

Runaway servants were usually rewarded with a severe whipping by their masters, but if brought into court thrice the number of days they had been absent could be added by the court to their time of servitude. An incident which came before the Charles County Court at the January 12, 1664/5, session shows that the justices were not without a sense of humor. Three servants, one of them a chronic offender, Matthew Broune, were brought before the court on the charge of being runaways. The two others, a man and a girl, declared that "they went along with him for company". The court then ordered that they "shall also for company sake at the whipping post in the publicke vew of the Peopell" receive respectively nine and seven lashes on their bare backs as a penalty. Broune was more severely punished (p. 560). Failure of masters to deliver to servants the clothes, tools and corn to which they were entitled at the termination of their servitude by the "custom" and the law of the Province, were the cause of a number of suits against masters. There are cases in which masters sought to extend the term of servitude of those already bound by indentures, or contracts, by persuading them to sign extensions or new contracts. This abuse became so notorious that the Assembly in 1661 and 1662 passed acts declaring invalid all extension contracts, even when wages were provided for, that had been made during the period of servitude (*Arch. Md. i*, 409, 453). In the case of Joane Wilmot, whose master had "sold" her after the expiration of her legal servitude and while she was working on one of these extended contracts, the Charles County Court, February 3, 1663/4, declared her to be free (pp. 443-444).

That the fate of many servants at this period was a deplorable one is made plain by a reading of these proceedings. The number of suicides which occurred among them is very significant. Inquests held over the bodies of servants who showed evidence of brutal beatings, raised the question in several cases whether death was due to natural causes, or was the result of blows inflicted by masters. In one instance a young servant boy in attempting to escape from a master bent on administering a whipping, plunged into the river and was drowned; according to the jury this was a case of suicide (*Arch. Md. liv*, 360-362). In another instance a boy was so neglected by his master that the court declared that the "voyce of the People Crieth shame thereat" and gave him his freedom (p. 410).

There will be found scattered throughout these court minutes a number of cases in which individuals, not bound either by indentures or by action of the county courts, had entered into agreements or contracts to work for a specified time and wage, where disputes as to the amount of wages due by employers resulted in suits before the courts for their recovery.

Disputes between masters and apprentices also found their way before the court. Not only the duration of the apprenticeship might be at issue, but neglect in the care of the apprentice might be complained of. An interesting case to be referred to later was one in which a surgeon's apprentice complained that he was not properly dressed for his position in the world (pp. 1, 413).

The story of Sarah Taylor, a servant in the family of Thomas Bradnox, one of the justices of Kent, and her sufferings under a brutal master and mis-