

were frequently bound out as apprentices not only as a means of learning a trade but also as a means of providing for paupers, orphans and illegitimate offspring.<sup>17</sup>

The total number of white servants in Maryland during the years 1696–99 is unknown but it probably was in the neighborhood of 2,500. Available statistics show almost 1,700 imported into the province in the period 1696–98. Various efforts were made to improve the caliber of imports by prohibiting the importation of convicts and by placing a high duty on “Irish papists.” Neither restriction appears to have had any noticeable effect. The prohibition on convicts was contrary to English policy and ships’ masters continued to bring in Irish Catholics despite the duty.<sup>18</sup>

The law in Maryland regulating white servants and governing master-servant relationships was extensive and detailed. A substantial portion of the business of the county courts in Prince Georges County and elsewhere was concerned with various aspects of such regulation and government.

In Maryland, as in neighboring Virginia, tobacco was almost the only staple commodity—“our meat, drinks cloathing and monies”—and the greater part of the cultivated soil was devoted to its growth. While by the end of the century some foodstuffs were being raised, chiefly Indian corn or maize and wheat, and, to some extent, being exported to other colonies, the amount barely exceeded the needs of the colony. If the crops were poor, exportation of foodstuffs might be prohibited.<sup>19</sup> Tobacco was king and for better or worse the great majority of the planters were its subjects. In spite of the difficulties inherent in tobacco culture, in spite of “over production” and in spite of wide and sometimes ruinous fluctuations in price, it was a cash crop. It was the only product indigenous to the colony, with the possible exceptions of naval stores and furs, which was marketable in the mother country. Hence the planters in the late seventeenth century saw no alternative but to continue to raise it even in the face of low and fluctuating prices, higher duties and rising freight costs and exhaustion of the soil. Several severe winters in the 1690’s spoiled tobacco crops, turned planters to more extensive cultivation of food for their cattle, and interfered with the scheduled sailings of the “tobacco fleet.”<sup>20</sup>

The available figures indicate that the amount of tobacco exported from Maryland during the period from 1689 to 1715 remained stable, although the number of planters increased. The prices received in the colony by the Maryland planter for his tobacco during this same period, generally regarded as low, fluctuated within rather narrow limits, for 1697–1700 ranging from 1½d. to 2d. per pound. No comparable figures are available for prices of tobacco sold in England by Maryland planters during this period.<sup>21</sup>

Tobacco was not only a marketable commodity. Although a clumsy medium of exchange, it also served as the chief currency of the plantation in the absence of any significant quantity of specie in circulation.<sup>22</sup> The records here published indicate it was receivable by law for all taxes and assessments, including fines im-

17. McCormac, *White Servitude in Maryland, 1634–1820*, JHUS, Series XXII, Nos. 3–4 (1904) c. IV; Smith, *Colonists in Bondage, White Servitude and Convict Labor in America, 1607–1772* (1947) (those portions relating to Maryland c. 1690–1700); Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (1946) (those portions relating to Maryland c. 1690–1700).

18. Morriss, *op. cit. supra*, 77–78.

19. *Id.* 15–17, 24–25; 20 *MA* 503; 22 *id.* 85.

20. 19 *id.* 580; Wyckoff, *Ships and Shipping of Seventeenth Century Maryland*, 34 *MHM* 270, 275 (1939).

21. Morriss, *op. cit. supra*, 36–38.

22. *Id.* 28–29.