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THE Decorated
Stove Plates
of the Pennsylvania
Germans.

BY

HENRY C. MERCER.

Boylestown,
McGinty's Job Press
1899.

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The Decorated Stove Plates

OF

The Pennsylvania Germans.

Numbers set after the figure numbers of illustrations refer to original specimens in the Museum of the Bucks County Historical Society at Doylestown, Pennsylvania; numbers in italics to specimens in the writer's collection, at Indian House, Doylestown.

The existence of plates of cast iron, about two feet square, elaborately decorated with biblical scenes, hearts, tulips, mottoes and scriptural quotations, recently exhibited in Bucks County by its Historical Society, ought to be of general interest.

Brought to light, like relics of a vanished people, they were rescued none too soon. Unvalued as things of beauty,

The Death of Abel.

As before the foot-lights of a stage the figures stand in low relief within a conventional frame formed by two Roman columns supporting a round arch with pendant Acanthus. Furious Cain, uplifting in both bared arms a death dealing club, advances upon his unarmed brother, who, standing beside one of the trees of Eden, makes a protesting gesture.

The costume, the apparent bareness of the legs, the roll of the long stockings below the knee, the kilt like skirt and shoulder scarf, though probably an attempt to reproduce some idea of the dress of ancient Rome, suggest the peculiar costume of the Scottish highlanders. Beneath the figure and above an oval including the date 1741 set in rococo scrolls is the legend, CAIN SEINEN BRUTER AWEL TOT SCHLUG (Cain killed his brother Abel.) Discovered by Mr. Alexander Ralph, at Camp Hill, Montgomery County, Pa., in pulling down a tenant house, this interesting and well preserved plate, presented by him to the Bucks County Historical Society, is marked like a duplicate of Fig. 5 in the possession of Mr. B. F. Fackenthall, of Riegelsville, Pa., with the oldest date yet found on any of these designs. Because across the main pattern and between the date figures, straight cracks as of warped wood appear, there can be no doubt that the specimen was cast from a wooden mould



Fig. 1 1199.
From an original 2 ft. 2 in. square

unremembered though the reflected fame of their makers, whose names had perished; abandoned to rust and weather, as pavings for fireplaces, smoke houses and bake ovens, as the sluices of dams and the bridges of gutters, the time of their utter destruction had almost come; yet historians of Pennsylvania might well be surprised that a leaven of art in the ingredients of colonial life, represented by these iron heirlooms, for a time regarded as facings for the backs of fire places, but finally identified as the component parts of stoves, had so completely escaped their investigation and notice.

Hearts, Tulips, and Birds of the Pennsylvanian Potter.

whole here and there with oxide of copper. Glaze with the old Haycock transparent yellow glaze of red lead and buff clay. Then the design burns red on a yellow background spotted with green. In No. 4, doubtless derived from designs of the Pelican tearing its breast to feed its young, (see Illuminated Leaflet in Contributions to American History by the Bucks County Historical Society, No. 2.) the blue clay slip design, traced flowingly on through a quill protruding from the slip cup, and treated as before, burns yellow on a red background. Working thus by the method of medieval and modern Italian, French and German peasant potters, and with the design of the heart and tulip, bird and flowers at your finger tips, you labor in a decorative spirit common to the earthenware, decorated iron, and illuminative writing of the Pennsylvania Germans.

The beautiful specimens, rivaling Italian majolica in the richness of their yellows, browns, greens, reds and blacks, are here photographed by the kind permission of Mr Dalton Dorr, as part of the remarkable collection originally made by Mr. F. A. Barber, at the Museum at Memorial Hall, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia.

No. 1. Museum No. 93-183. Heart and Tulip. *Sgraffiato* design, red under the scrape. Background dull greenish yellow slip, sponge spotted with green. Made at Scholl pottery, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, probably late in the eighteenth century.

On the pie plates Nos. 1 and 3, moulded, not turned, "thrown," of native buff Bucks County clay that burns red. pour thick as cream the New Jersey blue clay-and-water "slip" that burns white. When the bluish film has dried on the "body," scratch the bird, heart or tulip with its legend through the former, dabbing the



Fig. 2.

No. 2. Museum No. 93-217. Bird on twig. Design in yellow and sometimes green slip traced through quill from slip cup upon unslipped red background. Montgomery County, about 1796.

No. 3. Museum No. 96-55. Bird on Tulip, surrounded with motto. Design red where scraped on yellow slip background dabbled with green. Date 1789. Pennsylvania German. Given by Mr. I. J. Morris.

No. 4. Museum No. 93-218. Bird with bill turned against its breast in the style of the Pelican emblem among Pennsylvania Germans. Design in yellow slip traced through quill on red background. Montgomery County, about 1830.

They illustrate the much-talked-of relation of Germany to the United States at one of its most interesting points, proving the fact that the mediæval art impulses of the Rhineland crossed the Atlantic to survive, for a time at least, among the material conditions of the Pennsylvanian backwoods. For more than one generation the artificer, who had worked within knowledge of the fair monuments of Nuremberg, Rothenburg, Colmar or Basel, retained a memory of his craft.

Like the floriated earthenware recently investigated by Mr. A. E. Barber; like the illuminated handwriting lately rescued by ourselves, reflecting gleams of color, legends and ancient themes of beauty from an unlooked-for corner of the

The Temptation Of Joseph.

In some large work room or tannery rather than a church, where in the Lehigh Hill country *bundling* was an occasional practice in the last century, look at the fleeing Joseph and read the legend, to be reminded of the dangers of your surroundings among the sunbonneted daughters of the land.

The archaic treatment connects the plate with the workmanship of Fig. 4, but the arch is lacking, the column supports nothing, and the tassel hangs meaningless from the corner. Found in Emanuel Peterson's junk heap at Doylestown in 1879, it had been used as a door step by Mr. Henry P. Sands, who, in an oft repeated narrative, now forgotten, was wont to describe its discovery and acquisition at a farm house.

In some large work room or tannery rather than a church, where in the Lehigh Hill country



Fig. 3. No. 788.

From an original 2 feet wide and 2 feet 2 inches high.

wilderness, these ornate symbols of religious art surprise the investigator. They appear as incongruous elements in the material narrative of wood cutting, Indian fighting and legislature making. Yet they are there. As survivals of the past, proven ingredients of national character, they must be taken into consideration.

For many reasons the artistic impulses concerned in the making of these heirlooms, the stove plates, the illuminated writing and the earthenware might be classed together. And

The Miracle of Cana.

Set in the mud for a gutter-crossing when found at the farm of Mr. G. Martin, of New Britain, Pa., the interesting relic was rescued at the last moment, as a part of one of the original stoves used for warming the tannery of the Shewells at Painswick Hall. Time and rust working upon the venerable plate have not effaced the outlines of human figures, of the well and of of water vessels, decoratively framed between two columns, and an Acanthus leaf depending from a superincumbent arch now rusted away. To the left a figure works with both arms at the well pulley, behind whom on a block rests a large tankard. Between this and two similar vessels set upon the ground to the right, as containing the water changed to wine by miracle, stands the figure of Christ working the wonder, while below and across the entire plate runs the motto, JESUS MACHT AUS WASSER WEIN (Jesus makes wine from water.) From beneath this in a scrolled oval are the words, I IAN AM 2 CAP. (Ist John in the second chapter.) The style of scrolls, columns and pendant Acanthus seem to connect the undated plate, possibly made at Durham, with Figs. 1 and 17



Fig 4. 1195
Reduced from an original 24 inches
high and 21 inches wide.

though in this instance we speak particularly of the decoration of stoves, it should be borne in mind, by way of a general preface, that, with the exception of some of the earthenware of English origin, all these crafts were German; and furthermore that all were the work of the peasant, or the man of the land, as distinguished from the inhabitant of cities.

Because of the first fact we must go to Germany and not elsewhere to explain the tulips, birds and allegorical figures about to be discussed, and because of the second we realize that we are dealing with those instincts and motives which are the deepest and most characteristic in the case of any given people, namely, those which are known to cling longest about the life and habits of the agriculturalist, the man of the land.

After the more conscious art of Germany began to be affected by Italian and other influences, after the walls of the

**Adam
and
Eve.** A better plate in duplicate of this rusted pavement relic from Mr. Martin's farm at New Britain, Pennsylvania, was made at Durham furnace as dated, in 1741, and is in the possession of Mr. B. F. Fackenthal, of Riegelsville, Pennsylvania, from whom unfortunately it has not reached the writer in time for illustration.

Here, under apple trees and near the shadowy figures of animals, rust and the rubbing of feet have left us the dim figure of Eve plucking an apple. The Scriptural text and the inscribed oval with most of its decorated scrolls are gone

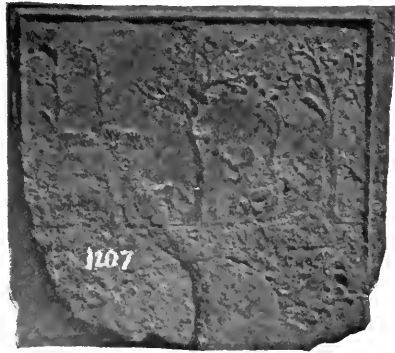


Fig. 5.

Museum No 1207

From an original fragment 26 inches broad and 21 inches high.

Bavarian palaces and churches became denationalized in design with the kind of ornament known as rococo, the man of the land in remote valleys or hamlets continued to decorate the handles of scythes, carve tombstones, or paint earthen trenchers as his ancestors had done, just as he continued to narrate fairy tales and repeat customs or sing ballads that reveal the Teutonic character in the clearest and simplest manner. Such is the nature of the artistic themes of these stove plates made by German workmen at Durham furnace a century and a half ago, or of the jars, plates and illuminated leaflets referred to above. The art is that of the German peasant.

Therefore it is rude. But it is ancient, and like the ballad song of Strasburg, or the story of the Juniper tree, it is as purely as possible Teutonic, and pertains to that fountain head of unconscious popular suggestion from which artists like Wagner declare they have sought inspiration.

Near a column adorned with curtain and tassels we see Potiphar's wife leaping from her couch to seize the fleeing Joseph. We recognize the figure of Christ standing amidst the water vessels of Cana, or Eve plucking for Adam the forbidden apple.

The armed, helmeted figure of a warrior approaches a skeleton who turns away to seize a burly character in rich dress, while the latter seeks to drive off the destroyer with a

The Cross and Tulip of 1751.

The tulip or lotus, in combination with the twisted column and arch, is here treated in three manners; as naturally blossoming on a curved stalk, as growing from a flower pot, and as springing from a Maltese cross. The latter design, not less beautiful and more suggestive than the French *Fleur de Lys*, may have been derived from it through general similarity of form effected by interchange of popular decorative ideas between France and Germany in the seventeenth century or earlier. In the last century the potters of France, (see a plate in the museum at Sevres) who were continually familiar with the Royal *Fleur de Lys*, also decorated earthen plates in *Sgraffiato* with tulip designs indistinguishable from the Rhenish American Specimens (see Fig 2) found in Pennsylvania.

The religious character of all the old stove work is apparent in the hand-made legend in Roman capitals, DAS LEBEN JESUS WAS EIN LICHT, (the life of Jesus, what a light,) above the date 1751. Because the name Iahn Pot (John Potts) occurs on this plate and on Fig. 16 both plates may be doubtless referred if not to the same designer at least to Warwick Furnace, near Pottsville, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, where a German workman made Fig. 16 eight years later in 1764.



Fig. 6. No. 1242.
From an original 2 feet high and
27 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide

club or sword; the whole design illustrating one of the episodes in the ancient allegory known as the "Dance of Death," referred to later.

On an unusually large plate a figure in a costume of the early 18th century appears to be speaking or reading while a demon, his inspirer, blows into his ear with a bellows. Behind him stands a smaller figure in similar dress, apparently mimicking his action, at whose feet two swine fight desperately. Unfortunately this plate is broken in half, so that the

**Judge Not
That ye
be Not
Judged.**

The pleased eye wanders from hearts and tulips, stars, medallions, arches, and columns,

emblematic of German Christianity, to the words RICHTET NICHT AUF DAS IHR (judge not that ye—) running its sequence, "be not judged" upon Fig. 8. And this reminds us that the legend of many of these plates, like Figs. 8 and 13, are inexplicable alone and without the context of the remaining parts of the stove to which they belong. Obtained by Captain J. S. Bailey from the old farmhouse of Clinton Callender, near Mechanics Valley, Pennsylvania.



Fig. 7. No. 709.

From an original 23 inches high and 15½ inches wide

full significance of the design is lost; while of the disjointed motto, both above and below the figures, but few words remain.

Other designs more artistic as works of decoration represent a class by themselves. Here, as in fanciful pleasure grounds, thought wanders among graceful tulips set in vases, or hearts framed in medallions, themselves the origin of the growth of flowers. Stirring the imagination as a thing more suggestive than the Fleur de Lys of France, we see a tulip springing from the symbol of the cross, and read mottoes, admonitions or quotations of Scripture, (in meaning unre-

lated to the spirit of the design yet harmonizing with its pattern,) inscribed as upon the pavement of terraces overlooking the bloom of beloved plants.

These are some of the designs in cast iron, which we have had the pleasure of placing in the museum of the Historical Society at Doylestown, as novel memorials of the early history of Pennsylvania.*

We learn that they were cast in open sand, which accounts for certain corrugations on their backs, and that they form component parts of rectangular stoves of various sizes, one of which had been presented to the Bucks County Bi-Centennial Exhibition by Mr. B. F. Fackenthal, of Riegelsville, who tells

The Master- piece of S. F.

Twisted column and round arch with conventional bows, (doubtless developed from the fancy of the transverse curtain as in Fig. 1,) hearts and tulips flourish on this beautiful plate, where above the initials S. F., not yet explained, the words NICHT GERICHTET WERT (be not judged) end the phrase "Judge not that ye" of the companion side plate (Fig. 7.) Let the conscious designer of the nineteenth century, attempting to work in similar spirit, equal if he can this masterpiece of the German peasant who, unconsciously reproducing the decorative thought of centuries, combines religious symbols into a vital, harmonious design, balanced yet irregular, and conventionalized strictly within the limits of the iron caster's art



Fig 8 No. 124.

From an original 21 inches wide
and 24 inches high

Its companion, Fig. 7, dates it in 1756, and because when unearthed from the hearth ashes of Mr. Thomas Sassaman's smoke house at Ottsville in 1897, a fragment of Fig. 6, made at Warwick Furnace, near Pottsville, lay beside it, and because of a similarity in the treatment of tulips, we may doubtless ascribe this plate to the same furnace.

*Through the kind help here gratefully acknowledged of Captain J. S. Bailey and Messrs. Patrick B. Trainor, I. J. Stover, Alexander Ralph, J. Cheston Morris, Marshall B. Pugh, George B. Potts, Henry McK. Ingersoll, G. Martin and T. Sassaman, of Philadelphia, Bucks and Montgomery Counties.

us that none of the moulds, which in the case of Figs. 1 and 16 must have been made of wood, or as we suggest, of stucco, or gilded clay, are to be found in the precincts of the furnace.

Moreover, the making of these stoves, which, according to Mr. Charles Laubach, took place under the directorship of the Logans, Morgans, Tailors, and Backhouses at Durham Furnace, from 1741 to 1790 at least, (judging from a rim, No. 251, in our possession, marked —ACKHOUSE DURHAM,) and which, from the testimony of the plates themselves, distinguished Warwick furnace during its ownership by John Potts

The Dance of Death.

May we suppose that some historic incident explains this allegory where the skeleton, apparently interrupting a dispute between a helmeted knight and a richly dressed person, seizes the latter, who flourishes his sword in the air? The legend consists of the challenge of death, *Hier* (*Hier*) *Feit* (*Fecht* or *Streit*) *mit mir der Bitter* (*Bitter*) *Tot*, (here fight with me the bitter death,) and the victim's answer, *Er brigt mich in Tot's* No (*Noth*.) (He brings me in Death's stress.)

This interesting plate, of which a duplicate has been discovered, first proof of the artistic treatment of the theme of the *Todtentanz* or Dance of Death by American pioneers, was found by the writer among the waste iron at the stove works of Roberts, Winner & Co., at Quakertown, Pennsylvania, in 1897.

On account of the zeal of certain friends, who, visiting the collection last summer and learning from us the significance of the plates, have instituted rival collections and removed several specimens from the county, we have been able to add fewer examples to the county's series than the case warrants. But enough have been placed at Doylestown for study, to establish the value of the information given gratuitously to the collectors referred to, at the start, and to generally illustrate the meaning of the plates which invite our attention both from the point of view of their execution and design.

about 1741, was not probably confined to those works. But though we suspect the existence of other contemporary stoves from other old furnaces in New England, New Jersey,



Fig. 9. No. 879.

From an original 23 inches wide
by 22 inches high.

Virginia and Pennsylvania, we cannot yet learn that any were decorated to the extent of these specimens, the oldest of which, thus far found, dated 1741, are in the possession of Mr. Fackenthal and the Bucks County Historical Society. (See Figs. 1 and 5.)

In more ways than one we can trace the origin of the stoves to Germany, where we learn of the existence of ancient rectangular stoves of decorated cast iron, resembling those here discussed, in the neighborhood of Siegburg, near Cologne, in Rhenish Prussia, and where the heating of houses by stoves, often of earthenware, had been the common custom before the discovery of America. On the other hand the open hearth, prevailing much more generally in England, had been introduced into America from the latter country. Because of the cheapness of wood German emigrants turned at first from stoves to fireplaces, yet though these wood stoves, made in the first place rather from habit than stress of circumstance, appear to have attained no very general vogue,

The Devil's Inspiration.

A winged demon blows his bellows into the ear of the speaker, behind whom in the dress of the early eighteenth century stands, in impossible perspective, a small human figure near two fighting swine. Below are the disjointed words DURCH GEDULT HOFFEN UND NCKEN WRDDEN GETROFFEN and above the syllables EFRD FERTIGE. After much searching I failed to recover the missing piece of this plate, which Mr. Funk having found near the bake oven of an inn in Hilltown, broke in half to fit the floor of his forge.

though they were often demolished and their plates built in the backs of fireplaces or the floors of bake ovens, about the time that Franklin's fireplace stove became a favorite in the parlors of the rich, the value of their principle, that of the concentration of heat in an iron box, far from perishing, speedily developed in a way to revolutionize household life.



Fig. 10. No. 986.
From an original fragment
29 inches high and
12 inches wide.

Like the iron stoves of Holland of the early eighteenth century in principle resembling them, like the cast iron German fire boxes heated by a wood fire through the wall against which they were built, or like the earthenware wood burning stoves of North Germany, Scandinavia and Russia, economizing the smoke heat through a labyrinth of internal passages, there can be no question that the oldest of these American stoves dating from the days of fire place cooking, and antedating the existence of ranges and iron culinary stoves, were designed never for cooking but always for heating. On the

Frag- ments of Stove Plates.

More designs have existed, more plates remain to surprise and reward the careful searcher than was at first suspected. The fact is proved by the discovery of pieces which continually varying in detail represent whole stoves whose remaining parts are lost. The tulip appears on each of these three fragments, on the upper left one of which is cast the name THOMAS SMITH and M. C. E. The lower fragment with the date 1765 was found in the waste iron heap of Mr. Kenderdine, near Dublin, Bucks county, Pennsylvania, while the upper pieces, evidently fragments of old stoves used in the last century in Nathaniel Shewell's Tannery, were found built into the springhouse wall at "Painswick Hall," New Britain, Pennsylvania.



Fig. 11. Nos. 789, 1514, 1515.
From the original largest fragment, 11 inches wide and 21 inches long.

other hand the existence of the rim for a side oven door, at the Bucks County Historical Society, testifies to the important change which came over the structure of these stoves towards the end of the last century, beginning with the introduction of an internal oven for baking, and, through a series of further changes, resulting in the development of the "template" wood burning cook stove in vogue in the eastern United States from the beginning of the century till about 1840.

It was to the convenience of this last apparatus that cooking in the open fire at last yielded in the Pennsylvania

country about the year 1830; whereupon a prodigious expansion in the manufacture of iron stoves, as thenceforth objects of daily increasing necessity, took place.

But from the point of view of art this change of old stove forms into new is a narrative of retrogression rather than progress. Decorative impulse yielded to mechanical excellence, when, as Franklin continued his experiments in heating, the plates, no longer cast in open sand, grew finer, better

Illuminated Mennonite Hymn.

produced until the year 1830. (See *Survival of the Medieval Art of Illuminated Writing; Contributions to American History by the Bucks County Historical Society*, No. 2.)

Here, as in scores of similar leaflets, *taufscheine*, book-marks and title pages once common among the Mennonites, Dunkers, Schwenkfeldters, Moravians, Lutherans and probably Amish, painted often with brushes made of cat's hair with colors liquified in whiskey, and varnished with cherry gum, testifying to the survival in Pennsylvania of the mediæval art of manuscript illumination, we find the symbolic birds of the potter and the tulip of the stove-caster. The same spirit expressing ancient artistic impulses of the German people pervades all three crafts.

The illuminated hymns and admonitions thus engrossed, and painted in red, brown, green, blue, yellow and black inks by Christian Gross, teacher of the German school at Deep Run, Bucks County, about 1760, and after the manner of the Bucks County Mennonites, continued to be



Fig. 12.
From an original leaflet 13 inches long
and 8 inches wide.

joined and thinner, when the Biblical scene and sacred legend, the cross and column, heart and tulip merged into realistic figures of angels blowing trumpets, flowers and animals, or resulted in the more meaningless if inoffensive scrolls and hatchings of the ten-plate stove. Long before the latter apparatus had been replaced by the iron coal-burning cooking and heating stoves of to-day the art was dead. No trace survives in the recent cast iron productions of the Schuylkill and Hudson valleys, which as representing winter comfort

and daily cookery in innumerable farm houses, seem to have reached the climax of decorative monstrosity.

Here, however, it is not the history of iron stoves but the symbolism in the designs of the old plates in question as repeated upon the illuminated leaflets and the pottery—the "Dance of Death," the heart, the tulip, and the birds, (as yet known peculiar to the illuminated writing,) that concerns us. All are survivals in the United States of artistic themes long in existence in Europe, and often doubtless stamped in relief on such earthenware stoves as those exhibited at Nuremburg Castle. The heart and birds are very ancient. The tulip may be equally so, while the "Dance of Death," to the surprise of the antiquarian and historian, illustrates the existence in the Pennsylvanian colony, in once omnipresent form, of one of the most interesting allegorical themes known to mediæval art.

Hearts and Tulips of 1756.

DIS (Dies) IST DAS
JAHR DARIN WITET,
(this is the year in
which rages—) in
hand modelled Ro-
man letters set in the
midst of hearts, potted

tulips, diamonds, fluted columns and arches, over the date 1756, is evidently the beginning or end of a phrase over-running a companion plate. It was presented by me to the Bucks County Historical Society after Mr. I. J. Stover had found it in use as a step set in a path at the house of Mrs. Anna Hoffman, in New Britain, Pennsylvania, and as part of a complete Durham stove once used to warm a neighboring building, since destroyed.



Fig 13. No. 711.

From an original 26 inches high
by 28 inches wide.

It is easy to learn that the notion of personifying the triumph of death sprung out of the conquest of Paganism by Christianity in Europe, and flourished in Germany in the 14th century, in plays or dialogues between Death and his victims, where a skeleton or shriveled corpse, dancing to a fiddle, leads off one individual after another.

Encyclopedias tell us that the theme became mixed with the story of the seven martyred brothers of the seventh chapter of Maccabees and hence was called in France "*La danse Macabre*," that artists represented it in frescoes, carvings and tapestries, at Paris, (1425,) Aimens, Rouen, Salisbury, (1460,) at Lubeck (14th century) and at Basel, (1424,) and that finally, after the invention of printing, the dialogue and dance idea of the drama gave way to such impressive treatments of the theme as Holbein gave it in his celebrated woodcuts.

The Flowers of S. F.

Why has posterity forgotten the name and history of the pioneer craftsman who, bringing with him to the back woods the religious symbols of Germany, made between the years 1756 and 1764, this plate and the series of castings here illustrated that may be regarded as its fellows. The manner of Figs. 7 and 8, known to be companions to this plate, and of Figs. 6 and B, closely resembling it in design and detail, distinguish the series from the varying if not less characteristic outlines of the figure plates; while the unusually small size of this specimen, with its motto *LAS*

DICH DAS BESE (Boese) NICHT (give not thyself to evil) only indicates that various enlargements of the same model were used to produce duplicate stove designs of several sizes.

executed in 1538. These things have been generally known, but who had realized that German artificers came to Durham in the middle of the last century and cast the design upon the faces of stoves to continually confront the settler with a sinister truth?

The German engraver, Johann Bink, (1520,) represented the heart in the hands of Venus as symbolic of passion. Christian art in a gallery of the cathedral at Venice, (8th century,) and in old pictures of St. Magdalene refers to it as an emblem of love. With the stove makers of Durham the design seems to have taken a strong hold of the fancy. They



Fig. 14 No. 237.
From the original, 22 inches wide,
21 inches high

not only continually produced it on the plates, but their contemporaries painted and outlined it on the written leaflets, called *fractur*, and the earthen plates and jars. Sometimes it appears to be the source of growth of a tulip, sometimes the root from which springs the stalk of a tree or many branched flower, but whether as a bordering for the *taufschein*, or bap-

Colonial Fireback

The difference between the once common cast iron backs for the fire places of England and America, and the Rhenish American stove plate, is shown in the form of this cumbersome specimen which, with irregular curved top designed to conceal the chimney's base, lacks the grooved levels for stove fitting. Without earnestness or religious significance, representing Esther and Ahasuerus between two realistic floral designs and under cornucopias and dolphins, the casting, made for the small fire place of a colonial parlor, presents a strong contrast to the direct simplicity of the stove plates. It must have remained for a century where I found it in 1897 set in the parlor fire place of Painswick Hall, New Britain, Pennsylvania.



Fig 15. No. 1201.
From an original 32 inches wide by
35½ inches high

tismal certificate, a feature of the colored hymn, or a part of the stove plate, it indicates everywhere that loving spirit which impelled so many of the German settlers, who used and still use the affectionate "thou," to call each other brother.

Turn back to the 7th or 8th century and to the advent of Byzantine architecture into Italy for proof of the antiquity of the figure of a bird, symbolizing the human soul, or that of two birds, apparently pecking fruit or the petals of a flower. To cite a few of many instances we see it carved in stone on one of the galleries of the cathedral at Venice, (7th century,) on a parapet of the University of Ferrara, (8th century,) on the cathedral of Torcello (11th century) and on a fountain at St. John Lateran at Rome (8th century). Here again, in

colonial Bucks County, after the lapse of ages, it survives as one of the prominent decorative features of the artistic crafts of Pennsylvania. It will not be difficult for the student of religious symbolism to explain more fully the significance of this emblem, or of the single bird, probably derived from Egypt, as emblematic of the human spirit. The chief point to be noted here is that the emblem crossed the Atlantic and survived among us into the memory of a generation now living.

In like manner our own present ignorance prevents our going far towards the elucidation of the further very prevalent flower outline on the stove plates, which because of its shape, its contemporary appearance on earthenware and the assertion of Geo. Diehl of the Bucks County potter's tradition that the

The Delight of Warwick.

Half German, half English, the ill-spelled words LAHN (Johann) POT (Potts) AND WARCK FURNEC (John Potts and Warwick Furnace) and the German legend LAS DEN BESEN (Boesen) UND THUE GUTES (eschew evil and do good,) betray the handiwork of a German designer working at the Warwick Furnace, near Pottstown, Pennsylvania, in 1764. The heart and tulips at the lower corners, the curious sundial like medallion enclosing a tulip, the twisted columns, round arches, stars, potter's tulips and basket like designs set above the date, mark the identity of the design and treatment with Figs. 6, 7 and 8. The finding of this plate at Pottstown with a duplicate at Penllyn in the possession of Mr. J. Cheston Morris, its donor, together with the fragment of another duplicate in a kitchen at Ottsville, shows that Warwick stoves had, in competition, found their way to the county and neighborhood of Durham Furnace a hundred and fifty years ago. Shall we suppose that this plate and its apparent associates, Figs. 6, 7 and 8, were made at Warwick rather than Durham, or that one or more pioneer German casters, finding employment from time to time at both furnaces and possibly carrying their wooden moulds with them, made duplicate stoves at both places?

Half German, half English, the ill-spelled words LAHN (Johann) POT (Potts) AND WARCK FURNEC (John Potts and Warwick Furnace) and the German legend LAS DEN BESEN (Boesen) UND THUE GUTES (eschew evil and do good,) betray the handiwork of a German designer working at the Warwick



Fig. 16 No. 790.
From an original 24 inches high
by 26 inches wide.

style of work expressing the flower was known as "*tulibogen*," can be reasonably regarded as a tulip. But because the tulip whose very name, *tulpend*, (turban,) is oriental, was introduced to Augsburg in 1559 from Constantinople by Conrad Gesner, we cannot suppose that any tulip patterns in Christendom, these designs included, are older than that date. On the other hand there are tulip-like designs on an illuminated missal once belonging to Charlemagne, (9th century;) in the Louvre, on a leather-covered chest, (date 1510;) in the castle at Meran, Austria; on a buttress at Santa Maria in Valle,

David and Goliath.

There is no need of the rudely cast, undated legend, DEN GROSEN GOLIATH HAT DAVID UBER WENDEN DAS I BUCH SAM 17 CAP (David overthrew the great Goliath, 1 book of Samuel, 17th chapter) to inform us that the little figure is that of David, who, armed with a single barbed spear, twirls his sling at the giant Goliath. Notwithstanding traces of similar treatment in Fig. 2, the lack of spirit in the design (across which the cracks of a wooden mould appear) the exaggerated pendant Acanthus and the substitution of a weak scrolled framework for columns, mark the handiwork of an inferior or apprentice hand. Found by Mr. H. McK. Ingersoll at the destruction of an old house at Springhouse, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.



Fig. 17. No. 791.
From an original 21 inches high
and 24 inches wide.

Italy, (8th century,) and on an arch at Porto, Rome, (8th century). But it may be going too far to make definite assertions about any floral designs thus conventionalized. We must grant a good deal to chance and the decorator's caprice. If the outline on the stove plates is a tulip the motive cannot be older than the date 1559. If it is not a tulip, and we are permitted to trace it backward through the floral designs above referred to, it far antedates that strange epidemic of the 17th century known as the "Tulip Mania," which for a time seized Holland like a plague, and made Dutch gardeners mad

enough upon the subject to pay prices like 4000 florins for a single bulb. If it is older than this we may perhaps be permitted to recognize its outline on the base of a column at the chapel at St. Zeno at Rome (9th century) and follow the arguments of those who find its earliest suggestion in the Egyptian lotus.

HENRY C. MERCER.

Indian House,
February 14, 1899.

Postscript.

Further investigation of the decorative stove castings during the period of their persistence and decline, has led us to infer the existence in Colonial Pennsylvania of three kinds of cumbrous wood-burning stoves made of open-sand-cast iron. *a*, the *German* or wall, warming stove, described in Chambers' encyclopædia of 1788, and as "jamb stoves" in Watson's Annals of Philadelphia, vol. 2, p. 34. Made of five

The Wedding

Under fluted column and curtained arch the bewigged minister, bible in hand, from a canopied pulpit, marries the bride carrying a nosegay on the left and the bridegroom on the right, as both figures seem to emerge from open doors. Below runs the seriocomic legend (one of the few nonscriptural ones yet seen on the older *wall* stove plates.) WER DARUBER NUR WIL LACHEN DER MAG ES BESER MACHEN TATELN KINEN (KOHICH) JA SER VIL ABER BESER MACHEN IST DAS RECHE SPIL. (Let him who will only laugh at this make it better; many can find fault but the real fun is to do better.)



Fig. 18.

From an original 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide and 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches high.

Infer from the broad bevel on one side of this plate as observable on all the other earlier decorated stove plates here discussed, (namely, Figs. 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 17, 18, 23, 24 and 26,) manifestly unadapted for joining with the groove fittings of

such contemporary end plates as Figs. 8 and 22, but rather for insertion in surfaces of masonry, that all these older plates are component parts, not of stoves like Fig. 19, but of five-plated iron boxes built against the wall, and kindled through it from outside the room into which they protruded.

Earthen stoves thus heated have been often seen by the writer in Germany, and decorated cast iron specimens were observed about 1850 at Gansbach near Rastadt, Baden, by Joseph Merkel, of Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

The writer has just been informed that a complete decorated wall stove of this character supported on soapstone blocks, without a stovepipe, and connected through the back with a flue in the wall, was destroyed in 1898, in pulling down an old house once belonging to Governor Mifflin, on one of the eastward, numbered, Delaware-neighborhood streets of Philadelphia.

plates, sometimes without, sometimes with a sheet-iron pipe, and sometimes connecting its smoke egress with an adjoining chimney through the wall-built end, it was cast, as in Germany, at the old furnaces in Pennsylvania, (possibly in New Jersey and other States,) from the year 1741 or earlier, until about the year 1760. Built with an open end against a wall through which its fuel was introduced from outside the room into which the stove protruded, it is to this wall box that all the above described more important decorated plates (as their broad bevels for wall insertion testify) pertain. *b*, the *Dutch* warming stove described in Chambers' encyclopædia of 1788,

The Conqueror

Under a series of meaningless decorative scrolls only the head of a prancing horse with the lowered standard and fallen sword of a warrior, above the form of a small retreating animal, are seen to the right, and in opposition to the conquering advance of a kingly figure on horseback holding a drawn sword. Because the plate, found for the writer in a lumber room by Mr. Robert Rau, of Bethlehem, like Figs. 11 and 16, has no broad bevel for wall insertion, while lacking an aperture for an oven door, we infer it to be either part of an ovenless box "Dutch" stove, or the back doorless plate of one of the "Ten-Plate" oven stoves like Fig. 20, and which supplanted the original "German" wall stoves here discussed. Its lack of inscription and of decorative balance mark a decline in the caster's art



Fig. 19

From an original about 2 feet high and 26 inches wide.

and Reese's encyclopædia of 1802, made of six plates, always with a stove pipe, and probably with iron legs, a rectangular box placed free of the wall in the room, with a draft opening and fuel door at one end. Cast as in Holland, at the old American furnaces, we may suspect that the form was from the beginning a contemporary of the German stove, while it is certain that some specimens were made in Pennsylvania

**Decadence in
Decoration
as Stoves
Develop.**

With the abandonment of the old wall stoves about the year 1760, and the introduction of portable stoves like Fig. 20, set free of the wall in a room, often as in this case and Fig. 21, fitted with internal ovens for baking, (and hence the originals of the ten-plate wood-burning, and modern coal-burning cooking stoves of the Eastern United States,) we mark a rapid decadence in the artistic symbolism and religious significance of the iron caster's craft. Both in this oven stove, Fig. 20, made by Baron Stiegel, at Elizabeth Furnace, near Manheim, Pennsylvania, in 1769, and now in the collection of Mr. George H. Danner, of Manheim, and in the plate, Fig. 21, with its aperture for an oven door lacking the broad bevel for wall fitting, made by the "Signer," George Ross, as iron master at Warwick Furnace in 1765, and found in repairing the Fountain Inn, at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the introduction of the oven door seems to have paralyzed the designer's skill. Meaningless scrolls everywhere attract the attention, and though in Fig. 21 a small tulip is naïvely used as a sort of punctuation between the words George and Ross, the tulips set to the right and left, bear no true relation to the insignificant ornaments below them.



Fig. 20

From an original in the collection of Mr. G. H. Danner, at Manheim, Pennsylvania



Fig. 21

From an original about 27 inches wide by 24 inches high, in the possession of Dr. Park Breunerman, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Adam and Eve of 1745.

Found in use as a house step in the possession of Mr. Burroughs Heston, of Solebury, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, who in making a fence had dug it from the base of an old fireplace, it was brought

to the writer's attention through the observation of Mr. Matthias Hall, of Wrightstown. Ill treatment and rust have almost erased the outlines of Adam and Eve, the serpent, the central apple tree, and five animal forms; above the words ADAM UND EVA, with the date 1745 set in a medallion. Possibly made at Durham by the designer of the less compressed contemporary pattern Fig. 5, the deep side grooves, as in the case of the S. F. plate, Fig. 8, identify it as the end rather than the side of one of the wall stoves whose plates are the principal subject of discussion in this paper.



Fig. 22. No. 792

From an original 20 inches wide and 24 inches high

about the year 1760, at the time of the disuse of the latter. To the Dutch stoves are probably to be ascribed such open-sand-cast plates, without broad bevels for wall insertion, as

The Heart and Treasure.

This left side of a wall stove shows in its striking similarity to figures 6, 7, 8, 13 and 14, evidence of the handiwork of



Fig. 23

From an original about 2 feet square, in the collection of Mr. George H. Danner, of Manheim, Pennsylvania

one school of design, or, let us suppose, of one individual stove decorator, who about the year 1757, the date of this plate, journeyed for employment from Warwick to Durham and from Durham to Elizabeth Furnaces carrying his wooden moulds with him. The legend, continued on a lost companion plate, WO LFF HERZSCHATZ IST DA, begins the sentence from Matthew 6:21 and Luke 12:34, ("Where your treasure is, there,") continued on a lost companion plate IST AUCH EUER HERZ (will your heart be also)

Figs. 16 and 19. *c.* The "Ten-Plate" warming and cooking stove, such as Fig. 20, made of ten plates, (six for the outer box, and four for the inner oven,) with smoke pipes and legs, developed, we suppose, from the Dutch stove by the addition of the interior oven, and the introduction of an oven door in one or both side plates as in Figs. 20 and 21. Interesting as the original form of the latterly familiar ten-plate cooking and heating stoves, of Pennsylvania, first cast, as far as our evidence goes, about the year 1760, its appearance seems to have been coincident with the disuse of the older German and Dutch stoves, and the decline in the German craft of decorative iron casting that characterized both the latter.

Judged by the evidence of the plates themselves, the decorative craft here discussed has pertained to the *German* stoves of the first class, rarely to the *Dutch* stoves of the sec-

The Prussian Grenadier.

Besides two duplicates of the cross and tulip plate, Fig. 6, set in a library fireplace at the Pennsylvania Historical Society, in Philadelphia, are two other apparently recent castings from an original wall stove plate, 25 inches wide by 23 inches high, in the cellar, representing, not as an informant supposed, Penn's treaty with the Indians, but two of the celebrated gigantic grenadiers of Frederick William I, King of Prussia. Beside them as they ground arms stand two men of ordinary size shaking hands, while below runs the rhymed legend, continued from a lost companion casting, DEN CRANETIER (grenadier) GESTELT ERIEBT WOL AUS DEM SATEL GAR MANCIEN BRAFEN HELT. (To the grenadier is (placed?) He (or it) knocks out of the saddle full many a brave hero.)

In the same cellar a plate with broad bevel for wall insertion, 24 inches wide and 29 inches high, the unbroken duplicate of Fig. 10 was found. It fully explains the imperfect motto of the latter and its design as representing a family quarrel. Husband and wife, both inspired by bellows-blowing demons, attack each other, he armed with tongs and she with an upraised whip, while with one hand she pulls his hair. The distressed children, a boy and girl, stand near fighting dogs and pigs to the left and right. While the full legend runs, SELIG SIND DE (die) FRIDFERTIGE DURCH STILLE DURCH GEDULT DURCH LIBEN (lieben) LIDN (leiden) HOFFEN UND NICHT DURCH ZANCKEN WRD (wid) DER FEIND AUFS HAUPT GETROFEN. (Blessed are the peaceable. Through quiet, through patience, through loving suffering, hoping, and not through quarreling, is the devil rapped upon the head.)

Another plate, found with the last, in the style of Fig. 16, and probably made by its caster, lacking the broad bevel for wall fitting, shows evidence of artistic decline in the substitution of the names of M. R. THORNBRUGH AND A. M. SFANDSON for the religious legend below the date 1764 and above the words CARLLISE (Carlisle) FURNACE.

ond class, and only in its decline to the *Ten-Plate* stoves of the third class. These incidents in the American survival and decline of the trans-Atlantic art, unsuspected, when at the writing of Page 11, the relation of the stove plates described, to the German and Dutch stoves of Europe, was not clearly recognized, are shown in the fact that nearly all the plates, (dated generally before 1760,) made in the religious and allegorical spirit here discussed show broad bevels on one side as if for insertion in masonry; that a few, Figs. 11, 16 and 19, betraying signs of artistic decline, lack the latter bevels and are properly adapted for fitting against the end plates of Dutch stoves; while others, dated after 1760 and manifesting the final subversion of the caster's craft, (see Figs. 20 and 21,) show orifices for the oven doors of the earliest ten-plate stoves.

At such centres of German settlement in Pennsylvania as Lancaster, Manheim, and Bethlehem, existing castings show that the iron masters, Baron Stiegel at Elizabeth Fur-

Baron Stiegel for Elizabeth.

It is the name of Baron Heinrich Wilhelm Stiegel, founder of Manheim, Pennsylvania, (upon the rectangular model of Rhenish Mannheim, his native place,) constructor of its glass works and importer of

its glass painters, builder of its "castle," master of its furnace, donor of land to its Lutheran Church, (according to his deed, "For one red rose in the month of June, given to me or my heirs, forever if lawfully demanded,") energetic and lavish benefactor, shipwrecked investor, ruined prisoner for debt—it is his name which here cast in iron lends an individual interest to this plate, as it has to the town of Manheim itself. There in recent years Dr. J. H. Sieling has chiefly helped in finally honoring the ill-remembered life of the founder, by restoring, in the now well-known "feast of roses," the ceremonial presentation of Stiegel's rent as the latter asked it, a yearly red



Fig 21.

From an original about 28 inches wide by
26 inches high, in the collection
of Mr. G. H. Danner

rose given in the church to the lineal heir on the second Sunday in June. Who but the caster of figure 6, betraying his handiwork by tulips with bent stalks at the lower corners, could have made for the iron master of Manheim this beautiful wall stove plate, with its little tulip used after the word "for" as a decorative punctuation, and its inscription, H. W. HELM STIEGEL UND COMPAGNI FOR ELIZABETH 1758.

Found in 1893, by Dr. James Sanderson, at the digging of a foundation in Reading, Dr. Sieling supposes it to have been made after 1762, (though no wall stove plates have yet been found by the writer of a later date than this of 1758,) in memory of Stiegel's first wife, Elizabeth, who died in 1758.

Look at the birds, hearts and tulips of the illuminated Pennsylvania Taufschein, Fig. 25, (here represented through the kindness of Mr. B. F. Fackenthal, Reigelsville, Bucks County, Pennsylvania,) for further comparison of the art of the iron caster in colonial Pennsylvania with that of the scribe.

nace, and George Ross at Warwick, (see Figs. 20 and 21,) had soon after 1760 presided over the decline of the stove decorator's craft, in the making of ten-plate stoves, while at Bethlehem the decadence could be further traced in the existence of meaninglessly decorated yet old and open-sand-cast plates, (probably pertaining to Dutch stoves,) with scrolled designs, found by the writer as makeshift hearth stones and firebacks in the communal building.

Among the variety of designs and styles of the older *German* stove plates, testifying to a number of contemporary artificers working in the same spirit, it is the floral patterns, as most truly imbued with the characteristics of an unconscious religious art, that longest captivate our fancy. That many of these were made at Warwick furnace, our investigation had conclusively proved before our recent search discovered two other floral specimens, identical in style and treatment with the Warwick castings, made at Elizabeth Furnace, near Manheim, Pennsylvania. This discovery war-



Fig. 25.

From an original leaflet about 11 inches long by 7 inches high.

ranted the inference that the unknown maker of these beautiful designs, had worked both at Warwick and Elizabeth furnaces (and presumably elsewhere) carrying his moulds with him.

While no opportunity has offered for examining the manufacture and decoration of *Dutch* stoves among the Dutch colonists of New York and elsewhere,* nowhere has evidence appeared that influences favorable to the production of the

**Look
Not
Back
from the
Plow.**

A cactus-like tree, two medallions, the uppermost of which may represent the sun, three flowering

stalks, the initials T. M. set under diamond and basket-like designs with a plow and the date 1747, complete the features of this most irregular child-like and archaic of any of the stove designs yet seen, found at the Museum of the Young Men's Missionary Society, in Bethlehem. The hanging curtain of the upper right hand corner and its general treatment connect it with the Prussian Grenadier plate referred to previously and with Fig. 18, while entirely disassociating it with the S. F. and other floral plates, (see Figs. 6, 7, 13, 14, etc.) The legend, JESUS ABER SPRACH ZU IHM WER SEINE HAND AN DEN PELUG LEGD UND SEHT ZURUCK DER IST NICHT GESCHICKT ZUM REICH GOTES, LC. A 9, (and Jesus said unto him, no man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God, Luke in 9,) whose expanding form covers the entire base of the plate, gives us some



Fig. 26.

From an original 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide and 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches high.

*Through the kind information of Captain J. S. Bailey, of Buckingham, Pennsylvania, the writer learns of a very beautiful and elaborate Dutch cast iron plate, 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide by 26 inches high, dated 1659, and representing Christ and the woman of Samaria, with the inscription, JACOBS BRUN CHRIST VOM FROLIX VOX SAMARIA IOH. 4. Evidently made in Holland, supposed to be a fireback rather than a Dutch stove plate by the editor of the *Metal Worker* (Magazine) who published an illustration of it in an old issue, and had it copied in cast iron, it was found in recent years, set in an old fireplace at Kingston, N. Y.

The writer here gratefully acknowledges the help generously given him during the preceding investigation by Dr. J. H. Sieling and Mr. G. H. Danner, of Manheim; Professor M. D. Learned, of the University of Pennsylvania; Messrs. Roberts and Winner, of Quakertown; Mr. Robert Rau and Miss Maria L. Schultz, of Bethlehem; Mr. J. M. Swank, of Philadelphia; Mr. George Steinman, of Lancaster, and Mr. Louis Moermann, of Doylestown.

reason for associating it with the Joseph Plate, Fig. 3, made two years later, possibly at Durham, and a duplicate of which with its legend, (omitted by mistake on page 3,) DAS WEIB DES SUCHT JOSEPH ZU ENTZÜNDE IM I. B. MOSE. 13. c. 1749, (the woman who tries to corrupt Joseph, in 1 book, Moses, 13 chapter, 1749,) was found by the writer at Bethlehem in use as a chimney top in the possession of Mr. Robert Ran. The broad bevel adapted for wall insertion marks the plowman plate like all others thus cast as part of one of the original so called German or wall stoves described herewith. If Christopher Saur made German stoves in Germantown, the floral *German* stove plate in the style of Fig. 14, with the initials I P—S P, the imperfect legend, VER ACHE DAS ALTER NI, (he who respects the aged) and the date 1758, found in the cellar of the house of Mr. Walter Cope, opposite Saur's house, in Germantown, may have been made by the latter, as also a *German* plate in the style of Fig. 18, seen in duplicate by Dr. Sieling, of Manheim, now in the possession of Mr. Charles J. Wister, of Germantown, representing the Pharisee and Publican with the rhymed legend, ES RUEHMT SICH IM GEBET DER STOLZER PHARISAEER DAS NIDERN ZÖLERNERS HERZ GEFELT DOCH GOTT FILL MIR LCA AM 18, CAP 1742, (the proud Pharisee glorifies himself in prayer, but the humble Publican's heart pleases God much more, Luke, in 18th chapter, 1742.) A *Dutch* floral stove plate in the style of Fig. 16, recently found near Fort Washington, Pa., with the date 1761 and the incomplete legend, GOTES BRYNLEIN HAT WASER DIE FILE (viele) M. C. FURNACE, IN LANC. (Lancaster?) D. G. T., (Gods well has water in plenty, M. C. Furnace — — —) is in the writers collection No. 824, also a *German* floral stove plate No. 826, in the style of Fig. 13, with the legend, WO ETER SCHAZ IST DA IST —, (where your treasure is there is —) At Stenton, near Germantown, a broken *Dutch* plate in the style of Fig. 16, with the inscription, DER GOTLOSE BORGET —, (the godless man borrows —) and the words REIDDING FORNES, was recently seen by the writer in the possession of Mr. Albanus Logan.

decorative work described, were developed by the Anglo-Saxon colonists, or associated with the birth of the Anglo-American colonies and their subsequent nationality. On the contrary the substitution of the English for the German language on the plates, and improvements in iron casting and stove mechanism, all are coincident with the decline of the craft of the iron decorator.

Found outside the domain of conscious art as recognized by the historian, the plates pertain rather to folklore. As true songs of the people, always simple yet always ethnically significant, possess in themselves a fascination with which conscious musical compositions, however great, rarely share, so these iron allegories of the people, already old, we may believe, when they crossed the Atlantic, tell deeply of tonic life. Like the etymology of words, like the genealogy of myths, they are portions of the inner flowery growth of German imagination. Withering soon in America in face of more material and worldly conditions, they yet remain to be reckoned with in the estimate of American character, as landmarks upon an ancestral pathway, as influences in the life current of thousands of the immigrant inhabitants of the New World.

Indian House April 7, 1899.

HENRY C. MERCER.



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