

Source H: Account by former indentured servant George Alsop (1666)

Background: George Alsop was an indentured servant who moved from London to Maryland, then eventually back to London when his period of indenture was over. He wrote this book to encourage servants to go to Maryland. What does he say about the conditions and the prospects for servants in Maryland? Is it different for men and women?

And let this be spoke to the deserved praise of Mary-Land, That the four years I served there were not to me so slavish, as a two years Servitude of a Handicraft Apprenticeship was here in London. . . .

They whose abilities cannot extend to purchase their own transportation over into Mary-Land, (and surely he that cannot command so small a sum for so great a matter, his life must needs be mighty low and dejected) I say they may for the debarment of a four years sordid liberty, go over into this Province and there live plenteously well. And what's a four year's Servitude to advantage a man all the remainder of his days, making his predecessors happy in his sufficient abilities, which he attained to partly by the restraint of so small a time?

The Merchant commonly before they go aboard the Ship, or set themselves in any forwardness for their Voyage, has Conditions of Agreements drawn between him and those that by a voluntary consent become his Servants, to serve him, his Heirs or Assigns, according as they in their primitive acquaintance have made their bargain, some two, some three, some four years and whatever the Master or Servant ties himself up to here in England by Condition, the Laws of the Province will force a performance of when they come there: Yet here is this Privilege in it when they arrive, If they dwell not with the Merchant they made their first agreement withal, they may choose, whom they will serve their prefixed time with; and after their curiosity has pitched on one whom they think fit for their turn, and that they may live well withal, the Merchant makes an Assignment of the Indenture over to him whom they of their free will have chosen to be their Master, in the same nature as we here in England (and no otherwise) turn over Covenant Servants or Apprentices from one Master to another. Then let those whose chaps are always breathing forth those filthy dregs of abusive exclamations, which are Lymbeckt from their sottish and preposterous brains, against this Country of Mary-Land, saying, That those which are transported over thither, are sold in open Market for Slaves, and draw in Carts like Horses; which is so damnable an untruth, that if they should search to the very Center of Hell, and enquire for a Lye of the most ancient and damned stamp, I confidently believe they could not find one to parallel this: For know, That the Servants here in Mary-Land of all Colonies, distant or remote Plantations, have the least cause to complain, either for strictness of Servitude, want of Provisions, or need of Apparel: Five days and a half in the Summer weeks is the allotted time that they work in; and for two months, when the Sun predominates in the highest pitch of his heat, they claim an ancient and customary Privilege, to repose

themselves three hours in the day within the house, and this is undeniably granted to them that work in the Fields.

In the Winter time, which lasts three months (viz.) December, January, and February, they do little or no work or employment, save cutting of wood to make good fires to sit by, unless their Ingenuity will prompt them to hunt the Deer, or Boar, or recreate themselves in Fowling, to slaughter the Swans, Geese, and Turkeys (which this Country affords in a most plentiful manner:) For every Servant has a Gun, Powder and Shot allowed him, to sport him withall on all Holidays and leasure times, if he be capable of using it, or be willing to learn.

Now those Servants which come over into this Province who are Artificers [craftsmen], they never (during their Servitude) work in the Fields, or do any other employment save that which their Handicraft and Mechanic endeavors are capable of putting them upon, and are esteemed as well by their Masters, as those that employ them, above measure. He that's a Tradesman here in Mary-Land (though a Servant), lives as well as most common Handicrafts do in London, though they may want something of that Liberty which Freemen have, to go and come at their pleasure He that lives in the nature of a Servant in this Province, must serve but four years by the Custom of the Country; and when the expiration of his time speaks him a Freeman, there's a law in the Province, that enjoins his Master whom he hath served to give him Fifty Acres of Land, Corn to serve him a whole year, three Suits of Apparel, with things necessary to them, and Tools to work withal; so that they are no sooner free, but they are ready to set up for themselves, and when once entered, they live passingly well.

The Women that go over into this Province as Servants, have the best luck here as in any place of the world besides; for they are no sooner on shore, but they are courted into a Matrimony, . . . Men have not altogether so good luck as Women in this kind, or natural preferment, without they be good Rhetoricians, and well versed in the Art of persuasion then (probably) they may rivet themselves in the time of their Servitude into the private and reserved favor of their Mistress, if Age speak their Master deficient.

In short, touching the Servants of this Province, they live well in the time of their Service, and by their restraint in that time, they are made capable of living much better when they come to be free; which in several other parts of the world I have observed, That after some servants have brought their indented and limited time to a just and legal period by Servitude, they have been much more incapable of supporting themselves from sinking into the Gulf of a slavish, poor, fettered, and entangled life, then all the fastness of their prefixed time did involve them in before.