
THE REDEMPTIONERS

AND THE

GERMAN SOCIETY OF MARYLAND.

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GERMAN SOCIETY OF MARYLAND,
AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

Read by Louis P. Hennighausen at a Meeting of the Society for the History of the
Germans in Maryland, held on the 9th of January, 1888.

IT is not my object in this paper, to give a complete history of the German Society of Maryland, but only of the condition of public affairs which led to its organization, and of its activity and success in fighting a system of a sort of slavery of white people then in existence in the State of Maryland.

In law this system was known as an apprenticeship, or service entered into by a free person, voluntary, by contract for a term of years, on wages advanced before the service was entered. The servants by performing the service were redeeming themselves and therefore called "Redemptioners." In practice however, with a certain class of people and in instances hereinafter related, this system was as revoltingly brutal and degenerating as the negro slavery abolished in our own time in its worst aspects.

It was conceived and had its beginning in the harmless and in some respects benevolent idea, to help a poor person in Europe, who wished to emigrate to America, and had not the money to pay for his passage across the ocean, by giving him credit for his passage money, on condition that he should work for it after his arrival here, by hiring as a servant for a term of years, to a person who would advance him his wages, by paying his passage money to the owner or master of the vessel.

Lord Baltimore found this system in vogue in the colony of Virginia, before he came to Maryland, and he adopted it in order to colonize more rapidly his province of Maryland, and fixed the time of service for redemption at five years. By an act of the Assembly passed in 1638, this term of service was reduced to four

years, but by the act passed 1715 all servants above the age of 25 years were to serve five years, those between the age of 18 and 25 years to serve six years, those between the age of 15 to 18 years to serve seven years, and all below 15 years up to their 22d year of age.

In most cases, according to the character and temper of the master and the intelligence and obedience of the servant, these servants were well treated. A so-called custom of the country grew up, to give to the servant at the expiration of his service a reward, which was in 1637 (Md. Archives case of Henry Spinks) judicially ascertained to be: One cap or hat, one new cloth, or frieze suit, one shirt, one pair of shoes and stockings, one ax, one broad and one narrow hoe, fifty acres of land and three barrels of corn, which Henry Spinks was adjudged to be entitled to out of the estate of his deceased master Nicholas Harvey. Many of these servants, after serving their time, became prosperous and even wealthy citizens, it was no disgrace to be or to have been a servant, and intermarriages between masters and servants were not of rare occurrence. There are instances on record when school teachers, and even ministers of the Gospel, were in this manner bought by congregations to render their services in their respective offices. Laws were passed for the protection of the masters and of the servants. Whilst this is the bright side of the Redemptioners' life, it had also a very dark side. The Redemptioners on their arrival here, were not allowed to choose their masters nor kind of service most suitable to them, they were often separated from their family; the wife from the husband, and children from their parents, were disposed of for the term of years, often at public sale to masters living far apart, and always to the greatest advantage of the shipper. I have read many reports of the barbarous treatment they received, how they were literally worked to death, receiving insufficient food, scanty clothing and poor lodging. Cruel punishments were inflicted on them for slight offences when they were at the mercy of a hard and brutal master. Their fellow black slave was often treated better, for he was a slave for life, and it was in the interest of the master to treat him well to preserve him, whilst the poor Redemptioner was a slave for a number of years only, and all his vital force was worked out of him during the years of his service.

As with many masters these servants were treated alike, and had to live in common with and among their negro slaves, it happened that some of the white female Redemptioners cohabited and intermarried with the negro slaves and gave birth to Mulatto children. This became a great offence to the better portion of the society of the colony, and to remedy this evil, the General Assembly of Maryland in 1663, chapter 30, passed a most curious, but also the most abominable law which ever disgraced the legislative code of even a Slave State, it reads as follows:

AN ACT CONCERNING NEGRO AND OTHER SLAVES.

Sect. 1. Be it enacted by the right honorable the Lord Proprietary, by the advice and consent of the Upper and Lower Houses of this present assembly, that all negro or other slaves within the Province, and all negro and other slaves to be hereafter imported into the Province, shall serve *durante vita*, and all children born of any negro or other slave, shall be slaves as their fathers were for the term of their lives.

Sect. 2. And for as much as divers free born English women, forgetful of their free condition and to the disgrace of our nation, do intermarry with negro slaves, by which also divers suits may arise touching the issue of such women, and a great damage doth befall the master of such negroes, for prevention whereof, for deterring such free born women from such shameful matches, be it further enacted by the authority, advice and consent aforesaid, that whatsoever free born woman shall intermarry with any slave, from and after the last day of this present assembly, shall serve the master of such slave during the life of her husband, and that all the issue of such free born woman so married shall be slaves as their fathers were.

This law was in violation of the ancient maxim, that the children of a free woman, the father being a slave, follow the status of their mother and are free. In Maryland therefore, the only State I believe that ever enacted such a law, the child was a slave when either father or mother was a slave. So the presumption was always in favor of slavery. We must assume that this law was honestly intended to prevent future marriages between white women and negro slaves, but these honest legislators little knew and understood the cupidity and depravity of human

nature. For, instead of having this effect, many of the owners of white female Redemptioners purposely intermarried them with their negro slave men, and thereby legally secured the white female Redemptioners as slaves, and also their children. This seems to have been done extensively. In 1681, however a case occurred which led to the speedy repeal of this law. In the spring of that year Lord Baltimore came on a visit to his Province of Maryland. Among his servants he brought with him an Irish maid servant, named "Nellie," she was a Redemptioner. Lord Baltimore soon returned to England, and Nellie was sold for the unexpired term of her service to a resident of the colony. "Within two months thereafter the new master of Nellie married her to his negro slave Butler, and thereby made her his slave, and her children also became his slaves under the operation of the law. Lord Baltimore, hearing of this, became very indignant, and immediately secured the repeal of this horrible law and the enactment of a new law, which effectually did prevent future marriages of white female Redemptioners with negro slaves. The preamble of the new law is especially instructive to show us the condition of these poor female Redemptioners, it reads:

"And for as much as divers free born English or white women, sometimes by the instigation, procurement or connivance of their masters, mistresses or dames, and always to the satisfaction of their lascivious and lustful desires, and to the disgrace not only of the English but also of many other Christian nations, do intermarry with negroes and slaves, by which means divers inconveniences, controversies and suits may arise, touching the issue or children of such free born women aforesaid, for the prevention whereof for the future, be it further enacted, &c., That if any master, mistress or dame, having any free born English or white woman servant as said in their possession or property, shall by any instigation, procurement, knowledge, permission or contrivance whatsoever, suffer any such free born English or white woman servant in their possession, and wherein they have property as aforesaid, to intermarry or contract in matrimony with any slave, from and after the last day of this present assembly, that then their said master, mistress or dame, of any such free born woman as aforesaid, shall forfeit and loose all their claim and title to the service and servitude of any such free born woman; and also the said woman servant so married, shall be, and is by this

present act, absolutely discharged, manumitted and made free, instantly upon her intermarriage as aforesaid from the services, employment, use, claim or demand of any such master, mistress or dame so offending as aforesaid. And all children born of such free born woman, so manumitted and free, as aforesaid, shall be free as the woman aforesaid; as also the said master, mistress or dame shall forfeit the sum of ten thousand pounds of tobacco, one half thereof to the Lord Proprietor, and the other half to him or them that shall inform and sue for the same, to be recovered in any Court of Record within this Province, by bill, plaint or information; and any priest, minister, magistrate or other person, that shall from and after the publication hereof join in marriage any negro or other slave, to any English or other white woman servant, as aforesaid, shall forfeit and pay the sum of ten thousand pounds of tobacco, &c."

The passage of this law did not however set poor Nellie free, nor liberate her two sons, for they in 1721 petitioned for their freedom, but the Court of Appeals of Maryland (Harris and McHenry case of *Butler vs. Boarmann*) decided, that Nellie having been married to the negro slave Butler before the passage of the law of 1681, she as well as her after born children were slaves

No public records were kept of the contracts entered into abroad by the Redemptioners, nor of the time of the expiration of their service. The Redemptioners were not furnished with duplicates of their contracts. They were sometimes, and could be, mortgaged, hired out for a shorter period, sold and transferred like chattel by their masters. (Md. Archives, 1637—50, pag. 132, 486.) The Redemptioners, belonging to the poor and most of them to the ignorant class, it is apparent that under these conditions they were at a great disadvantage against a rapacious master who kept them in servitude after the expiration of their true contract time, claiming their services for a longer period.

As the number of slaves increased in the colony, and labor became despised, the Redemptioner lost caste and the respect which is accorded to working people in non-slave holding communities. He was in many respects treated like the black slave. He could not purchase nor sell anything without the permission of the master. If caught ten miles away from home without a

written permission of his master he was liable to be taken up as a runaway, and severely punished. The person who harbored a runaway was fined 500 pounds of tobacco for each twenty-four hours, and to be whipped if unable to pay the fine. There was a standing reward of 200 pounds of tobacco for capturing runaways, and the Indians received for every captured runaway they turned in a "match coat." For every day absence from work, ten days were added to his time of servitude. The master had a right to whip his Redemptioner for any real or imaginary offense, provided he gave him no more than ten lashes for each offense, which must have been a very difficult matter to determine, for offenses may be multiplied. The laws also provided for his protection. For excessively cruel punishment the master should be fined and the Redemptioner set free. I presume in most cases this was only effective when the Redemptioner had influential friends who would take up his case.

For many years the Redemptioners in Maryland had come principally from England and Ireland. The abuses of the system having become known in England rigorous laws and measures were adopted in England for their better protection, and letters and articles appeared in the newspapers warning the poor people from entering into these contracts. The first and early immigration of Germans came into Maryland from Pennsylvania. From Lancaster County it extended into Baltimore, Harford, Frederick and the "Western counties of our State. As wages advanced, the trade of shipping Redemptioners to the colony became highly lucrative. Large profits were made in a successful voyage with a full cargo of human beings, who on their arrival here were sold to the highest bidder for a term of years.

The Dutch who in 1620 had sent the first cargo of negro slaves to this country, and had amassed great wealth in the pursuit of the negro slave trade from distant Africa, discovered that it was less troublesome and equally remunerative to engage in a sort of a white slave trade, by shipping Redemptioners from their own country, Germany, Switzerland and adjoining countries to the American colonies. The shipping merchants of Holland would send regular agents, or drummers as we now would call them, who received one half of a doubloon for every Redemptioner shipped by them into these colonies. These agents generally appeared in gaudy dress, with flourish of trumpets, and in glowing

language depicted the wealth and happiness of the people of this country, whereof all could partake if they only would come here; that they did not need any money for their passage, as all they had to do was to sign a contract, that on their arrival here they would pay for the same out of their first earnings. In this manner these agents would travel from village to village, deluding the poorest and most ignorant to follow them to the New Eldorado.

Whenever such an agent had collected a sufficient number, he would take them personally to the shipping harbor in Holland. It was a gay crowd which travelled in this manner in wagons across the country. The horses and wagons were decorated with gay ribbons, and joyous songs were heard from the emigrants, who believed they were leaving toil and poverty to go to the fabulously rich America, to enjoy the ease and plenty of this world's goods. This spirit was artificially kept up by the liberality of the agent until they were safely aboard the ship. From thence such a life of suffering, privation and hardship commenced, that it seems incredible that the Christian Nations of Europe and America should have permitted such a trade to flourish up to nearly the end of the first quarter of the present century. I myself know several very old persons yet living in Baltimore, who came to this country in this manner. The contracts which these Redemptioners had to sign in Holland, and which few of them then understood, contained the proviso, that if any passenger died on the voyage, the surviving members of the family, or the surviving redemptioner passengers would make good his loss. Thereby a wife, who had lost her husband during the sea voyage, or her children, on her arrival here would be sold for five years for her own voyage and additional five and more years for the passage-money of her dead husband or dead children, although they may have died in the very beginning of the voyage. If there were no members of the family surviving, the time of the dead was added to the time of service of the surviving fellow passengers. The effects and property of the dead were confiscated, and kept by the captain. By this the shipping merchant and the captain of the vessel would gain by the death of a part of the passengers, for the dead did not require any more food and provision. It seems that many acted on this principle. The ships were often so overcrowded, that a part of the passengers

had to sleep on deck. Christoph Saur, in his petition to the Governor of Pennsylvania in 1775, asserts that at times there were not more than twelve inches room for each passenger. (I presume he means sleeping room below deck) and but half sufficient bread and water. Caspar Wister, of Philadelphia, in 1752 writes: last year a ship was twenty-four weeks at sea, and of the 150 passengers on board thereof, more than 100 died of hunger and privation, and the survivors were imprisoned and compelled to pay the entire passage-money for themselves and the deceased. In this year 10 ships arrived in Philadelphia with 5000 passengers. One ship was 17 weeks at sea and about 60 passengers thereof died. Christoph Saur in 1758 estimates, that 2000 of the passengers on the 15 ships which arrived that year, died during the voyage. Heinrich Koppele, the first president of the German Society of Pennsylvania, writes in his diary, that of the 312½ passengers on board of the ship, wherein he crossed the ocean, 250 died during the voyage. In February, 1775, Christoph Saur relates in his newspaper: Another ship has arrived. Of the 400 passengers not more than 50 are reported alive. They received their bread every two weeks; some ate their portion in four, five and six days, which should have lasted 15 days. If they received no cooked victuals in eight days, their bread gave out the sooner, and as they had to wait until the 15 days were over, they starved, unless they had money, with which to buy of the mate flour at three pence sterling a pound and a bottle of wine for seven *kopstick* thalers. Then he relates how a man and his wife, who had ate their bread within eight days, crawled to the captain and begged him to throw them overboard, to relieve them of their misery, as they could not survive till bread day. The captain refused to do it, and the mate in mockery gave them a bag filled with sand and coals. The man and his wife died of hunger before the bread day arrived. But notwithstanding, the survivors had to pay for the bread which the dead ought to have had. Pennsylvania in 1765, at the instigation of the German Society, passed rigorous laws for the protection of the Redemptioners, but Maryland remained inactive until more than fifty years later.

I found the following advertisements in the "Baltimore American," published in the year 1817.

On the 8th day of February, a card headed:

GERMAN REDEMPTIONERS.

The Dutch ship, "Jufvrouw Johanna," Capt. H. H. Bleeker, has arrived off Annapolis from Amsterdam with a number of passengers, principally farmers and mechanics of all sorts, and several fine young boys and girls, whose time will be disposed of. Mr. Bolte, ship broker of Baltimore, will attend on board at Annapolis, to whom those who wish to supply themselves with good servants, will please apply; also to Capt. Bleeker on board. On February 25th, the following advertisement appeared:

That a few entire families are still on board the "Johanna" to be hired.

On March 3d, a reward is offered for the capture of a German Redemptioner, a tailor, who absconded from Washington. And the following:

FOR SALE OR HIRE.

A German Redemptioner, for the term of two years. He is a stout, healthy man and well acquainted with farming, wagon driving and the management of horses. For further particulars apply to
C. R. GREEN, Auctioneer.

On March 11th, Patrick McCrystal offers \$30 reward for the capture of a German Redemptioner, a bricklayer.

On March 13th, Aquila H. Sparks offers \$50 reward for an absconded German Redemptioner. On April 11th, the following:

GERMAN REDEMPTIONER.—\$30 REWARD.

Absconded from the subscriber on Sunday, the 5th inst., a German Redemptioner, who arrived here in November last, by name of Maurice Schumacher, about 30 years of age, 5 feet, 9 inches, well proportioned, good countenance, but rather pale in complexion, short hair, has a very genteel suit of clothes, by trade a cabinet maker, but has been employed by me in the making of brushes. He is a good German scholar, understands French and Latin, an excellent workman, speaks English imperfectly. \$30 Reward if lodged in jail.

JAS. M. STAPLETON,
Brush Maker, 139 Baltimore Street.

From March 21st, to April 7th, the following appeared:

GERMAN REDEMPTIONERS.

The Dutch ship "Johanna," Capt. H. H. Bleeker, has arrived before this City and lies now in the cove of Wiegman's Wharf; there are on board, desirous of binding themselves for their passage, the following single men: two capital blacksmiths, a ropemaker, a carrier, a smart apothecary, a tailor, a good man to cook, several young men as waiters, etc. Among those with families are gardeners, weavers, a stone mason, a miller, a baker, a sugar baker, farmers and other professions, etc.

This ship had arrived off Annapolis in the first days of February, and on the 7th of April there were still some of these Redemptioners detained on board. These are the last advertisements relating to Redemptioners that I have found in the "American." The misery and suffering of these poor people at last aroused the sympathy and indignation of the humane people of our City and State.

The winter of 1817 was of unusual severity for our climate; the thermometer on February the 5th registered five degrees above zero, on the 6th, 13th, 15th and 17th at zero, on the 14th four degrees below and on the 16th four degrees above zero. The bay was frozen from shore to shore. On the 7th of February the following appeal appeared in the "American," it came from Annapolis and was addressed "to citizens generally and to benevolent societies":

"A ship with upward of 300 German men, women and children has arrived off Annapolis, where she is detained by ice. These people have been fifteen weeks on board and are short of provision. Upon making the Capes, their bedding having become filthy, was thrown overboard. They are now actually perishing from the cold and want of provision."

On the 13th of February another strong appeal was made by a German descendant for aid of the distressed immigrants on board of said ship. The same paper contained a call for a meeting of Germans and descendants of Germans to be held at Kaminsky's tavern that evening to form a Society for the better protection and assistance of German immigrants. This was the beginning of the German Society of Maryland. Kaminsky's tavern, I am

informed, was at that time and for many years later, a well known popular resort, located in Water street near Light street, and the building is still standing.

The meeting was attended by many influential and wealthy citizens. Among the organizers and first members of the Society we find General John Stricker, the commanding general of the Maryland Militia and an officer of the revolutionary war, the merchants Christian Mayer, B. J. von Kappf, Heinrich Schroeder, Louis Brantz, Frederick Leypold, Johann Hoffman, Frederick W. Brune, Michael Kimmel, F. L. E. Amelung, the founder of the first glass furnace in the State, Wm. Krebs, John Frick, Samuel Keerl, John F. Friese, Peter Sauerwein, Frederick Waesche, Jesse Eichelberger, Dr. Diffenderfer, Justus Hoppe, Lewis Mayer, Philip D. Sadtler, J. J. Cohen, Samuel Etting, Conrad Schultz, Dr. A. J. Schwartz, Benj. J. Cohen, Charles W. Karthaus, Lawrence Thomson, the eminent attorneys David Hoffman, Wm. Frick and Charles F. Mayer.

The descendants of most of these are still living in our midst and maintain the high character, the virtues and influence of their ancestors. Stricker, Waesche, Schroeder, Hoffman, Etting and Decker streets perpetuate some of these names in our city.

At the next meeting of the Society, which was held on the 18th of February, 1817, a constitution was adopted, and at the following meeting on the 3d of March the following Board of Officers were elected: President, Christian Mayer; Vice-Presidents, Dr. A. J. Schwartz, B. J. von Kappf, Heinrich Schroeder and General John Stricker; Managers, Justus Hoppe, Louis Brantz, Conrad Schultz, Jacob Small, F. L. E. Amelung, William Krebs, John F. Frick, Samuel Keerl, John F. Friese, Peter Sauerwein, Michael Kimmel and Jesse Eichelberger; Secretary of the Society, Louis Mayer; Secretary of the Officers, Lawrence Thomson; Treasurer, Friedrich Waesche; Counsellors, David Hoffman and William Frick, Esqs.; Physicians, John Geo. Wolf and Jacob Baer. All officiating German clergymen in the State were made honorary members. The objects of the Society were declared to be: The protection and assistance of poor immigrants from Germany and Switzerland, and of their descendants, who may reside in the State of Maryland or be temporarily sojourning therein.

The Society must have been prosperous from the beginning, for we find at the first meeting of the officers, held on the 6th of March, 1817, a resolution, entered: that two thousand dollars of the funds of the Society be forthwith invested in United States stock.

The attention of the Officers of the Society was immediately after its organization directed to the grievances and complaints of the Redemptioners who came from Germany and Switzerland. In England the government had assumed control over and had passed laws regulating the contracts of servitude and shipment of these servants. Appeals had been made to the Government of Holland to pass similar laws, but were not heeded, although cases of barbarous cruelty had been brought to its notice. Nothing, however, added so much to the misfortune of the German and Swiss Redemptioners as their total ignorance of the Dutch and English languages, and of the laws, manners and customs of this country. They were at a terrible disadvantage against crafty, unscrupulous shippers and masters. The officers of the Society soon found enough work on their hands, and a lively time they had of it.

It was the good fortune of the Society to have had from the beginning a man of superior intelligence as its president. He was master of the English, as well as of the German language, bold in the protection of the poor Redemptioners against hard and cruel masters, yet moderate and firm in the exercise of the law, confining himself to the ways and means sanctioned by it to alleviate their suffering. He bettered their condition by prompting the enactment of wise and just regulations and was in truth an eloquent defender of the legal rights of the poor man. Of no less marked ability was Lawrence Thomson, its first secretary, a German of rare attainments, his writing in the English, as well as in the German language does not betray his nativity. After the passage of the registration act of German and Swiss Redemptioners, Mr. Thomson was highly recommended by the Society for and appointed by the Governor to the office of Register at the City of Baltimore. He died on the 20th of April, 1819, and resolutions of sorrow for his loss were passed by the Board of Managers.

One of the first acts of the officers was to instruct their legal counsellors to proceed against Captain Bleeker of the Dutch

ship "Jufvrouw Johanna," then off Annapolis, for the cruel treatment and selling of the Redemptioners on board of his ship, contrary to law, and appropriating to his own use the effects of deceased passengers. C. E. Stieff, a sick passenger aboard the ship, was ordered to be removed to a hospital and to be taken care of. A committee consisting of the president and the two counsellors of the Society was elected to secure at the next session of the Legislature the enactment of a body of laws and regulations for the protection of German and Swiss immigrants arriving in the State of Maryland. The provisions of the laws prepared by this committee and enacted, clearly indicate the principal evils complained of.

At the next session of the Maryland Legislature, on February 16th, 1818, the Society was incorporated and the following law was enacted, viz.:

AN ACT RELATIVE TO GERMAN AND SWISS
REDEMPTIONERS.

"Whereas it has been found that German and Swiss emigrants, who for the discharge of the debt contracted for their passage to this country are often obliged to subject themselves to cruel and oppressive imposition by the masters of the vessels in which they arrive, and likewise by those to whom they become servants, Be it enacted:

Sect. 1. Providing for the appointment by the Governor of a trustworthy person, skilled in the German and English languages, as Register of all contracts for apprenticeship of German or Swiss emigrants arriving in this State.

Sect. 2. Regulates the manner of making these contracts, and none shall be valid, unless the same be drawn by the Register or approved by him.

Sect. 4. Provides for the recording of these contracts, or indentures, in a Court of Record.

Sect. 5. Provides that the Master must give every minor under the age of 21 years at least two months schooling annually during his servitude.

Sect. 6. No emigrant shall in any case be bound to serve longer than four years.

Sect. 7. That no German or Swiss emigrant arriving here shall be detained longer than 30 days on board of the vessel after such arrival, and receive during the detention on board good and sufficient provisions, without increase in the period of their servitude.

Sect. 8. Makes it the duty of the Register to remove on shore any sick emigrant or any emigrant having been cruelly or ill-treated by the officers of the ship, at the expense of the vessel. If no purchaser is found for him within sixty days after arrival, the master or owners of the vessel shall have no further lien on such emigrant.

Sect 9. That no children shall be answerable for the passage-money of their parents, dead or alive, nor parents for their deceased children, nor a husband for his deceased wife, nor a wife for her deceased husband, any pretense of custom in contract, promise or agreement made beyond sea, to the contrary notwithstanding.

Sect 10. That the Masters of the vessels arriving shall in case of the death of any German or Swiss emigrant within ten days after arrival deliver to the Register an accurate inventory of all the property of such emigrant on board of such vessel. The Register shall then sell such property, pay the Master the passage-money, provided that if the passenger died before the expiration of one-half of the voyage no passage-money shall be due, and the heirs of the deceased shall be entitled to the proceeds, and if after advertisement and due search no heirs of the deceased can be found within three years after the arrival of the ship, then the proceeds to go to the German Society of Maryland.

By these laws the Society received an official recognition. It possessed talent, influence and money, and now it had also the powerful arm of the law to assist it in its noble efforts in behalf of the oppressed. The Governor appointed only such persons to the office of Register, as were recommended by the Society.

The fight in behalf of the Redemptioners seems to have been short, vigorous and effective. A few years after the passage of the above laws, the name of Redemptioner disappears from the records, as well as from public print, and but few of the living generation know what a "Redemptioner" means, or that such a

system had prevailed in the Colony and State of Maryland for nearly two hundred years.

The following letters I have copied from the Record and Minute book of the Board of Managers of the Society. I have selected only such letters as by their contents throw light on or give information of the fate of some of these Redemptioners, and on the manner of the officers in dealing with their grievances and rendering them assistance.

On May 29th, 1817, the President of the Society addressed the following letter to one W. Martin Gillet.

Sir: — The bearer, John Bernet, has applied to the German Society for their aid in a complaint he has against you. They have referred him to one of their counsels, who is of opinion, that you have no right to the servitude of Bernet's children. The officers of the Society wish to inform you of this opinion of their counsel, and to invite you to an amicable arrangement of the business if possible by reference or otherwise. Bernet is willing to pay whatever impartial persons may think him indebted to you for his children and begs that you will cease sending officers of Justice after him. Your reply, written or verbal, if you are disposed to settle the difference in a friendly manner, will oblige, etc.

This affair seems to have been amicably arranged, for no further complaint is made. In July following, one Solomon W. Davis, who appears to have been the owner or manager of a marble quarry in Montgomery County, inquires of the President about a runaway Redemptioner named Theis. The President informs him that Theis had called upon him and complained of ill usage and that he was given work which, he having a rupture, it was impossible for him to do; that Theis had left for parts unknown, probably for Philadelphia, where he had friends living. The letter contains further the following significant language.

"These poor people, sir, are ignorant that the custom of its inhabitants (at least of those of British and Irish descent) make no difference between white servants and black slaves, and when they are treated accordingly they fancy themselves ill used, — which to be sure is inconvenient to their masters." Many Redemptioners complained to the President of being ill treated, and we find one case where the Society proposes to Charles Ridgely,

Jr., Esq., that Mr. P. A. Karthaus, a member of the Society, will employ a servant of Mr. Ridgely, who made complaint, at the highest wages, to reimburse him the money he had paid for the servant's family. The President laments that the want of understanding the language is frequently the occasion of injustice on the part of the master, and more frequently of his agents and the impropriety of conduct on the part of the servant.

In January 1819, a German, named Johann Bodenwerber, appealed to the Society for protection. He was a servant of one Henry Freeburger who had treated him with the utmost cruelty, and inflicted such injuries on him that he was for a long time laid up in the hospital under medical treatment. The President first tried to obtain a release of Bodenwerber from his bondage, and wrote the following letter to Freeburger:

"Sir: — If as a small atonement for the barbarous treatment, which Johannes Bodenwerber experienced from you, you will give up his indentures, the officers of the German Society will prevail on the Magistrate who issued a peace warrant against you, to have the prosecution withdrawn.—Should you unexpectedly not consent to this lenient measure, you may depend upon the Society's utmost endeavors to bring you to deserved shame and punishment. I have before me a physician's certificate which fully justifies my using this language to you. Signed, Christian Mayer, President of German Society of Maryland."

It is gratifying to us that Henry Freeburger in his cupidity and hardness of heart did not accept this proposition, for he was promptly indicted by the Grand Jury and tried in the Criminal Court of Baltimore City, and found guilty, and sentenced.

Johann Bodenwerber however was released from his bondage, became a free man again and married his sweetheart. The papers of Bodenwerber and of his sweetheart, that is, their passports and certificates of their good moral conduct from different public authorities of their native country, which had been in the custody of the German Society were delivered to them, together with a sum of money and the good wishes of the Society. The President speaks of Bodenwerber as a very worthy man who deserved a better fate.

In January 1819, there arrived here the Swedish ship "Prima" from Norway after a long tempestuous voyage with upwards of 250 German emigrants in the greatest distress. The master of the

ship did not have the means to pay the required foreign tonnage and the passengers were not permitted to land. The German Society deposited the money at the Custom House, and the passengers were allowed to land.

On February the 12th, 1819, the German Society made an appeal for aid to the Germans and descendants of Germans residing in Frederick and Washington Counties by sending a letter to Dr. J. Baer in Frederick and a duplicate thereof to Dr. Schnebly in Hagerstown, wherein they request that an enclosed translation of the proceedings of the Society may be published in the German newspapers of these towns, and one or two copies of the papers be mailed to the Society. The doctors are kindly requested to solicit subscription to the Society. A copy of the constitution is enclosed to serve for subscriptions, and the letter closes in the words, "As you doubtless appreciate the humane and benevolent purpose for which the Society was instituted, and which it is their anxious wish to bring more and more into beneficent operation,— and your place of residence, sir, and its neighborhood — abound in Germans and Swiss and descendants of them, who are well able to contribute to the relief of their or their fathers' distressed countrymen, we flatter ourselves that we shall not in vain solicit your kind assistance in this work of love and charity. Permit us to request you to favor us with an answer to this address, the freedom of which you will generously excuse when you consider its purport," &c.

On the 15th of March, 1819, the President wrote the following letter which certainly was not within the scope of his authority as the President of a Society which only had for its object the protection of the immigrant, and not of the ship owners. It is addressed, "To the German Immigrants yet remaining on board of the Dutch ship 'Vrouw Elizabeth'." "Captain Bredero has applied to the German Society of Maryland, and represented that you refuse to hire yourselves on reasonable condition for the payment of your passage money. As Captain Bredero conscientiously performed his part of the contract, and up to the present time, as we are informed by everybody, treated you very kindly, your refusal is unjust, unlawful and ungrateful. The German Society makes it its duty to assist your countrymen when they are in need, and to protect them as far as it is able; but it will

also not suffer any injustice to be done by immigrants, and by advise and act induce them to fulfill their obligations. I declare therefore to you, that Captain Bredero has a lawful right to have you committed to prison, to remain there on meagre fare, until your debt is paid, if you do not consent to hire for a reasonable time — that is not more than four years, for the payment thereof. The Captain can exercise this right after the expiration of thirty days of your arrival, and the German Society will assist him in this. Please conform to this, and it will please us. You are hereby warned of the consequences. (Signed) Chr. Mayer, President," &c.

On the 11th of May, 1819, the President gave to Captain Bredero a certificate that he treated his passengers with kindness and humanity.

The most interesting and important Redemptioner's case, which led to the resignation first of the two Attorneys of the Society, and later it seems of the President and Secretary, and almost broke up the Society was that of the "Breuning boys." The Breuning boys Christian and Adam, with their father and mother, arrived here aboard the Swedish ship "Prima," for which the Society had deposited the tonnage money to allow the passengers to land. Mr. Lawrence Thomson, the first Secretary of the Society, who was now the Register of the German and Swiss Redemptioners appointed by the State, went on board of the ship to attend to the indentures of the Redemptioners. Whilst there, the Captain of the ship sold the two infant sons of the Breuning parents to a farmer named "W. Denny of Queen Anne's County, separating them from their parents. Mr. Thomson, being appealed to, interfered, and offered himself to pay the passage money. The farmer had the children already in his boat, Mr. Thomson called to him to return the two lads on board to the Captain who would return to him the money paid by him, but instead of doing so the farmer carried off the boys in his boat to Queen Anne's County without even, having them legally bound and registered, leaving the bereaved and grief stricken parents on board of the ship, who were afterwards hired or sold to a farmer in Pennsylvania. These facts were reported to the President of the Society, and aroused his sympathy as well as his abhorrence. He was determined to act at once with the greatest energy in behalf of these unfortunate children and their parents. At the time, however, he had received from the Attorneys of the Society, Messrs. Hoffman and

Frick, an unfavorable opinion as to the right of the Society to interfere in behalf of a gardener named Stoffel, who claimed that he was kept in unlawful servitude by W. Carren. The son of the President, Mr. Chas. F. Mayer, who became one of the most distinguished lawyers at our bar, differed in opinion with the Society's Attorneys, and was in favor of taking legal steps in behalf of Stoffel. The President agreed with his son's views, and was not in harmony with the lawyers of the Society, he therefore sent them the following letter:

David Hoffman and William Frick, Esqs.

February 1st, 1819.

GENTLEMEN: — I have yesterday received the opinion you favored me with, and shall consequently in my official capacity desist from countenancing the gardener Stoffel's complaint against W. Carren. But permit me, gentlemen, to observe, that although it is surely not illegal in Holland for one man to become gardener for another for three years without wages, yet that species of domestic servitude, which is nothing but a temporary slavery, which makes one man the property of another, and divests him of all civic rights, is utterly unknown to the laws and customs of the Netherlands,—there is even no feudal serf or adscriptus glebae in that country. If, therefore, Stoffel's contract is to be executed here as it would be interpreted in Holland, he is not Mr. Carren's indented servant (Leibeigener), but his hired domestic upon wages advanced.

Give me leave to state a simile: Suppose Stoffel had agreed with Captain Weems to be transported to the North-west coast of America, to be there maintained in the usual manner, could he have no right to complain if he were fed on rotten whale and putrid fish oil? With all due deference I crave your permission to submit the opinion of my son on this case.

I am at the same time under the necessity of calling your attention to another matter. Last week a misunderstanding took place between a passenger on board the ship "Prima," now in this port, and an inhabitant of Queen Anne's County, whose name Mr.

Thomson will inform you of, about the terms of servitude or apprenticeship of the former's two infant sons. Mr. Thomson not being able to accomodate the difference, requested the man from Queen Anne's to return the two lads on board to the captain, who would return him the money paid for the children's passage. But instead of doing so, the man carried off the boys in his boat, without having them bound. The father and mother are now indented to a farmer in Pennsylvania, and bitterly bewail the loss of their children. I beg, gentleman, you will by addressing the Chief Judge of the district in which Queen Anne is situated or by any other means you may deem advisable, endeavor to redress this wrong and punish the offender.

I have the honor to be, &c.,

CHRISTIAN MAYER,
Pres. of G. S. of Maryland.

The President however did not wait for the Attorneys to act, not even for a reply to his letter, he seems to have lost confidence in them, and on the 5th of February, 1819, sent them the following rather discourteous letter:

"Wm. Frick and David Hoffman, Esqs.

Sirs: — Before the receipt of your respected letter of yesterday it had been suggested to me to enclose to a storekeeper at Centreville, with whom Mr. Thomson has an open account, a petition to the judge of that district for a habeas corpus, accompanied by a deposition of Mr. Thomson, stating the facts of the case and a request to his correspondent to employ counsel at the expense of the German Society. Im am glad, gentlemen, that by this mode of proceeding I am enabled to spare you from perhaps unnecessary trouble."

By the dates of these letters it appears that the Attorneys had answered his letter within three days, but he had without waiting for a reply engaged another attorney, and taken this case out of their hands. The Attorneys could not act otherwise than tender their resignation to the Society. The resignation of Mr. Frick was accepted at the meeting of March the 1st, and Charles F. Mayer, the son of the President, elected in his place. The

habeas corpus case for the release of the Breuning boys was prosecuted with success. The President wrote to the Hon. R. Earle, chief judge of Queen Anne's County in behalf of these boys, the judge answered him and gave testimony of Mr. Denny's good character. The Society however insisted on their release, and had them afterward apprentised by the Orphans' Court under the laws of the State. On the 20. of April, Peter H. Cruse, a friend of Chas. F. Mayer, was elected Attorney for the Society in the place of David Hoffman resigned. The Stoffel case against John Carren was also taken up again, but it does not appear that there was any success in it, for it is not mentioned thereafter in the records. Mr. Thomson having died the Society recommended Lewis Mayer to the Governor as his successor, and he was appointed. There are but few entries in the record-book during the year 1819 after the resignation of the Attorneys, there were but eight members present at the meeting of the 1st of March. The Norwegian ship "Prima," Captain Woxwold, after a long, perilous voyage, with a cargo of Redemptioners, had been compelled to seek harbor in distress; it had found shelter at the City of Bergen, and the authorities there had kindly provided for the emigrants. The German Society here passed resolutions of thanks to the Captain of the ship and to the authorities of the City of Bergen. The Society also assisted a Redemptioner named Johann Schwartzkopf in Annapolis to obtain his freedom. On the 25th of September is the last entry of the year 1819 in the minute-book of the officers, and also the last entry relating to Redemptioners. Public opinion had strongly arrayed itself against the system of Redemptioners. The hardships and suffering of these so-called servants had become more widely known abroad and about the years 1818 to 1822 it gradually ceased.

There is no entry in the minute-book from the 25th of September, 1819, to the 26th of December, 1821, when Justus Hoppe was chosen President, and shortly thereafter William Frick and David Hoffman appear again as the regular chosen Counsellors of the Society.

Though there were no more Redemptioners to be cared for, poverty and misery had not disappeared. They will forever remain objects for the kind offices of a humane society, and as our city increased in population, poverty and misery increased in the same degree. The German Society of Maryland continued to flourish

and extended its beneficent charities to many thousands of poor immigrants, but still more to the poor inhabitants of our city who were in distress. Men of influence continued to offer their services as officers, and the public was liberal in its support of the Society.

Up to the year of 1888, the large sum of about \$253,190.67 had been expended by it in the work of charity. From the year 1826 to 1888, 77,356 orders for pecuniary assistance were issued; from 1850 to 1887 (records of former years missing) 123,937 prescriptions for medicine for indigent sick were furnished at the expense of the Society, at a cost of \$26,869.46, the apothecaries charging but half and even less rates; four competent physicians were engaged for, and legal advice and assistance was given by two attorneys, without charge, to the poor. Trusses, bandages and chirurgical appliances were furnished to the ruptured and lame. Wood, coal and clothes were distributed. Two agents are constantly engaged in investigating the merits of the applicants whether they are really deserving the charity of the Society. Employment for many thousands willing and able to work, has been provided by its agents. The number of the German immigrants landed in Baltimore from 1834 to 1887 was 516,006, of whom many came for information, advice and assistance to the officers of the Society.

The Society is now as vigorous in its good works as ever, with a fair prospect of continuing for many years to come,—a living testimony of the intelligence and benevolence of our German-American and descendants of German-American citizens of Baltimore.

