Richard Frethorne, Letter to His Parents (1623)

This letter, from a young man named Richard Frethorne to his parents in England, describes some of the hardships faced by himself and other indentured servants in Virginia. Notice the similarities between the plight of Frethorne and the other servants and that of actual slaves in America.

Loveing and kind father and mother my most humble duty remembered to you hopeing in God of your good health, as I my selfe am at the makeing hereof, this is to let you understand that I your Child am in a most heavie Case by reason of the nature of the Country is such that it Causeth much sicknes [including scurvy and "the bloody flux"] . . . and when wee are sicke there is nothing to comfort us; for since I came out of the ship, I never at anie thing but pease, and loblollie (that is water gruell)[.] as for deare or venison I never saw anie since I came into this land there is indeed some foule, but Wee are not allowed to goe, and get yt, but must Worke hard both earelie, and late for a messe of water gruell, and a mouthfull of bread, and beife[.] a mouthfull of bread for a pennie loafe must serve for 4 men which is most pitifull if you did knowe as much as I, when people crie out day, and night, Oh that they were in England without their lymbes and would not care to loose anie lymbe to bee in England againe, yea though they beg from doore to doore. . . . I have nothing at all, no not a shirt to my backe, but two Ragges nor no Clothes, but one poore suite, nor but one paire of shooes, but one paire of stockins, but one Capp, but two bands, my Cloke is stollen by one of my owne fellowes, and to his dying hower would not tell mee what he did with it [although some friends saw the "fellowe" buy butter and beef from a ship, probably purchased with Frethorne's cloak]. . . . but I am not halfe a quarter so strong as I was in England, and all is for want of victualls, for I doe protest unto you, that I have eaten more in a day at home than I have allowed me here for a Weeke. . . .

O that you did see may daylie and hourelie sighes, grones, and teares, and thumpes that I afford mine owne brest, and rue and Curse the time of my birth with holy Job. I thought no head had beene able to hold so much water as hath and doth dailie flow from mine eyes.