

**LIBERIA:
DESCRIPTION,
HISTORY, PROBLEMS**

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Liberia: Description, History, Problems by Frederick Starr

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BY
FREDERICK STARR

CHICAGO

1913

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By FREDERICK STARR
CHICAGO

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
WILLIAM N. SELIG
OF CHICAGO
IN EVIDENCE OF APPRECIATION AND AS
A TOKEN OF REGARD

PREFACE

Africa has been partitioned among the nations. The little kingdom of Abyssinia, in the north, and the Republic of Liberia, upon the west coast, are all of the continent that remain in the hands of Africans. Liberia alone is in the hands of negroes. Will it remain so, or is it destined to disappear? Is it a failure? The reports which have so frequently been printed in books of travel and elementary treatises of ethnology appear almost unanimous in the assertion that it is. Yet there are those who believe that the Black Republic is far indeed from being a failure. We are not willing to admit that its history and conditions warrant the assumption that the black man is incapable of conducting an independent government. A successful Liberia would be a star of hope to the Dark Continent. In Liberian success there lies African Redemption; redemption, not only in the religious sense, but redemption economic, social, governmental. If the black men can stand alone in Liberia, he can stand alone elsewhere; if the negro is able to organize and maintain a government on the west coast, he can do the same on the east coast, and in the southern part of Africa. Africa is restless under the white man; it makes no difference whether the ruler be Portuguese, French, German, Spanish, Belgian, or English, the native is dissatisfied under the present regime. It is recognized that a spark may cause a conflagration through negro Africa. On the other hand, the colonial burden of the European governments grows heavy; the trade advantages of holding Africa might be equally gained without the expense and trouble of administration; it is mutual jealousy, not great sue-

cess, which holds the European powers in Africa. Were each convinced that withdrawal would not give advantage to other powers, that abdication would not be recognized as weakness, that free trade with black men might not result in individual national advantage, they would be quite ready to withdraw from the Dark Continent. In every colony the native is advancing; education becomes more general; it must continue to diffuse itself, and with diffusion of knowledge among the natives, restlessness will be increased; the colonial burden will become heavier,—not lighter. If Liberia prospers, it will stand as an example of what black men can do to all the other negro populations of the continent; its example would stimulate advance for all; the sight of enterprises originating with negroes and carried out by them would give heart and stimulus to negroes everywhere. This does not mean that all the European colonies should necessarily become republics; far from it. Nor would it mean, unless the home governments were blind and ignorant, a necessary severance between the mother country and its colonies; it would, however, lead to a great measure of home rule and to a large development of self-government. Wauwermans, years ago, recognized the powerful influence which a successful Liberia must needs exert. He says: "From this little state, the size of Belgium, whose population does not surpass, including the natives, a fifth part of the population of our country, will go forth perhaps some day the best imaginable missionaries to extend over the Black Continent the benefits of civilization and to found the free United States of Africa, sufficiently powerful to defy the covetousness of white men and to make justice reign, so far as it *can* reign among men."

One of the most thoughtful writers regarding the Republic is Delafosse who, for a time, was French Consul at Monrovia. He has written upon Liberia on various occasions, and what he says always deserves consideration. On the whole he is not a hostile critic,

having a rather friendly feeling toward Liberians and being deeply interested in the Republic. We translate some passages from his writings, as his point of view is original. He says: "If one consider the Liberians superficially—civilized, clad, knowing how to read and write, living in relatively comfortable houses,—one will probably find them superior to the natives. Actually, they are rather inferior to them, as well from the moral point of view as from the point of view of general well-being."

Further on he says: "First, along the coast and in the east, we see the Krumen, a race of workers, energetic, proud, and fighters, but honest, rejoicing in a fine physical and moral health, jealous of the virtue of their women, of a most careful cleanliness. What a contrast do they make by the side of the idle and nonchalant Liberians, expecting everything from the State, subject to every kind of congenital disease, and in particular to tuberculosis, never washing themselves, nourishing themselves with food which a native slave would not accept, decimated by a considerable mortality, having generally very few children, of whom, moreover, the greater part are born scrawny, weak, devoted beforehand to an early death!

If we cast our eyes upon the natives of the west and north, the Vai and other tribes of the Mandingo race, it is a different grade of comparison which offers itself to us, but always to the disadvantage of the Liberians. These natives half islamized, have, much more than the Liberians, the sentiment of human dignity, and their costume, fitted to the climate and the race, far from rendering them ridiculous, as the European does the Liberians, is not devoid of a certain æsthetic character. They have, the Vai and the Manienka, above all, a superior intelligence of commercial affairs. The Vai have even a self-civilization which makes this little tribe one of the most interesting peoples of Africa; alone, of all the negroes known, they possess an alphabet suited to the writing of their language, and this alphabet, which they have completely in-