

ing or consolidating the empire was quietly sneered down as dreamy nonsense, needing no refutation beyond some off-hand phrase, such as "we have enough already to bother us." The hole-and-corner politicians were masters of the situation, and answered their adversaries with little but brow-beating ridicule. Foreign nations exulted in the belief that England was allowing her sun to set. She would not only take no more business into her hands, but be thankful to get rid of what she had, and would retire as soon as she could into a comfortable shell, there to undergo a quiet and natural decline into a power of the third or fourth magnitude. There can be little doubt that many Englishmen had begun to acquiesce quietly in this degrading estimate of their state, urged persistently by a small but noisy set of crazy economical doctrinaires. Reaction from those extravagant delusions about the pecuniary value of colonies, which Adam Smith had exposed, had given birth to a more unreasoning passion of depreciation. Because some supposed benefits of colonial relations had been shown to be imaginary, men jumped into the opposite belief that there are no benefits at all. Sometimes, indeed, the dislike to foreign possessions rose, or was professed, from a maudlin kind of democratic and cosmopolitan philanthropy, little more indeed than sympathy with the crass selfishness of other human beings. But more often there was no redeeming feature, real or apparent, in the mutual attitude of the dominant sect. Colonies were assumed to be unprofitable, and isolation thus appeared to be dictated by an enlightened self-interest, scorning equally the grasping rapacity and the sentimental love of grandeur supposed to characterise the advocates of imperial policy. Then this self-interest was assumed to be the one guiding principle which ought to regulate our conduct beyond the four seas. The practical mind of this commercial age rejected with a superior sneer all Quixotic notions that we owe more than merely negative duties to our inferior fellow men. There was for them one God: Let Alone was his name: and this was his commandment, that we mind each man his own business. All this was, and is; but, thank God! not in all its former strength. The dawn of a better day began to glimmer when the Earl of