

MR. FROUDE'S VISIT TO "OCEANA."

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IF Mr. Froude had not disclosed the origin of the title of this able and deeply interesting volume* we might have thought it some-

what fantastic. It is, however, only—in a crystallised form—the magnificent ideal of a perfect commonwealth presented in a sketch by Sir James Harrington to the Protector, two hundred and fifty years ago.

The insular position of Great Britain is the foundation; the naval supremacy which enabled her to stretch out her protecting arm to the ends of the earth is the result. Many suns have risen and set, many generations of men have passed across the stage and disappeared since that sketch was drawn, and marvellous strides have been made towards the realisation of Sir James Harrington's dream. Indeed in extent "Oceana" exceeds his most sanguine anticipations. "Harrington," Mr. Froude tells us, "contemplated that Oceana would be a single commonwealth embraced in the arms of Neptune, but," he continues, "the spell which can unite all these communities into one has not yet been discovered." To discover this spell is one of the great problems now forcing itself upon the attention of statesmen, and the visit of the distinguished historian to South Africa and Australia, and the book in which he gives an account of it, form a most important contribution to its solution.

It was a happy thought which led Mr. Froude to see for himself the stage of progress at which some, at least, of the most important members of Oceana have arrived. What untold difficulties and blunders might have been avoided, had the statesmen who for many generations have ruled the destinies of the colonies from Downing Street, only adopted Mr. Froude's method of acquiring a knowledge of the regions affected by their decisions! "Sir Arthur Helps," Mr. Froude says, "told me a story singularly illustrative of the importance which the British official mind has hitherto allowed to the distant scions of Oceana. A Government had gone out; Lord Palmerston was forming a new Ministry, and in a preliminary council was arranging the composition of it. He had filled up the other places: he was at a loss for a Colonial Secretary. This name and that was suggested and thrown aside. At last he said, "I suppose I must take the thing myself. Come up-stairs with me, Helps, when the council is over. We will look at the maps, and you shall show me where these places are."

The world has never seen anything approaching in grandeur the Colonial Empire of Great Britain; it has grown from small beginnings, and by slow but irresistible steps has reached its present magnitude and importance. How to consolidate its various elements and to bind them in an indissoluble union with the Parent-land and with each other, is a problem which a hurried glance at a few maps on the wall will qualify no man, however brilliant, to master; Mr. Froude has pointed the way to the attainment of the knowledge necessary to this end, and we owe him a debt of gratitude for teaching us from his own experience the theory. We may hope that the Indian and Colonial Exhibition will act as an "object lesson" to impress it on the national mind.

When Mr. Froude was in Melbourne he told some of his colonial friends what Carlyle's thoughts on this subject were; with which his own evidently agreed. According to Carlyle, Mr. Froude said, "England's business, if she understood it, was to gather her colonies close to her, and spread her people where they could breathe again and send the stream of life back into her loaded veins. Instead of doing this, she had been feeding herself on cant and fine phrases, and delusive promises of unexampled prosperity. The prosperity if it came—which it wouldn't, and wouldn't stay if it did—meant only that England was to be the world's great workhouse. We were to be a nation of slaves—slaves of all the world, slaves to mechanical drudgery and cozening trade, and deluded into a dream that all this was the glory of freedom while we were worse off than the blacks of Louisiana. It was another England that Carlyle looked forward to—an England with the soul in her awake once more—no longer a small island, but an OCEAN EMPIRE, where her millions and tens of millions would be spread over their broad inheritance, each leading wholesome and happy lives on their own fields and by their own firesides, hardened into men by the sun of Australia or the frosts of Canada—free human beings in fact, and not in idle name: not miserable bondsmen any more."

Can this magnificent idea be realised? or were Harrington's germ-thought and Carlyle's nobler ideal of an Ocean Empire only idle dreams?

The future of millions of the human race is bound up with the nature of the final answer to this question. And we cannot but hail with pleasure everything which tends to throw light upon it. It is precisely this that Mr. Froude has done; he has shed a flood of light upon the subject, not the result merely of profound study in a well-filled library at home, but of actual contact with the very soil, the mountains and rivers, the cities and villages, the laws and institutions, the manners and customs and life of the men and women who dwell upon the great Australian continent.

Nothing can be more interesting than the account which Mr. Froude gives of the impressions made upon him by his first sight of the land. Thus of Adelaide

* "Oceana." By J. A. Froude. Longman and Co., London.

he says: "Its streets are laid out in anticipation of a larger future—broad, bold, and ambitious. Public buildings, law courts, Parliament House, are on the grand scale. Churches of all denominations are abundant, and handsome—symptoms of a people well-to-do, and liking to have an exterior worthy of them. It was busy England over again, set free from limitations of space."

Of the Botanical Gardens of Adelaide he writes after visiting them: "It was my first experience of the success of the Australian municipalities in this department. Whether it be the genius of the country, or some development of the sense of beauty from the general easiness of life, or the readiness of soil and climate to respond to exertion, certain it is that the public gardens in the Australian towns are the loveliest in the world, and that no cost is spared in securing the services of the most eminent horticulturists."

From Adelaide, Mr. Froude proceeded to Melbourne with its "population of 300,000 who are as well off as any equal number of people in the whole world," and where he found public gardens eclipsing even those at Adelaide.

"Adjoining the grounds of Government House," he tells us, "and connected with them by a private walk down a picturesque ravine, are the public gardens of the city, which eclipse even those of Adelaide in size and the opportunities of the situation. The Melbourne Gardens are on the slope of a valley, at the head of which, and where the incline is nearly precipitous, the tower and battlements of the house stand out conspicuous. The gardens themselves extend for a mile, with a large sheet of winding water in the middle of them. Here was all which heart of visitor could desire; avenues to stroll in, which a vertical sun could not penetrate; with the glory of colour which nature lavishes on leaf and petal to look at."

But men and women are of more importance and represent more truly the character of a country than buildings or gardens or forests, however magnificent. Let us hear what Mr. Froude has to say of them. "Meanwhile in-doors we were studying the Victorians and Victorian society. Party followed party, and it was English life over again; nothing strange, nothing exotic, nothing new or original, save perhaps in greater animation of spirits. The leaves that grow on one branch of an oak are not more like the leaves that grow upon another than the Australian swarm is like the hive it sprang from. All was the same—dress, manners, talk, appearance. The men were quite as sensible, the women as pretty, and both as intelligent and agreeable."

A country will always be judged largely from its public men. During Mr. Froude's stay in Melbourne he was the guest of Sir Henry Loch, the Governor. This gave him the opportunity of meeting the leading men of the country. "Several of the Victorian Ministers," he says, "dined with the Governor while I was there, and other gentlemen of past or present distinction. They seemed all to be persons who would have been distinguished anywhere—made of the same material as our public men at home. They would have

gone to the front in the English House of Commons as easily as in their own Legislature, and have become members of Cabinets in London instead of at Melbourne."

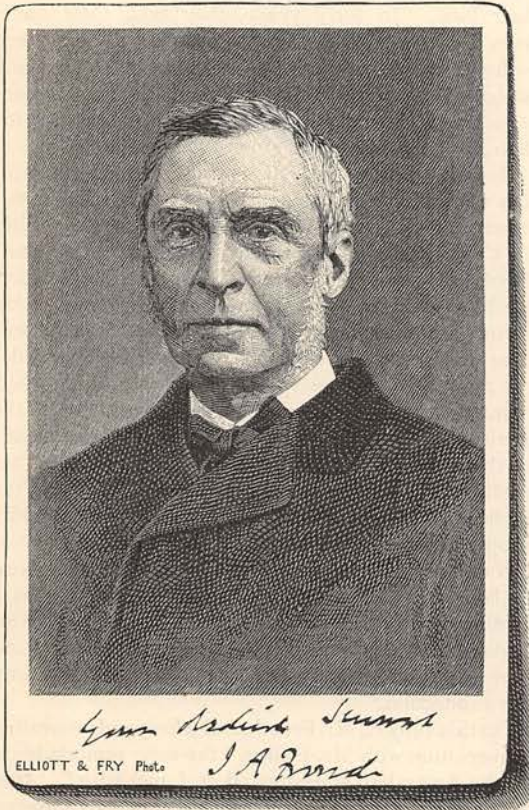
And after a full study of the land, Mr. Froude sums up his impressions of Victoria in the following words: "On the whole, considering that they have been nursed in sunshine, and have never known adversity, the merit of the Victorian colonists is very great. They have worked miracles in clearing and cultivating their land. In forty years—they take their name from the Queen, and are only coëval with her reign—they have done the work of centuries. They are proud of themselves, and perhaps assert their consequence too loudly; but their country speaks for them, and they have fair ground for elation."

But what do the Australians think about the connection with the Parent-land? Do they value the maintenance of the connection, and what form do they think the Confederation of the whole Empire should assume? These are the important questions, to find a solution of which Mr. Froude undertook the circumnavigation of the globe; and happily the answer he received was clear and emphatic—that is, so far as the general desire not merely to preserve the union with the Mother-country, but to strengthen the bond, extends. On the particular mode of effecting that object and the details of the process they were as hopelessly divided as are public men in England. But by whatever means the object was to be attained, there was entire unanimity of opinion on the importance of the fundamental question of a real binding union of the whole Empire. New Zealand was as strong on this point as Victoria; as a leading man in that country said to Mr. Froude, "New Zealanders were democrats in their own country, but were Imperialists to a man in the insistence upon English connection."

On this subject, Mr. Froude had a long and interesting conversation with Mr. Dalley, "the most remarkable of all the Australian statesmen that I met with." After discussing the various schemes of deliberative assemblies proposed, and dismissing them as impracticable, Mr. Dalley said there was something of immeasurably greater importance which might be thought of, and he referred to the subject of the Colonial Navy. Oceana, the great Empire of which Great Britain was the stem, and the Colonies the branches, was the creation of the naval enterprise of England. The fleet was the instrument of her power and the symbol of her unity. British ships of war were the safeguard of Colonial liberty and the natural chain which held the scattered communities together. The fleet therefore ought to be one. Let there be one navy, Mr. Dalley said, under the rule of a single Admiralty—a navy in which the Colonies should be as much interested as the Mother-country, which should be theirs as well as hers, and on which they might all rely in time of danger. Thus the Empire would be invulnerable on its own element, and invulnerable there, might laugh at the ill-will of all the nations of the earth combined.

But Oceana includes many lands besides Australasia. The sails of her ships whiten every ocean; her arms

embrace regions as widely separated as Canada or the West Indies are from Australia. The only regret we feel in closing Mr. Froude's most interesting and opportune volume is that he had not extended his visit to Canada. He would have found there, under different conditions, the same deep attachment to the "Old Country" and to its laws and institutions, and the same loyalty to its illustrious Sovereign, which he witnessed



THE AUTHOR OF "OCEANA."

in the Australian Colonies. Indeed he would have seen the interesting spectacle of Harrington's ideal advanced one stage nearer realisation by the Confederation of all the British North American Provinces into one great Dominion.

The principles of British law and order have been carried with them by the Colonists into their Transatlantic homes, and even the outward symbols of those principles are clung to with tenacity. An amusing illustration of this conservative characteristic occurred in Nova Scotia while I was a member of the Government of that Province. For upwards of a century a Great Seal had been in use, which was affixed to all grants of land from the Crown and other important documents. When the various Provinces were confederated, the Dominion Government sent a new Great Seal for the use of the Provincial Government, directing it by an Order in Council to be used in lieu of the old

Seal. The new Seal was certainly a monstrosity as a work of art, resembling the most hideous of mediæval seals, but it was not probably on that ground that the Government of the Province declined to adopt it; the reason was rather political than æsthetic; but, without going into details, the result in brief was that the new Seal was never used, and its existence had been almost forgotten. Some years had elapsed when the validity of a patent having the old Seal affixed was called in question in a case before the Supreme Court of the Province, and the Court decided that the patent was invalid. Instantly the whole Province was convulsed; the question was raised with great solemnity by the Opposition in the Provincial Parliament; the various grants of land and other documents issued since Confederation were affirmed to be illegal; titles to land were declared to be shaken; nay, every Act passed by the Legislature, summoned by writs sealed with the Old Seal, was said to be destitute of legal force. Much was said of the mysterious power residing in the true Seal—the very *clavis regni*; the people were reminded that when James II. fled from London the Great Seal of England was thrown into the Thames, so important was it deemed that this symbol of power should not fall into the hands of William and Mary—in short, utter chaos and confusion were gravely affirmed to have fallen on the land. Of course, the tempest was soon allayed, and the whole affair is now only remembered with a smile.

The newspapers in the United States made merry over the affair at the time; to the American mind it seemed hardly credible that a whole Province should be agitated in the nineteenth century over such a "bauble" as a Seal; but the excitement aroused by the incident in the Province showed how deeply seated was the attachment of the people, not only to British constitutional principles, but even to the material emblem which shadowed them forth.

Had Mr. Froude been able to extend his visit to Canada, there is little doubt that the views which he formed in Australia would have been greatly strengthened. It is much that so distinguished a writer has seen a great part of Oceana for himself, and has in such picturesque language shown his fellow-countrymen the vast importance of a united Empire; and I cannot better close this brief sketch of his work than by quoting the impressive words which occur in the last chapter of the volume:—

"The holding of the Empire together is of a moment to us which cannot be measured. Our material interests, rightly judged, are as deeply concerned as our moral interests, and there lies before us, if the union be once placed beyond uncertainty, a career which may eclipse even our past lustre. But, in theological language, it is the saving of our national soul, it is the saving of the souls of millions of Englishmen hereafter to be born, that is really at stake; and once more the old choice is again before us, whether we prefer immediate money advantage, supposing that to be within our reach, by letting the Empire slide away, or else our spiritual salvation. We stand at the parting of the ways."