The Germantown Protest of 1688
Against Negro Slavery

We know of two protestations against Negro slavery by German Americans during colonial times. Both were launched by groups and not by single individuals, but while the protest from Germantown of 1688 has been widely recognized and is considered to be a classic document, the long struggle of the Salzburgers from Ebenezer against the introduction of slavery into newly founded Georgia has not attracted much attention. Yet the motives that led to the opposition against slavery in the latter instance and the arguments that were brought forward by the Reverend Mr. Bolzius, the Lutheran minister of the Ebenezer community, have general social significance. The arguments not only pertain to the particular historical situation in Georgia from about 1735 to 1750 but they also characterize the advantages and disadvantages of two systems in colonial America—the system of slave labor compared with that of free white labor. No enthusiasm for abolition as a principle, however, was shown by the Salzburger group, not even by their minister. The religious and humanitarian motives manifest themselves more strongly in the Germantown protest.

Generally speaking the anti-slavery protest of 1688 has received more admiration and praise than critical investigation. The fact that this important document remained unknown until 1844, a time when the ethics of slavery were agitating the minds of many men, added certain glamour to it. When it was found and published by Nathan Kite in Philadelphia, the document spoke a vivid language. To appreciate the uniqueness and early date of the protest did not demand much interpretation. The document fitted very well, as one of the first links, into the whole chain of Quaker pronouncements against slavery. Thus interpreters were less inclined to investigate

all the aspects of the relationship between the document and contemporary historical events than they would have been if concerned with an ordinary historical source.\textsuperscript{2} What controversy developed, if such it may be called, was concerned with the religious affiliation of the four petitioners who signed the protest. These men left Germany as Mennonites; all, except one, came in 1683. But they must have joined the Society of Friends before 1692, since the Register of the Abington Quaker meeting recognized them as members in this year. Pastorius himself had instituted a monthly meeting which was soon recognized as a Quaker Meeting by the Yearly Meeting, and it can safely be assumed that the house of prayer, which he built in 1686, was a Quaker Meeting House. Pastorius never touched upon confessional distinctions.\textsuperscript{3} To-day the official Quaker status of both the signers and of those to whom they addressed their protest is established beyond doubt.\textsuperscript{4}

The Quaker denunciations of the inhuman treatment of the Negro in the seventeenth century were rare but all the more remarkable. In the eighteenth century the number of protesting Quakers increased considerably, and they were the first to appeal to legislatures on the subject of slavery. Esteem for the service which these eighteenth-century Quakers had rendered to the cause of abolition made it seem natural that the same humanitarianism, and that humanitarianism only, was the motive guiding the four men who signed the protest in Germantown in 1688. It will never be denied that genuine human sympathy for the fate of the enslaved black race was a motive for the protest. Nor is there any reason to doubt that the spiritual source for this sympathy was the funda-

\textsuperscript{2}R. M. Jones, \textit{The Quakers in American Colonies} (London, 1911), 441, quotes a passage of the “celebrated protest” without any comment. W. Hubben, \textit{Die Quaker in der deutschen Vergangenheit} (Leipzig, 1929), 114 ff., presents a translation of the protest, calling it “one of the most memorable documents in the fight against wrong and oppression.” No further comment is offered. M. Stoughton Locke, \textit{Anti-Slavery in America from the Introduction of African Slaves to the Prohibition of the Slave Trade (1619-1808)} (Boston, 1910), 24, presents an excerpt of the “first distinctly anti-slavery document” without interpretation. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, \textit{The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870} (Cambridge, 1896), 20 ff., reprints part of the “first American protest” without comment except “that this little leaven helped slowly to work a revolution in the attitude of this great sect.”

\textsuperscript{3}W. Hubben, \textit{op. cit.}, 113–114.

\textsuperscript{4}H. J. Cadbury, \textit{op. cit.}, 4
ment of the German Quakers. But historical causality is rarely to be determined by one factor alone. Manifold experiences and the ensuing reactions of those who underwent the experiences were too complicated for that. What then were the experiences related to this protest which the signers underwent? In what situation did they find themselves in the year 1688?

William Penn visited Germany twice before he went to Pennsylvania. He met the so-called Saalhof-Pietists in Frankfort on the Main on his second visit in 1677. This group originated under Spener but had already emancipated itself from the Pietist leader when Penn became the proprietor of the American province. Francis Daniel Pastorius joined the group in 1682. Pastorius had been a student at several universities and had finished his studies as a doctor of jurisprudence at the University of Altdorf not far from Nürnberg. This was the only German university where “jus publicum” was taught; that is, public law in lieu of the law of a particular German state and of the canonical law. After an extensive tour through European countries he returned to Frankfort where he settled as a lawyer. His search for genuine and simple religion brought him in contact with the Saalhof Pietists. Among their members were Van de Walle, Dr. Johann Jacob Schütz and Daniel Behaghel, who were the first to plan for emigration to Penn’s colony. They had received Penn’s Account of the Province of Pennsylvania, which had been translated into German in Amsterdam in 1683. After corresponding with Penn’s agent Furley in Rotterdam, they discussed the emigration with Pastorius, the newcomer in their group, telling him “that some of them entirely resolv’d to transport themselves, families & all in this remote part of the world.” “This begot such a desire” in Pastorius “to continue in their Society and with them to lead a quiet, godly & honest life in a howling wilderness” that he decided to emigrate to Pennsylvania. The Frankforters organized a land company and elected the lawyer as their agent.

The orders which Pastorius received suggest that the colony planned by the Frankforters was to be founded on a sort of feudal

5 M. D. Learned, The Life of Francis Daniel Pastorius (Philadelphia, 1908), 107; W. Hubben, op. cit., 44.
6 M. D. Learned, op. cit., 110. The quotation is from Pastorius’ account of his departure for America found in his Beehive.
basis. Pastorius was to purchase land for the company, to "converse" it, "to order the Tillage of the ground" and "to hire Laborers, to grant part of the land to others and to take the yearly Revenues and Rents." The plan to rent land in America to tenants was not unusual in the seventeenth century. The reader may be reminded of the patroon system in New Amsterdam, of the seigneuries in Canada, and of early attempts to introduce the métauère system in Virginia. In fact, The Articles, Settlement and Offices of the Free Society of Traders, organized under Penn's patronage, contain a paragraph which suggests the same intention:

That if the Society should receive Blacks for servants they shall make them free at fourteen years and upon consideration that they shall give into the Society's warehouse two thirds of what they are capable of producing on such a parcel of land as shall be allotted them by the Society with a stock and necessary tools as shall be adjudged by the Society's Surveyor. And if they will not accept of these terms, they shall be servants till they will accept it.

Another plan devised for the settlement of Pennsylvania in 1682 suggested different schemes whereby poor white families might be transported to America by rich men who should settle those families on one-hundred-acre farms and allow them to rent those farms after four years' service for annual fees, called "Fee-Farm-rents." These were all attempts to solve the American problem of getting laborers and settlers in ways that followed European precedents well known to the proprietor and agents.

7 Pastorius' English translation of his power of attorney in Learned, op. cit., i.
8 The patroon system is considered to have been harder on the Dutch settlers than conditions in Holland. Complaints were raised in 1643, 1644 and 1649 and the "Vertoogh van Nieuw-Neder-Land 1650" signed by Van der Donck and many others in 1649 is a remonstrance against the system. The feudal system of "seigneuries" in Canada seems to have been more satisfactory, see E. B. Greene, The Foundation of American Nationality (New York, 1922), 214. J. C. Ballagh, White servitude in the Colony of Virginia (Johns Hopkins University Studies, 1895), 29 ff., describes the attempt to establish a métauère system in Virginia by the Company in 1624. A famous document of intended feudalism in America is the "Fundamental Constitution of Carolina" in 1669, abrogated in 1693.
10 "Information and Direction to such persons as are inclined to America, More Especially Those related to the Province of Pennsylvania," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, IV. 331 ff.
The Frankfort Land Company was reorganized in 1685, and at that time the second article of their contract specified that all expenses for cultivation, improvement and buildings, and for the transportation of servants, tenants and other persons should be shared by the members of the company in proportion to the individual shares of each holder.\(^{11}\) This proves that the company still planned in 1685 to settle servants and tenants on their lands in Pennsylvania.

Pastorius had left Frankfort on April 2, 1683, and had gone to Cologne and Crefeld where he met a group of Mennonites who also had purchased land in Pennsylvania independently of the Frankfort Land Company. Pastorius landed in England on May 8 and purchased fifteen thousand acres for his company. On June 6 he embarked for America.\(^{12}\) He arrived on August 20 and called on Penn one day later in order to discuss the location of the fifteen thousand acres of land with the proprietor. The land was to be located "near a navigable stream"; three hundred acres were to be granted in the City Liberties between the Delaware and Schuylkill; and three lots were to be granted in the City of Philadelphia for the erection of houses.\(^{13}\) These demands were not conceded without hesitancy on the part of Penn, who made the tenure of the lots in the city conditional upon the building of a house on each of them within two years. Penn also granted the second demand but he objected strongly to the assignment of fifteen thousand acres—minus the small number of acres granted in the City and City Liberties—in one tract of vacant land. Finally he granted Pastorius six thousand acres jointly with the group of Crefelders, six days after the arrival of the latter. The conditions upon which this grant of the six thousand acres was made provided that the land be divided into three townships and that ten families be settled in each township within a year. In addition to this tract, on which Pastorius laid out

\(^{11}\) M. D. Learned, \textit{op. cit.}, 141.
\(^{12}\) W. Hubben, \textit{op. cit.}, 113, gives May 10 for the date of Pastorius' departure from England. This is unlikely as it would have allowed him only two days in England for transaction of his business. Edward W. Hocker, \textit{Germantown 1683-1933} (Germantown, 1933), 14, states June 6 as the date of departure from Gravesend. Learned, \textit{op. cit.}, 117, gives June 10 as the date of departure from Deal.
\(^{13}\) M. D. Learned, \textit{op. cit.}, 127.
Germantown, Penn reserved another tract of twelve thousand acres which Pastorius hoped to settle with Germans within a short time in order to create a German province. Pastorius wrote:

I could wish for my small part that we receive a small separate province and be so much the better able to protect ourselves from oppression. If one of you could release himself to come hither and bring with him so many families your own best interests would be incomparably advanced thereby. . . . In case however it is too difficult for you to transport so many families in such a short time it would be well in my judgment which of course is not binding that the friends of —— accept a few thousand acres and assist some households from their rich abundance to come hither in order that the 15,000 acres may be assigned to us together and without any English neighbour intervening.

In the same report to his friends, Pastorius also expressed a strong desire for "laborers and farmers who are most necessary here." He wished for a "dozen of strong Tyrolesians to fell the thick oak trees." He emphasized the necessity of building three houses on the city lots for otherwise the company would lose the claims for them, and he warned his friends to send no more Dutch people whom he had found from his own experience with a maid from Holland to be unsatisfactory workers.

No additional settlers, however, came from Frankfort; and Pastorius wrote to Van de Walle, Dr. Schütz, and Behaghel on November 14, 1685, that he wanted to be released from his responsibility as a land agent "for in as much they in like manner promised me to follow me to this Province the next ensuing year after my departure out of Germany the which was not performed by them." But the Frankforters did not fulfill Pastorius' wish. They urged him to continue as their agent and to send over accounts of his business dealings. The outcome of their correspondence was the reorganization of the Frankfort Company and the contract mentioned above. According to this contract the expenses for transporting servants and tenants were to be shared as well as the profits arising from them.

The different conception of indentured labor in Europe and in

14 Sichere Nachricht auss America, wegen der Landschaft Pennsylvania von einem dorthin gereisten Teutschen, dated March 7, 1684; photostat in Learned, op. cit., following p. 128; partly translated into English on p. 132.
15 Learned, op. cit., 139.
America is well exemplified by the German text of the contract dated November 12, 1686, as compared with the English translation extant in Pastorius' own handwriting which runs as follows:

Per Contra all Profits, Revenues and whatsoever there is got, built, planted, till'd & brought forth, either in products of the Ground, Slaves, Cattle, manufactures, &c, nothing at all Excepted, shall be Common among all the Partners pro rato of the number of Acres.

The original German text does not contain the word "Sklaven" but "Leibeigene Menschen," of which the correct legal translation should have been "bond servants." Pastorius translated the term as "slaves," consciously or unconsciously conforming to the customary practice of his new environment. It is more than doubtful that his German friends ever received notice of Pastorius' English translation of the contract. But we have no reason to assume that the friends whom Pastorius once expected to follow him and who previously had shown great interest in America did not know that slavery existed in the New World. It can be assumed that Pastorius was asked to give information about this point. The protest of 1688 itself provides the basis for this assumption. For in the last passage the signers asked that the right of the Christians to make the Negroes their slaves be explained so that they might "lickewise satisfie their good friends & acquaintances in their natif Country to whose it is a terrour or fairfull thing that men should be handeld so in Pensilvania." This sentence hints that the friends had inquired into the nature of Negro slavery in America and that the signers wished to answer them in order to satisfy their curiosity.

Probably Pastorius penned the protest himself. The style and the Germanisms make his authorship likely; moreover, the document is in his own handwriting, and the reference to the practice of the Turks who take and sell slaves refers to a personal experience. Pastorius' boat had a narrow escape from a Turkish pirate ship.

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16 The German text of the contract is reprinted as Appendix A in Learned, op. cit., 288 ff.

17 Pastorius' English translation reprinted in Learned, op. cit., 140 ff.

18 The English text is reprinted in Learned, op. cit., 261-262. A German translation is found in Hubben, op cit., 115-116.

19 W. Hubben, op. cit., 114. Reference to the danger from the Turkish menace to ocean travellers was frequent in the seventeenth century. Quaker writers like George Keith, John Hepburn and others comment upon this state of affairs.
Pastorius' experiences as a land agent for the Frankfort Company are also clearly reflected in the middle of the first passage, where he raised the question whether it is compatible with the principles of Christianity to own slaves: "You surpass Holland and Germany in this thing. This makes an ill report in all those Countries of Europe, where they hear off that ye Quakers doe here handel men like they handel there ye Cattel. And for that reason some have no mind or inclination to come hither, and who shall maintaine this your cause or plaid for it?" Pastorius and the three other signers must have been extremely anxious for the good reputation in Europe of their new homeland for they mention Pennsylvania's reputation a third time, demanding that the slaves be freed as in Europe so that "Pennsylvania is to have a good report instead it hath now a bad one for this sacke in other Countries. Especially whereas ye Europeans are desirous to know in what manner ye Quakers doe rule in their Province . . . ."

The repeated reference to the effect which bad reports of Pennsylvania might have on Europeans, particularly on people in Holland and Germany, together with the implication that these people were not inclined to settle in Pennsylvania on account of the practice of slavery, is no accident. This argument gains meaning in the light of Pastorius' experiences as land agent. The question has been raised why Pastorius did not address his protest to the Assembly of which he was a member, instead of to a small group of Friends at their monthly meeting in Richard Warrel's house. Hocker answers that "perhaps he recognized that the time was not yet ripe for civil action." It might also be suggested that Pastorius thought a group petition to the Quakers by Quakers would be more effective than a single appeal by a non-English member to the new American civil body.

The very fact that the appeal was made by a religious group to a religious group, makes the economic and secular arguments all the more remarkable. The serious plea to follow the Golden Rule, "that we shall doe to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent or Colour they are," is the only biblical saying quoted in the protest. On the other hand, the contemporary Epistles of George Fox contain many exhorta-

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20 E. W. Hocker, op. cit., 60.
tions to deal mildly with the Negro for the fear and love of God. George Keith in his pamphlet of 1693, *Slavery opposed to the Golden Rule*, was also concerned lest slaveholding would be a "great hindrance to the spreading of the Gospel" and hoped that the liberation of Negroes by Christians would make the slaves Christians themselves. He frequently quotes biblical sayings which forbid slaveholding. The words "Christian" or "Christianity" are only quoted three times in the more secular Germantown protest, while six references to "Europe," "Germany," "Holland" or "native country" can be counted. The signers do not once appeal to the love or fear of God or the Lord, but all the more to the sense of justice and equity of the members of the meeting.

The first non-religious argument "against making Slaves of Men" used by a Quaker, after the Germantown protest, was John Hepburn's "Motive 20" in his essay, *The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule or an Essay to prove the Unlawfullness of making Slaves of Men.* He said: "When the Country grows full of people and also abounds with Negroes, poor People will want Imploy, and must either beg or steal for their Living, which will be no pleasant thing to Rich and Poor." Both Hepburn and Keith remarked that slavery as practiced in America was unknown in Europe, but they did not say anything about the effect that slavery might have on the attraction of America for poor white settlers.

It is well known that nothing came out of the Germantown protest which was transferred from the monthly meeting in Dublin to the quarterly meeting in Philadelphia. From Philadelphia the Germans themselves took the protest to the yearly meeting at Burlington where it was not considered proper "to give a positive judgment in the case, It having so General a Relation to many other Parts."

The German Quakers themselves kept clear of the practice which they had denounced. In John Hepburn's essay, which was written in 1714, testimony is given in support of the Germans. When the Negro-Master argues with the Christian that the Quakers, too, are

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21 Published in 1715.

22 M. D. Learned, *op. cit.*, 262 f. The minute of the quarterly meeting written on the protest recommended "that the abovesaid Derick and the other two mentioned therein present the same to the Yearly Meeting." The minute of the Burlington Yearly Meeting says: "A Paper being here presented by some German Friends. . . ."
owners of slaves, the "Christian's Answer" is: "There is a good Body of People without the Bonds of your Instance and that is the German Quakers, who live in Germantown near Philadelphia. Who (to their renowned Practise be it spoken) have above all other sects in America kept their Hands clean from that vile Oppression and enriching Sin of making Slaves of their fellow Creatures, the Negroes as I was credibly informed by one of themselves."

Pastorius excerpted fourteen pages of Hepburn's book for his "Alveralia," a notebook in which he preserved comments and excerpts. He had in his library, which was unusually large for a settler in the seventeenth century, George Keith's Exhortation concerning buying of Negroes, George Fox's Family Order of Whites, Blacks and Indians, and The Negro Christianized. This shows that his interest in the fate of the black race in America did not die out. But Pastorius never took any action again so far as we know.

It has been shown that this protest was not merely the protest of some "simple-hearted Protestants." Of the four signers, Pastorius, who mastered German, French, Italian, Latin and English, took the "Grand Tour" through European countries and was a well-trained lawyer, can hardly be styled as "simple-hearted." Derick op den Graff was a linenweaver from Crefeld and served as burgess in 1691 and as bailiff from 1693 to 1694 in the German community. Abraham op den Graff also served as burgess. Nothing is known of the fourth signer, Garret Hendericks. M. Stoughton-Locke also finds that "economic arguments although they received considerable attention among the Quakers were only supplementary. They were used for the sake of convincing others not because they had any influence in the mind of the writer." That the author clearly did not have the protest of 1688 in mind is indicated by her lack of comment on the document. In the case of the Germantown protest, the secular arguments were very strong in the minds of the writers, and although religious arguments were used, they do not deserve more attention than does the appeal to practical interest.

Finally the protest bears out a feature which is significant for the history of immigration. The problem of Americanization not only

24 A list of the books in Pastorius' library is found in M. D. Learned, op. cit., 278-282
deals with the traditions which the immigrants brought with them and the American traditions accepted by them but also with the spontaneous opposition that originated from the new conditions entirely unknown to the settlers from Europe. It is justifiable to bring the Germantown protest of 1688—as well as the opposition of the Salzburgers²⁶—in line with the attitude of Northern European immigrants toward slavery in the nineteenth century. In both cases the reaction to slavery was negative. Coming from a non-English country, the settlers were neither involved in the systems of slave-trade and slavery for reasons of profit nor were they accustomed to the fact of their existence. To say that slavery was customary in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is only true in so far as the colonists themselves were found to be accustomed to it. Except for the German element, non-English immigration was insignificant during colonial times. The German settlers proved to be opposed to the custom. They pronounced their reaction in two significant group-petitions. Their different attitude to slavery and to the involved problem of races could also be demonstrated by early utterances of single individuals, the account of which is not within the scope of this paper. That the practice differed not only according to geographical circumstances but also according to different nationalities is borne out by the first American census of 1790. At that time the number of slaves owned by Germans was 3,079 as compared with 2,586,684 owned by people of English and Welsh origin, 27,570 owned by people of Scottish and 6,578 owned by people of Irish origin. The average number of slaves per slaveholding family was 3.5, 6.8, 6.3, and 6.8, respectively. The number of white persons in German, English, Scottish and Irish families was almost the same, that is, 5.7, 5.7, 5.6, and 5.5. The number of slaves owned per hundred of all families was 77 for English and Welsh families, 101 for Scottish, 105 for Irish and 13 for German families. The comment of the census about the Germans is: "It is significant that the smallest proportion is shown by the Germans who even at the early period were obviously opposed to slave ownership. Had the proportion of slaves for the entire white population of the United

States in 1790 been the same as it was for the German element the aggregate number of slaves at the First Census would have been but 52,520 instead of approximately 700,000.”  

The reasons—geographical, economical, psycho-sociological and cultural—for this striking difference in slave ownership between the different nationalities cannot be investigated here. But as for the Germantown Protest it may be said that it not only deserves a place in the history of abolition and of Quakerism but also in the history of immigration and Americanization.

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