family Reflections [PERHAPS PLACE THIS AT END OF NEXT CHAPTER DEALING WITH BETTY, CAROLINE AND MARIA]

Modernity and transformation

The lives of John Molteno's sons and daughters exemplify some aspects of the transformation of Victorian society into the more modern world of the 20th century. One change was the sharp decline in the more or less universal Christian belief and practice of 19th century Europe and the growth of secularism. In this regard Frank's religious faith was very much an exception among his brothers and sisters. Another change was the growth in the number and variety of modern professional opportunities that opened up as economic development and modern technologies transformed society. Where John had had his education cut short and he had had to become a self-made businessman and farmer, Frank trained as a surveyor, Percy and James did law degrees, and Victor became a doctor. In the next generation, several of his grandchildren became the first scientists in the family – Charlie's son, Peter, becoming a biologist, and Victor's son, Harold, a geologist specialising in the emerging oil industry.

Tapestries of connectedness

The lives of John Molteno's 14 offspring, and their partners and children, wove an extraordinary tapestry of connectedness in the last decades of the 19th century and early decades of the next. It was not all harmony of course, in this huge extended family. But its members – brothers and sisters, and even more numerous cousins – were deeply interested in one another's lives and there was a never-ending exchange of letters and visits among them. Many were also part of a web of remarkable generosity, both financial and emotional, towards one another. In a rather profound sense, no member of the widening ripples of the family were 'on their own' or left to 'sink or swim' in life.

Migration, part of the human condition

Once again in the long story of the Moltenos, the tendency to move countries recurred. In this branch of the family, the main driver wasn't poverty now although looking for cheap land to farm certainly motivated Jarvis and Lenox Murray going to Kenya. Nor was political oppression and disillusion a factor; that was to come in South Africa only in the second half of the 20th century. Instead it was often the vagaries of career (Barkly and Vincent Molteno joining the Royal Navy), or the choice of spouse (as when Percy married Bessie Currie).

'The path of true love'

One is struck by how varied were the paths of love experienced by different members of the family, quite contrary to any narrow stereotype of what Victorian marriage should be. There were happy

heterosexual, life-long marriages, of course, like Caroline and Dr Murray's. Other fulfilling marriages, as we will see, were cut short by death like Maria and Tom Anderson's, or Margaret Molteno and George Murray. There was intense affection, but beyond the territory of a conventional married relationship – Barkly and his 'sweet friend'. Some members of this generation became trapped in unhappy marriages, but did not feel free to violate the expectations of respectable society and get divorced; both James and Clare, and Barkly and Ethel, endured long years of unhappiness as a result. And there was one instance of a relationship even further removed from the shores of late Victorian morality – Betty and Alice Greene's lifelong lesbian partnership.

Children – Joy and Tragedy

John and Maria Molteno's offspring had, in turn, many children in their families. While infant mortality was much less than in their mother's generation, some of the children were the harbingers of sorrow – Caroline's Jack who was mentally retarded; Victor's daughters who were very frail; Percy's eldest son who died, utterly unexpectedly, of meningitis when he was only 14.