

OUR COLONIAL EMPIRE

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Our colonial empire by R. Acton

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R. ACTON

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Richard
BY R. ACTON.



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P R E F A C E.

THE design of the following chapters is here to be briefly explained. Many books have been written on the colonies; that is to say, books treating separately of particular colonies. But a comprehensive view of all the colonial off-shoots of this nation, in every quarter of the globe, and of all the British dependencies abroad, excepting India, seems likely to be of service, and at the same time full of interest, to all classes of Englishmen. The author has endeavoured to study the most authentic reports of the actual condition of our colonies, of their material resources, their social economy, and their public administration. It is of necessity little more than an outline sketch of this extensive and diversified subject that is here presented to the reader.

The main interest of the subject, apart from any personal connection that one may chance to have with the settlers of a particular colony, lies in the wide spread of the English nationality. It will, perhaps, be more exactly appropriate to say, of English citizenship; for the present survey does not include the United States of America, while it does include, along with the English, Scotch, and Irish colonial subjects of Queen Victoria, their French, Dutch, and German fellow-citizens in Canada and at the Cape. The aggregate number of people of European race now inhabiting the British colonies, all over the world, is fully seven and a half millions. The number will probably exceed twenty millions before the

lapse of the next twenty years, that is, at the beginning of the twentieth century. English patriotism, though its first concern must be the welfare of Britain, cannot regard with indifference the prospect of the propagation of British social and political institutions abroad that is here in sight. The principles, rules, and methods of our public life, amidst party and sectarian differences in this as in former ages, are tolerably well understood and esteemed in this country. If we have any public spirit, we must care for the tokens already visible, that this national inheritance will not be lost by transplanting large communities of Englishmen to distant shores. We hope the best for England, and we are bound to do our best for her; but there is a true sense in which England may be said to exist wherever, to use Cowper's heartfelt expression, "a nook is left where English minds and manners may be found," and the practices of English citizenship tend to form the mind and manners. England should thus be found in Canada, in Australia, or in New Zealand, as well as here, and we are but half patriots if we care not to inquire about the civil and social welfare of these countries as part of England herself.

The events of three or four years past, especially in South Africa, have provoked much feeling of vexation and anxiety with regard to British colonial policy and administration. This feeling was carried by some writers and speakers to the point of indiscriminate censure of British government in South Africa, as well in the Cape Colony, with its Parliament and responsible Ministry, as in Natal, and in the administration of the Native Protectorates. The real merits and tolerable success, during a long period, of those colonial administrative functions, which had kept the peace of South Africa, for the

most part, till the outbreak of the Galeka war in 1877, were too little perceived. It is not, however, convenient to discuss here transactions of recent colonial history. The vice which really lay at the root of the errors of South African policy was inherent in the treatment of Foreign Office affairs, under the existing official system, by an agent of the Colonial Office. We have seldom had much cause of late years to find fault with Colonial Office action in its proper sphere.

There are some other topics of discussion, which have lately been more or less brought under public notice, and upon which a few remarks will be offered in the concluding chapters. The project of an Imperial Confederation, advocated for some years past by lecturers at the Royal Colonial Institute and others, is one of these topics; and that of an Imperial Customs' Union, or else of some restriction to be put on colonial tariff legislation, is another. The writer feels, indeed, that he ought not to dogmatise upon these questions; but the views he has expressed are those of many intelligent British and colonial politicians.

R. A.

October, 1881.

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