

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LIBERIA OBJECTS

THE ARTICLE "Pepper Coast Republic" [SR Sept. 24], which is made up of excerpts from the sections on Liberia in "Inside Africa," by John Gunther, is not in harmony with SR's traditions of accuracy and truth. Travelogues on the West Coast of Africa are often written from the deck-chairs of ships. Some bolder souls write definitive guides as a result of a month's stay ashore at the local pubs. Mr. Gunther has surpassed them all by writing an "inside story" after spending only two days in Liberia. Liberia is a country in transition. The current cultural and political transformation is so rapid that a literary sketch is hardly valid a couple of days after it is made. Furthermore, deliberate efforts are being made in Liberia to insure that a pattern will emerge which will reflect a complex interaction of Western Civilization and African culture. A cursory glance through jaundiced eyes, not taking these things into account, is likely to see an incongruous, incomprehensible drama.

Mr. Gunther, without firsthand experience there, leans principally on second- and third-hand information, excerpts from partisan news organs published during the heat of a political campaign, for example, and to a lesser extent on a study of Liberia written by Raymond Leslie Buell entitled: "Liberia: A Century of Survival." He also uses files of the League of Nations Commission of Enquiry. More than anything else, however, he leans on Elizabeth Furbay's "Top Hats and Tom Toms."

The thoughts behind Dr. Buell's book are summarized in Buell's own words: "In the light of our present knowledge of the cultural and material differences between primitive and advanced groups, and of the danger in uprooting an individual from his cultural environment, it is almost miraculous that (Liberians) should have succeeded as well as they did in making a new life for themselves in West Africa." Further emphasizing the point Dr. Buell wrote: "Having diverse African backgrounds and languages these people (meaning the Negro settlers from America) were suddenly dumped into an entirely strange spot, marked by a severe tropical climate, great economic difficulties, and struggles with native tribes and foreign powers. It is an astonishing achievement that these people should have been able to maintain, particularly after the withdrawal of American direction in 1847, an independent Negro state."

Any balanced and complete reading of Buell's book will establish the relationship between Liberia's poverty, her difficulties, and the hostility with which colonial powers have consistently reacted to the independent countries of Africa. That Liberia lost a fourth of her territories to those powers is merely mentioned by Mr. Gunther *en passant*, as if there could be no social demoralization



"Our sole advice to you, young man, is—marry into money."

or evil economic consequences flowing from these century-long despoilments.

The references to the exportation of labor and the Commission of Enquiry which touches a period now long past must be considered in context. The export and movement of labor under similar conditions were not exclusively a Liberian phenomenon. Nevertheless, when conditions were exposed which wounded the Liberian people's sensibilities drastic correctives were immediately instituted. Mr. Gunther has not given credit for acts of courage on the part of the Liberian people which stand in stark relief to situations where other national governments have been known to introduce and exercise corrective measures only gradually and piecemeal over a long period of time. Neither does he recall the morality of that day when certain members of the League of Nations invited Germany to take over Liberia as a colony in lieu of territories lost as a result of a world war in which Liberia had boldly participated on the side of the Allies.

Mr. Gunther's third and principal frame of reference is the twenty-year-old caricature of Liberia: "Top Hats and Tom Toms." The tales about a Liberian cabinet minister pilfering a cabbage or the Monrovia postmaster calling on foreign arrivals and demanding \$100 to insure prompt mail deliveries, the use of top hats for stealing toilet paper, etc., certainly bring to memory similar little jokes in the apocryphal writings of Elizabeth Furbay. That book as well as Mr. Gunther's hasty survey of Liberia are intended to take the armchair Gulliver

on a sensational journey into a never-never land 100 years out of step with the surrounding countryside. Here, in inert stagnation and laziness, he will find men who "work ten days a year," roads which are only bands of mud, hospitals that are pools of filth and ignorance, and corruption and inefficiency at a high premium. A keen imagination like Jules Verne's could conjecture such a story without the excuse of a two-day visit.

Out of fairness Mr. Gunther should have mentioned that Liberia spends a larger portion of her income for public health than any other country; that, in addition to having more than 200 students studying abroad, millions of dollars have been appropriated in cooperation with the Technical Cooperation Administration for a new mechanical and agricultural college; that a network of improved roads is being constructed from a \$21,000,000 grant of credit by the Export-Import Bank.

A vigorous unification program inaugurated in 1944 is effectively smashing the last vestige of any barriers that existed between tribal and civilized elements. Already, through Mr. Tubman's persistence, the suffrage has been extended to the tribesmen and tribeswomen alike; and education and health facilities are being provided, without discrimination, to all sections of the country through ninety-six medical clinics, five leper hospitals, a sanatorium, and twenty general hospitals.

C. L. SIMPSON.
Liberian Ambassador
to the United States.

New York, N.Y.



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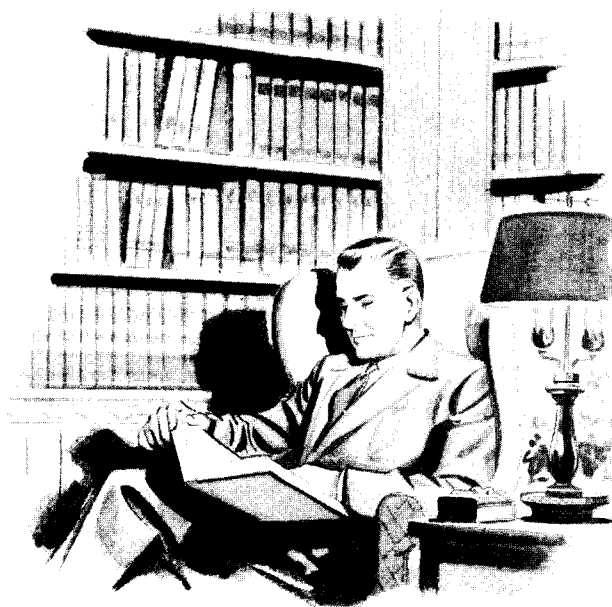
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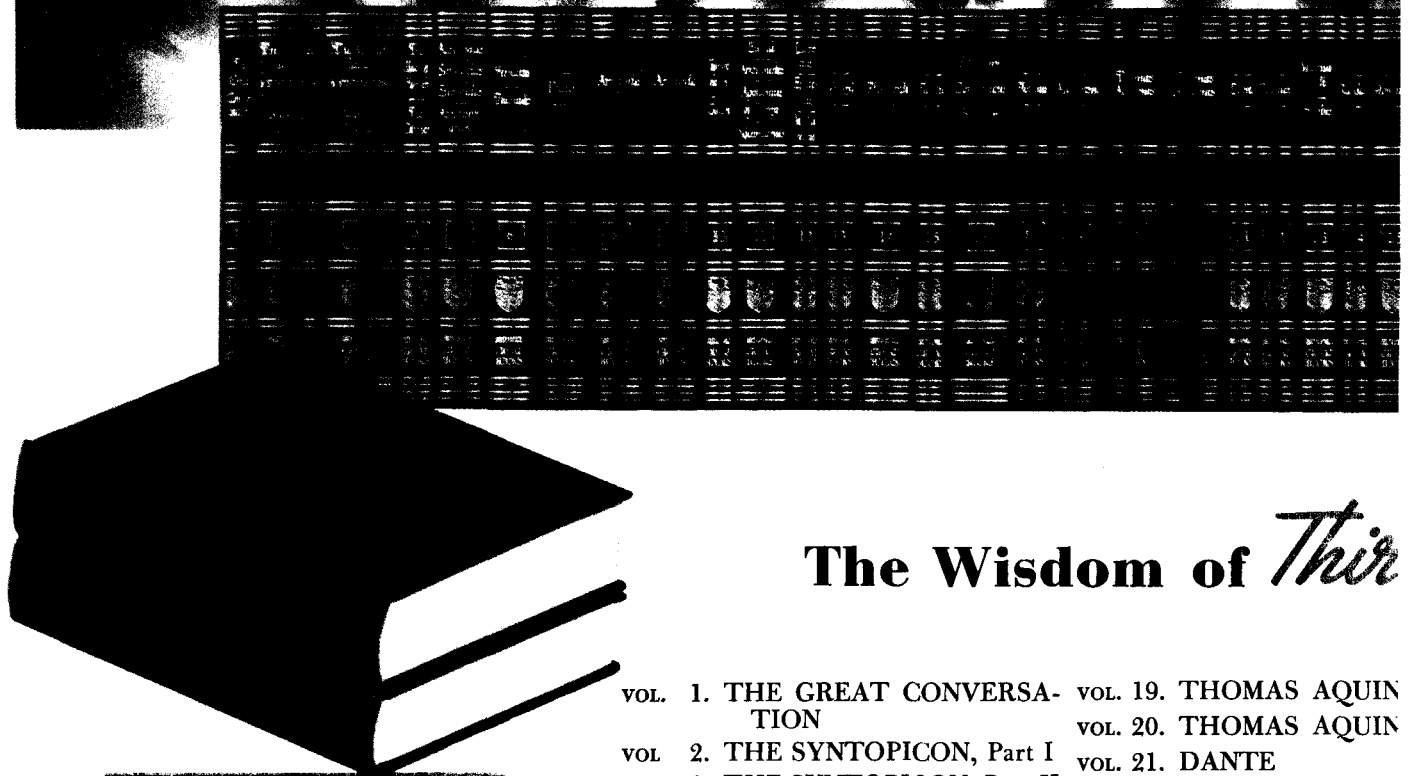
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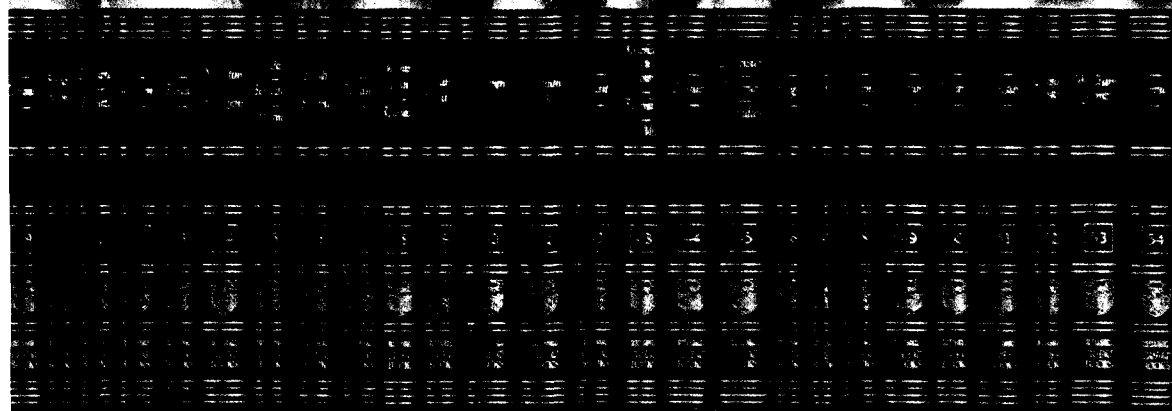
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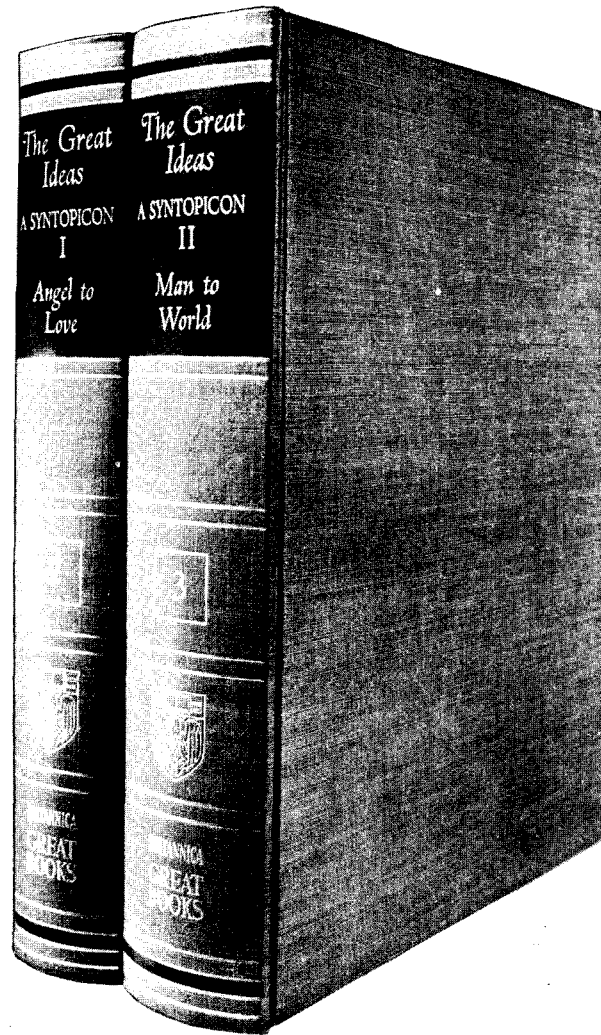
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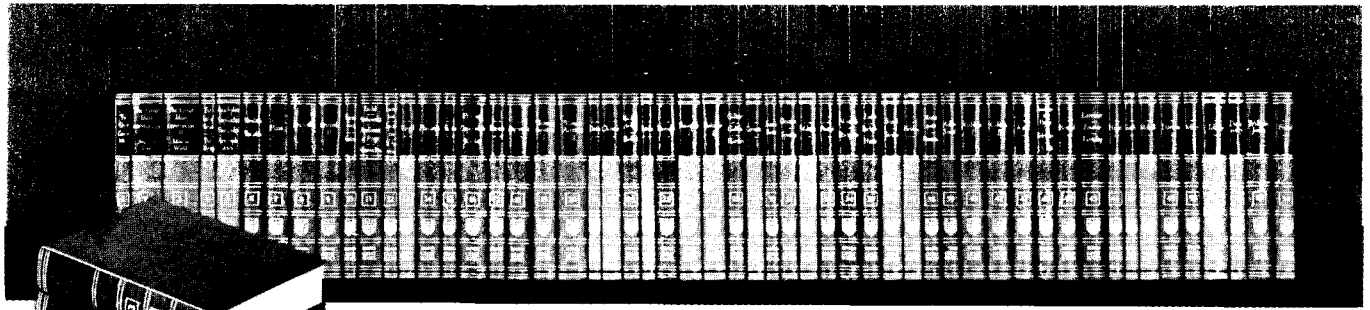
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Saturday Review



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Saturday Review

Commissar Curmudgeon's Mélange



"Notes for a Journal," by Maxim Litvinov (William Morrow. 347 pp. \$3.75), is a fascinating but unauthenticated collection of political reminiscences, which were purportedly written by a former high Soviet official. Our reviewer is Professor Sidney Harcave of Harpur College, author of "Russia, A History" and other books.

By Sidney Harcave

AS Soviet memoirs go, we have had thus far the post-revolutionary political experiences of only one former member of the Politburo, one former member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and one former People's Commissar—and these three were all one, Leon Trotsky.

Those other Communist leaders who have ventured into the field of autobiography have usually dealt only with their prerevolutionary past and warily stopped short at the Soviet period.

But Maxim Litvinov, to whom "Notes for a Journal" is ascribed, was for many years a Central Committee-man and People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, and his personal record of those years—if authenticated—would be a valuable addendum to our limited knowledge of the USSR from within.

As a book his supposed "Notes for a Journal" is a mélange of trivial and important items, all of them interesting. There is a description of the Politburo debating Soviet policy on the Spanish Civil War and there is an account of how two intelligence agencies paid large sums for two versions of the Tanaka Memorial (both of which turned out to be forgeries). Here one also finds Stalin discoursing on the uses of policemen, Kamenev displaying a tongue so sharp that it might be expected to sever his head from his body, and still another version of the death of Stalin's second wife. One finds former Politburocrat Bubnov being divorced for permitting his child to be baptized but continuing to live in sin with his ex-wife and the leader Stolz, who was in charge of Party discipline, a-tremble with fear because his sister made *gefилte fisch*. One watches a group of commissars' wives at a seance summoning up the materialistic ghost of Karl Marx, and

one finds Litvinov himself expressing preference for a weak anti-Soviet Germany rather than a strong, friendly one.

True or false, the notes reveal the vigorous personality of a Russo-Jewish curmudgeon who is keenly appreciative of his own virtue, sensitive to criticism, and impatient with all those of weaker attributes. It would be a pity if so intriguing a book should prove to be pure fabrication.

But the publishers of "Notes for a Journal" candidly state that they cannot vouch for its authenticity. They can vouch only for the fact that "a group of Russians in Paris" came into possession of the typescript of the material, which was allegedly dictated by Litvinov at various times from 1926 to 1950 and deposited by him with a Soviet envoy to Sweden who died three years ago, Mme. Kollontai. E. H. Carr, who was asked to judge the authenticity of the document before its original publication in England, is inclined to believe after examining the typescript and talking to persons who knew something of its history that part of it is possibly genuine and that the other part is probably spurious. Yet neither Mr. Carr nor the publishers explain how the document came into the hands of its purveyors, and the identification of them as merely "a group of Russians in Paris" invites caution, especially since Paris has long

been known as one of the major centers for the fabrication of Soviet documents.

SO THE consideration of the book's authenticity must center on the problem of credibility. It is difficult to believe that Litvinov would have made the numerous errors of fact which are scattered throughout the work—e.g., that the Politburo decided in 1926 to prepare for an early Communist seizure of power in China. Actually it is an established fact that the Politburo firmly rejected such a course.

Mr. Carr suggests that errors may be part of the embroidery added to the original text. But even if Mr. Carr's suggestion is granted there is still the doubt raised by the out-of-focus character of much of the work. Some of the outstanding events of Litvinov's career are ignored while insidious gossip, personal grudges, and intimate relations are fulsomely discussed. Credulity is further strained by the fact that the reader is asked to accept the idea that a Soviet leader would risk the danger involved in keeping secret notes. Against all doubts, however, one must admit that Litvinov while still in the service of the Soviet Government in 1946 told both Ambassador Walter Bedell Smith and American correspondent Richard Hottelet of his opposition to Soviet policy. Such a man may have dared to leave an inside record for the world.

For MHS

By Jesse Stuart

SOFT, velvet grass erases all the scar
Where she now lies embedded for the night,
Beneath the sun, the ambient wind and star . . .
Amid the grass, her yuccas blossom white.
Her eyes have seen before these in their season
But cannot see them blossom now for her;
The quilt that she lies under is the reason,
So close where they and winds of April stir . . .
Hands that once plucked the yuccas for bouquets,
Each day, the vase refilled in every room,
Cannot reach through the walls of Plum Grove clay,
To touch again and fondle yucca bloom,
Nor can their white-hair roots reach to her bed.
She and her flowers must remain apart,
Her living yuccas and the wreaths we spread,
Garlands of beauty too far from her heart.