was that the colony was going on in but a languishing condition; that the funds of the company were likely to fail, as they received no return of profit to keep them up; that they were then in treaty with the government to take the establishment off their hands; but that in no event should they be willing to receive more of these people from the United States, as it was that portion of settlers who had gone from the United States, who, by their idleness and turbulence, had kept the settlement in constant danger of dissolution, which could not have been prevented, but for the aid of the Maroon negroes from the West Indies, who were more industrious and orderly than the others, and supported the authority of the government and its laws.

I think I learned afterwards that the British government had taken the colony into their own hands, and I believe it still exists.

The effort which I made with Portugal, to obtain an establishment from them, within their colonies in South America, proved also abortive.

You inquired, further, "whether I would use my endeavours to procure such an establishment, secure against violence from other powers, and particularly the French." *Certainly, I shall be willing to do any thing I can* to give it effect and safety.

But I am but a private individual, and could only use endeavours with individuals; whereas *the National Government* can address themselves at once to those of Europe, to obtain the desired security, and will unquestionably be ready to exert its influence with those nations to effect an object so benevolent in itself, and so important to a great portion of its constituents; indeed, *nothing is more to be wished than that the United States would themselves undertake to make such an establishment on the coast of Africa.*

Exclusive of motives of humanity, the commercial advantages to be derived from it might defray *all its expenses;* but for this the national mind is not prepared. It may, perhaps, be doubted whether many of these people would voluntarily consent to such an exchange of situation, and but few of those who are advanced to a certain age in habits of slavery would be capable of governing themselves. This should not, however, discourage the experiment, nor the early trial of it. And propositions should be made, with all the prudent caution and attention requisite to reconcile it to the interest, the safety, and prejudice of all parties.

Accept the assurance of my respect and esteem.

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

This letter not only informs us of the efforts made by Mr. Jefferson, to obtain a suitable territory for the colonization of the free people of colour, but also gives us to understand the deep interest which he felt in the subject, and his readiness to cooperate with the Legislature of his native State, in carrying their views into full effect.

All the proceedings of the Legislature of Virginia were in secret sessions; and their attempts to acquire a suitable territory for a colony having failed, nothing further was done until the year 1816, when Charles Fenton Mercer, Esq., having become a member of the Virginia Legislature, heard, by mere accident, of the secret resolutions which had been passed at a former session, and having satisfied himself of their nature, by reference to the recorded minutes of the House, resolved to bring up the subject anew. But as we have Mr. Mercer's own account of this matter in a speech delivered at a public dinner given to him in Charleston, Kenhawa county, we will give it in his own words.

Having been complimented, among other things, on account of the part which he had taken in forming the Colonization Society, he replied as follows:

"With respect to the first of them, (the secret resolutions,) I can truly say, that the intelligence broke in upon me like a ray of light through the profoundest gloom, and by a mere accident which occurred in the spring of 1816, that upon two several occasions, very early in the present century, the General Assembly of Virginia had invited the aid of the United States to obtain a territory, beyond their limits, whereon to colonize certain portions of our coloured population. For the evidence of these facts, then new to me, I was referred to the clerk of the Senate, by the friend who revealed them, and in the private records of that body I found them verified.

"It was then too near the close of the session of the Legislature to attempt immediate action on the subject; but in a few weeks after this, I concerted with Francis S. Key, of Georgetown, and Elias B. Caldwell, of Washington, in the District of

Maryland Historical Society

The Maryland State Colonization Society Papers

XIV. Books

3.

A History of Colonization on the West Coast of Africa

by Archibald Alexander, Philadelphia, 1846