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African Sketches.

We are indebted to the Charleston Observer, for the following sketches. They are from the pen of Rev. J. L. Wilson, an American missionary, now at Cape Palmas, in Africa; and are, as we underof Africa is comparatively little known, and as it | them for it. is regarded with much interest as a missionary field, these sketches, drawn by an observer on the

FAIR HOPE, Cape Palmas, Oct. 1838.

My Dear Brother,-In compliance with your request, I have determined to give you some information about the native tribe of Africans among whom we live, and to whose welfare and improvement, our labours are more particularly di-

mouth of Cavally river, and confined almost entire- | individual may be, in amassing property, he cheer- | silly enough to expose themselves to such a snare. ly to the sea coast. Three-fourths of their terri- fully deposites almost the whole of it in the house | They have no magistrates, and all cases of distory is embraced in the colony of 'Maryland in of the head-man of his family, and seems amply pute, are brought before the people in assembled come. Liberia,' though they have reserved certain por- repaid for his toil in having the satisfaction to capacity for adjudication. They have no written tions of their land for their own use, and are inde- know that he has contributed largely to the com- laws, and such as they have, are made viva voce. pendent of the government of the colony. The | mon stock. whole tribe is divided into six independent dynas- The old men who stand at the head of their are no respects in which they can properly be ties, and the entire population is estimated to be respective families are much revered; and when considered a bloody-minded people. Banishment between twenty and thirty thousand inhabitants. | they are united in any particular measure, their | is the highest penalty ever enforced. Almost The extent of their territory is about thirty miles | influence is very considerable, and their decisions | every trespass is punished by fine; and that is coastwise, and varying in width from five to eight are seldom reversed. But there is not, I believe, regulated not so much by the nature of the offence the names of their chief settlements, viz. Fishtown, | them. Rocktown, Capetown, (Cape Palmas,) Graway, the Ivory coast is so denominated from the abun- | shape, and much larger than the generality of the | be submerged into the oil and taken out without | simple prohibition has been all-sufficient. dance of ivory which is sold by the natives. The houses. It is something of a pantheon, and is a injury, the individual of course is guiltless, and so Grain coast extends from Cape Mount, (thirty place of refuge for all culprits who fly to it. If a vice versa. But another that is more serious, and Bassa, and continued his wicked business in defimiles north of Monrovia,) to this place—a distance | criminal can enter the house, and lay his hands | I believe almost universal on the western coast of | ance of repeated orders from my predecessor to of two hundred and thirty miles. There is no upon the horns of the great greegree, no one but Africa, is the trial by 'sasa wood,' (called in the remove, was formally notified soon after my arrivery remarkable dissimilarity in the habits and the Bodio can remove it. In front of the Bodio's vicinity of Sierra Leone, and elsewhere, the red val here, to leave, under penalty of the confiscation character of the inhabitants of the different parts | house, important oaths are administered; and per- | wood,) and is regarded as an infallible and sove- | of his property. of this country; but my remarks will be confined jury, under such circumstances, is guilt of the reign means of detecting witchcraft. The bark of At the same time, he was distinctly informed, ed with them than with any others.

as the time when they formed their first settlement as the badge of his office, and if that should by if the stomach is unable to disgorge itself, death quite ready to comply with this reasonable order, on the sea-coast, it is somewhat difficult to com- any means be removed, or lost, he would lose his is sure to ensue, and the person, of course, guilty and begged permission to remain only until he mand satisfactory information. The people them- office, and be subject a very heavy fine. He is sub- of a great crime. The quantity of the decoction could procure the means of removing his property. history of their fore-fathers, and their traditions are | He must never sleep out of his own town. The cient to destroy life, though it possessed no ingre- remained, he should not deal with the natives exlied upon. The Portuguese traders who frequent- allowed to sit down except on a monkey skin, violent. When there are decisive evidences of family. ed this part of the coast more than two centuries | which he always carries in his hand. He is re- approaching dissolution, no mal-treatment what- Instead, however, of removing, he set himself ago, speak of a large and powerful community, stricted from certain kinds of food, and on burial ever is considered too severe, and the person often about enlarging and fortifying his place—increawho were denominated the 'Mena people,' (call- days, he is not allowed to eat any thing at all until expires under the most brutal severity. And after sing the means of his business and engaging the ed on modern maps Mandoo,) from whom, it is the sun has gone down, He can wear only one he expires, the corpse is dragged all over the native princes to defend and protect him. To my probable, that all of the coast people have sprung. kind of cloth. If a stranger has a complaint to town, and he finds a resting place for his mortal subsequent orders he paid no attention, feeling hood of the Kroo country, and spread themselves to the Bodio, and makes known his complaint, ignominious cause. along the beach, north and south, to the distance of who calls a town council, and presides at it, but The trial by 'sasa wood' is always voluntary fore. After waiting a sufficient time to see that several hundred miles. The Grebo tribe, as evi- has no power to decide any case without the con- on the part of the accused; he is not compelled mere words, or even threats, were without effect, dently appears from their character and habits, as | currence of the people. The wife of the Bodio is | to drink it, but death is preferable to the suspicion | I despatched an armed force under the direction of well as the similarity of their language, to have a person of still more sanctity. Any lewd inter- of witchcraft. And many, I have no doubt, drink the Marshal of the Colony, to seize his property, now called Harper, with the view of drawing out | weather be clement or inclement. peeped at the white man, but would not venture | the Bodio is. ters of general interest. The wars which they drinks, and wears what he pleases. have had among themselves, have made two par-

by any particular bonds. Each one of these communities has an officer, whom they call their king, in their transactions | is the body of men who are called the 'soldiery.' | dency. If the whole of the property of an indivi- | coon in safety-not a man was hurt. The men in hence they call their most prominent man king, high-handed and exorbitant exactions upon the and sometimes governor. In this, however, they people, both in times of peace and war. This is whole of their property swept away three or four cessful charges were made in the woods—by ing that can be raked up. Their government has have their property set at the mercy of a body of oracles. not one single feature of royalty. So remote is it | men who have no mercy.

There are four prominent officers of state, viz. and sometimes four-fold.

ties in feeling, though these are not linked together | something of a civil magistrate among the soldiery | naturally seem to be a great drawback to indus- | hazardous attempt, but by a judicious sortie from in times of peace.

perhaps, by hearing that the governors of Euro- | nevertake away a man's property, however, with- | and temporary banishment. When they feel a | woods, whence they returned occasionally, keeppean colonies along the coast, are highest in autho- out alleging some sort of crime against him, which disposition to provoke their neighbours, they gene- ing carefully under cover of the skirt of the wood, rity, without knowing that they are subject to a they are never at a loss to start. The charge of rally seize some of their people and put them in and fired into the baracoon. higher authority at home. In many cases there is | witch-craft is one that they can always bring for- | stocks, or fasten them in the roof of a house, and | Finding the war likely to be protracted, and a furious quarrel to determine, a few hours before | ward with some degree of plausibility, and the | smoke them with pepper. Sometimes they fill | being threatened with additional enemies from the hand, who shall be represented as king on board of result of the prosecution, if nothing worse, always their eyes, nose, and mouth with pepper. They leeward, I returned to Monrovia in the schooner any vessel that may anchor near their town. Usu- turns a bullock into the hands of the soldiery. never enter into hostilities precipitately, for and brought down a re-enforcement with two field ally they select a stout and good looking man, and | But the people understand their interest, and | they firmly believe that God will not prosper them | pieces and a large supply of ammunition, but by he attired in all the extras of ornament and cloth- | would prefer to bring voluntary offerings, than to | in an unfair cause, and they always consult their | this time the natives had grown heartily tired of

abolish, suspend, and execute all laws whatever. I did not belong to the institution, he would be se- | referred to the arbitrations of a third party. All | produced the desired result, and the next day I

No offices, whatever, are hereditary, and there is | verely fined upon his return home. There is no | of their treaties are held sacred. They have nothing like Caste. Kings, governors, chiefs, restraint upon this body, powerful as they must several ways of ratifying them. The most commen, women and children-eat, drink, sleep, and necessarily be, but their own interest. As it is mon is the following: the parties concerned are mingle together in the common affairs of life, with | constituted by nearly an equal representation from as little restraint as the herds of cattle which each family, and as all fines imposed upon indigraze upon their meadows. Kings think it no de- | viduals must be paid out of the family stock, they traction from their dignity to perform the most | would naturally restrain each other, and prevent irksome drudgery, and to labour, side by side, as much lawless aggression as possible. They do with their poorest subjects, provided there is no not often oppose themselves to the influence of the stand, to be followed by others. As the condition one to witness it, who would be likely to deride old men, and I am not aware that they ever reverse their decisions. But the old men are careful not In some respects their government is patriarchal. to infringe upon the prerogatives of the soldiery. Each family, in the male line, keeps itself entirely | They enforce all the decisions that are passed by | same knife; by this means their blood is mingled, distinct from the others, and there is always one | the people in a collective capacity. If any one | and they become one people. Treaties thus ratispot, will no doubt be acceptable to our readers. representative head, who is the guardian of the refuses to pay a fine that may be imposed, it is fied are as inviolable as any in the world, and may property, and the protector of the rights of the only necessary to report the case to the soldiery, be relied upon with implicit confidence. family. When a family becomes too large to and they are always glad of an opportunity to intertransact business without inconvenience, it is di- | fere, for besides collecting the money, they always vided and subordinate heads are appointed. These | indemnify themselves abundantly for their pains. subordinate heads transact all their affairs sepa- In times of war, they may seize and kill whatsorately, except in matters of great moment. The ever cattle they may choose, and the owner must head man of each family receives and holds all the | not demur. If he charges the soldiery with stealing, money and other property of its different members. | they employ the following test for their acquittal: You will have learned before this, that the peo- He is responsible, however, for every disburse- the accused is taken to the water's side, and an ple call themselves the Grebo tribe, though they ment from the common stock. He is required to open basket provided. He is told if the basket are better known to Europeans as a part of what | purchase wives for the young men, and is politically | hold water, the soldiers are guilty, but if it runs is called the Fishermen tribe. They inhabit the responsible to the people at large for the payment out, it proves his charge to be a false accusation, southern extremity of what is called on our maps of all fines which may be imposed upon the mem- and he is fined three fold for his audacity. The be occupied with colonies like those of Liberia the Grain coast, reaching from Fishertown to the bers of his family. However successful any one mode of trial is well known, and very few are

They never inflict capital punishment, and there

sprung from the same race. About the time of course with her is always most severely punished. it in the confident assurance that it can do them no their forming their first settlement on this part of On no consideration whatever would she be harm, who sacrifice their lives thereby. I have seen Strict orders were given to the Marshal, to use no the coast, there is some doubt. Probably two cen- allowed to be absent from home one night. If the persons far gone under its influence recovered by violence in the execution of his duty, unless turies ago. It is said that a Portuguese trader | town burns down, and months elapse before it is | the use of a powerful emetic. It generally proves | opposed by force. On the approach of the expeonce fixed himself on the site of the town that is rebuilt, she must sleep on the spot, whether the more fatal to the aged and infirm; and perhaps dition, the slaver ran away, taking his slaves, one-third of those who drink it die. If an indi- about 14 in number,—and the baracoon was taken the natives to trade, who were then quite shy of The Tihbawah stands at the head of the soldiery, vidual drinks it with impunity, his character possession of without resistance. It was soon white men, but was unsuccessful, and soon de- and may be regarded as their judicial head. He is comes forth like gold well tried; and the same found, however, that the slaver had no intention of camped. The fore-fathers of the Grebo people, subjected to almost all of the restraints to which person is seldom subjected to it more than once. quietly yielding his property and abandoning his

began to frequent the coast. Originally, the Grebo | (tower tail) is a little singular, but it is in strict | rest of his townsmen in accumulating property, | sides of the baracoon. people formed but one settlement, and that was accordance with the notions of Africans. Here, he becomes the subject of jealousy, and he lifts constituted of nine men, who were the progenitors as every where else in the world, the post of most his head above the common level only to be I had despatched with an extra supply of ammuof the nine families, which keep themselves dis- | danger, is the post of most honour. Hence, the | brought down. Some charge or other is preferred | nition, &c. were compelled to put back through tinct, even to the present day. As their numbers | rear-most rank in retreat, which is much more | against him. He has grown too saucy—he has | stress of weather, without reaching their destinaincreased, they found it necessary to spread them- | common in their warfare, is the place of most | defrauded the people—he is guilty of witchcraft— | tion. But by a remarkable providence, an Ameriselves, and they have formed the settlement above | danger, and the man who has bravery enough to | or something of the kind is got up and used as a | can slave vessel fell into my hands the same day, referred to. There is no particular functionary, occupy it, is, of course, the commander-in-chief. pretext for confiscating his property, and in the in which I immediately embarked with a small nor any one community among them, that has any | His authority is never called out until war is de- | course of a few hours he is reduced from affluence | suite and a quantity of ammunition, and proceeded decided ascendency over the others. They are clared, and then he has more power than any other to the most abject poverty. So liable are they to to Little Bassa, where I arrived on Friday morentirely independent of each other, though they | individual in the community. He is subjected to | to palavers of this kind, that an opulent man | ning, almost at the moment the attack commenced. sometimes come together, to concert upon mat- none of the restrictions above mentioned, but eats, never thinks of keeping all of his money at the We landed in the face of the enemy, who occusame place, and seldom lets it be known how much | pied the beach and the wood skirting the path Ibadio is associated with the Tihbawah, and is | property he has. This want of protection would | which led to the baracoon. It was apparently a try. But with Africans it is not so. They scarcely | the baracoon, and a well timed fire from our boats, But the most powerful and efficient organization | know the meaning of discouragement or despon- | we succeeded in landing and reaching the barawith foreigners; and another they call the gover- They constitute the bone and sinew of the body dual is swept away in one hour by fire or by the the baracoon had been hotly pressed all the mornor. But these persons have no authority that can | politic. It embraces the chief part of the young | violence of a mob, he sets to work immediately, | ning, and their small stock of ammunition was properly entitle them to these appellations. They and middle-aged of the men. They fight the and in good glee, to repair his loss. Indeed I have nearly expended, when a good supply was thus have heard of the kings of Europe, and they sup- wars of the people, and they repay themselves never known but one native who ever gave way to providentially afforded them. The fight continued pose them to be the richest men in the world; and abundantly for their toil and exposure, by their the evil of despondency, and that case was only with little remission throughout the day, but we are not uniform; for they are often puzzled to an elective body. No one can be admitted to the least | which the natives were driven back and suffered know whether the king or governor should be up- | rank except by paying an initiation fee, which is | dejection or relaxing their efforts to gain a new | severely. The next morning the battle was repermost—they sometimes show the utmost defer- generally a bullock. They receive a great many fortune. Banishment for life is seldom ever en- newed by the natives, but with less vigour than ence to the governor, and comparatively little to presents to present to presents to present to presents to present to present to presents to present to pr their king. They have been influenced to this, selves to much that is not given to them. They murder is punished by fine and soon made them retreat 'deeper into the

required each to take a mouthful of water from the same vessel, and to squirt it out in the presence of witnesses, at the same time calling upon God, the devil, and the town, to bear witness. They have another that is employed on more extraordinary occasions, particularly when a league of amity is to be established for the first time. An incision is made upon the back of the hands of persons belonging to the two parties, with the

Yours truly, &c.

Colonization and the Slave-Trade.

Colonization has often been charged with being the handmaid of slavery, and the colonies with secretly abetting the slave trade. The annexed very interesting letter from Governor Buchanan, of Liberia, to Rev. Dr. Proudfit, Corresponding Secretary of the N. Y. Colonization Society, places the subject in its true light. Let the African coast and Cape Palmas, and the slave trade would be forever annihilated. We doubt if it can be done in any other way,—at least for many years to

In spite of the most vigilant efforts of the British cruisers for many years past, it is said the abominable traffic is carried on now to a greater extent than at any former period. Annexed is Governor Buchanan's letter, above alluded to .- N. Y. Journal Commerce.

Monrovia, 13th Aug. 1839.

Reverend and Dear Friend: You are already miles. On some of our largest maps you will see any thing like a political organization among as by the ability of the delinquent to pay. For aware of my early steps against the slave trade stealing, they are required to restore two, three, the manifestoes and proclamations with which I attempted to drive the slavers from our waters, and Cavally. The last mentioned place is the Bodio, (probably buhdeho, 'father and mother,') Their belief in witchcraft is a fertile source of and put an end to every kind of intercourse bedividing point between the Ivory and the Grain | Tihbawah, (the drum-keeper,) Worabank, (the most disgraceful charge | tween them and our citizens;—but I have now to coast. The Grain coast receives its name from tower's tale,) and Ibadio. The two first are sacred that can be preferred against one. They have inform you of more serious measures and more the immense quantities of Malaguette pepper officers. The Bodio is the protection of the peo- several modes of trial by ordeal. A very common successful results-I mean more successfully only which is raised in this part of the country; and ple and the town. His house is of a different one is to dip the hand into boiling oil. If it can as regards the slavers—with the Colonists, the

A slaver, who had established himself at Little

chiefly to the Grebo tribe, as I am better acquaint- | deepest die, If the Bodio lay his hands upon an | the tree is procured, and from it a strong decoction | that Little Bassa was within our territorial jurisindividual who is to drink 'sasa wood,' he goes is prepared, which the accused is required to diction, where, by the laws of the Colony, all In relation to the origin of this people, as well free. He wears a plain iron ring around his ankle, drink. If he throws it up, he is innocent. But slave dealing was prohibited. At first, he seemed selves seem to have felt but little interest in the jected to a great many singular and silly restraints. Which is sometimes administered, is of itself suffi- This was granted, on condition that while he too strongly tinctured with the fabulous to be re- rain must never touch his head, and he is never dient of poison. Death, occasioned by it, is very cept so far as to procure articles of food for his

They penetrated to the sea-coast in the neighbour- lodge against an individual in the goes remains among others who have fallen by the same himself now too strong to regard my threats, and continued purchasing and shipping slaves as bedestroy the baracoon, and release the slaves .-The will of the people is the law of the land, profitable business. After getting the slaves out of near enough to trade. This, probably, was pre- The Worabank is commander-in-chief in time and no man can prosper who does not conciliate the way, his allies, the natives, came up in great vious to the period when vessels from other nations of war. The manner in which he gets his name, public opinion. If he is more successful than the numbers, and commenced a furious attack on all

In the meantime two small colonial vessels that

fighting 'Merica man' and had drawn off to their Their international laws are equitable and wise. I towns. I then despatched messages to King Bahfrom that arbitrary despotism which prevails in | The institution savours a little of masonry. It | Their families are so much interwoven, and their | Gay and Prince, the authors of the war, demancertain parts of Africa, that it may be regarded as | entitles its members to special privileges abroad. | marriages are so constant, that the interest of any | ding the immediate surrender of the slaves taken the purest specimen of republicanism to be found | If a soldier goes into a different community, and | one community requires that they deal with others | from the baracoon, as the only condition on which in the world. The people govern, and they govern | finds the soldiery eating and drinking collectively, | as they would wish to be dealt with; and they | I would grant them peace—and threatening in en masse. All proceedings, whether legislative, as frequently occurs, he has a right, nolens volens, have too many mutual drawbacks and checks case of their non-compliance, to carry war into judicial, or executive, are conducted by the peo- to take his seat among them, and share with them upon each other to allow of any high-handed or the heart of their country and punish them effecple, in a body; and the majority, of course, enact, whatever they have. If this was done by one who unjust procedure. Litigated points are frequently tually for their attack on us. These messages