

“Redemptioners.”

The following extract from Albert Cook Myers's *Immigration of the Irish Quakers into Pennsylvania, 1682—1750* (p. 99), will explain the use of this term:—

It was a frequent occurrence for poor emigrants to sell themselves into temporary servitude, usually for a term of four years, in order to defray the cost of their transportation to Pennsylvania. On engaging passage the emigrants made an agreement or indenture with the shipmaster that they were to be sold after their arrival, and were known on this account as indented servants or redemptioners. It is evident from certificates of removal and other manuscripts that many Friends, particularly those from Ireland, arrived in this manner. . . . At the end of their service, if their behavior merited it, they received a suit of clothes, a set of tools of the occupation in which they were engaged, and frequently a sum of money, and those who had come over with first purchasers were allowed by Penn to take up fifty acres of land at a rent of one half-penny an acre per annum.

The working of this system is illustrated by the following extract from a letter written to Margaret Fell by Henry Fell, from Barbados in 1658 (preserved in D., Swarthmore MSS. i. 72):—

. . . My loue to my Brother Thomas & y^e rest of my friends after y^e fflesh thou mayst remember & lett them know that J am well euery way J did mention in one of my fformer letters to thee, one Thomas Hatton (who is nephew to Gervase Benson) who was apprentice to a Barber in Kendall he went ouer in y^e same shipp with me, as a Serv^t to Serue 4 yeares here to whomsoeuer his m^r to whom he had entered himselfe serut^t to should sell him. Soe J vnderstandge that his master would sell him, J spoke to him to know what he would haue for him knowinge that he might be servicable to some ffriends here, he tould me J should haue him cheaper then any, And the younge man desired to liue with a ffriend, soe when we came to y^e Jsland J spoke to Peter Evans (who is a faithfull ffriend) who was willinge to buy him, & soe gave 1600^{li} of sugar for him. Peter likes him well, & he will be seruicable to him. But J thought good to mention this againe, y^t his vncl^e may be acquainted with it, the fellow desired me to mention it if J writt into England. J desire to heare from his vncl^e to know his minde herein, if he will release him, or let him serue y^e tyme, which seruitude will be y^e lesse to be bone in regard he is with a ffriend. J would desire thee to let him knov thus much, and remember my deare loue to him. . . .

The dark side of the Indenture system may be seen in the life of Elizabeth Ashbridge (1713-1755); see *Quaker Grey*, by Albert C. Curtis, 1904.