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Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
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Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
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Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
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**History of Liberia Johns Hopkins
University Studies in Historical
and Political Science**

John Hanson Thomas McPherson

Imprint

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HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE**

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History is past Politics and Politics present History — *Freeman*

NINTH SERIES

X

HISTORY OF LIBERIA

BY

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1891

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PREFATORY NOTE.

This paper claims to be scarcely more than a brief sketch. It is an abridgment of a History of Liberia in much greater detail, presented as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Johns Hopkins University. I have devoted the leisure hours of several years to the accumulation of materials, which I hope will prove the basis of a larger work in the future.

J.H.T. McP.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, June, 1891.

HISTORY OF LIBERIA.

I.

INTRODUCTION.

There are but few more interesting spots in Africa than the little corner of the west coast occupied by the Republic of Liberia. It has been the scene of a series of experiments absolutely unique in history—experiments from which we are to derive the knowledge upon which we must rely in the solution of the weighty problems connected with the development of a dark continent, and with the civilization of hundreds of millions of the human race. Many questions have arisen which have not been settled to our complete satisfaction. Is the Negro capable of receiving and maintaining a superimposed civilization? Froude declares that "the worst enemies of the blacks are those who persist in pressing upon them an equality which nature has denied them. They may attain it in time if they are fairly treated, but they can attain it only on condition of going through the discipline and experience of hundreds of years, through which the white race had to pass before it was fit for political rights. If they are raised to a position for which they are unqualified, they can only fall back into a state of savagery." [1] Upon the truth or error of this view how much depends! It is shared by many; some even believe that the condition of Liberia tends to confirm it, thinking they discern signs of incipient decay. But the great preponderance of opinion is on the other side. The weight of evidence shows the colonists have at the lowest estimate retained the civilization they took with them. Many maintain that there has been a sensible advance. A recent traveller describes them as "in mancher Hinsicht schon hypercultivirt."

What might be called a third position is taken by one of the most prominent writers of the race, E.W. Blyden, the widely-known President of Liberia College. The radical difference in race and circumstance must, he thinks, make African civilization essentially different from European: not inferior, but different. The culture which the blacks have acquired, or may attain in further contact with foreign influence, will be used as a point of departure in future intelligent development along lines following the characteristics of the race. This tendency to differentiate he regards as natural and inevitable; it ought to be recognized and encouraged in every way, that the time may be hastened when a great negro civilization, unlike anything we have yet seen, shall prevail in Africa and play its part in the world's history.

If we make allowance for the errors and mistakes of an untrained and inexperienced people, the history of Liberia may be regarded as a demonstration of the capacity of the race for self-government. Upon the capability of individuals is reflected the highest credit. The opportunities for a rounded-out and fully developed culture afforded by the peculiar conditions of life in the Republic produced a number of men who deserve unqualified admiration. From the earliest days of the colony, when Elijah Johnson upheld the courage of the little band in the midst of hostile swarms of savages, to the steadfast statesmanship of Russwurm and the stately diplomacy of Roberts, there have stood forth individuals of a quality and calibre that fill with surprise those who hold the ordinary opinion of the possibilities of the Negro. The trials of the Republic have afforded a crucial test in which many a character has shown true metal. It is not too much to assert that the very highest type of the race has been the product of Liberia.

There are other aspects in which our tropical offspring has for us a vital interest. Perhaps the most important is the connection it will have in the future with what is called the Negro Problem in our own country. There have been and are thoughtful men who see in colonization the only solution of its difficulties. Others ridicule the very suggestion. It is a question into which we do not propose to go. But there is scarcely any doubt that when the development of Liberia is a little more advanced, and when communication with her ports becomes less difficult, and when the population of the United

States grows more dense and presses more upon the limits of production, there will be a large voluntary migration of negroes to Africa. And no one will deny that the existence of a flourishing Republic of the black race just across the Atlantic will react powerfully upon all questions relating to our own colored population.

But let us not venture too deeply into this theme. Another claim of Liberia upon the sympathetic interest of the entire people, is that it represents our sole attempt at colonial enterprise. It is true the movement was largely individual, but the effort came from a widespread area of the country; moreover, the part played by the National Government was not only important, but essential. Without its friendly intervention, the plan could never have been carried out. The action carries with it some responsibility. The United States might well exercise some protective care, might now and then extend a helping hand, and let the aggressive Powers of Europe see that Liberia is not friendless, and that encroachment upon her territory will not be tolerated.

A few words upon the topography of the country and upon the aborigines may not be out of place. Liberia is by no means the dreary waste of sand and swamp that some imagine it. The view from the sea has been described as one of unspeakable beauty and grandeur. From the low-lying coast the land rises in a terraced slope—a succession of hills and plateaux as far as the eye can reach, all covered with the dense perennial verdure of the primeval forest. Perhaps the best authority on the natural features of the country is the zoölogist of the Royal Museum of Leyden, J. Büttikofer, who has made Liberia several visits and spent several years in its scientific exploration. The account of his investigations is most interesting. Small as is the area of the country all kinds of soil are represented, and corresponding to this variety is a remarkably rich and varied flora. Amidst this luxuriance is found an unusually large number of products of commercial value. Cotton, indigo, coffee, pepper, the pineapple, gum tree, oil palm, and many others grow wild in abundance, while a little cultivation produces ample crops of rice, corn, potatoes, yams, arrowroot, ginger, and especially sugar, tobacco, and a very superior grade of coffee. The fertility of the soil renders possible the production of almost any crop.

The fauna of the land is scarcely less remarkable in variety and abundance. The larger animals, including domestic cattle and horses, do not thrive on the coast, but are plentiful farther inland. On the Mandingo Plateau, elephants are not uncommon. Buffaloes, leopards, tigers, antelopes, porcupines, the great ant-eater, divers species of monkeys, and numerous other animals are found, besides many varieties of birds.

The native Africans inhabiting this territory are probably more than a million in number, and belong to several different stocks of somewhat varying characteristics. The most common type is of medium size, well formed, coal-black in color and rather good-looking. They are intelligent and easily taught, but are extremely indolent. Their paganism takes the form of gross superstition, as seen in their constant use of gree-gree charms and in their sassa-wood ordeal. Like all the races of Africa, they are polygamists; and as the women manage the farms and do nearly all the work, a man's wealth and importance are often estimated by the number of his wives. Domestic slavery is universal among them, the great majority of slaves being obtained by capture in war. These inter-tribal wars were once almost constant, and their prevention requires the utmost vigilance of the Liberian authorities.

The natives harvest rice and cassada; supply the coasting trader's demand for palm-oil; raise tobacco; procure salt by evaporating seawater; engage in hunting and fishing. They carry on a number of rude industries such as the manufacture of basket-work, hats, mats, fish-nets; a crude sort of spinning and weaving. Iron ore exists in abundance, and the natives have long known how to smelt it and obtain the metal, from which they manufacture rude weapons, spurs, bits, stirrups and kitchen utensils. The cheapness of imported iron ware has driven out this interesting art on the coast; but in the interior it is still practised by the Mandingoes, who are also fine goldsmiths, and manufacture highly ornamented rings. There are also silversmiths among the Veys, who do good work. The leather industry, too, has been carried to some perfection.

With all their disadvantages the natives seem to extract a good deal of enjoyment out of existence. They are very fond of singing

and dancing to the rude strains of a drum and harp, and usually prolong their revelries far into the night.

Taken as a whole, the native character has many fine traits; and from the civilization and development of this part of her population, Liberia has much to hope.

II.

THE COLONIZATION IDEA.

It is always a most interesting part of historic inquiry to search out the very earliest sources, the first feeble germ of the idea whose development we are investigating. It is difficult to decide from what one origin can be traced the continuous development of the idea which resulted in the birth of Liberia; but toward the close of the last century there arose a number of projects, widely differing in object and detail, which bore more or less directly upon it, each of which may be said to have contributed some special feature to the fully rounded and developed plan.

The earliest of these sprang from the once notorious hot-bed of slavery—Newport, R.I. As early as 1773 the Rev. Samuel Hopkins, then widely known as a theological writer, and responsible for the system termed Hopkinsianism, conceived the idea of a missionary effort in Africa, undertaken by natives properly trained in the United States.[2] This at first did not include the conception of a permanent settlement; but on consultation with the Rev. Ezra Styles, afterward President of Yale, it developed into a definite plan for a colony. The scheme proved popular; it was widely advertised by sermons and circulars both in this and the mother country; and by 1776 funds had been collected, Negro students placed under suitable instruction at Princeton, and success seemed almost assured. The outbreak of the Revolution, however, swept away all the thought of carrying Hopkins' cherished enterprise into execution, and after peace was restored his most strenuous efforts failed to arouse the old interest. Later thinkers, however, found suggestion and encouragement in his labors.

The colony founded at Sierra Leone by English philanthropists drew in part its inspiration from Hopkins' idea, and in turn suggested later American plans. After the celebrated decision of Lord Mansfield in the Somerset case (1772), many slaves escaped to Eng-

land, where they congregated in the dens of London in helpless poverty and misery. James Ramsay's essay on Slavery soon turned public attention to the Negro, and Dr. Smeathman's letters suggested quite a scheme of colonization. A movement in behalf of the oppressed race asserted itself at the University of Cambridge, in which Clarkson, Wilberforce, Granville Sharp and others took part. As a result of these efforts some four hundred Negroes and sixty whites were landed at Sierra Leone in May, 1787. Disease and disorder were rife, and by 1791 a mere handful survived. The Sierra Leone Company was then incorporated; some 1,200 colonists from the Bahamas and Nova Scotia were taken over, and the settlement in spite of discouraging results was kept up by frequent reinforcements until 1807, when it was made a Government colony and naval station. Its growth in population and commerce has since steadily increased, and it now numbers some 60,000 persons chiefly concentrated in the city of Freetown, and all blacks save one or two hundred.

It may be as well to mention here two other sporadic attempts to lead colored colonists to Africa. In 1787 the gifted and erratic Dr. Wm. Thornton proposed himself to become the leader of a body of Rhode Island and Massachusetts colonists to Western Africa; he appears to have been in communication with Hopkins on the subject a year later, but the effort fell through for want of funds. The other is much later. Paul Cuffee, the son of a well-to-do Massachusetts freedman, had become by his talents and industry a prosperous merchant and ship-owner. Stimulated by the colony at Sierra Leone, and longing to secure liberty to his oppressed race, he determined to transport in his own vessels, and at his own expense, as many as he could of his colored brethren. Accordingly, in 1815, he sailed from Boston with about forty, whom he landed safely at Sierra Leone. He was about to take over on a second voyage a much larger number, when his benevolent designs were interrupted by death.

It will be observed that the colonization plans hitherto unfolded had all been proposed for some missionary or similar benevolent object, and were to be carried out on a small scale and by private means. It is now time to consider one proposed from a widely different standpoint. As a political measure, as a possible remedy for

the serious evils arising from slavery and the contact of races, it is not surprising to find Thomas Jefferson suggesting a plan of colonization. The evils of slavery none ever saw more clearly. "The whole commerce between master and slave," he quaintly says, "is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this and learn to imitate it." And again, "With what execration should the statesman be loaded, who, permitting one-half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms these into despots and those into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, and the amor patriae of the other.... I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just." [3] Yet his equally clear perception of the evils sure to result from emancipation immediate and unqualified, makes him look to colonization as the only remedy. "Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state?" he asks, "Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites, ten thousand recollections by the blacks of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race." After the lapse of a century how prophetic these words sound! Jefferson believed then that by colonization slavery was to be abolished. All slaves born after a certain date were to be free; these should remain with their parents till a given age, after which they should be taught at public expense agriculture and the useful arts. When full-grown they were to be "colonized to such a place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper, sending them out with arms, implements of the household and handicraft arts, pairs of the useful domestic animals, etc.; to declare them a free and independent people, and extend to them our alliance and protection till they have acquired strength."

Such in outline was Jefferson's contribution to the colonization idea. Its influence was unquestionably great: the "Notes on Virginia," privately circulated after 1781, and at length published in 1787, went through eight editions before 1800, and must have been familiar to nearly all of those concerned in the formation of the Colonization Society.

Clearer still must the details of Jefferson's project have been in the minds of the members of the Virginia Legislature in 1800, when, after the outbreak of a dangerous slave conspiracy in Richmond, they met in secret session to consult the common security. The resolution which they reached shows unmistakably Jefferson's influence. With the delicate if somewhat obscure periphrasis in which legislation concerning the Negro was traditionally couched, they enacted: "That the Governor be requested to correspond with the President of the United States on the subject of purchasing lands without the limits of this State whither persons obnoxious to the laws or dangerous to the peace of society may be removed." [4] An interesting correspondence ensued between Monroe, who was then Governor, and Jefferson. Both regarded the idea as something far more important than a mere penal colony. Monroe, too, saw in it a possible remedy for the evils of slavery, and refers to the matter as "one of great delicacy and importance, involving in a peculiar degree the future peace, tranquillity, and happiness" of the country. After much discussion Africa was selected as the only appropriate site, and approved by another Act of the Legislature. Jefferson lost no time in attempting to secure land for the colony, but his efforts met with no success. After a discouraging repulse from Sierra Leone, and the failure of several half-hearted attempts to obtain a footing elsewhere, the whole matter was allowed to sink into abeyance. For years a pall of secrecy concealed the scheme from public knowledge.

In the meantime a new private movement toward colonization was started at the North. Samuel J. Mills organized at Williams College, in 1808, for missionary work, an undergraduate society, which was soon transferred to Andover, and resulted in the establishment of the American Bible Society and Board of Foreign Missions. But the topic which engrossed Mills' most enthusiastic attention was the Negro. The desire was to better his condition by founding a colony between the Ohio and the Lakes; or later, when this was seen to be unwise, in Africa. On going to New Jersey to continue his theological studies, Mills succeeded in interesting the Presbyterian clergy of that State in his project. Of this body one of the most prominent members was Dr. Robert Finley. Dr. Finley succeeded in assembling at Princeton the first meeting ever called to consider the