

HOW SHOULD THE BOOK END?

Note: I have not successfully cracked the nut of how to end the book. But I have at least begun a train of thought!

The Molteno Family in the 1950s: Should it go into the book?

Issue: Should I try and take any part of the story up to then? Probably not systematically.

But should I at least give some picture of Willowmere and life in Cape Town half a century ago?

* **My detention in Zambia:** I thought that I might give a short account of being detained in Zambia in the context of the Family and Politics and the prices which members of the family have paid for their political beliefs.

* **Life at Willowmere:** I would love to pull together these recollections. And in any case, for May and Sharon, I ought to do so.

The Moltenos in the 1950s:

The family has become so disparate after the Second World War that it would be difficult to do so. There are branches, by then, in the Joburg area; Natal; the Eastern Cape; the Karoo; Elgin; and the Cape Peninsula. My bit of the family was not closely in touch with most of them.

Also, if I were to include a section on this, what of the Australian Moltenos and Lees, as well as the Scottish Riddells, Rackhams etc -- about whom I know nothing. ie It would involve a whole new research effort as well as greatly increasing the length of the book.

So for both reasons, I am reluctant to do so.

Perhaps I should at least have a short concluding chapter providing a round-up of the impact of

- * **The Great Depression;**
- * **The Second World War (briefly)**
- * **The 1950s and the post-war world**

The points that could be made:

The family by the 1950s had lost almost all coherence. In earlier generations, there had already been a process of different branches losing contact with one another -- for example, the Bristows in England had really no contact with the Moltenos; and the Australian Moltenos and English Lees -- while having some contact with one another -- had really none with John Charles Molteno's descendants in either South Africa or

Britain. This process accelerated after the 1930s once the sons and daughters of Sir JC had died (with the exception of Barkly til 1952 and Ted -- about the same year -- and Harry).

The reasons are obvious:

- * **The family had got just too big;**
- * **The world was no longer one in which people grew up with, or even wanted, a sense of wider family connections.** Instead, we were into an era of an intense individualism.
- * **The key places which had acted as nodal points of the family to get together were largely gone** -- Nelspoort was sold in the late 1930s; Palace Court at perhaps the same time; Parklands too. And their sale was followed eventually by Glen Lyon in Scotland; Inungi in East Griqualand; and Millers Point in the Peninsula. A few family places did survive -- Palmiet River (until Cousin Kathleen's own death in the 1970s?) and Painswick Lodge (but Patrick and Caroline did not use it as a base at which to welcome the farflung family after Margaret's death in 1967).
- * While most members of the family were materially well off and air travel made to'ing and fro'ing easier, there was **no longer great wealth in the family** (except for Edward Molteno) **or very dominant figures** (like Caroline or Percy) **who could act as centres of gravity.**
- * There was also **an accumulation of intra-family history which contributed to the centrifugal process of pushing the family apart** -- divorces, one or two property disputes, and in the South African case, the impact of politics in which the gulf between conflicting values and political beliefs grew much bigger and more bitter.

So what can one say of the family in South Africa from the early 1950s on?

- * **It certainly no longer had the social prominence** that two and three generations earlier it had commanded in what had been a much, much smaller Cape society.
- * **Nor did it have the relative wealth or political centrality** that Sir John Charles (1850s to 1880s) and several of his sons and daughters (1890s to 1914) had had. Two factors contributed to the permanent political marginalisation of the Moltenos. On the one hand, the Afrikaner political monopoly really from as early as 1910 (symbolised in that year by the fight which James Molteno had in getting elected as Speaker of the Union Parliament) -- a process which greatly accelerated from the early 1930s on and reached its apogee in 1948. And on the other hand, the rise of a whole new axis to South African politics: the struggle against racism and for democracy led by the Congress Alliance. (NB. Donald Molteno, throughout his life, did make important contributions, however, to this transition and new centre of gravity).
- * **And it had become part of a much bigger society** -- the joining together of the 4 different colonies in 1910; the tripling and quadrupling of the population; the huge development of a professional middle class and large business class.

And what of the family in England and Scotland?

I really know too little about it to make any definitive statements. But somewhat similar processes, however, happened here too:

* After Percy Molteno's retirement from parliamentary politics in 1920, no Molteno relative in the UK has really played any political role in British society of a prominent kind.

* The process of indigenisation within the English and Scottish middle and upper middle classes continued. By occupation. By public school education. By marriage.

* Migration also continued, as it did with the rest of English society. Not so much prompted by the dire need of the 19th century, but more by a desire to escape the English class system and old world stuffiness of the country, and as part of the accelerating process of the international mobility of the intellectual classes.

So where is the family at at the moment of the Millenium?

* **It has been through a multitude of experiences** -- arriving in new countries as immigrants, colonial settlers, or just as part of a new international norm of mobility; becoming farmers by the accident of the countries they landed up in and then sticking with it; being caught up in two world wars and often becoming also professional soldiers and sailors; changing religion as they married or moved; and crossing boundaries of culture and colour as these ex-Italians and adoptive Britons and South Africans married North Americans, Hungarians, Frenchmen, Armenians, and their own fellow countrymen -- Black and Brown South Africans.

* **Perhaps the essence of what happened to them is that they moved from being exceptions** (as all immigrants are for a generation or two) **and exceptional** (as the certain larger than life personalities in the family lived out their lives in the 19th and early 20th centuries) **to being much like everyone else** -- busy with their personal concerns and busy with their jobs in the midst of the increasingly huge, anonymous and rapidly changing societies of the modern world.

* **And yet there remains something special about this family.** As I wrote this book, I kept coming across the same bundles of characteristics -- intelligence, energy, eccentricity, a sense of humour and often marvellously attractive personalities (some noisy and dominant, others quiet and with a wonderful aura). I even found myself bumping into the recurring echoes of common physical features -- the hooked nose, handsome profile, spare build and receding hair that so many of these Molteno and Murray men and women shared. I also kept finding an interest in the family -- its history, its far flung branches, and what its various members had done with their lives. How many relatives, mainly old but also some young, did I meet who had tried to reconstruct their particular bits of the family tree? Or who had a fund of anecdotes passed down from their parents, and their parents' parents, about particular

individuals, incidents, places in the family. And then there were certain tendencies, or preoccupations that seem, generation after generation, to recur and recur -- a sense of wider responsibility, a commitment to self-education, above all, a concern with the artistic -- a desire to study art, to collect art, a flare to do it.

* And for everyone of us in the family who gets on with life in an unflamboyant way just like most of those around us, there are other members of the younger generation every bit as eccentric, or adventurous, or committed to making a contribution to the betterment of society as any of their forebears -- Stephen Molteno sailing an Arab dhow along the northern Mozabican coast in the 1980s; Martin Molteno flying a microlight (or helicopter?); May Molteno earning next to nothing coordinating a network of local environmental organisations in Cheshire; and countless young people in the family painting, studying art, doing it in one way or another.

So what of the future?

As the next century is upon us, perhaps there are certain traditions and strands in this family which place not just its own members but other people in a good position to cope with the transitions which now look possible, even if not inevitable -- a shift from a very single-minded preoccupation with the individual and seeing the world in the first person singular to a re-valuing of the wider group, the community, the social and the public spheres; a shift, also, from seeing as supremely, even exclusively, important material consumption and increasing wealth to seeing instead the roots of happiness and purpose in life through developing practical skills, *doing* things rather than just being a spectator, appreciating culture, beauty and nature and learning again how to live actively together. Perhaps 'belonging' is the key to the future -- learning how to belong to one another and how to belong as part of the natural order around us. The making of this book has certainly for me, and hopefully for quite a number of other members of this family, been a process of reconnecting, belonging again to one another, and rediscovering the fact that wisdom does not lie always with the new and the young, but also with the old and the elderly.