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Excerpt of Sketches of Pennsylvania From the Commercial Herald, July 1833

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SKETCHES OF PENNSYLVANIA

After crossing the Mine Ridge, and passing from Chester into Lancaster county, a remarkable change is visible in the character, habits, and language of the population. In Lancaster, the German prevails in about the same proportion as the Quakers do in Chester, retaining their language as a means of communication with each other, though the greater part of them are able to converse in English.

There is some very harsh and unmusical in the dialect which this people speak, and which differs of course from the classical German, which Goethe and Schiller have immortalized. The German of Pennsylvania is, to all intents and purposes, an unwritten language, transmitted from mouth to mouth, and therefore constantly corrupted, and changed by the introduction of foreign and new fangled words. We have been at the pains to count the words in a legislative document, professing to be in the German language: and have discovered that about one-fourth of the whole number are English words a little disguised by the German mode of spelling. A German scholar set down among the farmers of Lancaster, would probably be as little able to comprehend what he heard, or to make himself understood, as if he had lighted upon a tribe of the Aborigines.

Besides the peculiarity of language, two other characteristics invariably mark a German settlement, namely, huge stone barns, and gigantic horses immoderately fat. It seems as if these frugal and industrious people, looked first to the preservation of their crops and the comfort of their cattle, and devoted no more attention to their own accommodation, than could be spared after these primary

objects had been accomplished. Not that dwellings are bad, on the contrary, they are substantial, durable, and of sufficient size. But they always look diminutive, in comparison with the barns, and the fact is always obvious that attention has been given to the useful and the productive, far above the beautiful or the ornamental.

The Germans comprise the great mass of the population of all that portion of the Pequea Valley, which lies in Pennsylvania, and they are also numerous in Frederick county, in Maryland. They are of various religious denominations. A very considerable portion belong to the society of Mennonists, who resemble the Quakers in their tenets as to war, and follow the Jewish custom of leaving the chin unshaved. We never saw one of these personages driving his wagon along the turnpike, with a six inch beard, filled with limestone dust, without wondering that in a country where cleanliness was so essential as in Palestine, the barber's profession had not risen into higher repute. Nor did such a sight fail to dissipate all our notions of the picturesque, as connected with flowing beards, in certain books of poetry.