

**BRIGHTER SOUTH
AFRICA: OR LIFE AT
THE CAPE AND NATAL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649405008

Brighter South Africa: Or Life at the Cape and Natal by J. Ewing Ritchie

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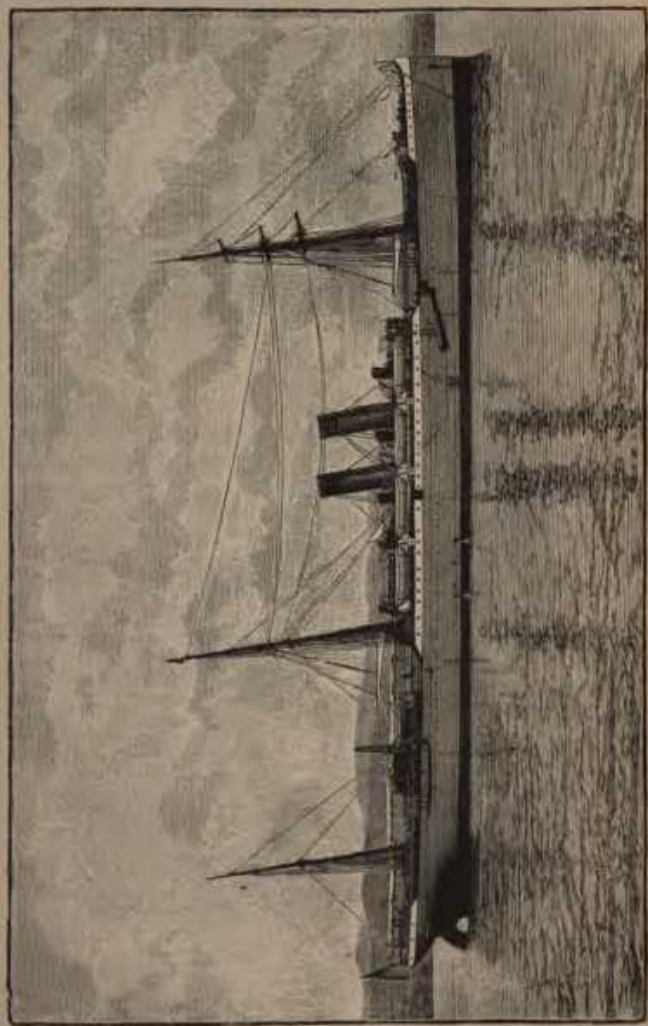
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J. EWING RITCHIE

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AFRICA: OR LIFE AT
THE CAPE AND NATAL**



R.M.S. 'DUNOTTAR CASTLE' (5,500 TONS).

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BRIGHTER SOUTH AFRICA.

CHAPTER I.

*Off to the Cape—Sir Donald Currie—Need of Information—
The Cape as a Health Resort—The Union Company—The
Great Scot.*

I AM off to the Cape. It is true a rolling stone gathers no moss, but no man can travel far without having his ignorance enlightened, his narrow views widened, his prejudices removed, and without coming home a wiser and better man: When many years ago my friend, the late gallant Admiral Sir King Hall, introduced me to Sir Donald Currie, I had no idea that at any time I should have the pleasure of sailing as a passenger on one of those grand steamers of his which have brought the Cape and England so close together.

The last ship of the Castle line has beaten all the others, having accomplished the passage between England and the Cape in a little more than sixteen days. I go out in the *Rosslyn Castle*, which, till the recent achievements of the *Dunottar Castle*, had performed the journey in the quickest time. Captain Robinson, the able commander, is glad to hear I am going out with her. I am equally glad to put myself under the captain's care. We have sailed together before now, and I am able to speak of the captain as a gentleman and sailor of the highest type. I am glad to be in one of Sir Donald Currie's ships. They have carried the Grand Old Man and the Poet Laureate many a hundred miles. Why, I ask, should they not carry me ?

Sir Donald Currie is a fine example of the pushing Scotchman who makes his own fortune, and does at the same time much for the welfare of the community. Born in Greenock in 1824, as soon as he was out of his teens he made his way to Liverpool in search of fame and fortune, entering the service of the Cunard Company, where he speedily distinguished himself—devoted himself most assiduously to the business of the company, and thoroughly mastered all the details of the shipping trade as there carried on. In 1846 he

was sent by the company to establish a line of steamers between Havre and Liverpool, which having successfully accomplished, after a residence of six or seven years in France he returned to Liverpool, and remained in the company's employ till in 1863 he commenced business on his own account by running sailing vessels between Liverpool and Calcutta, also taking a part in the Leith, Hull, and Hamburg Steam Packet Company. Early he seems to have realized Cowper's fine line, that—

'Trade is the golden girdle of the globe.'

He made his way to London, finding that the homeward cargoes of his Indian ships were mainly directed to the Thames. In 1872 he commenced his connection with the African trade. At that time the Union Steam Packet Company had a monopoly of the traffic with the Cape. In this attempt he was aided by the Cape merchants; and in January a small steamer, the *Ireland*, was despatched to the Cape by the firm of which Mr. Donald Currie, as he then was, was the head. Now he has no less than fifteen magnificent steamers constantly ploughing the watery highway between London and the Cape, halting at Lisbon, Madeira, the Canaries, Ascension, and St. Helena,

with half a dozen fine subsidiary steamers to carry on the inter-colonial service between the Cape and Natal and the Mauritius. Nor was the Castle Company, as Sir Donald's line is called, started a day too soon. In 1872 the discovery of diamonds in Griqua Land caused a sudden rush to the spot, and later the discovery of gold in the Transvaal increased the demand for greater travelling facilities between England and the Cape. In old days letters to the Cape paid one shilling, and were delivered in thirty-seven days. Now the postage is almost nominal, and the time taken for the delivery is almost one-half. In other ways Sir Donald has done good service. He arranged the diamond-fields dispute to the satisfaction alike of the British Government and the Orange Free State. If his advice had been taken, there is reason to believe that there would have been no Zulu war, and when that war broke out the Castle steamers rendered important service by the *Dunrobin Castle* starting from the Cape a day before her time with the news of the disasters at Isandula, and by one of them stopping at St. Vincent to bear to the Cape the intelligence of what England was about to do to restore her prestige, and to obliterate the evil consequences of her defeat. Sir Donald did more: he patriotically placed his fleet at the dis-