

## THE COLONIAL QUESTION THEN AND NOW

*By John A. Ewan*

TO James Anthony Froude should be awarded the merit of foreseeing how great a part Britain's Colonial possessions might yet play in the fortunes of the Empire. Thirty years ago neither of the great British parties could see much advantage in the possession of Colonies, and they would have witnessed any of them cut loose from the Motherland with calm resignation. Mr. Disraeli, Mr. Gladstone, Lord Granville and Mr. Bright had all expressed themselves in this sense, and there seemed to be no one of equal eminence to say them nay. The test of all things then was, How much British goods do they buy? The statesmen who had this for their standard were quite logical when they said that an Englishman who emigrated to the States was quite as useful to the United Kingdom as an Englishman who emigrated to the Colonies, because he, at least, was as free a purchaser of British goods in one situation as in the other. This was the sort of political philosophy in vogue thirty years ago, and which Froude combated vigorously with his trenchant pen. In one of these, an essay published in 1870, there are matters upon which there will not be universal agreement, but there are also forecasts that the light of events has shown to be close previsions of the truth. He begins by saying that between 1845 and 1870 four million British subjects had become citizens of the United States of America. The burden of his complaint was that no effort had been made to turn the stream of this emigration to the Colonies, the maxim of British statesmen being that it was a matter of perfect indifference whether an Englishman settled on the Mississippi, the Murray or the St. Lawrence. The essayist deplores this view and scornfully asks if there is another European Power which, having a surplus population and Colonies in which to place them, would put forth absolutely no

effort to prevent them straying under the folds of another flag. "We want land on which to plant English families," he says, "where they may thrive and multiply without ceasing to be Englishmen. The land lies ready to our hand. The Colonies contain virgin soil sufficient to employ and feed five times as many people as are now crowded into Great Britain and Ireland. Nothing is needed but arms to cultivate it, while here among ourselves are millions of able-bodied men unwillingly idle, clamouring for work, with their families starving on their hands. What more simple than to bring the men and the land together? Everything which we could most desire, exactly meeting what is most required, is thrust into our hands, and this particular moment is chosen to tell the Colonies that we do not want them and they may go."

He warns his countrymen that the whole tendency of the time is towards the augmentation of nations, and prophesies that the German States will before long become one country, a prediction that was realized in less than two years thereafter. If Great Britain does not care to assume the leadership of the Anglo-Saxon race he feels sure that the United States will take it up. "If we throw off the Colonies," he says, "it is at least possible that they may apply for admittance into the American Union, and it is equally possible that the Americans will not refuse them. Canada they already calculate on as a certainty. Why may not the Cape and Australia and New Zealand follow?" He goes on to say that if Australia and the Cape were American we could not hold India except at the Americans' pleasure. British commerce would be equally at their mercy and the best prospect for Britons would be to be one day swept into the train of the same grand confederacy. This line of reflection he concludes as follows:—"From the day that it is