INFLUENCE OF THE COLONY ON THE NATIVES.

On the first settlement of Cape Palmas, we stood in the same relation to the inhabitants of the neighboring towns that we now do with regard to those of our newly acquired territory, and it is but reasonable to suppose that our future intercourse with them will produce similar results; and I have but to give you correct information with regard to what I conceive to be the effect which the establishment of the colony has produced upon those in our immediate vicinity, in order that you may form some conception of the vast field of usefulness which the operations of your society have already opened to the christian and philanthropist. But be not too sanguine, nor expect that the inhabitants of Cape Palmas are already a civilized christian people, or that the majority of them are not averse to any foreign innovation or improvement. To a superficial observer they are the same indolent, naked, grovelling savages we found them two years since: but to one who is not only acquainted with the African character, but who personally knows almost every individual, and has frequent and interesting intercourse with them both in an individual and public capacity, they present a far different aspect. I have in a former communication stated to you that they paid no regard to a solemnly ratified contract; this was fact, and implied that they had no correct moral sense, certainly not what we would term such. They were, no doubt, sensible that this was wrong; they knew that it was so received by us; but this availed nothing, so long as they possessed neither conscience nor a sense of shame to incite them to a different course of conduct. Now in this respect there has been a material change; whether induced by our precepts, example, or power, or all combined, it matters not. At this time no respectable inhabitant of our neighbouring towns will forfeit his word sooner, or for a less plausible pretext, than ordinary men in civilized life.

I also stated that theft was tolerated, and even considered praiseworthy, in case the affair was managed adroitly. From this habit we suffered severely and long, and do so now to some extent; but it at one time seemed irremediable. No course seemed to promise any alleviation from our sufferings in this respect, until, from long intercourse with us, they found that a change must be effected, or such serious consequences would ensue, as effectually to prevent their reaping any of the proposed advantages ensuing from a connection with the colony. It may not be amiss to give you a brief detail of a palaver held upon this subject, as it will serve in a measure to show you how much of reason, persuasion and force are necessary in order to carry a point with these people. Having suffered severely from their almost continued depredations, and finding no hopes of a change of affairs from the authority of the king and head-men, I called a grand palaver, and depicted to them in the strongest possible manner our severe sufferings from this cause,

the injustice of their proceedings, and forcibly impressed upon them the necessity I should be under of proceeding to extreme measures of hostilities or reprisals, and the mutual injurious effect that must ensue to both parties from such a course. I told them that I should begin by making reprisals for all articles proved to be stolen by the natives, whether the thief could be detected or not, throwing the business of detection and proof upon them altogether. Having heard my proposal, they required time to consider upon it, and after talking the palaver in their own town some few hours, returned, and made the following objections to my proposition. They acknowledged that we suffered severely from this cause, that they were sensible a great part was committed by their people, that the course heretofore pursued was nothing like a remedy or preventive, and that they were willing, inasmuch as I was a white man, and had superior knowledge to them, to abide by such laws as I should make to remedy the evil, not repugnant to reason and justice. But that, what I had proposed was new to them; that they could not learn by their people who had visited the white man's country, that any laws of that nature were ever made. That as we were one people, and under one flag, I had no right to make one class more than another suffer for all the thefts. That had we been two different tribes, having no political connection, and could prove that their people had injured our persons or property, they would be bound as a people to make restitution. That in case I should make any law affixing a reasonable penalty for the crime, and lay down the proper course for detecting and arresting the thief, they would accede to it and support it. They demanded that some course should be pursued with them as with our own people. That a constable should be appointed, and a court held in like manner as if an American colonist was to be tried for the like offence. To a course of reasoning like this there was no demurring, and accepting of their proposal, I agreed to try this course for six months, and in case it proved in a great degree effectual, to adopt it as permanent; but in case their constables were remiss in their duty, or there were any open opposition to the full exercise of their authority among their people, I would at the end of six months make reprisals for all losses which could be reasonably attributed to them. I accordingly appointed six constables and six justices of the peace, and explained to them their duty when acting in their several official capacities. When any individual fell under suspicion, notice was immediately to be given to one of the justices, who would order the person to be arrested, and if the nature of the evidence warranted it, have him bound over to appear at the next court of monthly sessions, where, after such cases as might occur between the colonists had been tried, a court would be formed by the agent and two of the native justices, the case properly investigated, and sentence passed. This law went into operation about six months previous to my leaving the colony, and quite a number of cases have been

Maryland Historical Society

The Maryland State Colonization Society Papers

VIII. Commissions and Reports

D. Reports of the Board of Managers
1835-47