

IMMIGRANT AID SOCIETIES BEFORE 1820

ANY country receiving immigrants in large numbers is inevitably faced with certain social problems. Undesirable immigration involves only one aspect of the question. New arrivals, even of the most desirable classes, may fall into distress through the difficulties of adjustment to their new surroundings. When to this is added the further fact that the immigrant is frequently alone, without relatives or friends to aid him in such a period of distress, the likelihood of his becoming a public charge increases. In colonial days so urgent became the problems arising from the presence of newly-arrived immigrants suffering from ill health and destitution that a host of societies¹ for assisting the immigrant sprang up in the cities of the Atlantic seaboard. There were some like The Philadelphia Society for the Information and Assistance of Emigrants and Persons Emigrating from Foreign Countries, formed in 1793.² Most of these societies, however, were organized by earlier immigrants for the protection and aid of their own particular countrymen, each holding its annual meeting on the day of its patron saint: St. David, St. Andrew, St. George, or St. Patrick. The earliest of such societies in Philadelphia was The Welsh Society, or, as it was sometimes called prior to its incorporation in 1802, "The Society of Ancient Bretons"; its first meeting was an-

¹ Though these societies were not always organized for the encouragement of immigration, they incidentally did so indirectly. It may be noted, however, that there were European societies for the encouragement of emigration. Attention may be called to The High German Society of Langensalza organized in 1706 with the intention of establishing a Thuringian settlement in Carolina; and The High German Society of Frankfort-on-the-Main of which Pastorius was the agent in the settlement of Germantown in the colony of Pennsylvania in 1683.

² William Cobbett, *Porcupine's Works* (London, 1801), XII. 16-20, quoting an address from this society dated June 24, 1797. Not all the immigrant aid societies were racial in character: e.g., The Western Pennsylvania Emigrant Society (1827) formed by representatives of different parts of Europe. The object of the Society was to furnish immigrants "all the . . . assistance in its power, in procuring employment for them, locating them to the best advantage, according to their different situations, trades, or occupations; . . . and in rendering them all such services in establishing themselves, that they may need." Samuel Hazard, *The Register of Pennsylvania*, I. 24, Jan. 12, 1828.

nounced in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* for February 25, 1729.³ Others were The St. Andrew's Society of the State of New York, organized for the relief of Scots, and the similar society founded in Philadelphia in 1749; The Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland (1790) which grew out of the Hibernian Club of Philadelphia (1759) and the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick (1771); *Die Deutsche Gesellschaft zu Philadelphia*, founded in 1764 for the aid of Germans; The Society of the Sons of St. George "Established at Philadelphia [1772], for the Advice and Assistance of Englishmen in Distress"; and *La Société Française de Bienfaisance de Philadelphie, pour conseiller et secourir les Français* (1791),⁴ to mention only a few. Nor were these societies confined to the coastal region, for as immigrants treked westward other societies were established at Cincinnati, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Chicago.⁵

Perhaps the earliest immigrant aid society in the colonies was the quaintly named Scots Charity Box of Boston.⁶ As early as 1738 Thomas Coram wrote that he thought the Scots had a "Bank in Boston for the relieve of such of their Country as fell into Distress in New England";⁷ but by that year this venerable charitable society had been in existence more than three-quarters of a century.⁸ Only twenty-seven years after the founding of the town of Boston the Scots had thought it necessary to establish a society for the relief of those of their countrymen "brought through the Providence of God to necessitie." The explanation is simple, for in 1652 the ship *John and Sara* arrived in Boston bringing two hundred and seventy-two Scotsmen, who had

³ Howard B. Lewis, *The Welsh Society of Philadelphia* (1926); see also the manuscript minutes of this organization in H. S. P.

⁴ More than a score of such societies have been found to exist in this period along the coast. *Rules of the St. Andrew's Society at New York* (adopted 1764; reprint, 1915); *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of the Sons of St. George, Established at Philadelphia for the Advice and Assistance of Englishmen in Distress* (Philadelphia, 1797).

⁵ O. Seidensticker, *Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft von Pennsylvanien* (1876), 3; he lists other German societies organized in these cities.

⁶ Its official title is The Scots' Charitable Society, although it is also called "The Scots' Box" and "The Scots' Private Charitable Society"; *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, LVI. 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Thomas Coram to Rev. Colman, Sept. 1738.

⁸ The Scots' Charitable Society of Boston was instituted in 1657; reorganized in 1684; and incorporated by act of Massachusetts, March 16, 1786; *The Constitution and By-Laws of the Scots' Charitable Society of Boston* (Boston, 1896), 13, 14, 17.

been taken prisoners⁹ by Cromwell.¹⁰ As the quickest way of disposing of these, they were shipped off to the colonies to be sold to service for a longer or shorter time as the case might be. There was need for aid and so the original members of the society agreed to give "as god shall move our harts" and their benevolence was directed toward the "relief of our selves being Scottishmen or for any of the Scottish nation whom we may see cause to helpe."¹¹ The entries in the records show that they saw cause to help.¹² While their charity was intended primarily for the contributors to the society who by misfortune might become objects of charity, yet their relief was also directed toward the aged and infirm, the widow and the orphan, the sick and the shipwrecked, and to those desirous of returning but unable to transport themselves to their native country.¹³

There were other Scottish charitable societies organized at a later date in Philadelphia and New York. The St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia was organized in 1749 while that of New York adopted its rules in 1764.¹⁴ Alexandria¹⁵ and Charleston¹⁶ also had their Scot-

⁹ According to Butler, Winsor has erroneously stated that these prisoners were taken at the battle of Dunbar. They were taken at Worcester and shipped to New England, Sept. 3, 1651; J. D. Butler, "British Convicts Shipped to American Colonies," *Am. Hist. Rev.*, II. 13.

¹⁰ A letter from the Rev. John Cotton to Cromwell dated Boston, July 28, 1651, states that "sundry Scots taken by him at Dunbar, September 2, 1650, had arrived there and been sold, not for slaves to perpetual servitude, but for six or seven or eight years"; *Ibid.*, II. 13. The term "sundry" refers to 150 Scottish prisoners delivered to Augustine Walker, master of the *Unity* to be transported to New England; *Calendar of State Papers* (domestic series, 1650), 423.

¹¹ *The Constitution and By-Laws of the Scots' Charitable Society of Boston*, 9-10.

¹² "7th May, 1734. Voted Chas. Gordon, if he goes home, and if he do not go home the petition to be void—£3.7.0. Novr. 5th 1734. Voted Alexander Fyfe and William Ross, as an Act of Charity, not being members of the box—£3 each. 5th Decr. 1753. Given as Charity to a poor Wdo. Stewart a Scots Woman her husband Jno. Stewart being Wash'd Overboard in a Storm in their passage from Liverpool to New York and She much bruised and by which she lost the use of her left arm—by consent of the Presidt. and Vice Presidt. a Crown Sterling—£06.8. More given with consent of the Presidt. a Dollar—£06.0"; *Ibid.*, 24-29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴ *An Historical Catalogue of the St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia* (2 vols., Printed for the Society, 1907; 1913) I. 15; *Rules &c. of the St. Andrew's Society at New York*, (Reprint, 1915).

¹⁵ "Three Fourths of Alexandria are Scotch, and they are unanimous in assisting each other from the St. Andrew's Society which has an able fund"; Letter from John Bogen Carpenter, Sept. 15, 1795; *Look Before You Leap* (London, 1796), 69.

¹⁶ Easterby, J. H., *The History of the St. Andrew's Society of Charleston, South Carolina* (Charleston, the Society, 1930).

tish societies. Like the Boston society they too devoted their efforts to relieving their countrymen in distress.¹⁷ As the immigrants increased in numbers, the demands made upon the societies became heavy. It required considerable time to inquire into the necessities of each case. Soon it was found necessary to divide Philadelphia into districts so that the officers and assistants of the society might reach the needy more speedily and give proper help.¹⁸ Unfortunately the minutes of The St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia are missing for the early period and hence we can only catch a glimpse and infer the activity of the society in relieving the Scottish immigrant.

A much more complete record may be obtained of the work of the German societies which came into existence during the years 1764 to 1784 in the cities of Philadelphia, Charleston, Baltimore, and New York.¹⁹ The model for all other German societies was *Die Deutsche Gesellschaft* of Philadelphia. On November 30, 1764, a meeting was held to organize this society, and between that date and December 26 rules were drawn up and a permanent organization effected with Heinrich Keppele, a Philadelphia merchant, as president. The officials of the German societies included, besides the customary officers, lawyers and physicians. The historian of the Philadelphia Society states that it was founded as a result of the sufferings of the Germans on board the emigrant ships.²⁰ As a consequence the aims of the society were twofold: to secure the enactment of more stringent laws regulating conditions on the voyage to America; and to provide food, money, and clothing for the poor immigrants on their arrival at Philadelphia. Since all the German societies directed their efforts along the same channels of aid, monetary, medical, protective, educational, and legislative, their work may be considered as a unit. The activity of the Ger-

¹⁷ 1752, Feb. 7 "Mary Stark presents a petition stating that she was born in Glasgow of reputable parents, but seduced and decoyed thence to America at the age of nine years, and was in want—50 s. allowed"; *An Historical Catalogue of the St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia*, I. 37.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II. 9.

¹⁹ Philadelphia's German society was founded in 1764; Charleston, 1766; New York, 1784; and Maryland, doubtful as to exact date. Henninghausen's investigations into the early records led him to think the society was organized in 1783. Henninghausen, L. P., *History of the German Society of Maryland* (Baltimore, 1909), 35; 42-43. Note that in its first rules the New York Society set forth as one of its duties the encouragement of immigration, but this was shortly dropped and the society worked rather to warn than to encourage the rash immigrant. Eickhoff, Anton, *In der Neuen Heimath* (New York, 1884), 2.

²⁰ Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 38-39.

man Society of Philadelphia was immediately directed toward securing better regulation of the transportation of the German immigrants.

Conditions on board ship were indescribable. Ships were overcrowded and often supplied with insufficient food for the passengers. This together with the unsanitary conditions caused hundreds of immigrants to die before they reached the colonies. It was estimated that two thousand Germans died on the voyage to America in 1749.²¹ On June 5, 1752, a ship anchored at Philadelphia with nineteen Germans on board, all that remained alive of the two hundred who had embarked.²² In these years Christopher Saur was leading an "unrelenting crusade" against the exploiters of the Germans, and the influence that he exerted was undoubtedly among the causes that induced the Pennsylvania assembly to enact a law in the winter of 1749-1750 forbidding the overcrowding of ships.²³ The French and Indian War had served to check immigration from 1755 to 1764. By the latter year, however, conditions were as distressing as at the earlier date, and these conditions contributed to the formation of the German Society of Philadelphia.

At their first meeting, therefore, in 1764 the Society resolved to petition the assembly. Their petition containing a project for protecting and regulating the passenger traffic came before the assembly January 11, 1765. The Society proposed that a German interpreter accompany the custom officers appointed by the government to go on board every vessel, and that he explain such portions of the acts of the assembly as pertained to the landing of passengers. Masters of ships were to give a receipt to each passenger for his baggage on embarking, and no passenger who had paid his full fare could be denied his goods. No one was to be held responsible for the passage of those who died on the voyage or for another, excepting a man for his wife and children. In the petition the society also asked that passengers owing for their freight should not be treated and held as prisoners for an indefinite length of time; that the sick be better cared for; that no warrants of arrest be issued for the payment of freight, unless one-half be not paid

²¹ Knauss, J. O., *Social Conditions among the Pennsylvania Germans in the Eighteenth Century as Revealed in German Newspapers Published in America*, Reprint, *Proceedings of Pennsylvania German Society*, XXIX. 59-60; From Saur's newspaper, *Hoch-Deutsche Pennsylvanische Berichte*.

²² *Ibid.*, 60.

²³ *Pennsylvania Statutes at Large*, V. 94-97, Jan. 27, 1749/50.

within twelve months after landing, or in case the debtor attempted to leave the province. Any contract in which the emigrant bound himself to pay more than his own freight was to be invalid. Furthermore indentures were only to apply to the province of Pennsylvania and no passenger without his knowledge could be sold out of the province, nor could man and wife be separated.²⁴ The very proposals made illustrate a host of abuses that this trade labored under. Since the petition was presented near the end of the session, action was deferred by the governor, but on May 13, 1765, a law prohibiting the importation of German or other passengers in too great numbers in any one vessel was passed.²⁵ There were other protective measures passed in which the German society proved influential. Under the charter of the city of Philadelphia it was the duty of the mayor to enforce certain rules relative to immigration. But from 1776 to 1789 there was no mayor to register the immigrants and look after their contracts. This duty had devolved upon justices of the peace collectively or upon any three of them.²⁶ Confusion resulted and again the German society petitioned the legislature in the spring of 1785 for redress.²⁷ As a consequence a new officer was now created called the register of German passengers. He was to be appointed from time to time by the president in council and placed under oath by the chief justice of the United States. His duties were to register all German passengers arriving in Philadelphia and to execute all indentures. He had to be an inhabitant of Philadelphia, and be able to speak the German and English languages with ease and propriety. By virtue of his office he could exercise all the power and authority of a justice of the peace so far as that power pertained to regulating and judging of the law respecting German passengers. The register now performed the work formerly done by the mayor or recorder.²⁸ The first to hold the office was Lewis Farmer.²⁹ In this connection Seidensticker comments that when enforcement of the immigration laws had depended on the mayor no care had been taken to see whether he understood German or not.

²⁴ Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 46-47.

²⁵ *Pennsylvania Statutes at Large*, VI. 432-40, May 18, 1765.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, XI. 603.

²⁷ Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 91.

²⁸ *Pennsylvania Statutes at Large*, XI. 602-604, April 8, 1785.

²⁹ Farmer was Vice-President of the Society and President the next two years. Other members of the Society subsequently held the office. Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 92-93.

Only two of the mayors understood German and these two themselves had been interested in the importation of Germans.⁸⁰ The German society was also a supporter of the federal act of 1819. The president of the Society wrote a letter to John Sergeant, then a member of Congress, in which he urged him to have enacted a law regulating the numbers allowed on ships.⁸¹

The German Society of Maryland also used its influence to protect the redemptioner from abuse. They secured the passage of a law compelling shipmasters to provide wholesome food for the immigrants and to care for the sick at their own expense. No person could be held to pay for the passage of a deceased relative or friend no matter what contract had been previously made. The term of servitude was reduced to four years.⁸² Thus by bringing pressure to bear upon legislators, the German societies sought the protection of the German immigrant.

Possibly one of the most important fields of work for the German societies was in protecting the immigrant from various kinds of abuse, and gaining redress for his grievances not only on his passage across the Atlantic, but also during the time of his service as an indentured servant. The opportunities for the societies to intervene in behalf of the immigrant were innumerable. Despite contracts made with ship captains in regard to quarters and provisions, immigrants were mistreated on their passage, for the provisions agreed upon were not forthcoming once the vessel was under way. It became the customary work of the German societies to inquire into conditions on board the ships that arrived at the ports of Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and Charleston to see that the immigrant was treated justly.⁸³ Occasionally where the inspection proved satisfactory, the committee distributed food among the immigrants as a parting gift.⁸⁴ In some instances the humane treatment of the immigrants on shipboard in-

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸² Dorsey, *Maryland Laws*, I. 684-86 (1817); Heninghausen, *op. cit.*, 72-76.

⁸³ Sept. 1785—Inquiry made on ship *Watson* bringing emigrants to New York; Jan. 15, 1797—Emigrants declare to committee they have nothing to complain of on board the *Minerva* from Hamburg; Jan. 15, 1797—Passengers of the *Criterion* from Amsterdam have no complaints; Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 12, 27.

⁸⁴ Jan. 15, 1797; The immigrants having nothing to complain of; the committee thereupon bought some white bread and distributed it among the immigrants and gave the children suitable food too. *Ibid.*, 27.

duced the society to write a complimentary letter to the captain on his conduct.³⁵ In many cases, however, it was necessary to send provisions to the ship immediately.³⁶ In addition to victualling the ships, the societies sought to redress grievances of the immigrants against the captains. Thus in the spring of 1794 the ship *John* arrived at Philadelphia from Amsterdam. It came to the knowledge of the German Society of Philadelphia that Captain William Whitwell had not only shortened the provisions, but had also allowed three women to be beaten. The Society laid a charge against the captain before the court of common pleas. The latter named three commissioners who awarded twenty-five dollars damages against the captain, the sum to be divided among the three women.³⁷ The justice the immigrant received scarcely seems commensurate with the sufferings he endured, but at least it was an effort in the right direction and gave a possibility of redress that would not have existed without the societies. But it was not always possible even for the societies to obtain satisfaction; in fact, it was very difficult as Saur complained to obtain justice for the wretched immigrants.³⁸

As the societies established themselves their power to work in behalf of the immigrant increased. Although they had no definite program of cooperation, there was a friendly feeling between the various organizations. The heads of the different racial societies in any one city were often present at the same banquets. The New York German Society, however, did agree to get into communication with the Philadelphia German Society for future cooperation in behalf of the Germans.³⁹ In 1796, at a meeting of the former society there was read a petition signed by twenty-one German immigrants who had arrived on the brig *Hester Maria* from Hamburg. In it they complained of horrible and inhuman treatment from the captain, and a committee

³⁵ Heninghausen, *op. cit.*, 43; Letter Aug. 9, 1784, written by the secretary to Capt. Claus Kulkens of the Brig *Lavater*.

³⁶ Sept. 3, 1770—Decided that the people who have last come from London in the ship of James Pemberton & Co. are to be victualled at the expense of the Society; June, 1784—Deliver refreshments to the passengers on the ship *Washington*; 1785—Bitter complaints concerning the diet on the ship, *Adolph*. Some passengers beg urgently for food so that they may not die of hunger. They were helped; Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 149-50.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁸ In this connection Saur wrote: "*Solte der alte Cain zu unserer Zeit einen perfecten Lawyer und Geld genug haben, er sollte beweisen, er hätte den Abel nicht einmal gesehen*"; Knauss, *op. cit.*, 38.

³⁹ Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 14.

was appointed to investigate and see justice done at the cost of the society. The captain was taken before court and the passengers received indemnification for their mistreatment. The lawyer was paid by the Society. But their efforts did not cease here, for it was decided to write to an honorary member of the Society living in Altona, Germany, acquainting him with the conduct of Captain Dunn so that he might warn emigrants in Germany against the man and his ship.⁴⁰ Thus the Society attempted to protect the emigrant even before he started on his passage across the Atlantic.

If the societies demanded justice for the German immigrant, they also expected the latter to abide by his contract. On January 15, 1797, the ship *Minerva* from Hamburg had arrived at New York and upon inquiry the committee of inspection found the immigrants had no complaints. The captain, however, appealed to the Society to make the immigrants abide by their contract.⁴¹ The captain's rights as well as those of the immigrant had to be protected in this instance. It was much more usual, however, for the captain to infringe upon the contract made. It sometimes happened that masters of vessels attempted to deliver their passengers at ports other than those agreed upon by the immigrant before sailing, or they might try to dispose of their service outside the colony to which they had been delivered. Such a case came under the investigation of the German Society of Maryland. It was charged that Captain Bleeker of the Dutch ship *Johanna*, which arrived at Annapolis, was trying to sell the services of the immigrants in Virginia and the District of Columbia. Suits were brought by the Society to protect the redemptioners.⁴²

In the harsh conditions of a passage on an emigrant ship when, through overcrowding, disease spread and deaths were numerous, it was not uncommon for children to reach the new world alone, having lost their parents during the voyage. In October, 1773, the Philadelphia Society learned that two orphans were on board the *Charming Molly* of Captain Gill. The keys to their boxes were in the possession of a person who was making use of their possessions as he wished. The Society sent its agents to protect and give assistance to the children.⁴³

⁴⁰ Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 26.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27; Heninghausen, *op. cit.*, 85-86; letter of March 15, 1819, written by the president of the society to German immigrants on board the Dutch ship *Vrouw Elizabeth* declaring it is the captain's right to imprison them if they will not consent to hire for a reasonable time and urges them to abide by their contract.

⁴² Heninghausen, *op. cit.*, 63-65.

⁴³ Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 89; 148-50.

The immigrant who lived through the horrors of a long sea voyage must have been overjoyed when the ship anchored, thinking his trial over. His despair must have been equally profound when he was imprisoned for unpaid passage. In earlier times this was quite the customary procedure if no purchaser were found. The immigrant remained in prison starving, awaiting a buyer. Again the German societies aided the immigrant by securing food, and at times lessening his freight cost.⁴⁴ While the immigrant was subject to abuse through unpaid passage and lack of a purchaser, he was also mistreated by being overcharged for his passage. Despite the sum agreed upon for the passage, the immigrant was often defrauded by being compelled to pay a higher price. In such instances appeals went to the German societies. Thus in October, 1772, a widow, Christina Martin, lodged a complaint with the German Society of Philadelphia. It appeared that in the summer of 1772 the Martin family, parents and six children, took the ship *Minerva* in Rotterdam for America. The cost of their freight, which amounted to six full passages,⁴⁵ was £91 16 0 and was to be paid through service in America. George Martin had also borrowed 40 Dutch guilders, so that his obligations were about £97. On the trip the youngest child and then Martin himself died, so that upon arrival at Philadelphia when the head money for five persons was added, the family found themselves indebted for a sum over £98. The three sons were sold for £30 each and the brother-in-law of the widow, who took the children, gave the consignees, Willing and Morris, a note for £10 in addition, so that the debt of the family was more than paid. But even then Willing and Morris allowed the widow to be bought—"That nevertheless she being near forty-six years of age has been sold to John Brown for 22 pounds 6 shilling to

⁴⁴ Dec. 1784—Mr. Biddle had two Germans thrown into prison for unpaid passage. The committee secured better food and lessened their freight cost by a third; Feb. 15, 1772—A sum of 8 pounds was sent to the jailer for the cost of newly arrived Germans; Dec. 1787—Eight people were sent to jail for unpaid passage, awaiting a purchaser. They were allowed only a loaf of bread. The society ordered that until further notice be given, sixteen pounds of meat with vegetables be allowed them each week. Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 94; Sept. 4, 1794—Herr Freese, *candidatus theologiae*, implored the aid of the New York Society to pay his passage. Since he had recommendations from an honorary member of the society a committee was sent to see if the captain would not take less than the eight guineas asked. They gave the man two guineas and a note to the Lutheran Church to make up the sum lacking and succeeded in getting the captain to accept six guineas; Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 24.

⁴⁵ An adult made up one full passage; children from 4 or 5 to from 10 to 14 years were half fare; those below four years of age were carried free.

serve him and his assignees for five years." Thereupon the widow sought the aid of the Society, and the latter sent its agents to Willing and Morris who appealed to a note of George Martin which set forth that they had not taken too much. It seemed impossible to come to any agreement, whereupon President Keppele of the Society went to Morris and begged him to have pity upon the widow. The minutes on this case end, "And he let the widow go free."⁴⁶

If the societies found many opportunities to aid and protect the immigrant at the time of his arrival, they found as many during the period of the latter's service as an indentured servant. Occasionally the Society extended its aid even before the redemptioner's servitude began. Thus on October 15, 1792, the president of the New York Society reported the arrival of some Germans on the ship *Henry George*. They had been engaged by the Hamburg agent of the Genesee association of New York. The conditions, however, made with these immigrants appeared unusually harsh and unfair, and the Society decided to send a letter to William Berczy, agent of the Genesee association, requesting him to place the Germans on a more reasonable basis and according to the usual custom. Though no result is noted, one infers that these steps were not entirely unsuccessful for there was later correspondence in a friendly tone with Berczy asking his aid for German colonists.⁴⁷ The societies were likewise alert to enforce the system of registration of indentures instituted for the protection of the redemptioner. Consequently when a farmer took two boys without the registration of their indenture, the officers of the German Society of Maryland acted to secure their release.⁴⁸ However, the usual type of redemptioner's case that came before the German societies was that involving the mistreatment of a servant by his master. A committee of the New York Society investigated a case wherein one Gilbert had beaten and thrown into prison his German servant girl, Elizabeth Schweizerin. The committee went to the prison, secured entrance by order of the mayor, and found the girl locked in a dark hole. Upon the mayor's order she was placed in the usual prison room. The committee then paid Gilbert £34 for the rest of her time, transferring her service to the society. They laid the case before the grand jury of the supreme court who found him guilty, and

⁴⁶ Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 88-89.

⁴⁷ Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 22-23.

⁴⁸ Henninghausen, *op. cit.*, 80-85.

Elizabeth Schweizerin lodged an indemnification charge against him.⁴⁹ The redemptioner was subject to imposition in other ways as well. In May, 1770, Nicholas Busing complained that he had been held three years past his time for serving. The German Society of Philadelphia was called upon to investigate.⁵⁰ Even after the redemptioner had served his time and been released from his contract there was work for the Society to do. It had become customary that he who had served his allotted time could not be sent "empty away," and the freedom dues that the master was required to pay when the term of the indenture expired was part of the consideration for an indentured servant. But servants did not always get their freedom dues without difficulty and many were entirely deprived of what was justly theirs. In 1770 Johann Zimmermann and his wife complained that they had not received their freedom dues from their former master, Matthias Kopplin. The German Society of Philadelphia brought Kopplin before a court and the latter granted the man and wife five pounds Pennsylvania currency.⁵¹ In the various types of cases that came to the societies for adjustment either by direct appeal or through the courts involving grievances against the captain for mistreatment and infringement of contract, and those involving abuse under the indenture system, it becomes apparent just how wide a field of charitable aid was covered by the immigrant aid societies.

These societies were of service to the foreigner in many other ways. There was much aid granted in money,⁵² clothes, and food to specific

⁴⁹ Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 27. No further decision recorded. May, 1786 a certain Jacob Hiller bound in service to Andreas Röver of Montgomery County complained he was mistreated by Röver so that he lost his health and was unable to work. The case was taken up with various officials and the Albany branch of the society was likewise notified. At the same time Hiller was sent \$3 as aid. No decision recorded. A German woman, Christina Parkes bound to Andre Finck in Montgomery County complained of mistreatment from the latter to the point where she was unable to work. Whereupon he discharged her but not before she had been forced to sign a paper pledging herself to pay Finck £21 sterling in the course of four years. Case taken up but no decision recorded; *Ibid.*, 14-15; see also Henninghausen, *op. cit.*, 77-78; Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 96-97.

⁵⁰ Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 88. No decision.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵² Minutes of one meeting of the New York Society:

Jan. 3, 1786, for the support of needy Germans the following money was granted: In behalf of Andreas Kocher, wife and three children arrived on the ship *Olive Branch*. \$4.00
 For aid of Weissenfels 10.00
 For aid of Wm. Hoffmeister 5.00
 For aid of Andreas David Ross 1.40
 A Swede of Geburt, Friedrich Fauth appealed to the society for aid and was allowed 8.00
 Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 11, 13.

individuals who applied. As the immigrants increased in numbers these individual cases became more numerous and at almost every meeting of the Society some aid was granted. This type of aid was an increasing burden and was continuous throughout the period 1764-1820. At times the demands for aid were unexpectedly heavy. In 1804 George Rapp brought his colonists to the community he was establishing in Pennsylvania. They suffered much during the winter, and until the community was ready to receive them, they lived in various places and the German Society of Philadelphia gave \$200 to aid them.⁵³ On December 26, 1818, the German Society of Maryland celebrating the first anniversary of its reorganization noted that over \$500 had been given to needy emigrants in the past year.⁵⁴ Money was not always granted outright; at times it was loaned to immigrants for various purposes. In October, 1785, the New York Society granted £7 to an immigrant who petitioned that money be advanced him to pay for his passage to Charleston.⁵⁵ From time to time the New York Society took under consideration Germans who wanted to make a start in some business or for other reasons needed money for a time. In such cases loans were made to them but only under condition that some member or other known person pledged himself for the repayment of the money loaned.⁵⁶ The humanitarian work of the societies included care of the sick and burial of the dead. An entry of the Philadelphia German Society reads: "December, 1772, sick people, namely five grown people and three naked children who have been lodged in the poor house received aid in clothes, shoes, bread, tea and sugar."⁵⁷ In the period 1818 to 1820 and later, one of the noteworthy functions of this society was the free care of poor patients by doctors of the German Society. The agents of the societies

⁵³ Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 152.

⁵⁴ Henninghausen, *op. cit.*, 78.

⁵⁵ Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁷ Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 148-49. The records do not indicate that these sick people were immigrants. The society was organized however to aid German immigrants in distress and though these people may have been the descendants of earlier immigrants or they may themselves have been naturalized citizens yet the fact that Philadelphia was a port of entry for immigrants leads one to assume that much of the society's aid went directly to immigrants who had but recently arrived. Irrespective of their status, whether naturalized citizens or recent immigrants, their care during the period of arrival and adjustment created an immigrant problem which may be considered here. July 5, 1785, the New York Society, granted £5 to a sick immigrant, Adam Wendell, for his support; Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 21.

occasionally did not reach the sick quickly enough with food, medicine, and doctors and then the entry reads, "the Society paid the expense of burial."⁵⁸ Just as the German societies, despite their efforts to secure protective legislation, could not prevent abuse and had difficulty even in securing justice, so in the case of the immediate financial aid granted, their efforts could only mitigate the sufferings of relatively few of the immigrants. It required greater cooperation and larger resources than the societies possessed to enable the immigrant to adjust himself to conditions of the new world.

In protecting the immigrant and caring for his immediate material wants the German societies did not overlook the possibilities of service to the children of immigrants.⁵⁹ Consequently education became one of the fields of work. The German Society of Philadelphia first turned its attention to the education of German children at the time of the Revolution, for then immigration ceased and the society was relieved of the burden imposed on it by its other work. The aim was all-inclusive: to erect and maintain schools, one or more libraries, to instruct children of German birth or descent, and to pay schoolmasters. It is needless to say that this ambitious program was never fully achieved. The years 1781-1833 marked the first period in which the Society interested itself in education, a period in which the individual scholar was cared for.⁶⁰ The Society's first efforts came in 1780 when it sent two boys to the University. Thereafter throughout this period the Society paid the cost of instruction for the students it sent.⁶¹ The Society also provided books and supplies. Moreover, a number of scholars after their promotion as "*baccalaurei artium*" were given

⁵⁸ Sept. 19, 1781, the society received notice of a sick man, Christian Langmeyer, who was in dire need. Before action could be taken, he died, whereupon the society paid the expenses of burial; Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 21; 22; Jan. 30, 1773, burial costs paid for Jacob Bauscherl; Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 146-47; 148-49.

⁵⁹ In this matter of education of German children the difficulty of distinguishing between immigrants and the descendants of immigrants again arises. It is readily admitted that the education by the society of children born abroad who emigrated with their parents is direct aid to the immigrant. The education of children born in America of immigrant parents is still aid, for it enabled the parent to provide an education for his child which perhaps would not have been possible otherwise. In other cases the term "aid" could scarcely be applied, but since no distinctions are made in the records and since probably some of the German children came under the aforementioned groups, this phase of the society's activities has been included.

⁶⁰ Seidensticker, *op. cit.*, 198.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 190-91; Seidensticker lists the names of those sent each year from 1781 to 1830.

stipends of \$20 a year for three years if they decided to study theology.⁶² In addition the Society sought to give the protection of the law to those whom it could not reach in any other way. It often happened that masters of indentured children allowed them to grow up without any instruction in order that they could use all their time for work. In 1809 this matter was taken up by the Society and the help of the legislature was sought. As a consequence the law of March 19, 1810, was passed whereby all masters were required to give their servants who were minors six weeks schooling for every year of their term of servitude, and this was inserted in the indenture.⁶³ This law, however, only gave legal sanction to a custom that had been practised for many years. Schooling for children began to be mentioned in the indentures as early as 1785, and before 1810 had become common.⁶⁴ The German Society of Charleston was equally industrious in behalf of the German immigrant children. In 1803 it opened a German school wherein Latin and Greek, as well as German and English, were taught and twenty poor children were instructed free of charge. A German library was opened in 1805.⁶⁵ In 1797 a German arriving from Hamburg received a gift of eight dollars from the German Society of New York, so that he could go to East Camp, New York, to teach in a German school. This Society took upon itself the sending of two poor children to school. One went to the Lutheran and the other to the Reformed parochial schools.⁶⁶ In 1791, with the establishment of a free school for all poor German children, the Society thereafter committed itself to providing the necessary German books for poor students. The schoolmaster of the German free school was authorized to notify the treasurer of the Society if there were children in his school whose parents were too poor to buy their books so that the treasurer could provide them.⁶⁷ In proportion to the immigrants arriving, the

⁶² *Ibid.*, 190-91.

⁶³ *Laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Bioren), V. 113.

⁶⁴ Herrick, C., *White Servitude in Pennsylvania*, 263.

⁶⁵ Heninghausen, *op. cit.*, 33. The history of the German Society of Charleston has never been published. Heninghausen includes an account of it, making use of information furnished by its officers and from its records.

⁶⁶ Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 15. Herr Müller, the schoolmaster of the Reformed Church begged to be paid for three free pupils. The committee was authorized to pay if his claims were just. One infers that the society expanded its efforts to include more than the original two students. *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

numbers to which the societies could afford educational advantages was extremely small. The effort, however, was worthy, for it laid a basis for good citizenship and in so far as the immigrant children were taught English it was in a sense the later so-called process of Americanization. The various aids—protective, financial, educational—that the German societies afforded the immigrant have been traced in detail for the reason that the minutes of these societies are fuller and more accessible. Moreover, it may be inferred that they represent the same type of activity that all immigrant aid societies engaged in. It is not the intention, however, to leave the impression that they were the only societies. Most racial groups had their own organizations and consequently Irish and English societies are found as well as the Scottish and German societies mentioned above.

The English had their societies in Boston, Charleston, and Philadelphia, sometimes only for the relief of Englishmen and at other times expanded to include the Welsh and Scots.⁶⁸ The oldest Irish organization in America is the Charitable Irish Society of Boston, founded in 1737 by several gentlemen, merchants, and others of the Irish nation residing in Boston, through concern for their countrymen in need due to sickness, shipwreck, old age, and other infirmities.⁶⁹ Their design was to relieve their poor countrymen but as they assured the Boston authorities they had no "design of not contributing towards the provisions of the town poor in general as usual."⁷⁰ Philadelphia had its Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland, organized in 1790 and incorporated in 1792,⁷¹ while that of New York was instituted in 1784.⁷² The record of the latter society is summarized in general terms: numbers of deserving, but less fortunate fellow-countrymen, were relieved by the bounty of the Society, implements

⁶⁸ *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of the Sons of St. George* (Philadelphia, 1772), 6, 16. The Society of St. George in Charleston was incorporated December, 1805. *Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina*, Dec. 1805, 53. The British Charitable Society of Boston, incorporated Feb. 18, 1818, included English, Scottish, and Welsh immigrants. *Report of the British Charitable Society* (Boston, 1863), 2, 7.

⁶⁹ *Charitable Irish Society; Its Constitution and By-Laws* (1917), 21.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷¹ *Charter with Amendments &c. of the Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland* (Philadelphia, 1887).

⁷² Called Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick. *Charter Constitution By-Laws, Officers, Etc. of Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick* (New York, 1905). It was incorporated Dec. 13, 1827. *Laws of the State of New York*, 50th session, (Albany, 1827), 27-28.

and materials for domestic manufacture were furnished to the industrious poor. The needy were assisted with money, medicine, clothing and fuel, the destitute were provided with homes and when necessary, were furnished with sufficient funds to enable them to return to their native land.⁷³

Savannah incorporated its Hibernian Society December 10, 1812.⁷⁴ That the work of the Irish societies was similar to that of the German societies can be seen in a case brought before the courts by the Irish Society of Philadelphia. Incidentally it again illustrates the difficulty of obtaining justice for the immigrant. During the summer of 1790 upon complaint of some immigrants the society had interposed and prosecuted a master of a vessel in the passenger trade for the breach of an old law of Pennsylvania regulating that trade.⁷⁵ Captain Robert Cunningham was master of the brigantine *Cunningham*, of Londonderry. Upon the trial of the indictment it appeared there was a scarcity of provisions. The passengers had been reduced to short allowance for three weeks previous to their arrival; there had been little or no vinegar to keep the vessel clean; and in the berth provided for four persons a passenger had stowed himself, wife and eight children, only drawing the allowance of provisions for four people. The master was found guilty and fined £500 currency.⁷⁶ Since he had remonstrated with his owners concerning the inadequacy of his stores for the voyage it was expected some reduction of the fine would take place. In the meantime, for failure to pay the fine, he was imprisoned and remained so for many months. It was thought the Governor would remit the fine, but he deemed the charge so very prejudicial to the interests of the country, as tending to discourage emigrations from Ireland, that he resisted all applications for remission of the fine. Thereupon the friends of the captain had recourse to the legislature which passed an act for his relief by remitting the fine.⁷⁸ Once more

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁴ *The Acts of the General Assembly of Georgia* (Nov., 1812), 53-54.

⁷⁵ An act for prohibiting the importation of Germans and other passengers in too great numbers in any one vessel, Jan. 27, 1749/50; *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, V. 94-99.

⁷⁶ Phineas Bond to Duke of Leeds, Jan. 3, 1791; *Ann. Rept., Am. Hist. Assn.* (1897), I. 472-73.

⁷⁸ An act for the relief of Robert Cunningham, April 13, 1791; *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, XIV. 89-90.

justice went astray as a legislature expressed its indifference for what was deemed the interest of the country.

These societies were not unknown to the immigrant in America and abroad. Heinrich Miller in his *Staatsbote* mentions with favor the organization of *Die Deutsche Gesellschaft* in Philadelphia,⁷⁹ while Dr. John Ludwig Schultze of Friedrich's University, Halle, noted the existence of this Society.⁸⁰ The European reader of traveler's accounts found reference to them,⁸¹ and the emigrant guides called attention to them.⁸² In addition the societies themselves made their existence known through their publications issued for the guidance and protection of the immigrant. Incidentally these pamphlets must have been influential in encouraging emigration. The German Society of Maryland published an address to those in Germany intending to emigrate, setting forth correct information. Three thousand of these were forwarded and distributed in the different principalities of Germany.⁸³ The Shamrock Society of New York published *Hints to Irishmen* and sent it forth to guide the Irish immigrant.⁸⁴ About 1825 a pamphlet under the title of *Wohlgemeinter Rath an Auswanderer* was sent to Germany by the New York German Society.⁸⁵ Thus throughout the period under consideration, the societies were engaged in this type of work also.

The members of these societies had normally been immigrants themselves once and they knew the difficulties that confronted the newly arrived. Stirred to activity by the sufferings of the immigrants and their appeals to their countrymen for help, they had formed organizations to give that aid more efficiently and more widely than was possible where each individual acted alone. From small beginnings their aid had expanded to procure the enactment of legislation favorable to the immigrant, to give protection and support to him in

⁷⁹ Knauss, *op. cit.*, 11.

⁸⁰ *Reports of the United German Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in North America*, (1882), 1, 6.

⁸¹ Priest, William, *Travels in the United States of America* (London, 1802), 145.

⁸² Amphlett, William, *The Emigrants' Directory* (London, 1819), 87.

⁸³ Heninghausen, *op. cit.*, 99-100.

⁸⁴ *Hints to Irishmen who intend with their families to make a permanent residence in America*, By the Shamrock Society of New York (Dublin, 1817). This gained further dissemination through republication in Melish, John, *Travels through the United States of America* (London, 1818).

⁸⁵ Eickhoff, *op. cit.*, 4, 36-37.

the courts, to give the services of physicians as well as lawyers, to grant provisions and money, and to procure cultural as well as material benefits for him. Despite the relatively small number of their countrymen aided, the humanitarian service the societies rendered the bewildered immigrant was invaluable.

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