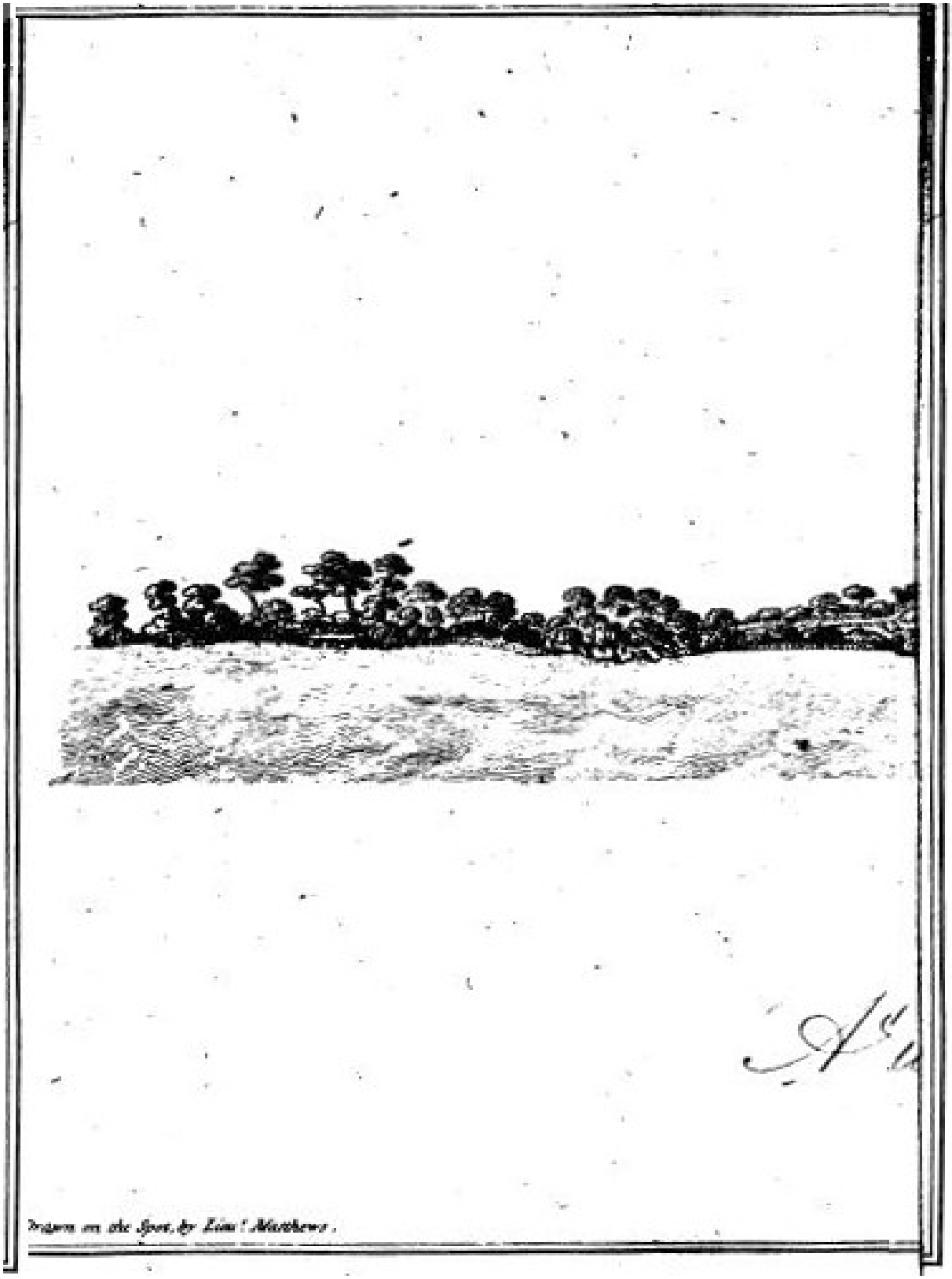


Drawn on the Spot, by Lieut.t Matthews.

A
VOYAGE
TO
THE RIVER SIERRA-LEONE,
ON
THE COAST OF AFRICA;

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF THE
TRADE AND PRODUCTIONS OF THE COUNTRY,
AND OF THE
CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS AND MANNERS
OF THE PEOPLE;

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS
TO A FRIEND IN ENGLAND.

BY JOHN MATTHEWS,
Lieutenant in the Royal Navy;

DURING HIS RESIDENCE IN THAT COUNTRY
IN THE YEARS 1785, 1786, AND 1787.

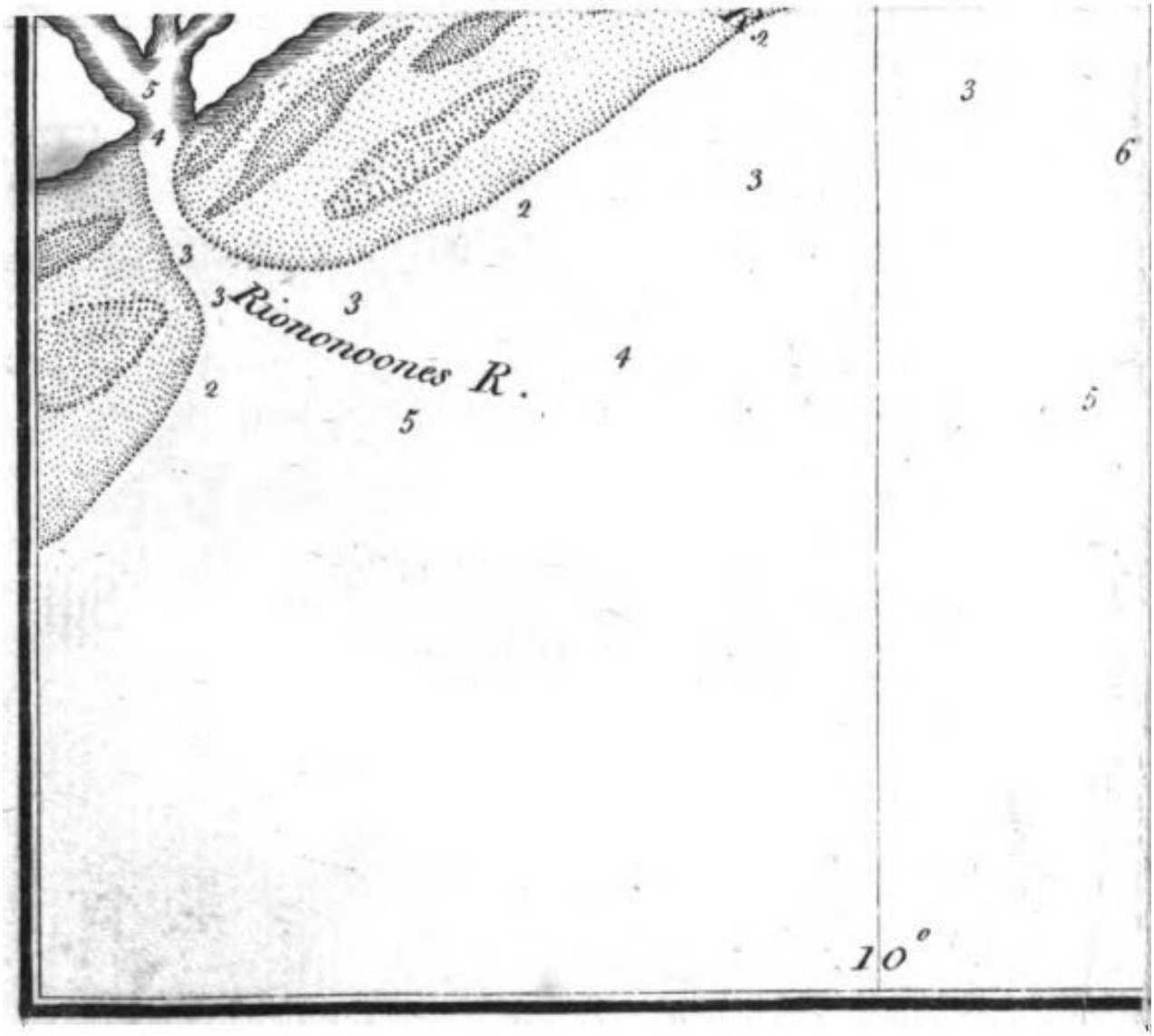
WITH
AN ADDITIONAL LETTER

ON THE SUBJECT OF
THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

ALSO,
A CHART OF PART OF THE COAST OF AFRICA, FROM
CAPE ST. ANN, TO THE RIVER RIONOONAS; WITH
A VIEW OF THE ISLAND BANANAS.

LONDON;
PRINTED FOR B. WHITE AND SON, AT HORACE'S HEAD
FLEET-STREET; AND J. SEWELL, CORNHILL, 1788.

C O N T E N T S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LETTER I.

Sierra-Leone, Sept. 25, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

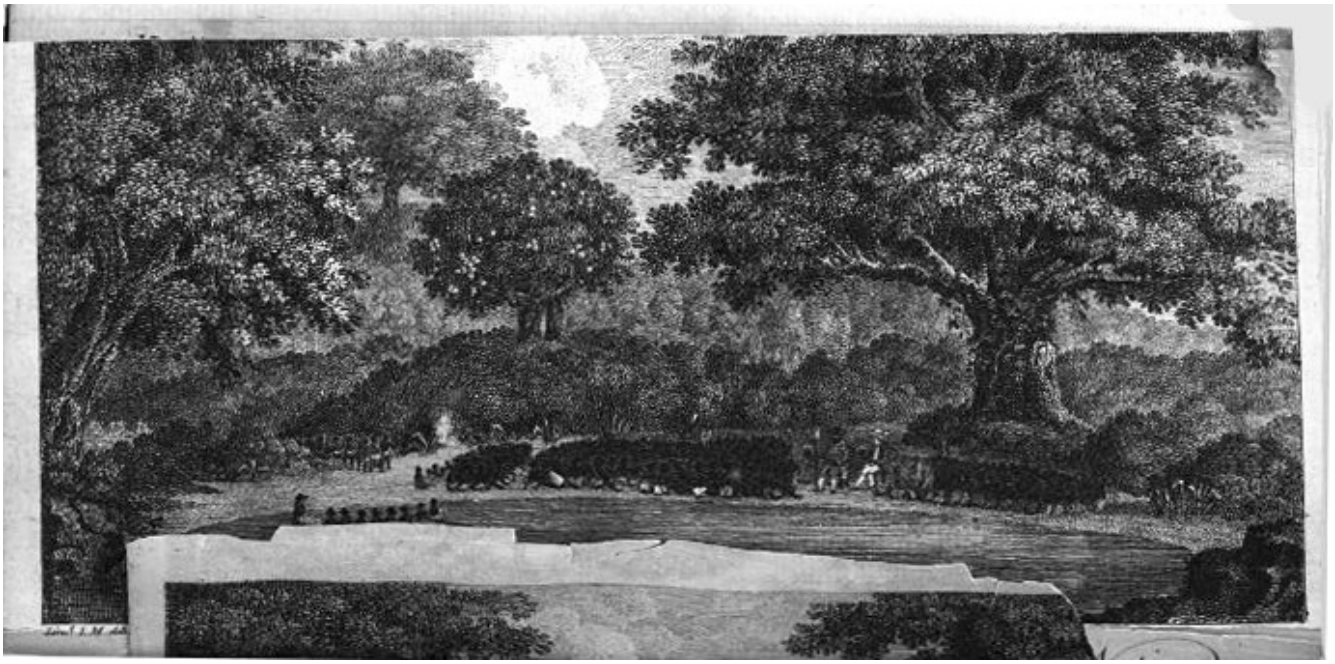
I Embrace the first opportunity to inform you of my safe arrival at the place of my destination, after an agreeable passage of thirty days, in which nothing happened sufficiently interesting to communicate. In passing between the Grand Canary and Teneriffe we were fortunate in having such a view of the *Peak* as is seldom seen.

The top, then covered with snow, appeared far above the clouds in the pure regions of ether; and, from its extreme summit, issued a bright flame. Round the base of the mountain, but above the cultivated country, the clouds gathered in thick darkness, from whence issued storms, thunder, and lightening, upon the plains below.

Your letter of the 20th of March did not reach me before my departure from Liverpool, as I sailed on the 22d, or I should have fully explained to you my motives, for going abroad.

There is such a contrast, you observe, between the glory of naval victories and the lifeless scenes of commercial pursuits, that it must be difficult to reconcile the mind to the sudden transition. I confess it is true, but it will be sufficient for the present, at once to observe, that, after serving as a lieutenant during the whole of the late war in the West Indies, and sharing in almost every action during that period, I found myself, at the peace, under a necessity of exerting myself some way or other, to support that appearance in life which might not be unworthy a British naval officer. In a commercial country like ours, in which the character of a merchant is as respectable and as useful an one as any in the state, I am free to own, it was with much pleasure I turned my thoughts to trade. I had indeed an additional inducement to connect myself with gentlemen who traded to the coast of Africa, because, having before been engaged in that commerce, I thought myself more competent to undertake a similar employment.

I have just finished my negociations with the natives for a convenient situation to erect stores and workmen's houses. The same place was purchased by a former agent to the same company by which I am employed, whom the natives murdered in a most horrid manner; since which time (about fourteen years ago) *not a white man has dared to put his foot on shore*: and, prior to that period, they had destroyed the crews of several vessels, and plundered their cargoes. It was with some difficulty I could prevail on the natives who resided in the bay to meet me; they were apprehensive I should take vengeance upon them for their former cruelty, a sentiment congenial to their disposition; as they imagine it indicates cowardice and want of spirit to let the enemy escape when an opportunity of revenge presents itself. I however took every means to inspire them with confidence, and so far succeeded, that I convened an assembly of the king and neighbouring chiefs, and of all the inhabitants of every denomination. Image to yourself the shore of a little sandy bay covered with black men, women, and children. Under the shade of a tree sat the king in an arm-chair, dressed in a suit of blue silk, trimmed with silver lace, with a laced hat and ruffled shirt, and shoes and stockings. On each side sat his principal people, and behind him two or three of his wives.



I began by informing them that all past acts should be buried in oblivion; that, notwithstanding the very bad character they had, I hoped the consequences of their former crimes, which they had severely felt in the loss of their trade, would, in future, make them behave better. I pointed out to them the condition which those men had fallen into who had been the chief promoters of their former cruelties; that though they got immense spoil, yet nothing now remained of it; and that they were punished and despised both by God and man. I stated to them that, by their own laws, they were bound to protect the stranger from insult and oppression; and that all white men were strangers in their land: and although the place we were then sitting upon was the property of my employers, yet, to avoid a retrospect of the past, I would again purchase it. I expatiated pretty largely on the power I was capable of exerting, should they attempt to destroy my property or people; but that I wished to live in peace and amity; and gave them the strongest assurances that they might at all times rely upon my word. That if ever they found me guilty of an untruth, I would forfeit every claim to their confidence; and concluded by making a hole in the ground, and saying in this grave I bury all past animosities, whoever opens it shall be subject to a palaver. *Ya, oh', ya, oh'fafeé*, (a term of approbation) resounded from every quarter, and echoed from the surrounding hills. The king and myself filled up the hole, which ceremony put an end to our assembly.

In the evening they brought an old man to me bound, and much bruised with the blows he had received about the head and face: I inquired for what reason they brought him to me? they answered "The king ordered us to offer him to you provided you will promise never to suffer him to return on shore. It is this man who has bewitched us, and who is the cause of all the injury we have formerly done to white men; if you do not take .him he cannot be permitted to return to land."—I declined the present for various reasons; but had I conceived the least idea of the intended fate of the poor unhappy victim, I should have considered it as a most fortunate event in my life, in preserving him from the horrid cruelty of his superstitious countrymen.

The canoe in which they brought the man put off from my vessel, and hovered in the bay till the sun

was set; they then tied a stone to the neck of the unfortunate wretch and plunged him into the sea, where, in all probability, *he, in a few moments, found a living sepulchre* in the bowels of a shark, which abound very much in the river of Sierra-Leone.

I shall conclude this letter with an assurance, that I shall not be unmindful of my promise to transmit you such information concerning the customs and particular ceremonies of the natives of the country, and the nature of the African trade, as I can collect from my own observations, or upon such authority as I can depend,

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

LETTER II.

Sierra-Leone, Feb. 20, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Though I have not hitherto had it in my power to collect much information concerning the manners, customs, &c. of the natives of this country, yet, such as I am enabled to give you, I shall from time to time take real pleasure in describing, as it is the only means I have *now* in my power of testifying my friendship and esteem.

That you may the better understand any future accounts I may send you, I think it first necessary to give you a short geographical description of the country in general; I mean such an extent of it only to which our connexions in trade reach, with a map of the sea coast, pointing out the outlines of the coast and the principal rivers, and situations of the islands contiguous to the continent.

The sea coast from the river Rionoonas, which is the northern boundary to Cape St. Ann, and which makes the south side of the bay of Sherbro', is an extent of sixty-five leagues, stretching nearly north and south, and is indented with many rivers and creeks; several of which are navigable for vessels of burthen, and all of them for small craft.

The river Rionoonas is very broad, and rapid at its entrance into the sea. Its present name, as well as the names of most of the other rivers, owe their origin to the Portuguese, who formed very extensive settlements soon after their discovery of Africa. Part of their descendants remained here so late as the beginning of the present century; and vestiges of their fort, and some other buildings, are still to be seen about thirty-five miles up the river. The tradition of the country says the Portuguese were driven from their settlements on this river, for having frequently endeavoured to subjugate the states round them; and to make all the natives without distinction their slaves, by bridling the country with forts; a measure which they have fully carried into effect at their principal settlement of Bassou, near Gambia. This river was formerly a place of great trade for slaves and ivory, but the slave merchants now take a different route. Ivory is still purchased in considerable quantities.—The natives are called Nalloes, and are very ingenious in fabricating cotton cloths, which they sell to their more southern neighbours.—The seacoast of this country is every where, till you reach Sierra-Leone, low; and in most parts swampy and intersected with creeks, which generally connect the adjoining rivers, and form an excellent inland navigation.

At unequal distances from five to twenty miles, in a right line from the sea, the country rises gradually, and beyond that distance, in many places, towers into high hills and lofty mountains, which, after a tornado, when the air is pure, may be seen twenty or twenty-five leagues at sea.

From Rionoonas to the Cappatches is about five leagues south east: this river is broad and deep within, but the entrances are all shallow, formed by little islands, similar to the mouths of the Ganges. The inhabitants are called Bagoes, and are very industrious in planting rice, making cloths, salt, and in

fishing, and trading for ivory; they also raise vast quantities of poultry.

From Cappatches to Cape Verges, which is a low point stretching out into the sea, is S.S.E. two leagues; from thence to the river Riopongeos, which is S.S.E. five leagues. The coast is formed of a number of small islands called Caxa Islands—the inhabitants are Nalloes and Bagoes, and employ themselves in a similar manner to those I have just described.

The river Riopongeos, though not equal to the Rionoonas in size, is yet one of the principal rivers for trade in this part of Africa; and, like the latter, has many large extensive branches, where European and native traders are settled. And it is worthy of remark, that the same black merchants who visit Gambia come likewise to this place.

The natives are originally Suzeés, but the principal people call themselves Portuguese, claiming their descent from the colonists of that nation who were formerly settled here, though they do not retain the smallest trace of European extraction; but having had a white man once in the family, is sufficient to give them the appellation. They also profess the Roman Catholic religion; and are visited once or twice a year by a priest from the Portuguese settlement at Baffou, who baptizes their children, and receives their confession of faith according to his dictates; yet the most enlightened of them are merely nominal Christians. Their religion principally consists in repeating a *Pater Noster*, or an *Ave Maria*, and in wearing a large string of beads round their neck, with a cross, or crucifix, suspended. In every other respect they follow the customs and ceremonies of their pagan countrymen; but generally exceed them in treachery and revenge. The black merchants who bring slaves and ivory down to this river, and the adjoining one of Dembia, bring also large herds of cattle, goats, and sheep, which form an article of traffic with the neighbouring countries. The natives are also industrious in cultivating rice, and in making an inferior kind of cloth, mats, and salt.

From the Riopongeos to Dembia river is south-east about eight leagues, where there is a considerable trade; the natives are called Coobé Bagoes, which is only a discriminating appellation, similar to our counties. From thence to Dania river is south-east four or five miles, where there is at present little trade; the inhabitants are Bagoes, and, like their neighbours at Dembia and the Riopongeos, are industrious in fishing, in cultivating rice, and making coarse cloths, mats, and salt. From Dania the land juts out south-west six or seven miles to Tomba Point. West from Tomba about three miles lie the Isles de Loss, which are seven in number, three of which only are inhabited, the rest are little more than rocks, on the most eastern of which are our town and factory. These islands, by being detached from the main, are extremely pleasant, and in general healthy; the largest, which is the westernmost, is almost semicircular, rising on both sides from the sea by a gentle ascent to a moderate height, covered with good timber trees; and surrounded on all sides, except to the north-east, by a rocky shore. The factory island lies almost north and south, with a high wood-crown'd hill at each end; which when first seen from sea, makes it appear like two islands. The road for shipping is on the east side; and, during the dry season, is extremely safe, and pleasant; but in the tornado and rainy season there is no security except in the goodness of your anchors and cables. The islands are called by the natives Forotimá, which signifies White Man's Land; and were not inhabited forty years ago, except by one single Bagoe family; but are now overstocked with a mixture of Bagoes, run away Suzee, and Mandingo slaves.

To the southward of Tomba the land recedes to the eastward, and forms a deep bay between it, and a

point called Matacong, which lies south-east eight leagues from the Isles de Loss. In the bottom of this bay are the rivers Quia, Porte, and Burria; the former is a very considerable place of trade, and has many large towns on the different branches of the river, in most of which are several European residents. The chief trade of the latter is rice.—The natives are Suzeés, industrious in cultivating rice, and assiduous in trade.

To the southward of Matacong runs Kissey river, which is large and deep, into which two other rivers empty themselves from Bierrareé and Kiangesá, which, as well as Kissey, are considerable places of trade, and the chief towns of the Mandingoes.—Sama river lies two leagues to the southward of Kissey, and is also a place of trade, having several considerable towns upon its banks.—About six leagues south of Sama are the great and little Scarcies rivers, between which and Kissey river is the Mandingo country: the natives are Mahomedans, and as zealous promoters of their religion as as even Mahomed himself could wish.— They cultivate great quantities of rice, but are too lazy and too proud to attend to trade, except when in want of what cannot be acquired without it. The Scarcies are both rivers of great trade for slaves, rice, and camwood, and for the fruit colá, which they sell to the Portuguese traders from Bassou.

The natives on the lower parts of the river, and between it and Sierra-Leone, are Bullams; but higher up, and on the north side, are Timmanies.—The ravages of time, and the encroachments of the ocean are no where more strongly marked than along this coast. Off the mouth of the Scarcies river were many considerable islands nearly adjoining to the continent, well remembered by several old men now living, which are now entirely overflowed by the sea, and form a sand bank to the distance of three or four miles from the shore, upon which there there is about two fathom water. The bank which is called the middle ground in Sierra-Leone river was by the tradition of the natives, formerly joined to the Bullam shore; and I had myself an opportunity of observing that, in one rainy season, near a quarter of a mile of the west end of the north-west Turtle island, in the bay of Sherbro', was washed away, and that the island increased by an accumulation of sand in an equal or greater proportion at the other end: the natives informed me this was the cafe with all the rest. Indeed it appears to me that they were originally not only all joined in one, but that they also were united with the neighbouring island of St. Ann; and, that thus united, they projected ten leagues from the present shore.

It is, however, highly probable that their separation has been occasioned by the impetuosity and incessant attack of the waves of the great western ocean, urged forward by the trade wind upon a flat shore.

The most extraordinary circumstance of this kind is at the river Gallienas.—The Portuguese had formerly a colony there, and erected a fort at the entrance of the river. The spot on which the fort stood has now seven fathom water over it, and is distant six miles from the shore, to which the water shoals gradually. Ships frequently lose their anchors upon it, or bring up fragments of the old walls.

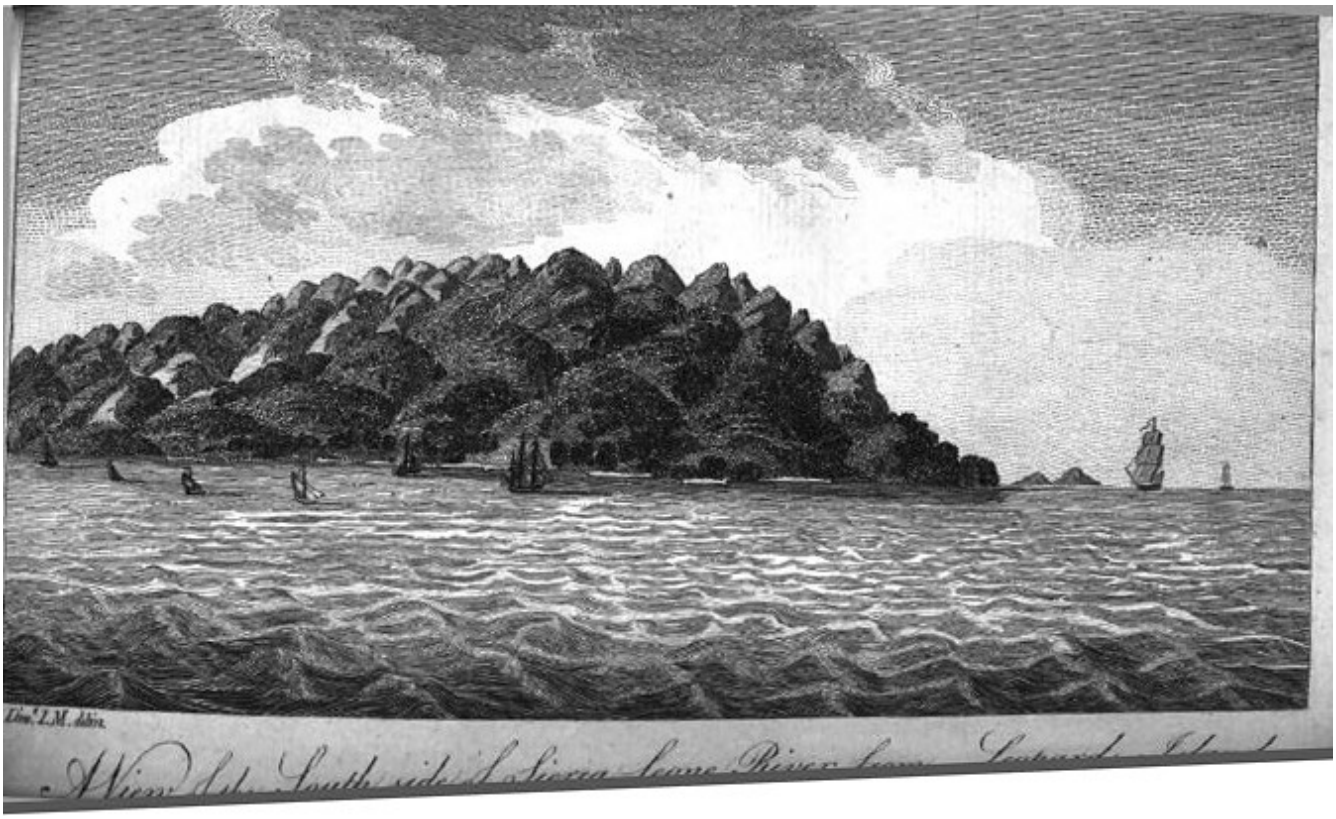
From the Scarcies to Sierra-Leone river is south three leagues. This noble river is at least two leagues wide at its entrance, and has a safe and deep channel for ships of any burthen, and affords excellent anchorage at all seasons. It continues nearly the same breadth for six or seven miles, and then divides into two branches; one of which contains Bance island, and runs to two principal places of trade for slaves and camwood, called Rokelle and Port Logo; the other branch is called Bunch river, in which is

Gambia island, where the French have a fort and factory. — On the north side of Sierra-Leone river the land is low and level, and produces great quantities of rice; the cultivation of which, and the making of salt, are the chief occupations of the natives, who, on both sides, are called Bullams; but on the south side it rises into hills, which, forming one upon the other, towers into lofty mountains crowned with perpetual verdure.—From the foot of these hills points of land project into the sea, which form excellent bays for shipping and craft, and convenient places for hauling the seine.— The vallies near the sea are inhabited; but few or any of the natives reside in the interior part of the mountainous country; which, if properly cleared and cultivated, would, in my opinion, be equal in salubrity, and superior in productions, to any of the West India islands.—In coming in from the sea in the dry season few prospects can exceed the entrance into Sierra-Leone river. Before you is the high land of Sierra-Leone rising from the Cape with the most apparent gentle ascent. Perpetual verdure reigns over the whole extent, and the variegated foliage of the different trees, with the shades caused by the projecting hills and unequal summits, add greatly to the beauty of the scene.

The slopes of the lesser hills have the appearance of a high degree of cultivation, arising from the tracts of land, which had been cultivated for two or three preceding years, but were now covered with thick underwood and rank weeds, that, at a distance, give it the appearance of pasture or pleasure grounds; particularly as large single trees, for which, the natives have a veneration, are left standing in different places, while the newly cleared ground has the appearance of stubble or ploughed land.

Between the two capes, which are distinguished by their projection into the sea, and by some remarkable trees, is a fine semi-circular bay, with a white sandy beach, edged with a beautiful grove of palms.— To the right is a distant view of the Banana's isle, and on the left is the Bullam shore, skirted with a white sandy beach, and decorated with clumps of palms and lofty trees. Several red cliffs are

also discovered which serve to break the line of uniformity; while, higher up the river, as far as the eye can reach, the trees seem to float upon the waving surface of the water, or, to a lively imagination, may appear like a fleet of ships.



The natives at and about Sierra-Leone are not remarkable for their industry or their honesty; they cultivate little more rice than is necessary for their own consumption from season to season; and, should a crop fail, they are frequently reduced to great distress. Immoderately fond of liquor they part with every thing they are possessed of to acquire it; and when those means fail they pursue the same which idle drunkards do in every part of the world, rob and plunder their neighbours; for few apply themselves to trade.

From Cape Sierra-Leone to False Cape is south two leagues; from thence to the pleasant island of Banana's is south six leagues; you then enter the great bay of Sherbro', which is formed by Cape Shelling and Cape St. Ann. Several large rivers empty themselves into this bay, which are marked in the chart, and which are places of great trade for slaves, camwood, and rice. The natives throughout Sherbro', as well as in the islands, are called Bullams, and are industrious in trade and agriculture; and particularly famous for a manufactory of matting, extremely beautiful, and made of stained grass.

The Turtle islands are situated on the south side, and the Plantains on the north side of this bay, and were formerly the residence of eminent white and native traders. Having conducted you so far I shall close this long epistle,

And am,

With the utmost esteem,

Yours, &c. &c.

LETTER III.

Sierra-Leone, June 10, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

In my last I gave you a description of the sea coast of this country, pointing out to you the names of the different nations who inhabit it. I shall in this describe to you the climate and seasons.

Cape St. Ann lies in latitude 7° 12' north; Cape Sierra-Leone in 8° 12" north; the Isles de Loss in 9° 20"; and the river Rionoonas 10° 21', and about 12 degrees or 48 minutes difference in time to the westward of London.—An abstract from my journal for the years 1785 and 1786 will, I conceive, give you a more complete idea of the the seasons and temperature of the clime than I could otherwise convey.

January.—About the middle of this month we had three or four days rainy weather, blowing hard from the south-west, with thunder and lightning.—The rest of the month moderate and variable, land and sea breezes, with pleasant weather; thermometer in the shade; morning 75°, noon 85°, evening 80°, but exposed to the meridian sun from 90° to 100°.

February.—Tolerable pleasant weather the whole of this month, with almost constant and regular sea and land breezes; the latter commencing about three in the morning and ending about ten, or shifting around to the north-west, which in the course of the day veered to the west or south-west. At this season the evenings and mornings are extremely pleasant; but it is very unwholesome to be out long after the fun is set or before it has risen, the dews being exceedingly copious and penetrating. The thermometer generally at the same height as in the last month.

March.—The first of this month it rained very hard, with light southerly and variable winds; the two following days had a strong land wind and thick fog, attended with a dry sharp air. It continued heavy weather from the horizon about 20° upwards, and clear and bright in the zenith the remainder of the month, with moderate land and sea breezes from north-west to west and southwest; thermometer during the day in the shade from 80° to 90°.

April.—Some rain about the middle of this month, with close cloudy weather and. southerly wind; the middle and latter parts clear and pleasant; the mornings generally calm, or light airs from the north-west, which veered to the west or south-west in the evening; thermometer in the shade from 80° to 86°.

May.—Heavy rain the first three nights of this month; all the remainder fair and clear, with regular sea breezes from northwest to south-west every day. Close in shore, and in the little bays light airs are felt off the land from midnight till nine or ten next morning. Thermometer in the shade as before, exposed 95° to 100°.

June.—The beginning of this month fair and pleasant weather: about the 8th it began to blow and rain from the northward; on the 13th had the first tornado; the remainder of the month frequent and heavy rain and southerly wind from southeast to south-west. The air raw, moist, and cold; the thermometer frequently falling to 72°, and on the sun's breaking out rising to 85° and 90°.

July.—During the whole of this month frequent and heavy rain, thunder and lightning, and violent tornados; the wind variable, but chiefly from the northward; frequently blowing hard for two or three days together from the north-west. Thermometer variable as in last month.

August. — Much rain, but chiefly from evening till morning, with strong southerly winds all this month, and dark disagreeable weather. Thermometer generally high, from 80° to 90°.

September.—Frequent showers, but little heavy rain during this month. In the first part the wind was light and variable, with frequent calms, close, hot, sultry weather, and much thunder and lightning. Thermometer high as in August,—Towards the middle and latter part had generally moderate land and sea breezes; and from the 18th had at least one tornado every twenty-four hours, which are always attended with violent gusts of wind, thunder, lightning, and excessive rain; but which greatly purify the air. Thermometer from 80° to 85° and 90°.

October.—From the 1st to the 10th of this month light variable winds all round the compass, with frequent calms, thunder and lightning, and very close sultry weather, the clouds lowering very near the earth, and the weight of the atmosphere sensibly affecting both the mind and body of the Europeans and natives.—From the 10th to the 21st had a heavy tornado every day, with strong land winds in the mornings from the E. S. E. to E. N. E. which, towards ten o'clock, veered to the north and north-west, and about noon to the west and south-west. The rest of the month had variable land and sea breezes, with frequent rain in the night, attended with thunder and lightning, and in general very hot, the thermometer seldom falling below 80° even in the night.

November. — Early in this month the smokes began, which are noisome exhalations attracted from the earth by the powerful heat of the fun, and have the appearance of the steam arising from large breweries, covering the whole face of Nature: the weather at the same time is extremely hot, sultry, close, and oppressive, and causes such an extreme lassitude, debility, and violent perspiration, that the whole body feels, as it were, dissolving.—This is the most sickly season of the year; and even the natives themselves are not exempt from its baneful influence. Fires and bark are the best preservatives. —Strong land winds are frequent during the smokes.—Towards the latter end of the month we had moderate and variable land and sea breezes, with hazy weather, frequent thunder and lightning, and an appearance of squalls or tornados from every quarter of the compass. We had only three tornados this month, but one so late as the 29th, which is rather uncommon.

December.—Till the 10th the weather continued as in the latter part of the preceding month; from the 10th to the 18th an almost continued gale from the northeast, and the fog or smoke so thick as to be totally impenetrable to the sun's meridian rays. During this period the air, raw, moist, and cold, is attended with the most pernicious effects on the human body, totally checking the perspiration, and causing a dry and chapt hard skin; and occasions also colds, fevers, and agues.—The birds and beasts seem to droop under its influence; no melody is heard in the woods, even the dove is silent: it has the

same effect on the earth as the frost in Europe, and causes all kind of woods to shrink in a most astonishing manner. The thermometer seldom rising above 75°.—These winds are, by some writers, called Haramatans, and are frequent along along the African coast from December to March, but generally without the fog. The remainder of the month had little wind, chiefly from the north and north-west, with hazy and very hot weather; the thermometer in the shade at noon about 85° exposed to the sun from 105° to 110.

The distinction of seasons here is between the *rains* and *drys*, and I think the most natural division of them compared with our own is as follows: *December, January, February, March, April, May*, the spring and summer, or dry season: *June, July, August, September, October, November*, the winter and autumn, or rains and tornado season. The tornados generally begin early in June, and continue till the middle or latter end of July: they commence again about the middle or beginning of October, and continue till the latter end of November. A remarkable circumstance attending them is, that they always happen at or about about the time of high or low water; from which it perhaps may appear they are influenced by the same powers that cause the flux and reflux of the sea.

From the foregoing account you will naturally conceive a very unfavourable idea of the climate; but the rains this year have been much more severe and longer than they generally are; neither have the dry months been so invariably fine as they commonly are.—I must also observe that my residence, where I made my remarks, was at Sierra-Leone, and where the rains are always more severe than they are any where along the coast, occasioned by the high wood-crown'd mountains; and though we have, from the fame cause frequent showers in the dry season, they are seldom felt from December to March, or April, a league from the coast.

D2 LETTER

LETTER IV

Sierra-Leone, July 29, 1786

MY DEAR SIR,

I hope you have received my former letters, in which I endeavoured to give you such a geographical and meteorological account of this country as my observations furnished; I shall now proceed to describe the appearance of the country and its natural history.

The sea coast, except the peninsula of Sierra-Leone, which is very high and mountainous, is generally a low swamp covered with very lofty straight mangroves, and intersected with innumerable little creeks. As you approach the habitable and cultivated part of the country, you find a boggy plain covered with a thin sward, on which grow a few straggling stunted trees of the ebony kind, without any sort of underwood. These plains are overflowed by the sea twice a year, at the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, and deposit a mud from which the natives extract salt by a simple process. When the crust of mud left by the inundation is sufficiently hardened by the sun's heat, they collect it together; it is then dissolved in water in large earthen pots: when the water is sufficiently saturated with salt it is boiled in shallow brass pans, and yields an excellent salt, which, although not so white as that procured from sea water only, by the same method of boiling, is preferred to it by the natives. Where their salt plains are extensive they employ their slaves, during the dry weather, in collecting the mud, leaving a few old ones to boil it during the rainy season.

The soil varies according to the situation. In the level grounds it is a strong loam or stiff clay; towards the uplands it is generally stony, but every where exceedingly fertile. A saponaceous white earth is found in several parts of the country, which is of so very unctious a nature that the natives frequently eat it with their rice, as it dissolves like butter, they also use it to white-wash their houses.

The face of the country, even where it is cultivated, appears woody from letting it lie fallow six years out of seven; yet, in the interior parts, and in some places near the sea, there are very extensive Savannahs, where the grass, known in the West Indies by the name of Guinea Grass, grows to an amazing height; and feeds and conceals vast numbers of deer, buffaloes, and elephants. The same grass is used by the natives to thatch their houses; and at the latter end of the dry season is generally set on fire, and when on fire burns with irresistible fury.

No country produces more variety of excellent and beautiful timber fit for every purpose; but few, if any, bear the least affinity or resemblance to the woods of Europe.

The camwood tree is so very plentiful in the interior country about the sources of the rivers, that I am informed the natives frequently burn it for fire-wood. And the tree which produces the gum copal grows in great abundance upon the heights of Sierra-Leone.

The palm tree, which furnishes the natives with both wine and oil, flourishes here in great plenty and perfection. The woods and mountains, as well as the savannahs, are well stored with wild beasts and game. Lions are said to be on the heights of Sierra-Leone; but I never yet saw any myself, nor have any persons upon whose veracity I could depend; but they have leopards in abundance, equally fierce and rapacious as the lion. When pressed by hunger in the rainy season, they haunt the towns and villages in the night, particularly towards the dusk of the evening, and frequently carry off men as well as animals. If a leopard is successful in carrying off his prey undisturbed the first night, he is sure to make an attempt the succeeding one; they are then prepared for him, and he seldom escapes. — They have likewise elephants, buffaloes, wild hogs amazingly fierce and large, deer of various kinds, some very large and beautiful, others small like young antelopes (the flesh of all is very dry eating, and never fat): there are musk cats, and a great variety of other animals, which the natives use for food; and monkies of so many casts and species that it would require a volume to describe them; but there is one peculiarity attends them all, which is, when caught and kept only a few days in a house or ship, and then turned loose, they never return to the woods; for it is said their old companions would tear them to pieces. Indeed I have frequently seen the wild monkies chase those that had been only a few days caught, out of the skirts of the wood, when they were searching for food.

The Japanzees, or Chimpanzees, are also natives of this country; and, when caught young, become very tame and familiar; extremely fond of clinging to those they like, and very sensible of good or ill treatment. I have now a young one in my possession, who very readily comes when called by his name; but if I push him from me, or strike him, or even do not regard his advances by shewing him encouragement, he turns sullen and sulky; will not take the least notice if called, or take any thing from me, till I put him into good humour.—Their appearance, when they sit, greatly resembles that of an old negro, except that the hair on their heads is straight and black like an Indian's; but their form is so amply described in Brooke's Natural History, that I must refer you to it: however, a few other circumstances related of them may not be unentertaining—They generally take up their abode near some deserted town, where the papau tree grows in great abundance, of which they are very fond; and build huts nearly in the form the natives build their houses, which they cover with leaves; but this is only for the female and young to lie in; the male always lies on the outside.—If one of them is shot the rest immediately pursue the destroyer of their friend; and the only means to escape their vengeance is to part with your gun, which they directly seize upon with all the rage imaginable, tear it to pieces, and give over the pursuit.

Camelions, and great variety of lizards and snakes, abound in this country: some of the latter are extremely beautiful, but almost all of them dangerous. I saw a boy upon the island of Banana's, who was bit by a small black snake, about four or five feet long, as he was tending the goats and sheep, who died within two hours after receiving the wound. I examined it immediately after the boy was dead, but could discern nothing more than two little punctures just above the instep, but not the least appearance of inflammation. I opened a vein in each arm, but no blood ran from the wounds, although the body remained as supple as when living for several hours.

The most remarkable snakes are the *tenneé* for its size, and the *finyacki-amoofong* for its pernicious quality.—The *tenneé*, when full grown, is from fifteen to twenty feet long, and about three feet round; the colour of the back dark grey; the belly something lighter and spotted. It not only seizes upon and devours goats, sheep, and hogs, but the wild animals, such as leopards, tygers, and deer, are equally

their prey where they come within their reach. The natives even assert that they are so large in the savannahs, in the interior country, that they will swallow a buffalo; though they are at no time formidable to man, except they should find him asleep.-— The manner in which they take their prey is, by first seizing the animal with their mouth, and as their teeth are turned inwards, like hooks, the more it struggles, the faster it is held; they then throw their tails two or three times round the body of their victim, and, by a sudden contraction, break every bone. This, as the tail will not cover the whole carcase, is performed by two or three operations: after which they make a circuit of at least half a mile round to fee that no enemy is near, particularly ants, who are the most formidable to them; for, as they are perfectly inactive after having gorged their prey, if the ants find them in that situation, they soon dispatch them by entering their mouth, ears, and nose: but, if the coast is clear, they then proceed to dress their prey, (if I may be allowed the expression,) by besmearing the whole carcase with an unctious kind of saliva; and at the same time by licking it into an oblong shape: after which they take the head into their mouth, and suck the whole gradually into their stomach without the least mastication. When this is finished, the animal becomes as lifeless as a log, and remains so till the whole is digested; which, if the prey be large, takes three or four days; during which time it is easily killed.—I have known an instance of one being killed a few hours after he had swallowed a large goat with kid, which was taken out whole and entire, except the bones being broken, which appeared as if they had gone through a mill. — They generally frequent the savannahs and skirts of towns; and are frequently seen rearing their heads above the grass, which grows ten feet high, looking round for prey.—The natives esteem their flesh a great delicacy.

The *finyacki-amoofong* is a very small snake, seldom exceeding a foot long, and about the thickness of a man's little finger; of a pale green colour, and black spots.— This destructive little creature is possessed of the power of ejecting a very subtile vapour into the eyes of any animal that approaches it within the distance of two or three feet, which instantly occasions incurable blindness, and, for eight or ten days, causes extreme pain. I have seen several people who have suffered from them. But the most formidable and destructive enemy of man and beast is the ant. These creatures burst forth from their nests in innumerable myriads: nothing can withstand their ravages, or turn them from their paths, but very large fires or deep water.

Frequent instances are known of their extinguishing fire made to stop their progress, by their numbers, and forming bridges, made by the sacrifice of themselves, to cross shallow waters which have impeded their route. They frequently oblige the natives to desert their habitations, and destroy every thing upon the face of the earth, and under the earth, to a considerable depth. In short, nothing escapes or can withstand their all-devouring rage but metals.

The different species of them are innumerable, from an inch in length to be scarcely discernible by the naked eye.

Many kinds burrow in the ground; some erect their habitations of clay, in a conical form, upon the surface; and others build upon the branches and trunks of trees.

The *termite*, or white ant, called by the natives *bugabug*, is amply and accurately described by Mr. Smeathman.

There is only one kind that I ever observed to fly, and that only for a short time—they are a red ant, and generally swarm towards evening and before rain. They do not fly far, and shed their wings as soon as they alight.

Wild geese and ducks, of various kinds, Guinea hens, pheasants, quails, curlues, plovers, snipes, parrots, and great variety of doves and pigeons, are found in the woods and on the banks of rivers; besides an infinite assemblage of other birds, chiefly of beautiful plumage, and whose notes vie with the feathered songsters of Europe.

Their domestic animals are cattle, sheep, goats, and small poultry.—Turkies, geese, and Muscovy and common ducks, would thrive here extremely well, and soon stock the country, would the natives be at the trouble to rear them. And it is not a little surprising that the Guinea fowls, which are real natives of the country, and are soon domesticated, should be neglected by them; for it is never seen tame but in possession of the Whites, or of those who adopt their, manners.

The seas, rivers, and creeks, abound in great variety of most excellent fish. The *manatié*, or sea cow, is frequently taken in the rivers; they have also three kinds of fresh-water, and three of sea-turtle; besides several kinds of land tortoises, and great abundance of excellent oysters, which grow upon rocks, mud banks, and on the roots of mangroves; and are denominated mud, rock, or mangrove oysters, from the place in which they are taken. They all are formed in bunches, and not single as ours.

Prawns, shrimps, and crayfish, are in great plenty and perfection; and several others, which serve the natives for food, but are unknown in England.

Great numbers of alligators are bred in the creeks and rivers, which frequently carry off small cattle, and sometimes the persons of the natives; yet such is their superstition, that, when a circumstance of that kind happens, they attribute it to witchcraft; and are so infatuated, that they will not be at the pains to inclose those parts of the rivers where their women and children are continually washing, and from whence they are frequently taken.—There are also vast numbers of large sharks in the mouths of the rivers, which almost instantly seize upon any thing that falls overboard. This circumstance renders bathing, even in shoal water, extremely dangerous. Yet even sharks and alligators, voracious as they are supposed to be, are harmless where they have not been used to prey upon animals.

In the river Gallienas, where alligators abound as much as they are said to do in the Nile, they were never known to touch any body; though the natives were frequently swimming in the river, till a slave ship blew up off the mouth of the river a few years ago. And at the Turtle islands, in the bay of Sherbro', an instance was never known of a shark attacking any person, although their children are playing in the water all day long. This the natives account for by being particularly careful to bury their dead, and their offals at such a distance from the sea-side that the sharks cannot even smell them.

The gall of the alligator is reckoned the most deadly poison, and in this the natives dip their poisoned arrows. When an alligator is killed, the person who destroys it is obliged to have two witnesses to prove he emptied the gall in their presence.

No gold is found in this country: the little the women wear, as ornaments, is brought from a very great

distance in the interior parts of the country, and is found in lumps washed down by the rains from the mountains. Neither have they any precious stones that I have yet heard of; but that perhaps may be owing to their ignorance of them in their native state.

The loadstone is found in the high lands of Sierra-Leone; and, from the appearance of some of the mountains, it is highly probable they may contain mines.

In the interior country, south of Sierra-Leone, they have a white iron, very malliable, of which they make knives and sabres; and esteem it preferable to European iron for every thing but edge tools. How they smelt and refine it from the ore, I never could learn.

The best indigo in the world, if we may judge from the deep indelible blues the natives give their cloths, grows wild in every part of the country: and the Portuguese, when settled here, had large indigo works in several places, the ruins of which are still remaining. They have also the art of dying scarlet and black in the most effectual manner.

Cotton is cultivated by the natives, but in no greater quantity than they can manufacture themselves; but, as it is an article that requires little trouble in the cultivation, I have endeavoured, by encouragement, to induce them to propagate it to such an extent as to become an article of European traffic. There are several kinds of it which materially differ, not only in quality but colour: particularly three kinds—one perfectly white, one of a tawny or Nankeen colour, and one of a pale red, or pink colour.

Sugar canes are a native plant, and grow wild to a size beyond any I ever saw in the West Indies; they also have some tobacco, which is not esteemed, owing perhaps to their want of knowledge in the cultivation. Rice is the chief and staple produce of the country, and constitutes their principal and almost only food: indeed such is their fondness for it, that the black sailors, who, from their situation, are sometimes constrained to subsist a few days upon salt beef and biscuit, never fail to complain that they have been so many days without food. Their method of cultivation, though attended with considerable trouble, as they never cultivate the same ground more than once in seven years, is performed in a very awkward and slovenly manner. After selecting a piece fit for their purpose, they cut down the trees and bushes, which when dry they set fire to and bum, the ashes serving for manure. The large old trees are always left standing, so also are the stumps of the fallen ones; and the trunks and large branches, unconsumed by the fire, are suffered to remain as they fell. This is all the preparation they give the ground.—The first new moon after the rains are well set in, which here is the latter end of July, or beginning of August, they sow their rice; after it is sown they slightly hoe it, just sufficiently to cover the grain: when it is about ten or twelve inches high they weed it, and in about eight weeks it is fit to reap. This is performed by cutting off the ears with a knife, and making it into small sheaves which they stick upon the branches of the fallen trees, till the weather is perfectly dry; they then stack it exactly as we do our corn. When wanted for use they strip off the grain by hand, and boil it a little in water; it is afterwards well dried, and the husk beat off in a large wooden mortar; and, where pains are taken with it, it is equally as white as Carolina rice, and every way preferable as an article of food. The whole management of the process, after the rice is cut, is performed by the women. The sides of hills are generally preferred for their rice plantations: and I have observed that the rice which grows on elevated or sloping situations, though smaller grain, is much sweeter, and more nutritive, than the

produce of low, moist, or level grounds, where the water lies longer on it; for, in Carolina and the East Indies, they overflow their rice grounds. This method indeed is not unknown in this country; for, to the northward, about the Rioponges, they have three rice harvests in the year; one crop from the hills, and two from the plains which they overflow.

To save labour, which the natives studiously avoid as much as possible, they plant their cassada, or manioc, amongst the rice after they have weeded it: it remains about four months in the ground, and is then fit for use. The young roots are very good eating either roasted or boiled, and are next to yams as a substitute for potatoes. The Abbe Raynal, in his history of the European settlements in the West Indies, says the manioc is twenty months in the ground before it attains perfection; and that it is a strong poison before it has undergone the preparation necessary to make it into bread: but this is by no means the case with the African manioc, as it is eaten raw with as much safety as roasted or boiled. Indeed the children are very fond of it raw, as it is very sweet when young. Whether the Abbe gives us his account of the West Indian manoic from hear-say or experience I know not; but what he advances as the cause of the black colour of the natives of Africa is utterly without foundation.

Rice, as I before observed, is the principal food of the natives, although they have cassada, yams, eddies, sweet potatoes, and great variety of other roots and vegetables unknown in Europe; particularly two kinds, which grow upon large trees; one very much resembles a sweet potatoe in form and taste, the other eats something like a bean, and has nearly the same shape, except only one of the kind grows in a pod, which is much larger than the common bean, and rounder.

The Mollugo, or African chick-weed, which produces a small bean, grows in such quantities, that, during the rains, or after a flood in the country, the shores are covered with them; and vast bodies, of several acres in extent, are seen floating many leagues out at sea; and these also serve the natives for food in times of scarcity.—Indian corn and millet both thrive extremely well, but are little cultivated.

The Malagato pepper, or grain of Paradise, is found in the woods; but it is not so pungent as that which is purchased from the natives at Baffa and the places adjacent. The bird and pod pepper is cultivated in great plenty and perfection; and there are several kinds of aromatic fruits, which are excellent substitutes in culinary uses for the spices of the East.

Most of the tropical fruits known m the West Indies abound here in the greatest perfection; particularly pine-apples, oranges, oranges, and limes; which are in season, but not in the same degree of plenty, all the year round. Guavas, tamarinds, acajous, or, as the English call them, cashews, and cocoa-nuts, have been planted by Europeans, and thrive amazingly. The wild fig-tree grows to the size of an oak; but the fruit is small, and generally destroyed by the ants. Nothing can exceed the luxuriancy of the wild vines, which bear amazing quantities of grapes, beautiful to the eye, but of an acrid taste. If cultivated, however, they would, no doubt, be equal to those of Europe. Several kinds of plums and other fruits, cooling and grateful, are found in the woods, which are unknown either in Europe or the West Indies.

But the principal fruit, in the estimation of the natives, is the colá. Both the tree and fruit in external appearance very much resemble the walnut. The fruit grows in large clusters, which contain six or eight colás. On the outside it is covered with a thick tough rind, and a thinner white rind on the inside: when this is taken off it divides into two parts, and is either of a purple colour or white; but the former is

generally preferred. Its taste resembles the Peruvian bark, and its virtues are said to be the same. Those who can procure it chew it at all times and at all seasons. It is presented to guests at their arrival and departure— sent in complimentary presents to chiefs — is a considerable article of inland trade, as well as with the Portuguese from Bassou, and frequently made the token of peace or war. It grows in the greatest plenty and perfection in the river Scarcies and on the Bullam shore, opposite to Sierra-Leone.

Castor nuts and many others, which produce oil, grow spontaneously almost every where; and the leaves of the castor are a most most excellent application in swellings and bruises.

Water is the only beverage the natives drink at their meals; nor have they yet found the means of intoxicating themselves with any thing of their own produce, but palm wine.

The natives, however, of the Riopongeos are to be excepted; who make a strong heady beer from a root called ningeé. It is extremely bitter, not much unlike the beer made in Russia and Norway. The plant is cultivated, and seems to partake of the nature of the asbestos, in not being altered or consumed by the action of fire.—The root, which is the only part useful, grows to the size of a man's leg, and three or four feet long. The preparation of it for brewing is as follows—They dig a square hole in the ground; and first place a layer of dry mangrove-wood cleared of its bark, then a layer of the root, which has been previously well washed and dried; and so proceed till the place is full, which they cover over very close with sods, leaving only a small aperture at the bottom for the air and fire. When it is sufficiently burnt, which is known by the wood's being entirely consumed, they carefully remove the sods from the top, to preserve the ashes which they make use of, and the root is taken out, and again well washed and dried. —When wanted for use it is pounded with a heavy wooden mallet, and steeped in water till its virtues are extracted. The water is then boiled, and afterwards put into earthen pots to ferment. When the fermentation is over it is fit to drink.—-The whole process takes up about three days. The root, when raw, is so extremely acrid as to excoriate the mouth on the slightest touch, except it be eaten with the ashes of a former burning, which is a strong alkali.

The beer is a powerful diuretic, and considered by the natives as a specific in the venereal disorder.

In short, my friend, Nature appears to have been extremely liberal, and to have poured forth her treasures with an unsparing hand: but in most cases the indolence of the natives prevents their reaping those advantages, of which an industrious nation would possess themselves.

I shall conclude with wishing you every happiness;

And am,

Dear Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In my last letter, which I hope you received safe, I endeavoured to give you an account of such parts of the natural history of this country as my observation furnished. In this I shall proceed to relate such particulars as I have been able to collect, of their religion, laws, government, and wars.

It is hardly possible for an European to form an adequate idea of the religion of the Pagan inhabitants of this country; for they have no order of priests, nor any fixed object of adoration which might be termed a national worship; every man fashions his own divinities according to his fancy: and the imagination can scarcely conceive the monstrous, uncouth, and ridiculous figures they adore.

They acknowledge and profess their belief in a God, who, they say dwells above them, and made and governs all things. If any circumstance of joy or distress happen they very cooly say God sent it them (unless they fancy it was caused by witchcraft); but without having any idea of returning God thanks for a benefit, or, by submission and prayer, of endeavouring to deprecate his wrath. They make offerings indeed to their devils and genii, who they suppose are the executive ministers of the Deity. Their devils, who they imagine reign paramount upon earth, are small images of clay, often renewed and made in some resemblance of a man: these are placed at the foot of a tree, and a small shed of dry leaves is constructed over them: various offerings are made to them of bits of cloth, pieces of broken cups, plates, mugs, or glass bottles, brass rings, beads, and such articles, but I never observed any thing of value given to them; indeed when they want to render their devil propitious to any undertaking, they generally provide liquor; a very small libation is made to him, and the rest they drink before his altar.

Besides these devils they have images of wood from eight to twelve inches long, painted black, which are their *lares* (household gods); but they seem to pay very little attention to any of them, except when they think they stand in need of their assistance.

On every accident which befalls them, whether trivial or important, they make an offering to their genii, who they imagine inhabit, and have power, in the air, as the devils have upon earth. A brass pan fastened to the stump of a tree by driving a country axe through it—a glass bottle set upon the stump of a tree—a broken bottle placed upon the ground with two or three beads in it, covered with a bit of cloth, and surrounded with stones—a rag laid upon small sticks and covered with a broken calabash—and a long slip of cloth, generally white, tied to the end of a pole and stuck upright in the ground, are the offerings they generally make; and in the efficacy of which, for whatever purpose they are made, they have implicit faith. To remove one of them, even unknowingly, is a great offence, and subjects the aggressor to a *palaver*, or action in their courts of law; who, if he be a poor man, and the offended person be powerful, the crime is often only to be expiated by the loss of liberty. Such are a part, for it would be impossible to describe the whole, of the ceremonies of a religion, if it may be so termed, in which it is difficult to determine which is most predominant, folly or superstition.

The Mandingoes who profess the Mahometan religion, are, in outward appearance, strict followers of the precepts of the Alcoran; nor could Mahomet himself have wished for more zealous promoters of his law. Fully sensible of what importance it is to have the conscience in keeping, they neglect no means of

policy to spread their religious doctrines—where they are strong they use coercive measures; and where they are not in a capacity to exert those means, they use every art that human subtilty can suggest.—In the villages of the tribes around them they erect schools, and teach their youth gratis, to read and write Arabic; and their missionaries, by temporizing with the prevailing follies and foibles of the distant nations which they visit; by assuming to themselves the sanctity and authority of the servants of God; by abstaining from all strong liquors; and, above all, by pretending to have power over every species of witchcraft; and, by their trade in making charms, do so insinuate themselves into the confidence of the chiefs and principal people; that I never visited a town in this part of Africa where I did not find a Mandingo man as prime minister, by the name of *bookman*, without whose advice nothing was transacted.

The religion of Mahomet was propagated in this country by the Arabs and Foolahs. Many of the Arab priests, or faquins travel not only across the country from the banks of the Nile, but also from Morocco to Abissinia, and are supported by the charity of the nations through which they pass. During my former residence in the interior part of the Mandingo country, I saw several of them, and gained no little esteem from the natives, by the alms I bestowed upon those travelling mendicants, who never eat or sleep in a house during their peregrination. By means of these people, and the travelling black merchants, the defeat of the Spaniards before Gibraltar was known at the Riopongeos within forty days after the action.

Circumcision of male children, whether a religious or political institution, is in general, but not universally practised all over Africa: but the circumcision of females I never yet read or heard of in any country, but among the Suzeés and Mandingoes: with them both sexes undergo the operation when they arrive at the age of puberty; and the performance of this singular rite on the females is by cutting off the exterior point of the *clitoris*. The ceremonies attending it are very curious:—Every year during the dry season, and on the first appearance of a new moon, the girls of each town who are judged marriageable are collected together, and, in the night preceding the day on which the ceremony takes place, are conducted by the women of the village into the inmost recesses of a wood. Griggories, or charms, are placed at every avenue or path which might lead to the consecrated spot, to warn and deter the approach of the ignorant or designing, during their confinement, which continues one moon and one day. They are seen by no person but the old woman who performed the operation, and who brings them their provisions daily; should she, through sickness, or any other cause, be unable to attend, the person who is substituted in her place calls out with a loud voice as she approaches, leaves the victuals at a certain spot, and retires unseeing or unseen; for, should any person, either through accident or design, break into their retirements, death is the punishment annexed.

It is principally during their confinement in the wood, when the body is subdued by pain, and the mind softened by the gloomy stillness of every thing around them, that they are taught the religious customs, and superstitions of their country; for, till that period, they are not thought capable of understanding or practising them.—When the time destined for their continuance in the wood is expired, which is judged sufficient for the healing their wounds, they are brought into the town in the night, where they are received by all the women of the village, young and old, quite naked: in this state, and in a kind of irregular procession, with various instruments of national music, they parade the streets till break of day; and would any man be found even peeping during their peregrination, he would immediately suffer death, or pay a slave.—A probation of one moon succeeds their release from the wood; during which

they are every day conducted in procession, with music, and their heads and bodies covered, to every principal person's house in the town, before which they dance and sing till they are presented with some trifling present. At the expiration of the month they are released from further attendance, and immediately given to the men destined for their husbands.

How they came to adopt, or for what reason they practise, this very singular rite, I never could learn; but the women hold it in such veneration, that to be reproached with the want of it, is the most villifying term they can possibly use; and frequent instances occur of women in years submitting to the operation, who, though born in other countries, yet, coming to reside where it was practised, were exposed to the reproach.

Their government and their laws appear to have been originally of the patriarchal kind, where the elder of every family was priest and judge. Time, that changes all all things, has made some change in this also.

At present the prevailing form in these parts of Africa is a kind of mixed monarchy, elective, and extremely limited both in external and internal power; and very much resembles the authority of the mayor of a corporation town in England; for the word *mungo*, which the Europeans translate *king*, only signifies head man; and he is always addressed by the title of *fafeé*, or *father.* Every separate district, in the same nation, has a separate king, ruler, or chief.

The Suzeés and Mandingoes, indeed, who are the most powerful and numerous, acknowledge subjection to the king of the Foolahs, whom they represent as a powerful prince, whose empire is very extensive, reaching from Gambia to Cape Mount, but the Bullams, Timaneys, and Bagoes, acknowledge no power superior to their own.

The necessary qualifications for any person to ascend the throne are, a thorough knowledge of the local customs of the country; to be a good orator; to have a clear understanding, or, as they emphatically express it, to have a good head; to be sober, to be at all times ready and attentive to hear the complaints and redress the grievances of the subject; and to be sufficiently powerful in his own slaves and people, who live under his immediate protection, to enforce the observance and execution of the laws.

Except among the Mandingoes and Suzeés, few kings are natives of the countries they govern. So different are their ideas from ours, that very few are solicitous of the honour, and competition is very seldom heard of.

The reigning prince has the power of appointing a deputy, who, upon his death, succeeds to all his honours and authority; and governs, in his name, till they elect a new king.— If the deputy be a man of power and address, he often takes possession of the property also of the deceased king, and secures it till the new king is elected, who will adjudge it to the right heir. But it frequently happens that if the deputy is found equal to the task of governing, he is either confirmed in the dignity of king, or continues to act under the title of deputy as long as he lives.

The present ruler of Sierra-Leone, who is in fact only a deputy, has reigned in that capacity for more than ten years; and his subjects are so well pleased with his conduct that they wish to make him king:

but he appears to be perfectly satisfied in ruling with a subordinate title.—The revenue, or rather the emoluments of his office, arise from the presents made him on every occasion where his assistance or authority are wanted; and which are always proportioned to the ability of the giver and the importance of the affair. — From a poor man, for instance, a basket of rice, a couple or half a dozen fowls, or a goat, would be accepted; but nothing less than the value of a slave would be taken in an affair of consequence.

The ensigns of authority of the kings of Sherbro' are an elephant's tail carried before them; or, if it be sent by a messenger, it has the same obedience paid to it as to the sign manual. But I never observed any such tokens of royalty among the other kings, except what they received from the whites; such as a silver-headed cane, or a gold-laced hat.

Though the executive, power and final decision of all causes is vested in the king, yet every head, or principal man of a village, thinks himself sole lord within his own town. Neither can the king command, but only intreat, except in matters which which have been debated and determined upon in full council. For instance, I wanted some wood at a distance from my residence, and sent people to cut it, the head man of the district prevented them. I complained to the king; his answer (which I found to be true) was, he would send to the man to desire him to let my people cut the wood; but that the place belonged to him, and he had no authority to compel him.

The family of a deceased king, or head man, lay no claim to superiority over their countrymen from their office, but fill that station only in which their wealth or connexion place them; and it very often happens that the son of a deceased chief, a few days after his father's death, is necessitated to hire himself as a gremeta, or sailor, to an European trader, for subsistance.

Present possession is the only tenure they allow of in the occupying of lands. If a man quits his situation, another may immediately take possession, provided he is a native; for they are extremely tenacious of their rights, and will not suffer any strangers to settle among them without their consent and approbation.

Their laws, handed down by tradition from father to son, are merely the local customs of the country; which differ, but not very essentially, in every district or state.—All causes are tried by the king, assisted by the head men, in open *burreé*, or court; and there are a set of men called *palaver talkers*, (i.e. counsellors) who plead on both sides.—I have known one of these men speak for two hours with such dignity of action, force and energy of elocution, as would do honour to an English orator.

Disputes among themselves, when brought to a *palaver*, are generally decided with equity, according to the evidence produced; particularly if the parties are equal in power: and the losing party pays all damages and costs of suit before he goes out of court, or is obliged to give good security.

In their disputes with white men they are not very rigid observers of justice; and, what is something singular, if a white man should succeed in his suit, he reaps no other advantage from it than the honour of being in the right; as they never adjudge any recompense to be made him on any occasion; and, right or wrong, he must pay the expences. — I have often asked them the reason of this conduct; they only answered, "White men get too much money; they cannot want their money."

All capital offences are punished with either fine slavery, or death; but the latter is now seldom practised, except among the Mandingoes, who rule by the Mahometan law, and whose proceedings are always summary; or, in cases of murder, when the friends friends of the deceased take vengeance before the crime has been publicly judged.

Witchcraft is slavery inevitable; but poison, adultery, or any other crime, may be compensated by fine.

The method of recovering debts appears to be founded upon the first principles of jurisprudence, which are generally adopted by all nations.

Debts are commonly contracted for a limited time; that is, there is such a length of credit given. If the debtor refuses or delays payment when the debt is due and demanded, the creditor applies to the king, or chief, for his assistance; who sends to the debtor, desiring him to pay the debt. If after this notice from the king, he refuses to pay it, or to satisfy his creditor, the latter gets the king's consent to seize the person of his debtor, or any of his slaves or people. If this be found impracticable, by the debtor's living in another town, the creditor seizes upon any person, who resides in the same town as the debtor, and detains that person till the debt is paid, which the people of the town compel the debtor to do immediately.

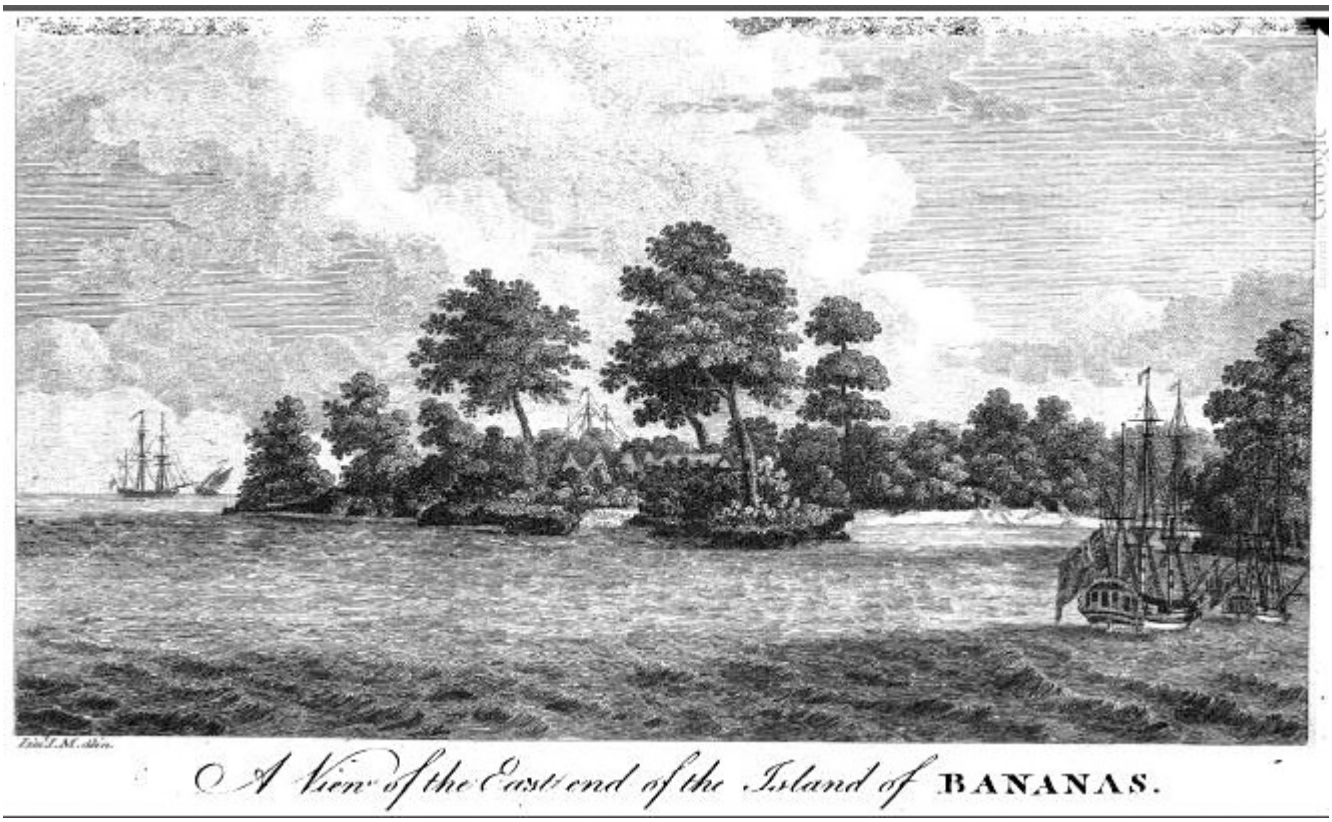
And this is not all; for when a man is thus deprived of his liberty for the debt of another, he instantly brings a palaver, or action, against the real debtor, and generally recovers considerable damages, as a compensation for the imprisonment.

The most singular law I have yet observed in Africa is what they term the purrah, and is peculiar to Sherbro'. This wise, political institution is disseminated through the country for the purpose of putting an end to disputes and wars, as the jealousy, pride, and irritability of the natives are such as will not suffer them, even when conscious of being the aggressors, to make concessions. Any freeman, after a certain age, (supposed about thirty) may become a member of this association. On his admission into the society he undergoes various ceremonies, and is enjoined the strictest secrecy respecting them, which they preserve as inviolably as the free masons in Europe do the mysteries of their institution; and to which it has some resemblance in other respects; particularly in having a grand master, or head purrah man, in every district or state, and the non-admission of females. This law is never used but in the dernier resort; and when it is in force, the crimes of witchcraft and murder are punishable by it.

When two tribes, or nations, are at war, and begin to be tired, or wish to put an end to it, but are too haughty and proud to make overtures to each other, they apply to the ruler of a neighbouring state for his interference as a mediator: if the offer be accepted, he immediately sends to the contending parties, to inform them he will act as umpire if they chuse to refer their disputes to him; and that if they do not agree to terminate their differences amicably, he will send for the purrah, as he will no longer look on with indifference, and see those who ought to be friends destroy each other and depopulate their country.

Should they, after this message, prove refractory, the purrah is ordered out; and the grand fundamental article of the purrah law is, that no blood shall be shed while it is in force; so that the late contending

parties follow their several occupations without fear. But encounters sometime happen, as their vindictive and revengeful disposition will seldom suffer them to let slip an opportunity of gratifying their thirst of vengeance, even under the terror of this law.



A View of the East end of the Island of BANANAS.

When the aggressors are known to the purrah, they come down in a body of forty or fifty men armed and disguised. All persons, of every age or description, fly before them; and if they find any person out of their houses, they put them to death, or dispose of them in such a manner that they are never more heard of. This is also the fate of all transgressors of the purrah law, when seized by the people of this extraordinary association.

It is impossible to describe the dread and terror this institution strikes into the common people: they believe the purrah men are possessed of the power of the devils, and can do whatever mischief they please without being affected by it themselves. They take away the stock and provisions, or whatever they like, belonging to the natives, without the least interruption or subsequent inquiry.

In describing the customs and manners of distant nations, we are under a necessity of using such expressions and phrases as suit our own idioms. Hence every petty quarrel, when perhaps there is only ten or a dozen combatants on each side, is in Africa called a war. It is the same also in speaking of their chiefs, or head men, who are all dignified by the Europeans with the title of king.

The vindictive and violent spirit of revenge which every African possesses when he imagines he is injured or insulted, is the cause of frequent wars among the natives. When a national war is agreed upon, it becomes general, and every person of each party is equally obnoxious to the other; but their

petty wars, or quarrels, only involve the particular town, or towns, which are engaged.—Their expeditions are always of the predatory kind. To surprize and burn a village, and make a few prisoners, is the utmost extent of their ambition; they never attempt to meet each other in the field, but sculk about in ambush, and laugh at the folly of the Europeans, when told of the manner in which they fight, and the numbers they bring into the field; as an African army seldom exceeds 500 men, and even that is considered as a very large one. The young men only go to war; but they are very indifferent soldiers, and can only be kept together with the hope of plunder, or being well supplied with liquor.

They are sometimes two or three years preparing and forming alliances with the neighbouring tribes before they make an attack, which is commonly done just at the commencement of the rains, when the men are employed in their plantations, at which time they are sure of finding the towns defenceless.

When two tribes, or nations are negotiating, and the final result must be peace or war; and, when they have made their election, if for war, two red *colá* are deposited upon a stone at the place of meeting; if for peace, one white *colá* is left at the same place, which is divided into two parts, each party take one piece, and they then meet each each other without fear to adjust the particulars.

The inhabitants of the sea coast have almost totally laid aside their national weapons for the sabre and gun; but the natives of the inland countries still use the spear, dart, and poisoned arrow.

It does not appear that the intercourse which has so long subsisted between the Africans and Europeans has made any material change in their customs or manners, except giving them a relish for society, and the enjoyment of what they consider as the luxuries of life, European manufactories. I have endeavoured to discover the causes of their wars, and whether the accusation so often made, — that the natives of Africa were excited to make war upon each other by the Europeans who traded with them— was, or was not, founded in fact. And this, I am free to declare, never was the case in any instance which fell under my observation and from every account I could collect it never had been the case.

When I first arrived at the Isles de Lose, I found an almost general war raged throughout the extent to which we traded. The Suzeés, aided by the Mandingo slaves who had revolted from their masters, were at war with the Bagoes and Mandingoes; and the people of Sherbro' were at war with each other. The origin of the war between the Suzeés and Bagoes, and their allies, arose from a Bagoe man killing a native of a Suzeé town, where he at that time resided: he fled from their resentment among his countrymen, who refused to deliver him up to the friends of the person he had killed, agreeable to the laws of the country. The war in Sherbro' arose from a quarrel between two chiefs, and involved the whole country in their dispute, After fixing my establishment at Sierra-Leone, I made a trip into Sherbro', in a mediator capacity, to endeavour to terminate their disputes. I visited both the principals in person, and sent to the allies of both parties. Reciprocal presents passed between us; but such was the mutual jealousy and distrust of each party, that I never could prevail on them to meet each other on board my vessel, though they separately visited me. I had however the satisfaction to lay the foundation of a truce, which has continued ever since, and is now enforced by the purrah.

LETTER VI.

Sierra-Leone, Nov. 20, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

My last letter conveyed to you the best accounts I could give of the religion, laws, and government, of the inhabitants of this country; in this I shall endeavour to describe the persons of the natives, and such of their particular customs and ceremonies which have fallen under my own observation, or which I have received from persons upon whole veracity I can depend.

It is a general remark all along the coast of Africa, that those nations bordering upon the sea, or inhabiting islands, are a much stouter, better made, a braver, and more active people than those who reside in the interior parts of the country, This, perhaps, may be in some measure accounted for by the difference of food, those upon the sea-coast living a good deal upon fish, and breathing a more salubrious air.

The Bullams, Timmaneys, and Bagoes, are a stout, active, and personable race; of a good black, straight limbs, and pleasing features; and rather above the middle size. The Timmaneys, in particular, are remarkable for an open, ingenuous countenance; and many of their women are really handsome.

During my residence here I have only seen two deformed people, and their misfortunes were occasioned by accidents in their infancy.

The Suzeés are of a yellow cast; and in person much inferior to those I have just mentioned; though they are generally straight limbed, they have thick lips and flatter noses.

The Mandingoes seem to be a distinct race from any of the others: they are tall and slender, of an indifferent black, and remarkably small eyes: they wear their beards like the Jews in Europe.

The Suzeés, Bullams &c. shave while they are young; but, when their hair begins to turn grey, they suffer their beards to grow; for the silver tokens of age with them denote wisdom: and, indeed, some of their old men, with long white beards, seated in council, make a most venerable appearance.

The striking difference between the free people I have described, and the appearance of the plantation slave, is so great, that I was never mistaken in my opinion respecting their situation even at first sight. The free man, elated by his liberty, walks with dignity and conscious pride, and looks with an eye of confidence on all around — while the slave, on the contrary, oppressed by the consideration of his situation, moves on with humble step and down-cast eye.

The persons of the slaves (except such as were born on the seacoast) are generally less in stature, and

not so robust or well made as the native free men, and come from the interior part of the country.

The Foolahs, who inhabit the country on the back of the nations I have described, appear to be an intermediate race between the Arab and the black, and very like the East Indian Lascar, having long, straight, black hair, yellow complexion, thin face, and long Roman noses. They are strict followers of the Alcoran; and, by their wars for the propagation of their religion, furnish a great number of the slaves which are sold in these parts.

Voltaire, in his preliminary discourse, mentions a race of people inhabiting the interior parts of Africa, whom he calls Albinos, and represents them as being of a milky white colour, and diminutive stature. I have made the most diligent inquiry of the natives, and travelling black merchants, but never could gain the least information that such a people existed. But I have seen several white negroes in different parts of Africa of a milky, or chalky whiteness, and white wool; but these do not propagate their likeness, but have black children, and are only considered as *lufus naturæ*. I remember to have seen one of the same kind in Georgia, South Carolina, and one in England, they were both females.

The Suzeé language seems to be the root from which the Bagoe, Bullam, and Timmaney is sprung; it is soft, and abounds with vowels and labial founds. The Mandingo language is, as the people are, perfectly different from any of the others, and appears to me to be a corrupt Arabic, though not the same as they teach in their schools, which they term the language of prayer.

The disposition of the natives is nearly similar every where, extremely indolent, unless excited by revenge, of implacable tempers, full of treachery and dissimulation, where they conceive the least resentment; nor do they ever let slip an opportunity of gratifying their thirst of vengeance when they can do it with impunity. To their particular friends indeed, they are hospitable and kind; but are addicted to pilfering, and are remarkable for the fickleness of their conduct on almost every occasion.

The Mandingoes, from religious motives, hate a Christian, and vilify those Europeans who reside among them, and whom they frequently see drinking and rioting, with the appellation of dog. But when I formerly resided among them, by pursuing a contrary conduct, and by being enabled to converse with them on the tenets of their religion, I received such treatment from them in the time of the utmost distress, when I was dangerously ill, as I could have expected only from my best and dearest friends.

Their methods of salutation are various; when a slave approaches his master to pay him obedience he bends the right knee almost to the ground, and stretches out his right arm, with the hand shut, which he supports with the left hand under the elbow. When two friends, or equals, meet, they put their right hand upon their breasts and wish each other good day; and sometimes embrace, or shake hands, and snap the finger and thumb. When a stranger comes upon a visit to a friend, no notice is taken of him till he announces his visit in form, which is often four or five days after his arrival, during which time he is provided with every thing necessary for himself and people, apart from the family: the same custom is observed by their ambassadors, or public messengers, upon business of importance. When the women meet upon visits, they join their right hands and curtsy; but the young and unmarried embrace with the most seeming affection. When a son visits his mother after an absence, and the first salutation is over, he lies at her feet, and, while she carefully examines his head for the purpose of destroying vermin, he relates the adventures of his journey.

The women are exceedingly clean in their persons, and are strictly attentive to domestic duties; and none can be more fond or careful of their offspring, or make better nurses. They never wean their children till they are able to walk, and to carry a calabash of water to their mother, which they instruct them to do as soon as possible; for, during the time a child is at the breast, the woman is not permitted to cohabit with her husband as they suppose it would be prejudicial to her milk. Barrenness they dread as the greatest reproach; and Nature has exempted them from the pain and sorrow our fair countrywomen experience in childbirth, as they are seldom confined more than a few hours. In their domestic amusements they in some respect imitate the good country housewife in England. In the evening the head wife, surrounded by the rest of her husband's women, and her female attendants, is employed in spinning and carding cotton, while one of the company amuses the rest with telling stories upon the plan of *Æ*sop's fables: to these tales I have often listened with infinite pleasure. They have several games of chance, at which the men and women play separate; but both sexes are passionately fond of dancing, which they never fail to enjoy when they have a light moon and fair weather, from an hour after sun-set, till midnight. Besides this, the birth of a child or the arrival of a friend or relation, furnishes them with an opportunity of enjoying their favourite amusement of singing and dancing, which they term a *cullunjee*. When a *cullunjee* is performed on any great occasion, they introduce dancers dressed in a grotesque style; on their heads they wear a high cap made of rushes, stuck round with feathers, and their faces are painted about the eyes, nose, and mouth, with chalk, or white clay, and they wear a pettycoat of rushes round their waist, which in dancing spreads in every direction. In their hands they have pieces of flat wood, which they clap together, and with which they keep time during the dance.

The death of a child, friend, or relation, adds no less to the enjoyment of this pastime, by performing the wha', or cry: but, from the manner in which it is performed, a stranger to their ceremonies would rather term it a rejoicing.

On the evening of the day appointed the friends and relations of the deceased assemble together, and proceed, by a slow and solemn movement, to an open space before their houses. Here they begin singing the praises of the deceased, and dancing to the music of a drum. In the dance they frequently vary the figure; sometimes forming one great circle round the music, and clapping hands at every period or repetition of their song. Sometimes one person performs the dance, the rest sitting or standing round in a circle, joining chorus and clapping hands as before: at other times two, three, or four, will dance together till they are weary, and then are relieved by others; the rest singing and clapping hands. This, with firing of guns, continues from evening till near daylight, without intermission; but they frequently regale themselves with liquor and tobacco. This ceremony is repeated three nights successively.

For people of consequence, whose friends can afford it, the cry is repeated once or twice a year for several years; but the poorer sort are sometimes two or three years before they can procure means to purchase rum and tobacco sufficient for the purpose: but whatever time they may be before they are enabled to put it in excution, it is never omitted.

This may be termed the public mourning after the death of their friends or relations, in which both sexes join; but there is also another kind, of a more private nature, practised by the women only, and is

peculiar to the Buliams and Timmaneys only.

The mourners wear a white linen or cotton cap, which is drawn over their eyes in such a manner as to prevent their seeing any thing, except on the ground, without turning their heads quite up, and several strings of large country beads are fastened round their neck and waist.—If married women, they are stripped of their cloth, and allowed to wear the *tuntungeé* only.

They are not suffered to eat or drink with any other person, or cook their own victuals, but at meal times beat a drum and dance before the person's door who is to give it them; and nobody is allowed even to eat or drink out of the vessels they make use of.

The time this kind of mourning continues is not fixed, but regulated by the whim and caprice of the person who orders it, who is generally the mother, aunt, or some elderly relation; and is commonly performed by girls approaching the age of marriage, in order to preserve their chastity; for should any intercourse between the sexes be discovered, during the continuance of this ceremony, the woman would become infamous, and the man be liable to a severe punishment.

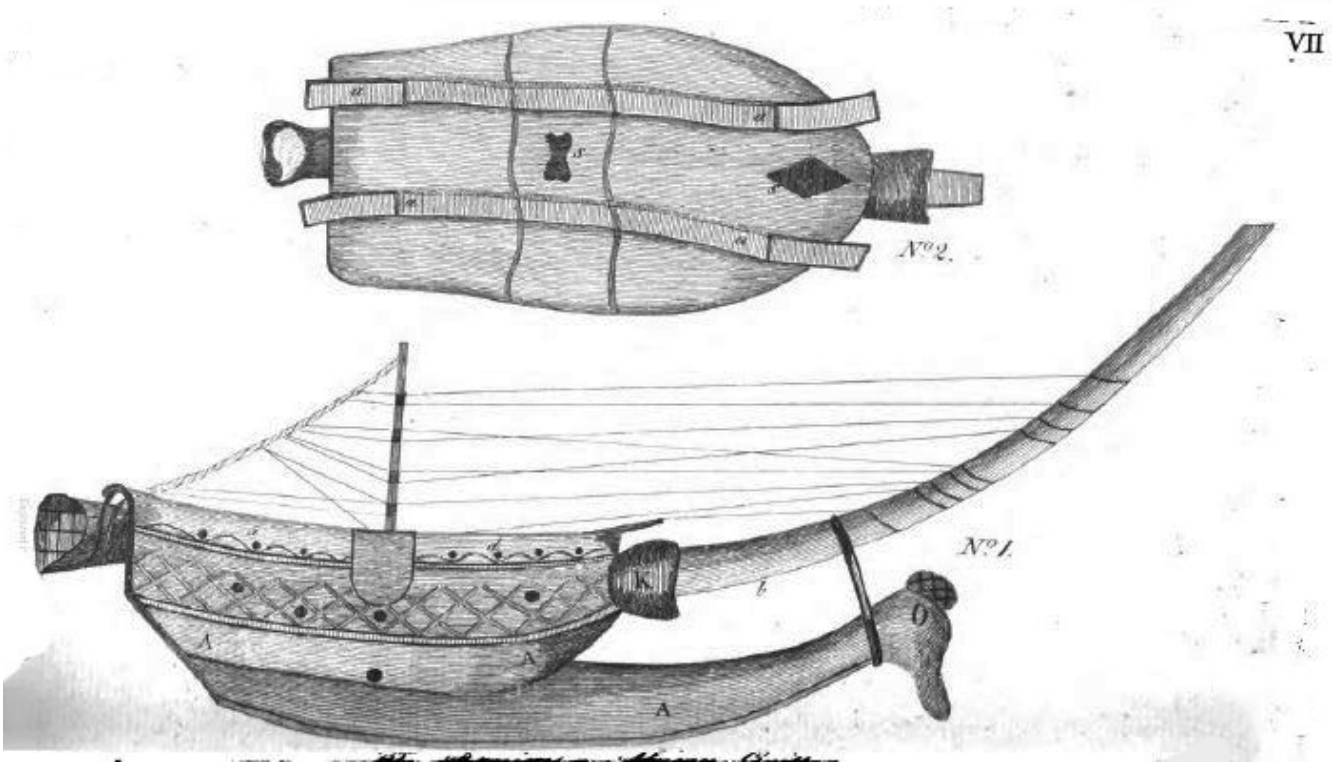
A woman also, when she supposes her husband neglects her, has the privilege of putting his favourite mistress into mourning. When this, however, happens, after a short probation and a peace-offering, to the wife, of a goat or six fowls, a jar of liquor, and a little tobacco, to be used in a cullunjeé, she is restored to his arms.

Indeed this appears no bad policy on the part of the elderly wives, to preserve some degree of consequence with the men; for during the time the young woman is in this mourning, the husband is deprived of her society.

They have various kinds of national music but the drum seems to be the principal instrument, of which they have three sorts, but they are of different sizes, according to the use for which they are intended; one is made of a hard wood, which is hollowed, the ends of it stopped close, and a longitudinal opening made on the side; they beat upon them with two sticks, and the loud and shrill noise these drums give are, in a still evening, heard to a great distance, and are used to spread an alarm: the others are made of light wood, hollowed throughout, and the ends covered with dried goat or sheep skin, laced tight over with cords. Some of these are very large, from six to eight feet long, and two or three feet diameter; in others the heads are only two or three inches apart, and shark's teeth or bits of copper are tied round she rim, which make a jingling noise.

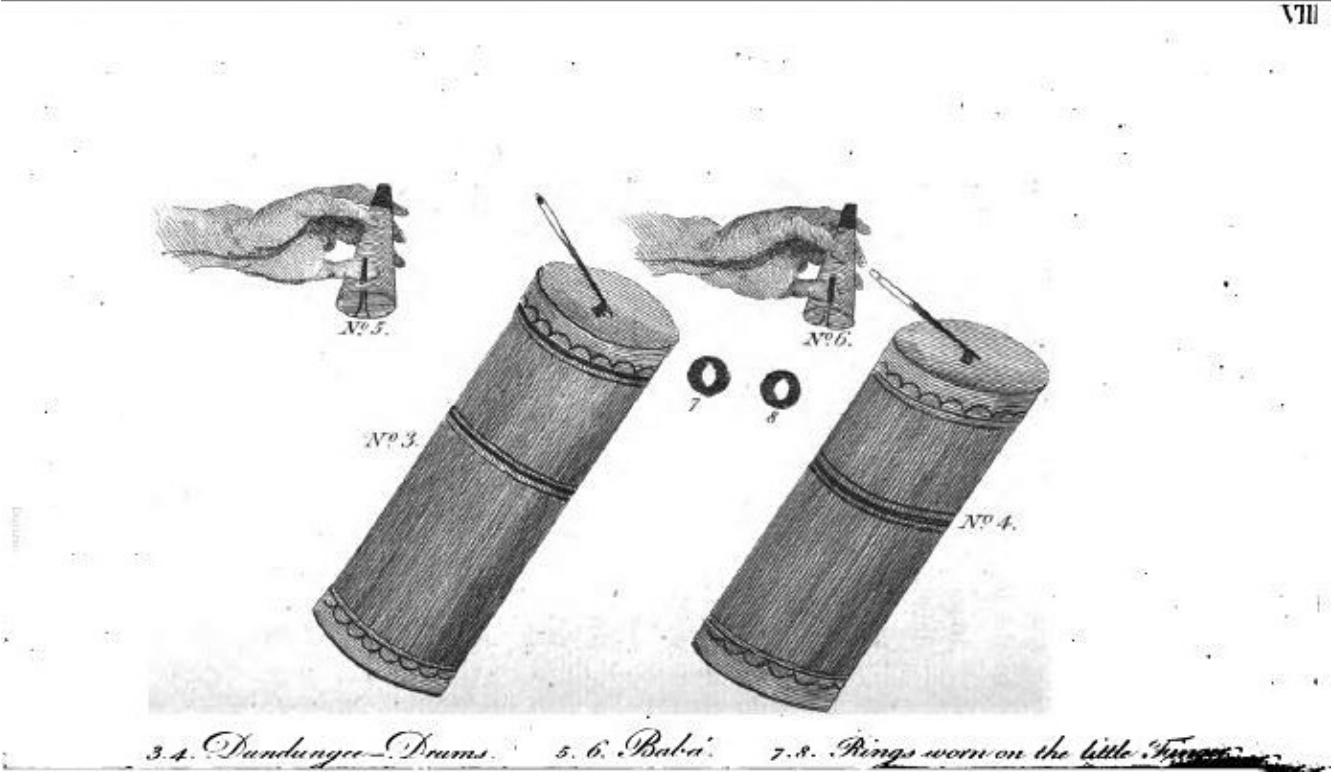
The trombone and tamborine, used in England, appear to have been borrowed from the Africans. They have also two kinds of string instruments; one is a sort of guitar, and is the same as the bangou in the West Indies; the other is in the form of a Welsh harp, but not above two feet long: the strings are made of the fibres of a plant and the hair of an elephant's tail.

The women and children also have several sorts of rattles made of gourds, into which they put small hard berries; and in Sherbro' they have a kind of pipe made of reed, with solar stops for the fingers; and a horn, or trumpet, made of an elephant's tooth.



The customary food of the natives is rice, which they always boil quite dry, and either eat it with palm-oil poured over it, or a strong gravy made of fish, flesh, or fowl, and vegetables boiled together, highly seasoned with pepper and spices, and palm oil. They use very little animal food, and in general prefer it smoke dried rather than fresh; but are good cooks, and make many savoury dishes.—The men and women always eat apart, and never drink any thing but water at their meals. They eat only twice in the day; the first time about ten in the morning, and the second about sun-set; but the principal men who can indulge, generally enjoy a slight repast early in the morning, which is prepared by the favourite of the preceding night.

The only trades in use amongst them are those of the carpenter, blacksmith, and griggory maker; and their workmanship, considering the tools they use, often display neatness and ingenuity. Every family spin and weave their own cloth, and make their own cloches; the men weave and sew, and the women spin and card the cotton. Their dress is very simple and easy. The boys and girls never wear any thing but a *tuntungeé*, which is a thin slip of cloth passed between the legs. The different manner of wearing it denotes the sex. The girls have a string tied round their waist, and the ends of the *tuntungeé* are tucked under it, and left to hang down before and behind, with a belt or girdle of beads, or loose strings of them tied round their waist; the boys have the short end forward, the other part is brought round their loins, tucked under, and left to hang down behind only. After marriage the women lay aside the *tuntungeé*, (except among the Nalloes, who never wear any thing else) and wear a cloth round their waist, which reaches down about the middle of the leg; though they are very fond of wearing it over their breasts, not in order to hide them, but to make them flat, which (as it is a sign of womanhood) gives them additional consequence. They are also very fond of ornaments, such as beads formed into necklaces, bracelets, &c. silver rings, lockets and chains, manillas, (which are hoops of silver made flat



3. 4. Dundungee-Drums. 5. 6. Baba'. 7. 8. Rings worn on the little Fingers.

or round to wear on the wrists), strings of coral and use a variety of paints. An African lady, when full drest, makes no contemptible figure:—over her common country cloth, which we may term her under petticoat, for she wears one of red taffity; a black silk handkerchief tied by two corners round her neck, hangs down before like a child's bib, and covers her bosom; another of the same colour is tied round her head, she has gold earrings in her ears, found her neck a string of large coral; and a silver or gold locket and chain. On each wrist two or three manillas, and five or six silver rings on each finger; her forehead is painted with various angles and triangles of white or red, and her hair neatly and curiously plaited; and sometimes close shaved in small circular or crescent formed spots.—Behind her follows her waiting-maids, (who are generally the prettiest girls she can procure, from ten to fifteen years old), decorated with coral and beads, and a piece of taffity or fine chintz thrown over their left shoulders like a Highlander's plaid.

The dress of the men is a loose shirt without a collar or wristbands, and very wide sleeves, with drawers which reach about the middle of the leg, and a hat or small close cap made of country cloth; though they generally go bare headed and bare footed, except the head men, who imitate as much as they can the dress of the whites, and the Mandingoes, who are always distinguished by wearing a red cap and sandals, and who also ornament their shirts and drawers with worsted embroidery; in manufacturing of which they are very ingenious.—The men never go without their belmós, which are large straight knives, hung in a sheath on the right thigh, exactly like the patou-patou of the Sandwich islands, described by Captain Cook; they have two of these, one small for the purpose of eating, and the other as a weapon of defence.

The custom of *tattowing*, or marking the body, which is called soccalá, is pretty general all over Africa, and I fancy was originally intended to distinguish the different tribes from each other: it is still practised

here on that account, but does not appear to be so necessary as it might have been formerly. The back, loins, belly, and breast, are the parts upon which they carve in this neighbourhood; and the manner in which it is done not only denotes the tribe, but the condition of the person, as a slave is not allowed to be marked in the same manner as a free man.—The operation of tattowing must be extremely painful, and is often dangerous; it is performed when the child is only a few months old. Some nations raise the skin in such a manner as to make it appear like embossed work; others perform it by puncture, with a sharp-pointed instrument dipped in a liquid, which leaves an indelible mark: but it must be observed, that those who use this method are of a yellow complexion. In the more southern and eastern parts of Africa, they mark the face as well as the body.

The situations which the natives chuse for their towns are generally on the bank of a creek or river, for the benefit of fishing, and are always distinguished by large pullam trees; which kind of trees are a certain criterion of a dry soil. They never take the trouble to clear more ground than is sufficient to build their houses upon; as they cannot conceive that cutting down the wood, so as to admit a free circulation of air, would render it more healthy: neither do they observe any order in the disposition of streets; but every man chusing a spot most convenient or agreeable, erects a number of small houses, according to the number of his wives and people (for every wife has a separate house); the whole forming a circle, which are inclosed within a trapada, or fence, made by driving stakes into the ground; which, in a few months, (so quick is vegetation in this climate) become living trees, and produce a very pretty effect.

A number of these inclosed buildings erected near each other form a town, which is generally surrounded with a mud wall or a strong palisade, and often cover a considerable extent of ground.

When the natives are at war they have several barriers, which are always shut at sun-set, and guarded, during the night, with a good watch; nor are they opened again, upon any occasion, till the sun rises next morning.

Their houses are only one story, and are either round or an oblong square; the sides built with upright posts, wattled and covered with a stiff clay. The floors are also clayed and beat hard; and the roots are supported with long poles, and thatched with grass. They have generally two doors, on opposite sides, which cause a draught of air through; and, together with their height, make them very cool in the hottest weather: and they white-wash the outside with white clay, which they get in some particular places from the bottom of the river, or a white soapenaceous earth found in Sherbro'. Though I have mentioned doors, they very seldom have any in the European manner, except those who imitate the manners of the whites; but, instead of doors, have a mat fastened to the upper end of the door frame; when that is dropped nobody presumes to enter without a previous inquiry; when it is rolled up that ceremony is unnecessary. The eaves of the roof project six or eight feet over the walls, and are supported with posts; the space between the walls and the posts is raised a foot or eighteen inches, which form a kind of piazza, and makes an admirable lolling place, as it screens them from the surf and rain.

In the interior parts of the country they build very large houses of brick baked in the sun, which stand many years, if the top of the walls are preserved from the weather.

They never have chimnies to their houses; yet the natives always keep fires in the morning and evening, to drive away the musquetos.

The common people, slaves, and children, sleep on mats or dried skins spread upon the ground before the fire; but people of consequence have bed places made by driving four stakes into the ground, with a bottom of split cane or bamboo; and mats hung round supplies the place of curtains. The men's apartments are furnished with a chest to contain their clothes and valuables, a mat or skin to sit upon, and their arms. The women's contain all their domestic utensils, mats, and stools, and never without a looking-glass.

Near the centre of every town there is a circular building, open at the sides, which they term a burreé (i.e. court house); where all palavers are talked, and public business of every kind transacted.

In the Mandingo country, where they profess the Mahometan religion, there is in every town a public mosque, from the top of which the people are called to prayers in the same manner as in Turkey.

There are also several small burreés, which serve as public schools; where their youth are taught to read and write Arabic.

Polygamy is allowed and practised here in its utmost latitude; and women, as in more civilized countries, are frequently among the great the bond of peace and friendship. If two tribes have been at war, or wish to contract a more close and intimate connexion with each other, a mutual exchange with the chiefs of each others daughters is the basis of every treaty: it is the same also with individuals, and from this cause is chiefly the reason of the head men having so many wives. In order to connect their families together, a female child is frequently given to a man as soon as she is born; but among the

Suseés the child remains with the mother till of a proper age, which is judged of rather from the external appearance, than from the age of the party; they are then delivered in form. On the day appointed for the marriage, the bridegroom stations relays of people on the road the bride is to come, with liquor and refreshments; for if these articles are not plentifully supplied, the bride's attendants will not proceed a step, even though the supplies should fail them in the midway. When they approach near the town, they halt, and are joined by the bridegroom's people, and friends, who make great rejoicing by shouting, drinking, firing guns, and other demonstrations of joy.

The lady is then taken upon the back of an old woman, and covered over with a fine cloth, for from this time she is not allowed to be seen by any male person till after consummation. Mats are spread on the ground, that the feet of the person who carries her may not touch the earth; in this manner she is carried to the house of her intended husband, attended by the friends of both parties, shouting dancing, and firing guns. In the evening the bridegroom retires to his wife's apartment. If he finds room to suspect she has before admitted the embraces of a man he immediately leaves her, which is no sooner known by her friends than they instantly abscond, shouting and howling with shame and confusion; but if he is satisfied, he remains with her all night. Great rejoicings are then made by her friends, who carry the tokens of her virginity, according to the Mosaical institution, in wild procession through the streets. In either case he is at liberty to retain her, but should he send her back, he must send every thing she brought with her.

Among the Bullams, Bagoes, and Timmaneys, they frequently receive their future wives when quite children, and bring them up in their own houses. On these occasions, when they receive the child, a present is made according to the receiver's ability, to the child's parents, which they term drawing wine for her; but if the child should be ill-treated before consummation takes place, her parents have a right to demand her on refunding the wine. On the other hand, if the man sends back his intended bride to her parents, they must receive her, but keep the wine.

From these circumstances one would naturally imagine chastity was highly valued, but in fact it is no longer the case than to the time of marriage; for it is reckoned extremely unpolite and ill-bred for a married woman to reject the offers of a lover; though she is sensible she is liable to a severe punishment if discovered, yet it does not at all affect her *reputation*. Almost every married woman has, according to the country custom, her *yangeé cameé*, or cicisbeo, whom she first solicits. This connexion she is at little or no pains to conceal, and her husband is often obliged to be silent, as otherwise he would have reason to dread worse consequences; for although the laws of the country are severe against adultery, it requires the arm of power, even among themselves, to put them in force. But it should be observed that it is among the great who keep a number of wives, that this practice more particularly prevails. The common people are in general contented with one, or at most with two wives. Yet there is one singular circumstance which should not pass unnoticed respecting their women's private amours.

They never attempt to impose on their husbands by introducing a spurious offspring into his family, but always declare before they are delivered who is the father. But if the husband wishes to have children by a favourite woman, he obliges her, though it is sometimes done voluntarily, to make a vow, that she will not for a certain time go astray and should she during that period be induced either by force or persuasion to break her vow, she immediately tells her husband, and both the offending parties undergo a most shameful punishment, and are ever after reckoned infamous, and held in contempt.

They deposit their dead in the ground in the European manner, and generally either in the evening or morning; but the ceremony of interrogating the corpse is curious, and deserves a particular description.

When the deceased is designed for interment, the corpse is laid upon an open bier, decently wrapped in a white cloth, and born upon the heads of six young people, either male or female; for that is a matter left entirely to the choice of the corpse, who signifies his approbation or disapprobation of the bearers, by his inclination or disinclination to move (which they firmly believe it is capable of exerting) to the place of burial. This place is always in the bush out of the town, When arrived there a person, who is generally a relation or friend of the deceased, places himself five or six paces before the bier, with a green bough in his hand, and addresses the deceased in this manner-—"You are now a dead man—you know you are no longer alive and as one of us—you know you are placed upon the sticks (i.e. the bier) of God Almighty, and that you must answer truth."—And then he asks him what made him die—whether he knew of his own death, or whether it was caused by witchcraft or poison; for it is a firm and universal belief among them, that no person dies without having a previous knowledge of his death, except his death be caused by witchcraft or poison, or the more powerful charms of another person over those he wears.

If the corpse answers in the affirmative to any of the questions proposed, it is signified by forcibly impelling the bearers several paces forward, by a power which they say they are unable to resist—if, on the contrary, it is signified by a rolling motion, which they also say they cannot prevent.—If, by the sign given, a suspicion arises that the death of the party was occasioned by poison or witchcraft, they proceed to question him who was the person, and name several people to whom they suppose he was not attached in his life time; but they first begin with his relations. If it should happen to see any of them the corpse remains silent for some time, as if ashamed to accuse his own kindred, but at last is obliged to answer. He is then more particularly questioned whether he is certain of the person; if he is, it is requested that he will strike that hand which holds the bough, (the person before the corpse holding the bough up in his hand). Upon this the corpse immediately impels the bier forwards, and strikes the bough. In order to convince the spectators, they repeat this two or three times.

The culprit is then seized, and if a witch sold without further ceremony: and it frequently happens if the deceased were a great man, and the accused poor, not only he himself but his whole family are sold together. But if the death of the deceased was caused by poison, the offender is reserved for a further trial; from which, though it is in some measure voluntary, he seldom escapes with life.

After depositing the corpse in the grave, which is hung round with mats, and his most valued clothes and necessaries put in with him.—They confine the accused in such a manner that he can release himself; which signifies to him he has transgressed the laws of his country, and is no longer at liberty. As soon as it is dark he escapes to the next town, and there claims the protection of the head man, who is supposed to be an impartial person; informs him that the corpse of such a person has accused him of causing his death by poison; that he is innocent, and desires that to prove it he may drink red water. This request is always allowed, and the friends of the deceased are sent for to be witnesses. At the time appointed the accused is placed upon a kind of high chair, stripped of his common apparel, and a quantity of plantain leaves are wrapped round his waist. Then in presence of the whole town, who are always assembled upon these occasions, he first eats a little colá or rice, and then drinks the poisoned

water. If it kills him, which it is almost sure to do, he is pronounced guilty; but if he escapes with life after drinking five or six quarts and throwing up the rice or colá unchanged by the digestive powers of the stomach, he is judged innocent, but yet not intirely so till the same hour next day. During the interval he is not allowed to ease nature by any evacuations; and should he not be able to restrain them, it would be considered as strong a proof of his guilt as if he had fallen a victim to the first draught. And to prevent the least possibility of the medicine's not operating, should any remain in the stomach, they oblige the accused to join in the rejoicings made for his escape, which consists in singing and dancing all night,—After being fairly acquitted by this ordeal trial, he is held in higher estimation than formerly, and brings a palaver, or, to speak in the professional language of my friend, an action against the friends of the deceased, for defamation or false imprisonment, which is generally compromised by a payment adequate to the supposed injury.

But if the deceased says he knew of his death, and that it was premeditated; they ask him what induced him to die and leave them, and propose several questions, such as, was any one possessed of a fine gun, or a fine cloth, that he could not acquire the same; or had any body offended him that he could not be revenged of; but on these accounts they cannot bring any palaver against the object of his resentment.

It sometimes happens that the corpse will accuse a person of causing his death by witchcraft, that they cannot sell on account of their age, or dare not sell on account of their family or connexions, as it leaves a stain upon the family; in that case, after the guilt of the person accused is proved, he is carried to a field out of the town and obliged to dig his own grave, the people who are with him as a guard frequently reviling him, saying "you deal in death and can make other people die, you must now taste of it yourself." Notwithstanding he goes on with his work with an appearance of the utmost unconcern, retorting, "'tis true I did kill such a one, and many others, and if I lived I would kill many more," and often during his work measuring the length and width of the grave, by the dimensions of his own body. When the grave is judged deep enough, they direct the prisoner to stand at the edge of the foot of it, with his face towards it, then a person behind strikes him a violent blow upon the nape of the neck, which causes him to fall upon his face into the grave; a little loose earth is then thrown upon him, and a sharp stake of hard wood is drove through the expiring delinquent, which pins him to the earth. The grave is then filled up, and his or her name is never after mentioned.

Though the ceremonies above related are constantly practised, yet the different tribes have different methods of performing them. The Suzeés carry the whole body, but the Timmaneys and Bullams only the clothes the deceased had on at the time of his death, and the nails of his hands and feet, which they cut off immediately after he is expired, and which they hold to have the same power to answer the questions proposed, as if the whole body was present in which no doubt they are right.

The collusion between the parties concerned in this curious ceremony, is so obvious, that it appears astonishing to me the common people have not as yet discovered it, though it has existed time immemorial.

I am told that in the interior parts of the country, they found, suffering the people to drink red water upon every trifling occasion, was attended with such fatal consequences as would in time depopulate the country; and although they could not entirely suppress it, as the common people, and particularly the women, are strongly prepossessed in favour of its infallibility, they have hit upon a method that has

greatly lessened the practice.

When a person is to drink red water the friends of both parties assemble armed as in a *Polish diet*, and the instant the poison operates, either in causing them to vomit or fall down dead, the friends of the accused immediately attack the other party, either to revenge their injured innocence, or death.

Though most unenlightened nations believe in charms and witchcraft, yet the inhabitants of this country are so much addicted to it that they imagine every thing is under its influence, and every occurrence of life they attribute to that cause; even the effects of their sometimes diabolical disposition, they will alledge is owing to the powers of witches over them; an extraordinary instance of which has lately happened within my own knowledge. A man of some consequence, but of a most vile disposition, had taken advantage of his son-in-law's absence, to commit the most horrid acts of cruelty on some of his people; apprehensive of the consequences on the son's return, he caused some deleterious poison to be given to one of his daughters; in the agonies which it threw her into, they prevailed on her by promises of procuring her relief, to confess she had made witch (which is the manner they express it) for her father to spoil his head, and make him do that bad thing; and he afterwards took care she should not retract what she said, by giving her a *quietus* in a few days after.

If an allegator destroys any body when washing or swimming, or a leopard commits depredations on their flocks or poultry; if any person is taken suddenly ill, or dies suddenly, or is seized with any disorder they are not accustomed to, it is immediately attributed to witchcraft: and it rarely happens that some person or other is not pointed out by their conjurors, whom they consult on those occasions, as the witch and sold.

In the power and efficacy of charms, which they call griggories, they have an unlimited faith.—These are made of goat's skin, either with the hair on, or drest like Morocco leather, into various shapes and sizes, from the bigness of a shilling to the size and form of a sheep's heart, and stuffed with some kind of powder, and bits of paper, on which are written in Arabic sentences from the Alcoran; these they wear tied round their neck, waist, legs, and arms, and in such numbers that when a man is properly equipped for the field, the very weight of them with his gun is an exceeding heavy burthen.

Every griggory is assigned its particular office; one is to preserve him from shot, one from poison, another from fire, others from being drowned; and when a man happens to be killed, burned, or drowned, they only say his griggory was not so good as the person's who occasioned his death; but this must be understood when it happened from an enemy: but they pretend not to any griggory that can preserve them from shot out of great guns and swivels.

They tell many wonderful stories of their griggory men: the relation of one or two of them will set their amazing credulity, in these matters, in a stronger light than any thing else can do.—They tell you their conjurers will go into the water with their hair loose, and continue there half an hour; that they will come up with it perfectly dry, and *plaited* very neatly after the country fashion: that in order to discover theft or adultery they put a quantity of the bark of a particular tree into a small country earthen pot; this they fill full of water, and put upon the fire: after it has boiled some time, the conjurer drops a small stone into it, which he takes out two or three times with his hand, to convince the spectators that he feels no inconvenience from the heat of the water. He then orders the culprit to take the stone out; if he

is innocent the water will not burn him; if it does he is guilty; which is generally the case when any female culprits are tried for adultery.

Another method, *equally efficacious* as the former, is done as follows:-—The conjurer fills a pewter bason, or brass pan, full of water; then sets up a stick on each side; from the tops of the sticks he stretches a small cord, and from the center of that cord suspends a grain of pepper by a thread, just to touch, but not in the water; he then dips his fingers in the water and flirts them them in the culprit's face; if he is guilty a white film immediately covers his eyes, which deprives him of sight and causes most excruciating pain; but, if he is innocent, it has no effect. After the guilty party has made his confession the conjurer dips his fingers into the same water, and sprinkles a little in his face, which instantly relieves him from pain and restores him to sight. — These things are always done in open day, and before a concourse of people; and what is most extraordinary, it may be performed by proxy. The conjurers also pretend to foretell future events by casting sand or stones into the air.

A capital white trader, who has resided near thirty years upon the coast, arid who is otherwise a man of sense, told me, very seriously, he once thought as he supposed I did; but that he had seen so many surprising instances of their art he could no longer doubt.

In the accounts of most uncivilized countries that we read of, we find the office of physician is generally annexed to that of priest or conjurer; but here it is carried on by old women, and the cures they perform are truly astonishing; particularly in external wounds, by the use of simples, which their woods and fields afford in abundance.

The diseases they are most subject to are intermitting fevers and the hydrocele; the latter is supposed to be caused by the too frequent use of palm wine, and excess of venery. The venereal disease is frequent, but never attended with those dreadful symptoms which too often accompany it in Europe, and is always easily cured; neither can they be convinced that it proceeds from impure coition. The small-pox is endemial, but is not so frequent on the sea-coast as in the interior country.

I shall conclude with my best wishes for your health and happiness;

And believe me,

Dear Sir,

Your's truly.

LETTER VII.

Sierra-Leone, February 15, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

Your last letter reached me, I presume, much sooner than, you would expect, as it was only five weeks from the date in coming to Africa. Your pointing out to me those subjects concerning which you wish to be informed, is a pleasing and convincing proof of your confidence and esteem. I shall make this letter the best answer I am able to your first inquiry, namely, the present state and manner of the African trade.

The Portuguese were the original discoverers of the whole coast of Africa, and most of the trading places still retain the names given them by the first adventurers; they also formed many considerable settlements, vestiges of which are still remaining, not more remarkable for the durability of the materials with which they were constructed, than the excellence of the situations, which no doubt were then, and still are, the best that could possibly be fixed upon for trade; but the only settlements they now have on the coast of Africa are, Loanga St. Paul's, and Baffou, and a small fort at Whydah; from the former, which is their principal settlement, they send a great number of slaves to the Brasils.

In the infancy of the African trade, gold, ivory, wax, gums, ostrich feathers, and several species of medicinal, and dye woods, constituted what might then be termed the staple commodities of the country, and which were purchased from the natives with glass beads, coarse woollen cloths, brandy; and sundry coarse and cheap ornaments of brass or iron. Nor was it 'till the Europeans had formed settlements in the West Indies, that slaves became an article of traffick.

In proportion as the West Indies were cultivated, the demand for slaves increased, as they were found to answer for that purpose much better than Europeans, and were also procured at a much easier expence. The English and French were the first who began to cultivate the windward islands, which had ionly been visited by the Spaniards, their first discoverers, and in consequence were the first who entered into competition with the Portuguese in the African trade. The subsequent wars of that nation with the Dutch, and other European states becoming adventurers also, soon dispossessed them of the greatest part of it; but this competition intirely changed the nature of the trade; the natives soon availed themselves of the eagerness and avidity, with which each adventurer strove to out-vie the other, and their demands increased accordingly. Slaves as well as the other productions of the country, which were formerly purchased with a few cheap and simple articles, were not now to be bought without a more extensive and valuable assortment of cloths, fire arms, powder, shot, great variety of beads, and silver ware: and soon after this trade was regulated in much the same manner in which it is carried on at present.—Custom has authorized what fancy began; in assigning to almost every separate district in Africa a different choice of goods, particularly in their arms, beads, and cloth, and in affixing different denominations of value to the articles of trade. From Senegal to Cape Mount the name of the nominal value given to goods is called bars, from which it is denominated the bar trade; from Cape Mount to Cape Palmas they are called pieces, and therefore the piece trade; from Cape Palmas all along the Gold Coast to Whydah, they are termed Ackeys; from thence to Benin Pawns; and from Benin to Bonny,

New and Old Calabar, Camaroons, and Gaboon, Coppers.

It may be presumed that the sea-coast alone at first furnished the slaves which were sold to the Europeans; but the constant and increasing demand, which has unremittingly continued from the first time of their being brought to America, soon obliged the natives to have recourse to the back country; and many of them are now brought from a very great distance.

The modes of dealing and procuring slaves are in most places extremely different; but, as I cannot pretend to describe them all, I shall confine myself to a description of the method of trade of these parts only.

When the adventurer arrives upon the coast with a suitable cargo—which for this place consists of European and Indian cotton and linen goods, silk handkerchiefs, taffities, coarse blue and red woollen cloths, scarlet cloth in grain, coarse and fine hats, worsted caps, guns, powder, shot, sabres, lead bars, iron bars, pewter basons, copper kettles and pans, iron pots, hardware of various kinds, earthen and glass ware, hair and gilt leather trunks, beads of various kinds, silver and gold rings and ornaments, paper, coarse and fine check, and linen ruffled shirts and caps, British and foreign spirits and tobacco—he dispatches his boats properly equipped to the different rivers. On their arrival at the place of trade they immediately apply to the head man of the town, inform him of their business, and request his protection; desiring he will either be himself their landlord, or appoint a respectable person, who becomes security for the person and goods of the stranger, and also for the recovery of all money lent, provided it is done with his knowledge and approbation. This business finished, and proper presents made, (for nothing is done without) they proceed to trade either by lending their goods to the natives, who carry them up into the country, or by waiting till trade is brought so them.—The former is the most expeditious way, when they fall into good hands; but the latter is always the safest.

When the country people come down themselves to trade with the whites, they are obliged to apply to the inhabitants of the villages where the factories are kept, to serve as brokers and interpreters.

When a slave is brought to be sold he is first carefully examined, to see that there is no blemish or defect in him; if approved, you then agree upon the price at so many bars, and give the dealer so many flints or stones to count with; the goods are then delivered to him piece by piece, for which he returns so many stones for each, agreebly to its denominated value; and they always take care to begin with those articles which they judge most essentially necessary.

Exclusive of this method of dealing directly with the natives, transient ships, or those who only come for a small number, generally barter with the white traders resident on the coast, or with the factories established there, who take their whole cargo at once, and deliver them slaves, camwood, ivory, &c. according to their agreement, in a certain time.

From the great number of slaves which are annually exported and which, from this place and the parts adjacent, including Sherbro' and the Riomoonas, amounts to about three thousand annually, one would be led to imagine the country would, in time, be depopulated; instead of which no diminution of their numbers is perceived; and, from every account we have been able to acquire from the natives themselves, who travel into the interior country, it is extraordinarily populous: but how such a number

of slaves are procured, is a circumstance which I believe no European was ever fully acquainted with.

The best information I have been able to collect is, that great numbers are prisoners taken in war, and are brought down, fifty or a hundred together, by the black slave merchants; that many are sold for witchcraft, and other real, or imputed, crimes; and are purchased in the country with European goods and salt; which is an article so highly valued, and so eagerly sought after, by the natives, that they will part with their wives and children, and every thing dear to them, to obtain it, when they have not slaves to dispose of; and it always makes a part of the merchandize for the purchase of slaves in the interior country; yet, notwithstanding salt is in such great demand, the natives of the sea-coast will not permit the import of it in European vessels, because it would interfere with the only article of their own manufacture, which they have for inland trade.

The present custom and ancient tradition of the country, handed down from father to son, and from generation to generation, both teach us to believe that the practice of making, buying, and selling slaves, was in use in Africa long before our knowledge of it. Death or slavery were, and still are, the punishments for almost every offence. And every prisoner taken in battle was either put to death or kept as a slave. The fate of prisoners was also in a great measure determined by the season of the year, and the occasion they had for their services. If they were taken after the harvest was over, they were seldom spared; but those who were captured before the commencement of the rice season, experienced a different fate, as they were reserved to cultivate the rice-ground; and sold, after the harvest, to those tribes bordering on the sea, who had no other means of acquiring slaves than by purchase; or were kept as labouring slaves, and for ever fixed to the spot. This was the ancient custom of the country, and the modern practice is nearly similar, as they seldom dispose of their new slaves till the rice is in the ground,, or until it is cut. Hence, though the Europeans by the eagerness with, which they push this trade may be censurable so far, as they may some times, by their competition with each other, excite the avarice of individuals to procure slaves, by means as repugnant to their own laws as any act of dishonesty is to ours; yet I believe we may safely conclude, that slavery can never be abolished in a country like Africa, consisting of a prodigious number of small independent states, perpetually at variance, and under no restraining form of government, where the people are of a vindictive and revengeful spirit, and where the laws make every man a slave who is convicted of the most trifling offence. During the late war in which England was engaged with France, when the ships did not visit the coast as usual, and there were no goods to purchase the slaves which were brought down, the black merchants suffered many of them to perish for want of food, and said they should not come down again till the ships arrived. When questioned what the inland people would do with their slaves? they replied "cut their throats, as they used to do before white men came to their country." And I am credibly informed, however shocking to relate, that this was, during that period, the case with .great numbers. , To the above account it may be necessary to add a short description of the present state of slavery in Africa.

Among the Suzeés, Bullams, Bagoes, arid Timmaneys, three fourths at least of the inhabitants are slaves; and among the Mandingoes a much larger proportion.—It is not an unusual thing for a head man to have two or three hundred slaves of both sexes, exclusive of their domestics who are very numerous; and some of the principal men among the Mandingoes have from seven hundred to a thousand, who reside together distinct from their masters, in what they call their slave towns;—these people know and feel their situation, for they are employed in every servile and laborious occupation; but there is a

distinction to be made between the labouring and the house slave, the former is as it were fixed to the soil, and held in no higher estimation than any other animal that contributes to its cultivation; but the latter is in some respect considered as a branch of the family, assumes his master's name, and calls him father; yet these are hired out as sailors or labourers, not only to the Europeans, who are settled, or come to trade there, but also to each other; and their masters receive the wages of their labour. They are also obliged to attend their masters in their wars and predatory excursions, and frequently experience a change of them from that cause.—It is related of the North American Indians, that when any of them are taken in battle, and rescued from death, by being adopted into a family, they immediately consider themselves as a part of that tribe into whose hands they are fallen, and would the next day march to attack their former friends with as much zeal as if they had never known them, but had been brought up amongst their new connexions.

The conduct of the African slave when taken in battle, or sold to another master, is nearly similar, as instances are extremely rare of slaves deserting the service of a present to return to that of a former owner, (except in cases of extreme ill usage). Born a slave he knows no other situation; and it is alike indifferent to him, whether he be the property of this or that man, as long as he is provided with the necessaries of life.

It is not to be doubted but the ideas of a slave, when sold to one of his own country and colour, and when sold to an European, are extremely different. In the first instance his situation, and the custom of his country, soon reconcile him to the change; but in the latter case, he imagines the white man buys him either to offer him as a sacrifice to his God, or to devour him as food; and I have seen some of these poor wretched beings so terrified with apprehensions of their expected fate, as to remain in a state of torpid insensibility for some time, till, by kind treatment, and making them understand for what uses they were purchased, the impressions of fear were gradually lessoned; others have obstinately refused their food, while some of a bolder constitution have looked at a white man with amazement, but without fear, examined his skin and their own, opened his breast, and felt whether the hair on his head was fast, or not, and frequently burst into laughter at the contrast, and, to him no doubt, uncouth appearance of a white man.

To reason from ones own sentiments, we should be led to suppose that those attachments which must in every situation necessarily subsist between the sexes, where they are together, would make them regret a separation; but the facility with which they form new connexions, and the knowledge that their children are the properties of their masters, soon remove all anxiety on these occasions.

Yet notwithstanding the almost absolute power which the master has over the life and property of his slave, he cannot sell any who are born his slaves, or who, though purchased, have resided twelve months in his possession, without accusing them of some crime; but for an accusation they are never at a loss.

Witchcraft is the most general charge; and such is the astonishing folly and superstition of these people, whether a slave or freeman, that they generally acknowledge themselves guilty of the crime of which they are accused; but if a slave should plead not guilty, it would little avail him, as, on these occasions, the master is both the accuser and judge; and, if a freeman, he would be obliged to drink red water, which is a poisoned liquor prepared on the occasion. The analogy between this mode of trial and those

which formerly obtained in England is very striking.

The Mandingoes, who are extremely cruel in the treatment of their slaves, had carried this practice to such an excess, that, in 1785, there was a general insurrection. The slaves took an opportunity, when the principal part of their fighting men were out upon an expedition, to attack their masters; several of whom they put to death, and had their heads carried before them on poles, as ensigns of victory and liberty; they then set fire to the rice which was ready to be cut, which reduced the Mandingoes to the utmost distress, who afterwards retreated to their towns, which they fortified in such a manner, and so effectually stopped every avenue that led into the country from whence the Mandingoes could receive assistance, that their late haughty masters were under the necessity of suing for peace—whether they will return again to their former obedience, or assert their independence, is yet undecided.

Another method which they make use of to dispose of their slaves is, to put them in pawn either to the ships and factories, or the native traders, for a limited time; and if they are not redeemed at the expiration of that time, they become slaves to the person to whom they were pawned: but should a pawn be sent off before the time is expired, or even after, without giving notice to the person who pawned him, a palaver, or action, would be brought against the person so offending.

It is customary, indeed, for people of all ranks to put their children out as pledges, but then they are careful either to redeem them in time or to pawn them to the resident traders or established factories; and these pawns are generally considered as a protection for your property, and are employed in all domestic offices; but are equally liable to be sent off, if not redeemed in due time, as the pawned slave. And it should also be observed, that a person, whether a slave or the son of a freeman, if not redeemed at the expiration of the time limited for his redemption, becomes so much the absolute property of the person to whom he was pawned, that, should he be kept in the country for the purpose of a domestic, yet it is intirely at the option of his master whether he will ever after let him be redeemed though they should offer twenty for one, or he should be a son of the most powerful person in the country.

From the public papers you were so obliging to send me, I find much has been said on the subject of the African trade; particularly respecting the inhumanity of it; I must confess I do not see it in that light; and when you have attentively considered the particulars which I have related, I flatter myself you will join me in opinion. A pretty close parallel may be observed between the African condemned for some offence against the laws of his country, to be sold to a white man, and the English felon transported to a wild uncultivated country; for such Botany Bay is represented, and whose distance for ever excludes the hope of returning.

Every circumstance of grief or distress which can increase the affliction of the African at parting from his native country, very probably may be felt with redoubled force by the more enlightened European.

It might be urged in support of this commerce, that the cruelty of the laws in Africa, which punish with death, is mitigated by transportation, as slavery would undoubtedly be the portion of these unhappy people in their native country. This is unalterable; but if their situation in our West India islands is such as could be restored by wise and humane regulations, such a plan would redound much to the honour of the British legislature, and may be considered as the only effectual relief that, under the present circumstances of Africa, can be administered.

I know it is urged by writers on this subject, that all mankind are by nature free and equal, and that no one has a right to subjugate the person of another to slavery.

In the writings, however, of many religious and moral philosophers, it is contended, that though man, of created beings, holds the first link, yet that there are different degrees of excellence in the human race, as there are in every other animal, or descending link, of the great chain of nature.

In Africa experience fully authorizes our assent to this:—Trace the manners of the natives, the whole extent of Africa from Cape Cantin to the Cape of Good Hope, and you find a constant and almost regular gradation in the scale of understanding, till the wretched Cafre sinks nearly below the Ouran Outang.

LETTER VIII

Liverpool, Feb. 20, 1788.

DEAR SIR,

When a subject of great national importance is agitated, and the minds of men are much divided, it is undoubtedly the duty of every good citizen to communicate every kind of information to the public which his observation and experience may furnish. Upon this principle, therefore, and in compliance with your request, I shall endeavour, in as concise and as perspicuous a manner as I can, to state those facts which I have collected from my residence at SierraLeone, in Africa, and to suggest such observations, as appear particularly to concern the African slave trade.

To those who contend that this commerce should be reprobated as entirely repugnant to moral law and the gospel, this answer might perhaps be given—that there are, and necessarily must be, many institutions, considering the depravity of human nature, and the state of society in general, equally incompatible with morality and Christianity. It might likewise be added that, perhaps for wise reasons inscrutable to us, this system and others analagous to it may be tolerated by Providence. To those who insist that no part of mankind hath any right to oppress, captivate, or wage war upon any other part, for any purposes of dominion or interest, might it not be observed, that men are by nature equal, and consequently that in church and state there should be no subordination? these two positions, or speculative truths cannot be denied. The theory is admired by the philanthropist, but the practice, being attended with insuperable difficulties, is rejected by the politician.

Self preservation makes it occasionally necessary to have recourse to arms, and to attack a rival nation without any apparent provocation; and, for the good order of society, there must be gradations of rank, and a scale of political dependance.

I have been sorry to remark, that persons who have delivered their sentiments against the abolition of this trade, have been branded with the name of hirelings of slavery, and other opprobrious epithets. There are no *arguments* in *abuse*; and as I address myself only to persons of enlarged and liberal minds, I have nothing of that sort to apprehend. I shall therefore proceed by observing, that the scope of this letter will be confined to the mode of *procuring slaves* on the coast of Africa, and to the impolicy of abolishing a traffic of such essential importance to the naval interests of Great Britain.

A description of the method of procuring slaves in the part of Africa where I resided, I have, in some measure, anticipated' in my former letters from Sierra-Leone, which were written at a time when I had no idea of a design to abolish that trade being formed, or I should have applied myself with greater industry to have acquired a more particular knowledge of the manners and customs of the natives of the interior countries; I shall however endeavour to combat such assertions as are made use of by the advocates for the abolition of this commerce, as my own knowledge and information may suggest. That slaves are often captives taken in war, is a position I readily accede to; but that those wars are undertaken merely for the purpose of procuring slaves is by no means the case; for it is necessary to

observe, the king, or chief of a tribe, has not power to make war upon any other tribe without the consent and approbation of the principal people of his nation; and it can scarcely be conceived that such consent could be obtained to a measure that would draw down upon them the resentment of the neighbouring states. Neither is it (as is alledged) in any instance which has occurred to my observation or inquiries, by the instigation of the European traders; for, whenever the people on the sea-coast are at war, it puts an entire stop to trade; and I always found it my interest, as well as my inclination, to reconcile their differences, and to preserve peace. But surely no person can seriously imagine that the Africans are without passions, or that their dispositions are so placid, as to be unmoved by anger or resentment, and excited to action by avarice alone. In my former letters I have described the causes of the wars that subsisted in the countries about Sierra-Leone when I arrived there; and I believe I may with confidence assert, that such causes are generally the origin of their quarrels.

In answer to the charge of kidnapping slaves, I can only fay that I never heard of such a practice, nor do I know a word in their language expressive of such a custom ever having had existence.

Those who visit Africa in a cursory manner have few opportunities of acquiring any intimate knowledge of the country or its inhabitants, and are very liable to be mistaken in the meaning of the natives, from want of knowledge in their language, or in the jargon of such of them as reside upon the sea-coast and speak a little English; the European affixing the same ideas to the words spoken by the African, as if they were pronounced by one of his own nation.

A specimen of the conversation which generally passes on these occasions will elucidate this observation. *"Well, my friend, you got trade to day; you got plenty of slaves?" "No, we no got trade yet; by and by trade come, you can't go.*[1]*" "What, you go for catch people, you go for make war?" "Yes, my brother, or my friend, gone for catch people; or they gone for make war."*

By this conversation nothing more is meant by the African than that his brother, or his friend, was gone into the country to purchase slaves from the nations who are at war; or, perhaps, his own tribe might be at war with some of the neighbouring states; and as they in general sell their prisoners, (though even now it is not always the case, revenge sometimes proving too powerful for avarice) they may wish the ship to remain in expectation of having more prisoners to dispose of.

But I must again repeat that the primary cause of these wars is not merely to procure slaves, but arises from the captious, quarrelsome, and vindictive, disposition of the people. But it is not the prisoners made in the wars which the inhabitants of the sea-coast have with each other, nor those whom the laws of their country, in consequence of their crimes, punish with slavery, that constitute a tenth part of the slaves who are purchased by the Europeans; for, in fact, the inhabitants of the sea-coast are only the merchants and brokers, and carry the goods which they receive from the Europeans into the interior country, and there purchase the slaves from other merchants.

The nations who inhabit the interior parts of Africa, east of Sierra-Leone, profess the Mahometan religion; and, following the means prescribed by their prophet, are perpetually at war with the surrounding nations who refuse to embrace their religious doctrines (and I have before shewn the zeal with which the Mandingoes inculcate their faith).

1 By which they mean to signify their desire for the ship to stay.

The prisoners made in these religious wars furnish a great part of the slaves which are sold to the Europeans; and would, I have reason to believe, from the concurring testimony of many of the most intelligent natives, be put to death if they had not the means of disposing of them.

That death would be the fate of their prisoners, the example of the inhabitants of Madagascar, is sufficient proof; for since the Portuguese have declined dealing with them they put all their prisoners to death.[2]

It is also given as a reason for the abolishing this traffic; that the distinctions of crimes are multiplied, and every transgression punished with slavery, in consequence of their intercourse with Europeans.

Upon this head I shall observe, that the crimes of murder, poison, witchcraft, adultery, and theft, are always considered as capital, and have been punished with either death or slavery from time immemorial.

That the punishment of death, for the commission of these crimes, is remitted by their becoming slaves, I believe, in many instances, to be the case; yet, surely no one would adduce this circumstance as a proof of its inhumanity. Lesser offences, whether they respect the religious ceremonies, or particular customs of the country, are punished by fine; which, if the defendant is not able to pay, he becomes the slave of the plaintiff till redeemed: nor can he be redeemed without the prosecutor's consent.

Such are, and such always have been, from every information I could collect, the laws and customs of the natives of Africa at and about Sierra-Leone. Indeed it has greatly astonished me to find that the long intercouse they have had with Europeans, and particularly with the English, should have so little affected their manners and customs. Several white men, natives of Great Britain, are now resident in the country, who have remained there upwards of twenty years; but the African born children speak no other language than their mothers, and in every respect follow the customs of the country: and what appears to me as a strong proof of the little inclination they have hitherto shewn to profit by the knowledge of European arts is, that those black and Mulatto children (and there are not a few of them) who are sent to Europe for their education[3], on their return to their native country immediately reassume the manner of living, and embrace the superstitious customs and ceremonies of their countrymen. The only apparent influence it has upon them is in the exterior decoration of their persons, and the interior ornaments of their houses.

I have, in my letters before alluded to, described the state of slavery in Africa, and here it may not be considered as irrelevant to the subject to say a few words on the treatment of them in that country. The

2 The circumstance of the king of Dahomy putting his prisoners to death which he took in the Whydah war, has been made known to the privy council by an eye-witness.

3 The natives of Africa, in most parts where the English trade, are desirous of sending their children to England to learn what they call white man's book; a knowledge which they find necessary for carrying on their trade. There are always several of these children in Liverpool, who are boarded and educated by the merchants and masters of ships trading to Africa. Query. Might not this plan of educating the African children in England, and instructing them in the principles of the Christian religion, be a more likely means of civilizing and converting the natives to Christianity, than a suspension or abolition of our trade with them; which would for ever leave them involved in the dark errors of paganism, or to become converts to the disciples of Mahomet?

labouring slaves go to work before the sun rises, and continue in the field or wood[4]* till ten o'clock, about which time they take their repast, and I believe do not exceed an hour before they return again to their labour, which continues till sun-set. Their manner of punishing the labouring slave is severe—the offender is stretched upon the earth with his face downward, and is either held in that position by men, or fastened to four stakes drove into the ground, and is beaten with rods as thick as a man's finger, at the will of his master. The Mandingoes, according to a precept of the Alcoran, limit the number of stripes to be inflicted for small crimes to forty lacking one, and for greater offences to ninety and nine; but few survive the greater punishment. They also punish by confining the feet in wooden stocks, which, though not fixed, are too heavy to be removed by any person confined in them.—Whether the condition of a slave in Africa or the West Indies is materially different, I must, from the circumstances I have stated, leave the public to determine[5]. The freeman indeed who has felt and enjoyed the sweets of liberty, to him the deprivation of it, though condemned by the laws of his country, or the fate of War, must no doubt be painful: but the man who is born a slave, who feels no alteration in his circumstances from a change of masters, and who never even in idea felt the sentiments which liberty alone can inspire, as he suffers not by the comparison, so he is not so great an object of our commiseration. But what have we to do with the African laws; may not the rulers in that country inflict what punishments they think proper, they are not our subjects, neither are they ever likely to become so? The genius of the people, and of that religion, which will in all probability one day prevail throughout that extensive continent, are equally averse to the introduction of European manners or European laws.

But let us suppose that the slave trade was abolished by every nation in Europe, would it abolish it in Africa, or would it in any measure add to the happiness of the natives of that country? That it would not abolish it in Africa is an incontrovertible truth to those who are at all acquainted with the state of the interior country, or the commerce that is there carried on.

The troops of the emperor of Morocco are composed of black slaves purchased in the more southern parts of Africa: and it is not unlikely that other despotic princes, both in the south and east parts, may compose their armies in the same manner; and I am credibly informed that in the northern and eastern parts of Africa the slave trade is carried on in large caravans of two or three thousand slaves and people travelling together, and are dispersed over every part of Turkey, Persia, and Arabia: but, independent of the numbers exported out of the country, either from the western or other parts of the continent, by the Arab or by the European, there is an internal traffic amongst the natives.

Slaves are the medium, instead of coin, for the purchase of every necessary, and the supplying of every want; and every article is estimated, by its proportion, to the value of a slave. I need not point out to the intelligent reader the analogy between this custom and that of all countries where coin is not used, or where it is a scarce article; nor is it very material whether a guinea, a sheep, cow, or a slave, are the denominations of value.

But would the abolition of this trade add to the happiness of the natives of Africa? I conceive not; and for the same reason that would attend the abolition of the trade of this kingdom to foreign parts.—For what purpose do we carry on a trade with the East Indies and other foreign places, but to supply us with

4 The cutting down woods for the purpose of making rice plantations in Africa, is a much more laborious employment than the cultivation of sugar or cotton in the West Indies.

5 The slaves who are employed by the white people resident in Africa as domestics and sailors, find their situation so materially different from serving their black masters, that instances of desertion are very rare.

the luxuries (not the necessaries) of life? Of the latter our own country affords us abundance; but were we deprived of the former, we should, from being accustomed to consider them as contributing to our happiness, severely feel the want of them.

The African is placed in the same situation, by his commerce with the Europeans, in such productions as his country affords, and which to him were no new article of traffic; he is enabled to acquire not only the necessaries, but such articles also as add to the enjoyment of life; and in the possession of which he places no inconsiderable share of his happiness.

On the impolicy of abolishing the African slave trade I shall beg leave to offer a few observations, and to point out the most probable consequences of such a determination.

The French, in the year 1784, in order to encourage the African slave trade, granted a bounty of forty shillings per ton upon every vessel employed in that trade, and a further bounty of near eight pounds sterling upon every slave imported into certain parts of their West India islands.

This bounty has already enabled them to monopolize the whole trade of the coast of Angola, and to share equally with the English at Bonny and other places; and has consequently caused an increase of their shipping and seamen, and a decrease of ours in the same proportion.

If we thus suffer a diminution in the number of ships and seamen employed in this trade from competition only, what must be the consequence should an abolition of the trade itself take place, I leave to every unprejudiced reader to determine.

But it is not the loss of the ships and men employed in the slave trade only that would lessen our maritime strength, the West India trade also would soon be annihilated; for whatever visionary schemes may be proposed for supplies of people to cultivate the sugar islands, experience, the most unerring guide, has sufficiently proved that no Europeans can stand the climate when employed in the cultivation of the soil[6] .

But this is not the extent of the political evil which may arise, not only from a total abolition of the African trade, but is even to be dreaded, should any partial or injudicious restrictions be laid upon it.

Whenever any particular branch of commerce becomes no longer profitable to the parties concerned in carrying it on, either from restraints upon the trade itself, or want of encouragement from the government to enable them to meet the competition of rival states, or from whatever cause it may proceed, that trade will consequently either totally subside, or sink into insignificance: and if it be of such a nature that the instruments by which it was carried on cannot be employed in any other way, from a sufficient number being already in use; and if, at the same time, rival states are using every means to possess those instruments, in order to increase and extend that particular branch of trade, is it not to be apprehended that the proprietor of such instruments would dispose of, or employ them, where he alone could do it to advantage?

The merchant, his fortune, experience, factor's ships, and the seamen employed in them, are the

6 Independent of the expence, as no white man can be hired under one dollar per day.

instruments by which the African and all other foreign trades are carried on: and there cannot be a doubt, but that those merchants who have employed their fortunes in this trade, under the sanction and authority of the legislature of their country, would (should they be deprived of it either *in toto* or under any restrictions which would render it unprofitable,) immediately remove, with every consequent contingent, to that country where they could find encouragement. And it may not be unnecessary to mention that France and Spain are at this moment, and indeed long have been, holding out every inducement to the British merchants and seamen experienced in the African business, to enter enter into their service. Considering it in this point of view, it appears a measure fraught with the most alarming tendency to the naval interest of these kingdoms, and pregnant with such consequences (as would inevitably result from it) as cannot have been duly reflected upon by the warmest of its advocates.

It is not for the interest of the individuals only who are concerned in the African trade that I contend, it is for the welfare of the nation at large; for it is a truth that needs no illustration, that, for every ship withdrawn from this trade by the English, France or Spain would have an additional one, as the idea of abolishing it has never yet, I believe, been thought of in the cabinets of Versailles or Madrid.

The consequences which might ensue upon the abolition of the slave trade to the merchants trading to the West Indies, and the proprietors of the Sugar Islands; the influence it would have upon the trade of the East India Company,[7] and the manufacturers of this country, I must leave to those who are better informed to lay before the public; but to those whose objections against the African trade arise from the supposed inhumanity of it, I must beg leave to suggest a few particulars.

It is, I believe, a generally received opinion, that a nation without foreign wars, colonies, or foreign traffic, double it's numbers in the space of thirty or forty years; admitting this to be the case, when a country becomes over stocked with inhabitants whom they cannot employ, how are they to dispose of their superfluous numbers. They must either follow the example of the Chinese, and drown the supernumerary infants as soon as born, or they will enact sanguinary laws, which punish alike with death the prisoner of war and the perpetrator of crimes. To mitigate the punishment of death by slavery or banishment, is a proof of civilization operating in favour of humanity; and every circumstance which contributes to that end, should undoubtedly be attributed to the same cause.

The trade therefore which the Europeans carry on with the natives of Africa for slaves, is probably permitted by Providence as a means of preserving the lives of the many thousands who would otherwise be put to death, and are thus made useful members of society.

THE END.

7 East India cotton, and some silk goods, compose a part of every African cargo.