They have a custom (like our pious & sapient forefathers of Salem) of attributing all the great calamities of life to witchcraft particularly all sudden deaths of the middle aged & active. In such cases the Greegree man, Doctor or Grand Devil (synonymous terms) is consulted & he points out the witch or incantator offending. In order then to prove whether the suspected is actually guilty he is compelled to drink large quantities of the decoction of a poisonous tree called Sassy wood. Should he survive he is deemed innocent, but otherwise, should it prove fatal. Quite a number have been subjected to this ordeal since our settlement here & some have died in the most excruciating tortures. Should the culprit vomit freely within a half hour or so after taking it before it has time to affect the system or inflame the stomach he experiences but little inconvenience from it. But should ~~[illegible]~~ it remain on the stomach an hour or two, that organ & the whole alimentary canal become highly inflamed. Constant & violent vomiting & purging succeed & continue until ~~de~~ the subject is completely exhausted. And to add greatly to his misery he ~~is placed~~ is placed, at the moment of taking the decoction, under a guard of soldiers, who keep him constantly in motion, racing about on the sand beach in the hot sun hardly allowing him rest during his violent evacuations. When his strength begins to fail, they force him to continue his movements by sharp sticks knives & bayonets. The poor wretch now becomes frantic & vainly attempts to revenge ~~himself~~ upon his persecutors; until completely overcome by the potency of the poison & his exhausting exertions he sinks upon the sand & expires in the most excruciating agonies. One of the natives who has frequently officiated as soldier of the guard in such cases, informed me that the torments of the victims were so great ~~at~~ in the last stages, that ~~they~~ the guards were frequently obliged to go to a distance & turn their backs, that they might not see their ~~[illegible]~~ distortions or hear their wailings & blasphemies. Since our residence here, nine months four or five have ~~been subjected to this ordeal, but two [illegible] have died which~~ two cases of which have terminated fatally. But a few days since one of the head men & one who has uniformly befriended the colony was arraigned & found guilty of bewitching standing members of ~~the~~ family of one of his rivals & doomed to the trial of Sassy wood. He had taken his first portion before I was informed of it & they had commenced driving him about. It had a very severe effect upon the poor fellow but he was quite comfortable at night. But the Grand Devil declared that inasmuch as it wrought thus hard with him ~~that~~ he must turn to, & take it again on the morrow. Being informed of this I went down early in the morning, called a palaver & endeavoured to save the man [illegible]. But all reason, entreaties, gifts & threatenings were of no avail. ~~& [illegible]~~ They appeared to bear him a deep grudge which nothing but his death could appease. On returning home I was informed that they have an ancient rule something like this: that in case a man is condemned to drink Sassy Wood that any friend of superior rank or standing can clear him by taking him by the hand when the potion is about to be administered, but the one so doing takes upon himself the responsibility & is liable either to supply his place or pay heavy damages; that in this case the king wished & had attempted to clear Popo (the prisoner) but he knew the consequences would be dangerous so great was the excitement against him. Upon hearing this I immediately set off for the sand beach & arrived just as they were driving off his wives & children who had been taking their last farewells. About five hundred ~~people~~ were collected & formed into a hollow square, in the midst of which was his Satanic majesty in full panoply, just raising a [illegible] two gallon pot filled to the brim with the poisonous decoction, to the lips of the wretched Popo. Poor fellow he was so altered from his yesterday's drenching & the dismal prospect before him that I ~~[illegible]~~ should not have recognized him, had he been mixed with the crowd; his countenance was despair itself. I briefly told them that if any one had any palaver for Popo that I would satisfy him, according to our laws & would be responsible for all they could prove against him; then taking him by the hand

Maryland Historical Society

The Maryland State Colonization Society Papers

II. Correspondence Received
A. Letter Books

2. 1834--1835

1834