

**PRACTICAL POLITICCS,  
NO.IV; BRITISH  
COLONIAL POLICY**

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Practical Politiccs, No.IV; British Colonial Policy by Sir David Wedderburn

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ATLAS CHAMBERS, PARADISE STREET, BIRMINGHAM,  
*February, 1881.*

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POSTSCRIPT.—The completion of the Series has been unexpectedly delayed; Sir Charles Dilke and the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain having withdrawn the papers promised by them, in consequence of their acceptance of office in Mr. Gladstone's Ministry.

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# BRITISH COLONIAL POLICY.

19078

BY

SIR DAVID WEDDERBURN, BART., M.P.

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## BRITISH COLONIAL POLICY.

THE relations between Great Britain and one of her most important Colonies are at present in a state of severe tension, and Englishmen of both the great political parties are fully persuaded by the course of events in South Africa that we have reached a new point of departure in our Colonial policy. We cannot in future allow ourselves to be dragged into costly and disastrous wars with African barbarians by the Government of the Cape Colony, over whose action we exercise no control, just as we cannot permit our treaty obligations towards the United States to be overridden, and our friendly relations to be imperilled, by an Act of the Legislature of Newfoundland.

These Colonies are in the enjoyment of "responsible" Government, but they seem to have never yet realised their own responsibility, although in South Africa that realisation seems now likely to be effected after a very tragic fashion, and the Colonists may find that their unaided strength is not adequate to the struggle which their rashness has provoked in Basutoland.



When the Transvaal Territory was annexed it was asserted that the Native inhabitants desired protection against the Boers, while the Boers in their turn required protection against the Natives, and that all alike were prepared to welcome the British flag. Unfortunately British protection is so little appreciated by the Natives, that the most powerful tribes within our territory are in open revolt, and it is only too probable that the Boers may make common cause with the Natives against us.

The Home Government not primarily to blame.

For the calamities which have recently occurred and are still impending in South Africa the Home Government is not primarily to blame. As happened so often in the early history of our Indian Empire, the most decisive steps, for good or ill, were taken by local officers without waiting for authority from home. There was no electric cable between Europe and South Africa until a few months ago; but now the telegraph has rendered it impossible for the future that England should find herself committed, without her own knowledge, to the destruction of a native kingdom or the annexation of an independent republic.

Fluctuation of British Colonial policy.

The Colonial policy of British statesmen has from time to time undergone remarkable fluctuations. There was an early period when Colonists were regarded as mere dependents, to be governed for the exclusive benefit of the Mother-country, and to be taxed without their own consent, their duty

being to take home manufactures, whether they wanted them or not, to send all their saleable produce into the home market, and to receive upon their shores the offscourings of the criminal population. This was the Spanish theory of Colonial obligations, and when it was rudely dispelled by the American war of Independence, the policy afterwards adopted by the British Government erred in the opposite extreme. The Colonists were allowed to enjoy the chief privileges of self-government, and were relieved of its most serious burdens; costly armaments being maintained at the charge of the British exchequer for the protection of the Colonies against all dangers, real or imaginary. This state of affairs could not be permanent: it was justly stigmatized as tending to make the Colonies a useless burden on the Mother-country, and even to produce, rather than to prevent, the risk of Colonial wars. Again a change took place, and those statesmen who withdrew the garrisons of imperial troops from the Australasian and North American Colonies were at first accused of wilfully promoting the disruption of the empire. But what have been the actual results? On *our* side the loss of a few healthy and agreeable military stations may be set off against a considerable reduction in the army estimates, as well as in the loss of men by desertion. On *their* side the Colonists have cheerfully recognised the obligation of prosperous, self-governing communities to provide for their own defence, and have

made the important discovery that the presence of standing armies is not conducive to the maintenance of peace. In particular the white people of New Zealand have found, since the departure of the red-coats, that it is possible to settle without fighting their disputes with their Maori neighbours, and the two races are now living side by side on terms of political equality.

Success of  
the policy  
carried out  
in North  
America  
and else-  
where.

If it were possible to carry out in other quarters of the globe the policy which has proved so successful in North America, in Australia, and in New Zealand, the prospects of the British Colonial Empire would indeed be bright. In those fortunate countries the Colonists are exempt alike from vexatious interference and enfeebling protection on the part of the Mother-country. They feel themselves to be a source of strength, instead of a burden, to their countrymen at home, and they cherish a proud loyalty for the British crown and flag, urging only the sentimental grievance that people in the old country do not take sufficient interest in Colonial affairs. Especially of Australasia can it truly be said that in the great islands of the Southern Ocean a Young England has arisen, cherishing for Old England the affection of a daughter, not the jealousy of a rival. A mighty nation has been already founded—a nation looking to England as a model in politics, in art, in literature, even in sports,—living our life, thinking our thoughts, reading our books, and