

## LAND WHERE NEGROES RULE

AFRICA'S last independent state is the negro republic of Liberia, on the West Coast a few degrees north of the Equator. Twice the size of Switzerland, it is mostly hilly jungle inhabited by some thirty tribes totalling 1,500,000 souls.

Like all African countries, Liberia owes its nationhood to foreign occupation. Yet these foreigners were not whites, but blacks—former American slaves, who were transported to Africa early in the last century by Abolitionist sympathisers. Enlarged by treaties with native chiefs, this American negro colony became an independent state in 1838.

Between the aborigines and the newcomers, despite their common stock, existed a sharp cleavage. The latter, with their English speech, veneer of European-American civilization, and apathy for native ways, behaved like white settlers. They lived on the coast, kept aloft from physical toil, suffered from the tropical heat, and assumed the position of a ruling class. The present-day Liberians—only descendants of the American freed slaves are so called—wear frock coats, top hats, and government decorations.

Centuries of human evolution lie between these outward signs of civilization and the native African's single homespun garment.

These American - descended Liberians still constitute the ruling class; they consider themselves the only civilized caste, the only people fit to govern.

Fearing possible domination by European capitalists, the founders of the negro republic forbade whites to acquire land. In consequence, Liberian independence remained secure; but the country's commercial possibilities were not developed. The Liberians preferred intellectual callings (to-day most of their descendants are lawyers, politicians, public officials, or clergymen); they proved unfit to become planters or pioneers. They built no railways, and, even now, only fifty miles of Liberian roads are usable by motor cars. Domestic animals are few, and transportation is still by the two-footed beast of burden—man.

The "closed-door-for-whites" policy remained in force until recent years. A group of Polish colonists obtained a concession, but this venture proved unsuccessful. More important is the

concession granted to Harvey Firestone, the American motor tyre king, for the cultivation of rubber. Most of Liberia's 20,000 day laborers are employed by Firestone.

The American - Liberians built up an exclusive aristocracy and reserved the right of participating in the government for themselves. Today, all civilized negroes are permitted to vote, but the weight of political and social prestige remains with the few families who trace their descent from the American freed slaves.

Officially, the absence of elementary schools in the hinterland is explained by the government's financial difficulties; but there is a further, unadmitted reason: by enlarging the class of educated aborigines, the Liberians might endanger their own long-standing supremacy.

Education in the hinterland has been left to private initiative, free from government regulation. The English mission schools seek to present Christianity in a form suited to native comprehension, and to avoid estranging the Christian negro abruptly from his tribal ties and traditions.

Not so the American missionary societies, which are of the opinion that a Christian negro will be more useful to his people than a heathen. Coupled with this is the notion that the

heathen mode of life is immoral—and the best way to alienate the young native from it is, apparently, to educate him like a little American citizen.

So, in their schools he learns, before all else, English, arithmetic, reading and writing. His schooling over, the pupil is different, both in dress and in outlook, from his family. Only on the coast, as a salesman in a shop or as a clerk in a Government office, can he hope to turn his acquired abilities to account. Perhaps he enters the aristocracy of civilized negroes—but not as a representative of the aboriginal class, which scorns him as much as do his new associates.

However, such opportunities are few, and many mission-school pupils remain jobless. Some of these join the coast proletariat; others return home. The latter have learned nothing that can enable them to retain their higher living standard. They become rice farmers, tilling the soil by methods just as primitive as those of their unschooled fellow-tribesmen. In addition, they are outcasts from their tribes. The chief may use them as interpreters in his dealings with the Government, but he disregards their counsel.

Towards the great mass of subject blacks, the government's policy is two-faced. Ostensibly, they deprecate the aboriginal mode of life. Yet, under the

surface, it has its attraction for them.

The government considers the tribal kings dangerous and seeks to replace them with puppets; and it undermines their prestige by laying down the rule that a chief's judicial decisions may be appealed to the District Commissioner, and, in the last resort, to the Supreme Court at Monrovia. Though seeming to allow the traditional institutions to stand, the government impairs their normal functioning, without any apparent intention of replacing them with a new social order.

The government's chief purpose seems to be to collect taxes on the natives' farms without arousing too much resistance. In all other African countries to-day, the principle is firmly established that at least a part

of the tax revenues should be expended for the welfare of the aborigines. But, in Liberia, the entire amount flows to the coast, to benefit the ruling class alone.

Liberia has not so far succeeded in creating a nation out of its population. Its political energies are absorbed in the struggle between its two classes of negroes—civilized and aborigines. The former want to retain their position as overlords at any cost; the latter are growing continually more weary of being exploited. However, their protests are easily checked by the little constabulary force of their black masters, since the multiplicity of tribal units makes anything like a united revolutionary movement impossible.  
—*Condensed from Deutsche Rundschau, Berlin.*

\* \* \*

## *How to Keep Your Temper*

WHEN a person annoys you, stop talking. Think. Put yourself in *his* place. Say to yourself that if you *really* were his superior you would be kind, considerate and patient, and not become angry.

When a circumstance upsets you, take a walk, if only round the room. Then sit down and think. Let your ego help you out by saying to yourself that nothing is insurmountable for you.

Get plenty of exercise and social activity.

Study other people and learn their faults and weaknesses. Let these amuse you.—*Your Life.*