The Dutch colonial system as exemplified at the Cape of Good Hope, or rather the system of the Dutch East India Company (for the nation should not wholly suffer under the condemnation justly incurred by a trading association that sought only pecuniary profit), was almost without one redeeming feature, and was a dishonour to the Netherlands’ national name. In all things political it was purely despotic; in all things commercial, it was purely monopolist. The Dutch East India Company cared nought for the progress of the colony—provided only that they had a refreshment station for their richly laden fleets, and that the English, French, Danes and Portuguese had not. Whatever tended to infringe in the slightest degree on their darling monopoly was visited with the severest penalties, whether the culprit chanced to be high in rank or low. An instance of this, ludicrous white grossly tyrannical, is preserved in the records. Commander van Quaelbergen, the third of the Dutch governors of the coIony, was dismissed from the government in 1667, and expelled the service of the company, because he had interchanged civilities with a French governor bound eastwards, the United Provinces being then at peace with France.@@1

Of this nature was the foreign policy of the Dutch company at the Cape of Good Hope ; modified, indeed, in some degree from time to time, but governed by principles of jealous, stringent monopoly until the surrender of the colony by Commissioner Sluysken in 1795. The internal government of the colonists for the entire duration of the East India Company’s rule was always tyrannical, often oppressive in the extreme. With proclamations, placaats and statutes abundantly filling huge tomes, the caprice of the governor was in truth the Iaw. A mockery of popular institutions, under the name of a burgher council, indeed existed; but this was a mere delusion, and must not be confounded with the system of local government by means of district burgher councils which that most able man, Commissioner de Mist, sought to establish during the brief government of the Batavian Republic from 1803 to 1806, when the Dutch nation, convinced and ashamed of the false policy by which they had permitted a mere money-making association to disgrace the Batavian name, and to entail degradation on what might have been a free and prosperous colony, sought to redeem their error by making this country a national colonial possession, instead of a slavish property, to be neglected, oppressed or ruined, as the caprice or avarice of its merchant owners might dictate.

From time to time servants in the direct employment of the company were endowed with the right of “ freeburghers,” but the company retained the power to compel them to return into its service whenever they deemed it necessary. This right to enforce into servitude those who might incur the displeasure of the governor or other high officers was not only exercised with reference to the individuals themselves who had received this conditional freedom; it was, adds Watermeyer, claimed by the government to be ap- plicable likewise to the children of all such. The effect of this tyranny was inevitable: it drove men to desperation. They fled from oppression; and thus trekking began, not in 1835, as is generally stated, but before 1700. From 1720 to 1780 trekking had gone steadily forwards. In 1780 van Plettenberg, the governor, proclaimed the Sneeuwbergen the northern boundary of the colony, expressing “ the anxious hope that no more extension should take place, and with heavy penalties forbidding the rambling peasants to wander beyond.” In 1789 so strong had feeling amongst the burghers become that delegates were sent from the Cape to interview the authorities at Amsterdam. After this deputation some nominal reforms were granted; but in 1795 a number of burghers settled in the Swellendam and Graaf Reinet districts drove out the officials of the company and established independent governments. The rebellion was accompanied by an assertion of rights on the part of the burghers or freemen, which contained the following clause, the spirit of which animated many of the Trek Boers:—

That every Bushman or Hottentot, male or female, whether made prisoner by commanders or caught by individuals, as well in time past as in future, shall for life be the lawful property of such burghers as may possess them, and serve in bondage from generation to generation. And if such Hottentots should escape, the owner shall be entitled to follow them up and to punish them, according to their merits in his discretion.

And as to the ordinary Hottentot, already in service, brought up at the places of Christians, the children of these shall be compelled to serve until their twenty-fifth year, and may not go into the service of any other save with their master’s consent ; that no Hottentot, in future deserting his service shall be entitled to refuge or protection in any part of the colony, but that the authorities throughout the country shall immediately, whatever be the alleged cause of desertion, send back the fugitive to his master.

After one hundred and forty-three years the rule of the Dutch East India Company came to an end at the Cape. What its principles were we already have seen. Watermeyer recapitulates its effects as follows:—

The effects of this pseudo-colonization were that the Dutch, as a commercial nation, destroyed commerce. The most industrious race of Europe, they repressed industry. One of the freest states in the world, they encouraged a despotic misrule in which falsely-called free citizens were enslaved. These men, in their turn, became tyrants. Utter anarchy was the result. Some national feeling may have lingered, but, substantially, every man in the country, of every hue, was benefited when the incubus of the tyranny of the Dutch East India Company was removed.

To this one further note must be added. The Trek Boers of the 19th century were the lineal descendants of the Trek Boers of the 18th. What they had learnt of government from the Dutch East India Company they carried into the wilderness with them. The end of the 19th century saw a revival of this same tyrannical monopolist policy in the Transvaal. If Water- meyer’s formula, “ In all things political, purely despotic; in all things commercial, purely monopolist,” was true of the government of the Dutch East India Company in the 18th century, it was equally true of Kruger’s government in the latter part of the 19th.

The rule of the Dutch East India Company was extinguished (September 1795) by the occupation of the colony by the British, who acted on behalf of the prince of Orange, Holland having fallen under the control of the revolutionary government of France. Following the peace of Amiens the colony was handed over (February 1803) by Great Britain to a commissioner of the Batavian Republic. During the eight years the British held the Cape notable reforms in the government were effected, but the country remained essentially Dutch, and few British settlers were attracted to it. Its cost to the British exchequer during this period was ₤16,000,000. The Batavian Republic enter- tained very liberal views as to the administration of the country, but they had little opportunity for giving them effect. In less than three years (January 1806) the Cape was reconquered by the British, who were at war both with France and Holland. The occupation was at first of a provisional character, but by the third additional article to the convention with the Netherlands of the 13th of August 1814 the country was definitely ceded to Great Britain. In consideration of retaining the Cape and the Dutch settlements now constituting British Guiana, Great Britain paid £6,000,000. The British title to Cape Colony is thus based upon conquest, treaty and purchase. The wishes of the inhabitants were not consulted, and among them resentment was felt at the way in which their future was thus disposed of. The Europeans at the Cape at that time numbered about 27,o0o.

Before tracing the history of South Africa during the 19th century, the early relations of the white settlers with the natives may be briefly reviewed. The natives first encountered at the Cape were the Hottentots *(q.v.).* They at that time occupied the Cape peninsula and sur- rounding country, and in the early days of the settlement caused the colonists a considerable amount of trouble. An extract from the diary of van Riebeek in 1659 will best illustrate the nature of the relations existing between colonists and natives at that time:—

*3rd June.—*Wet weather as before, to the prevention of our operations. Our people who are out against the plundering Hotten- tots, can effect nothing, neither can they effect anything against us; thus during the whole week they have been vainly trying to get at our cattle, and we have been trying vainly to get at their persons; but we will hope that we may once fall in with them in fine weather, and that the Lord God will be with us.

@@@1 It was not until the time of Ryk Tulbagh (governor of the colony, 1751-1771) that the Chamber of Seventeen permitted foreign ships to provision at Table Bay. Tulbagh was the most popular of the governors under the East India Company. During his governorship no new taxes were levied on the burghers. He was succeeded by van Plettenberg.