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978-1-108-03948-2 - The Life of Sir Frederick Weld, G.C.M.G.: A Pioneer of Empire

Alice Lovat and Hugh Clifford

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The Life of Sir Frederick Weld, G.C.M.G.

Written in 1914 by Alice, Lady Lovat (1846–1938), a cousin, this biography of Sir Frederick Aloysius Weld (1823–91) is characterised by its subtitle, ‘a pioneer of empire’. The young Weld emigrated to New Zealand with a cousin to establish sheep stations. Entering politics, he became Minister for Native Affairs and then Premier; his Native Rights Act of 1865 redressed many of the grievances which had led to the Maori Wars. In 1868 he was appointed Governor of Western Australia, where he brought in a degree of representative government and helped develop the telegraph and transport infrastructure. In 1874 he became Governor of Tasmania, and in 1880 was promoted to the Straits Settlements, where his period as a colonial administrator was notable for the increase of British influence among the princely rulers of the Malay States. Retiring in 1887 for health reasons, he died in England in 1891.

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Emory Walker En.sc.

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SIR FREDERICK WELD

G.C.M.G.

A PIONEER OF EMPIRE

BY ALICE, LADY LOVAT

WITH A PREFACE BY

SIR HUGH CLIFFORD, K.C.M.G.

“LET all the ends thou aim’st at be thy country’s,
thy God’s, and truth’s.”

SHAKESPEARE.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO
THE TEN SURVIVING CHILDREN OF
SIR FREDERICK AND LADY WELD
AND TO THE MEMORY OF THEIR SONS
DOM JOSEPH BASIL WELD
OF THE ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT
WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF GOD
ON FEBRUARY 27, 1908
AND TO
OSMUND
OF THE COLONIAL CIVIL SERVICE
WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY
ON JULY 14, 1910

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FOREWORD

SIR FREDERICK WELD'S career is set forth with sufficient terseness and no undue flattery in the obituary notices of the three countries—New Zealand, Australia, and the Malay Peninsula—in which his life's work lay. They are the justification for the claim the author makes for him of ranking as a Pioneer of Empire.

In the leading newspaper of the first of these countries it is said that :

“ In 1844 he arrived in New Zealand, and was returned to Parliament at its first session, held in Auckland in 1854. The same year he was appointed a member of the Executive Council. In 1860 he was made Native Minister, but resigned in 1861. In 1864 he was entrusted with the formation of a ministry ; his policy of self-reliance, which involved his sending back to England the Imperial troops, was accepted by the Secretary of State and favourably commented on by both Houses of Parliament in England. In 1865 he again resigned office. He was the first to explore the province of Nelson, and some of the uninhabited districts of the Middle Island. He was the author of several papers and pamphlets, etc. *Hints to Intending Sheep Farmers in New Zealand*, which has passed through two or three editions ; ‘ On the great Volcanic Eruption of Mauna Loa (Sandwich Islands), 1885, and the ascent of that Mountain,’ published in the *Journal* of the Geological

Society. Also 'Notes on New Zealand Affairs, 1869.' It was said of him that 'he introduced the self-reliant policy into New Zealand, dispensing with the aid of British troops, which, while costing the British ratepayer about two and a half millions a year, embittered the relation between the Mother Country and the Colony, and was entailing heavy burdens and imminent bankruptcy upon the latter. He believed in using small bodies of men trained to bush fighting, in making roads, and in removing grievances that might exist.'"¹

We take a similar record of Sir Frederick's life in Australia from a West Australian paper :

"Sir Frederick Weld possessed all the qualities to make him an ideal governor of a new and struggling colony. A skilful administrator, a clever statesman, an explorer of no mean repute, and a practical farmer and squatter,—the care which he gave to the preparation of many beneficial projects was only equalled by his firmness in carrying them out. In Western Australia his abilities had ample scope. At his coming he found the country in a lethargic condition, knowing almost nothing, and caring as little about the rest of the world. He at once took up the work of bettering her position, inspiring her to higher ambitions, stirring her to a more active life, and bringing to the task an indomitable will and all the gathered wisdom of a rarely varied career, he achieved a success that can be looked upon as little less than wonderful. Short as his tenure of office was, he was able to say of the Colony long before its close, 'At last she moves'—a statement which describes a course of progress due to his enlightened policy, then visibly beginning and which has never been entirely inter-

¹ *Morning Post*, Wellington, New Zealand.

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rupted. Sir Frederick Weld was the originator of the movement which has conferred upon us the free Constitution we now enjoy ; he gave to the country its first telegraph line, its first steamboat service, and its first railway line.”¹

The following testimony is given to Sir Frederick Weld’s work in the Straits Settlements :

“ Perhaps the greatest claim that he has upon the gratitude of the people of the Colony is the extraordinary success which has resulted from the vigorous but careful policy which he has pursued with unflagging energy in the Native States. Few of our readers can realise the state of anarchy in which these States were plunged when Sir Frederick Weld assumed the reins of government. It appears incredible to the traveller, as he steps into his carriage at the railway station on the lines of the Native States, that such a short time has elapsed since nearly the whole peninsula suffered under the misgovernment of native rulers. Sir Frederick Weld has withstood with his usual cheerful courtesy a certain amount of hostile criticism. . . . He has made a bloodless conquest of the Peninsula, and roads and railways have been among his most trusted agents in achieving his peaceful victories. . . . Singapore has been wonderfully improved of late years. A number of important buildings which were much wanted have been erected, and the place fortified, thanks to the persistent efforts of Sir Frederick Weld in impressing on the Home Government the absolute necessity of providing us with adequate means of defence. We have also to report great improvements made in the lighting of the Straits, and the establishment of a Forestry Department, and of European and Sikh contingents.”

¹ *Western Australian Record*, Perth.

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The author gratefully acknowledges the help and encouragement given her by Sir Hugh Clifford, K.C.M.G. She has also been much indebted to the late Rev. Dom Basil Weld, O.S.B., for the materials for his father's biography collected by him, and to his researches into the Weld pedigree; and to the author of *Lulworth Castle and its Neighbourhood*; and to Sir Henry McCallum, G.C.M.G. She has also made great use in the Life of Sir Frederick Weld of the following books: Swainson's *New Zealand and its Colonisation*; Fox's *War in New Zealand*; Major Richardson's *Our Constitutional History*; Whitmore's *Last Maori War*; Wise's *Australian Commonwealth*; Fenton's *Tasmania*; Sir Frank Swettenham's *The Real Malay*; McNair's *Perak and the Malays*; Sir Stamford Raffles's *Memoirs*, and the *Journal* of the Royal Colonial Institute.

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P R E F A C E

At Lady Lovat's request, and almost at a moment's notice, I furnish a preface to this biography; and I am glad that the task has been assigned to me, because an opportunity is thus afforded to me of paying a tribute of love and respect to one of my father's oldest friends, to the first Colonial Governor under whom I ever served, and to a man to whom I was deeply attached.

Though the author of this book has been mainly concerned with the delineation of the personality of Sir Frederick Weld, the incidents of her hero's life were of such a character that the story of it forms naturally a series of chapters in the early history of some of Great Britain's most interesting and important Colonies and Possessions. Young Weld went out to New Zealand as a squatter at a time when the Maori was still in full possession of the lands of his ancestors. He left it twenty-six years later—after having filled the post of Premier of the Colony at a season of peculiar difficulty and danger—leaving behind him as a heritage the memory of the “Weld or self-reliant policy,” the keynote of which was the theory that a colony capable of self-government must trust to itself and to its own resources, courage, and energy, and cannot for ever, without loss of self-respect, continue to look to Great Britain to fight for, protect, and mother it.

He was appointed successively Governor of Western Australia and Governor of Tasmania, and

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held these posts for five and a half and for six years respectively. Finally, in 1880, he became Governor of the Straits Settlements, and filled that position, save for one year's leave in England—his first return to his home for a decade and a half—until the middle of 1887. Thus from the age of twenty, until he was a man of sixty-four, his life and his life's work were bound up successively with the history of the Colony which he helped to make, and with that of those other Colonies over which he was set to rule and whose destiny he did much to fashion. Leaving aside, therefore, the personality of the man—and to those who knew Sir Frederick Weld his personality was the supreme attraction—the record of his life has inevitably attaching to it a wider, larger interest than is to be inspired ordinarily by even the most vivid portrait of a fine and noble character.

The statesman is born. The administrator is made. For the task of administration (or so some of us think) is as much an acquired craft or trade as the science of the electrical engineer, or the skill of the expert fashioner of patent-leather boots. It is a hazy appreciation of this fact that has led Great Britain—which has, the gods be praised, a happy knack of stumbling and blundering into the only safe path—to entrust the work of administration for the most part to her permanent officials, and to confide questions of statesmanship to their Parliamentary Chiefs. Weld, there can, I think, be little doubt, was far more a statesman than an administrator. It was the statesman's instinct, rather than the skilled hand and the tempered experience of the administrator, which stood him and his successive Colonies in the best stead. It was this gift of statesmanlike vision which directed the course he shaped, and persuaded others to follow, during the troublous times that beset New Zealand in its most critical

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period of transition. It was this, above all, that enabled him to view the essentials in the problems of the Protected Malay States, during a peculiarly critical moment in their somewhat tempestuous infancy,—to see so clearly, through all the obscuring littlenesses of that time, the brilliant future which we know to-day,—and with imaginative brain and calm, steady hand, to order all things for the attainment of that future.

And it was part of the superlative good fortune which has almost invariably attended the now Federated Malay States (their very balance-sheet reads like a fairy-tale, no less), that with the hour of their need came the man. Nay, not the man, but the *men*. What an exceptionally strong combination of outstanding men he had at his disposal. As I look back across the gulf of thirty years which divides me from those days, it seems to me that then there were giants in the land. To aid him in the Colony, Weld had Sir Cecil Clementi Smith,—“out and away the best Colonial Secretary that I have ever had,” was the late Lord Stanmore’s verdict on him, spoken to the present writer,—the late Sir William Maxwell, one of my predecessors on the Gold Coast, a man of quite exceptional administrative and literary ability, whose sad and premature death robbed the Empire of a great servant. In the Native States he had Sir Hugh Low, Resident of Perak from 1877 to 1889, who reimported into the Peninsula from Borneo the cult of dealing with Malays, which had been transmitted to him from Stamford Raffles through the first Rajah Brooke; and such men as the late Sir John Rodger (another of my predecessors on the Gold Coast), as poor Martin Lister, most lovable of mankind, as Sir Frank Swettenham, who himself afterwards rose to be Governor of the Straits, and a host of others.

Yet it was Sir Frederick Weld’s vivid and personal

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interest in the affairs and politics of the Malay States ; his long journeys through our jungles ; his indefatigable efforts to acquaint himself with all that was going forward, of all that was doing, or all that remained to be done ; his generous appreciation of good work, and his hatred of the shirker and the inefficient, which drew from all the best of his officers the best of which they were capable. Before he had been a year in the country he had grasped the essential fact that for a prolonged period the administration of these new, raw lands would call for a greater measure of elasticity than can, alas, be secured under the more rigid and precise Crown Colony system ; and seeing this, he pronounced a definite and authoritative opinion against annexation. He perceived quite clearly that, at the long last, the internal administration of the Native States would have to be assimilated very closely to that of the Colony ; and in our own time that process of assimilation has been made practically complete. He made it his business to see, however, that it should be a slow, a gradual, and a natural growth ; and to this unquestionably is due in a large measure the phenomenal rapidity with which the Native States were developed, and the cordial understanding which has long subsisted between the Malay *rajahs* and chiefs and their white advisers. Annexation would have transformed them into our unforgiving enemies.

I have said that Sir Frederick Weld was a statesman rather than an administrator ; and during the years of his tenure of the Governorship of Singapore the opinion was held by not a few malcontents that the Colony and its affairs were receiving scant attention, and that the Native States bulked too big upon the Governor's mental horizon. There was some truth in this contention ; but while Sir Cecil Clementi Smith filled the post of Colonial Secretary,

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there was no grievance, since all felt that the guidance of purely colonial politics was in very safe and very capable hands. Later, however, though the Native States continued to “swear by” Sir Frederick Weld, it is undeniable that his reputation in the Colony suffered some eclipse during the last two years of his administration. But the statesman was ever busy, hand and heart and brain, building more surely than perhaps even he knew, the foundations upon which such a stupendous monument of success has since been reared. He had little time to give to gross details of administration; yet, in the view of some of the smaller folk around him, these were the problems which should have claimed priority over all mere Native States’ affairs.

But it is of Sir Frederick Weld, the man, rather than of Sir Frederick Weld, the statesman, that I would here write.

Very tall, slim and erect, with great ease and grace of carriage, he looked all men in the face, with a certain modest yet frank self-confidence which betrayed itself in the most naïve ways. It is only Sir Fred, I fancy, who would have had at once the nerve and the simplicity to read Tennyson’s *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* aloud to the poet, in order to compare his own and his host’s elocutionary styles, and fearlessly to demand the great man’s verdict thereon.

He was remarkably handsome, when I knew him as a man of over sixty, with his white hair and white Dundreary whiskers, his fine figure, his calm, honest, pale blue eyes, the transparent case-ments out of which there looked a soul utterly at peace with its God, with its neighbours, and with itself. He had more brains, more experience, and fewer sorrows than Colonel Newcome; but the essential character of the man was singularly like that

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with which Thackeray endowed his hero. Incapable of a meanness or of deception himself, he was apt to read into those about him finer qualities than they in fact possessed. It was as though a glamour shed from his own purity of thought and intention illumined others, in his eyes, with the glow of virtues to which they could lay no claim; and even as a boy, I remember registering the silent opinion that he was a singularly bad judge of men. But on the whole, I think, this betrayed him into few mistakes. No one who came in contact with him could withstand the spell of his peculiar charm, the innate nobility of his character,—the principles so exalted, by which his life was guided, that any departure from them by so much as a hair's breadth, never, I think, presented itself to his imagination in the light of a possibility. And for such a man other men will usually work well, impelled by shame, it may be, if they be not stimulated by example.

To me, when I joined the Civil Service of the Malay State of Perak as a lad of seventeen, he and his were more than kind and welcoming; and I loved this splendid old fellow with all a boy's enthusiasm. Practical man of action though he had been all his days, he delighted in poetry and literature of all kinds; and this too was a bond between us. I was fortunate, moreover, in that he gave me the opportunity to serve him in 1887, by obtaining the Sultan of Pahang's promise to conclude a treaty with the British Government, which eventually led to the protection of that large State. He had been rather severely criticised for having had the boldness to entrust a special mission of some delicacy and difficulty to so young a man—I was at that time not quite one-and-twenty—and I think I can see him now, dressed in sleeping-jacket and *sârong*, and with disordered hair, tramping about his bedroom in

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exclamatory delight when, having arrived in Singapore unexpectedly in the middle of the night, after an absence of three months, I woke him up to tell him the result of my mission just as the dawn was breaking.

A statesman, honest, fearless, noble, kind; inspired by a wonderful and perfectly unostentatious piety; and beyond all things simple, so that the boy's heart in him was never subdued, and the purity of the boy never tarnished, he dwells in my memory, and so must always dwell, as perhaps the finest gentleman that I have ever known.

HUGH CLIFFORD.

CHRISTIANSBORG CASTLE,
THE GOLD COAST.

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