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"Doe Not Forget Me": Richard Frethorne, Indentured  
Servitude, and the English Poor Law of 1601

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# “Doe Not Forget Me”

## Richard Frethorne, Indentured Servitude, and the English Poor Law of 1601

In 1616, John Smith admonished Englishmen to “gaine to our Natiue mother-countrie a kingdom to attend her” that would at the same time provide “employment for those that are idle” (*Description* 343). Smith boasted that “Virginia doth afford many excellent vegetables and living Creatures” in such abundance that colonists—both master and servant—“may take with hooke or line what he will” (*Map* 151; *Description* 343). Smith’s narratives, in concert with the writings of adventurers Thomas Harriot and Thomas Morton, and religious refugees William Bradford and John Winthrop, reflect the varied experiences of middling men who are often associated with what Benjamin Franklin later described as a “general mediocrity” in America. The majority of seventeenth-century colonial immigrants, however, were neither adventurers nor refugees, and most did not share Smith’s or Bradford’s middling status. Of the more than 198,400 people who immigrated to the English American colonies in the seventeenth century, 67 percent (132,100) were indentured servants, slaves, and felons—all of whom were unfree, and of whom at least 96,600 were indentured servants. Unfortunately, few archival artifacts remain to attest to the conditions of their lives or to identify them as individuals (Fogleman 44).<sup>1</sup> Four remarkable exceptions are the letters of Richard Frethorne, the most familiar of which are those written to his parents from Virginia in 1623. Frethorne’s often ignored letter to a Mr. Bateman is, however, of much more significance because it reveals that Frethorne was indentured by his parish under the provisions of the English Poor Law of 1601 and was not, as is commonly assumed, a voluntarily indentured trade apprentice. The information about Frethorne’s parish indenture introduces important details about his life and the context of his servitude that reshape our under-

standing of Frethorne and alter our pedagogical and scholarly engagement with his letters.

Richard Frethorne arrived in Virginia around Christmas in 1622 on the *Abigail*, a ship overloaded with passengers and armor, but little food. The *Abigail* arrived ten months after raids by the Powhatan Indians destroyed crops and killed hundreds of English settlers, so the passengers on the *Abigail* knew that they were repopulating a war-torn colony. Frethorne was sent to Martin's Hundred, a settlement especially hard hit by the Powhatans. In March and April 1623 Frethorne wrote four letters, three to his parents and one to Mr. Bateman. In the letters, Frethorne painted a dire portrait of his life in Virginia: he was hungry, he had insufficient clothing, and he lacked consistent access to shelter. Textual analysis of the letter to Bateman identifies Frethorne as a parish-indentured poor child and his direct appeal indicates that Bateman was the churchwarden with administrative control of Frethorne's Virginia indentures and thus the person authorized to redeem his contract. Archival evidence confirms this analysis.

English churchwardens maintained Poor Law records in conjunction with other human events in the parish—baptisms, marriages, and burials—that made parish poor children visible as civic and historical beings. Unfortunately, the Virginia Company maintained few servant records during the early years of the colony. Ship manifests recorded the numbers of servant passengers, but only in rare instances were names attached. The dearth of data nearly cleansed parish-indentured poor children from the evidentiary record. Ironically, Frethorne's letters, and the indifferent treatment of indentured servants he conveyed, survived because they were politically advantageous to the aristocrats who oversaw colonial operations, including those who championed for children like Richard Frethorne to be "disposed of" in Virginia. The letters written by Frethorne thus provide unique insights into the plight of a substantial, unfree colonial population. In 1623, in the depths of despair and ravaged by hunger, Richard Frethorne begged that his parents, Bateman, and his parishioners in London "doe not forget me" ("Letter to His Parents" 60). Nearly four hundred years later, Frethorne is not only remembered, but his poignant letters give us the clearest understanding of the conditions faced by untold thousands of poor children who, like him, were parish-indentured servants in Virginia's earliest days.

The perspectives of two recent critical approaches inform my analysis

of Frethorne's letters: transatlantic or hemispheric studies and critical class analysis that focuses on poverty. According to Ralph Bauer in *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures*, transatlantic methodologies advance comparativist strategies that emphasize "the complex and inextricable *connectedness* of various places and histories, of the way in which these places [Old World and New] *acted upon each other*" (2). Frethorne's letters, for instance, are productively assessed by engaging their English sociopolitical context—the English Poor Law in particular—in relation to the Virginian environment. The suffering Frethorne conveyed is difficult to reconcile with constructs of indentured servitude as a means of social mobility that are integral to later colonial genres. Bauer notes that early American literature was "invented as a handmaiden to American national literary histories" that often privileged exceptionalism or post-Revolutionary concepts of individualism (7). When understood in the context of the English Poor Law of 1601, Frethorne's letters disrupt narratives of class transcendence that undergird histories of exceptionalism. The emergent field of poverty studies also situates Frethorne within wider literary reclamation endeavors that have, like the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (first published in 1989), altered the ways American literature is defined and interpreted. In *American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in U.S. Literature*, Gavin Jones articulates a persistent "blindness toward poverty in literary criticism" (5). Although Jones's study concentrates on nineteenth-century literature, his assertion applies to the early colonial era, since narratives elucidating poverty are too seldom the purview of scholarly interrogations, for which Frethorne's letters provide a welcome corrective.

Historian Hayden White, in *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, suggests that what Jones identifies as "blindness" is perpetuated because scholars often lack "the language, emotion, thought, and discourse . . . to make sense of the kind of experiences those families have endured" whose experiences, like Frethorne's, are not reflected in dominant discourse (13). For instance, most scholarship on indentured servitude conducted in the United States focuses on voluntary indentures, redemptioners, or convict labor, with little attention given to parish-indentured servants.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when we overlook the impact of the English Poor Law on the content of Frethorne's letters, and on his lived experiences, we participate in what White posits as a "failure of historical consciousness." White cautions that this failure "occurs when one forgets that history, in

the sense of both events and accounts of events, does not just happen but is made" (13). As White indicates, histories (and literary traditions) are determined by the accounts that are privileged and the perspectives through which they are assessed. A clearer understanding of Frethorne emerges when his letters enter into dialogue with familiar colonial discourses and less known archival evidence that also interact with the mandates of the English Poor Law of 1601.

Richard Frethorne lived at a time when poverty was a dominant social concern in England. During the first two decades of the seventeenth century, England experienced sustained economic depression and high rates of unemployment that were compounded by harvest failures and epidemics. There was neither enough work nor enough food, particularly in urban areas. Diseases—including plague—reduced incomes of poor families and undermined the collection of parish poor taxes when prosperous urban people fled to the countryside to avoid plague. Burgeoning poor populations required significant administrative oversight and threatened to overwhelm parish coffers. In the town of Southampton between 1606 and 1608, nearly 25 percent of administrative activity involved the poor (Connor 25). At the same time, the Poor Law of 1601 reflected a paradigmatic shift in perceptions of—and approaches toward—the poor, whose poverty was increasingly associated with criminality, as well as voluntary vagrancy and idleness.<sup>3</sup> The Poor Law of 1601 evolved from medieval Catholic charitable traditions that nurtured neighbors in need. In general, during England's Catholic period, poverty was regarded as a condition that was mediated by compassionate charity administered through parish councils. Protestantism increasingly criminalized poverty as personal moral failure that burdened the community and jeopardized individual salvation. In keeping with earlier Catholic approaches to poverty, the Poor Law stipulated that parishes must provide basic sustenance to their indigent people and ordered parish churchwardens to raise "competent sums of money for and towards the necessary relief of the lame, incompetent, old, blind, and such among them, being poor and not able to work" (Pickering 30). Among the Poor Law's negations of Catholic traditions, however, was the requirement that all able-bodied men and women be furnished with parish assistance only after they were "unburdened" of their children. The Poor Law authorized parish churchwardens to raise and disperse funds "for the putting out of such children to be apprentices" (Pickering 30).<sup>4</sup> Revenue from these

poor taxes enabled parish administrators to “set to work the children of all such whose parents shall not by the said churchwardens . . . be thought able to keep and maintain their children,” as these parish funds reimbursed the children’s masters for expenses they incurred in the indenture process (Pickering 30).

The tension between Catholic and Protestant perspectives seen in the 1601 Poor Law is also reflected in the records of the London parish of St. Dunstan in the East, the home parish of three Frethorne households, all of which received poor relief from the parish. The parish register for St. Dunstan in the East suggests that Richard Frethorne was the son of Christopher and Joane Frethorne, whose other children were Obedias, Mary, Triphena, and probably Dorcas, Susanna, and Ferdinand.<sup>5</sup> From 1600 until his death in 1643, Robert Bateman was a vestryman for St. Dunstan in the East. William Bateman, Robert’s brother, became a churchwarden in 1619 and, therefore, could also be the Mr. Bateman to whom Richard Frethorne addressed his letter from Virginia (St. Dunstan in the East, “Vestry Minutes” f. 155r, f. 199r). The vestry minutes for St. Dunstan in the East clearly indicate not only a shared parish affiliation but that the Frethornes received particular consideration from Robert Bateman and the other vestrymen of the parish during the first half of the seventeenth century.

St. Dunstan in the East’s vestry minutes demonstrate that this parish maintained a compassionate, “Catholic” approach to poverty and poor relief from the years that Robert Bateman was a parish vestryman, until after the English civil war in 1642.<sup>6</sup> Great care was taken to ensure that St. Dunstan’s poor had appropriate shelter and sustenance. The parish owned several dwellings and at least one almshouse to accommodate poor parishioners, including a house on Tower Street that was rented at minimal rates to John Frethorne, the parish clerk. The parish’s commitment to compassionate poor relief is reflected in St. Dunstan’s decision (in 1608) to raise money to purchase “sea coals” for its poor parishioners by selling its collection of armor and artifacts from the Crusades (West, *Some Records* 13–14).<sup>7</sup> In 1630 the parish organ was sold to provide relief to its poor (West, *Church* 55). Several children from St. Dunstan in the East were sent to Christ’s Hospital, a facility at which poor children, both boys and girls, received a liberal education as well as training in the trades (Christ’s Hospital). The vestry minutes also indicate that St. Dunstan in the East supported children at university, including two Frethorne boys, and contracted its

poor children as indentured servants to Virginia (St. Dunstan in the East, "Vestry Minutes" f. 201r). The inclusion of these records in the vestry minutes is significant because, in general, payments to support the poor were recorded in churchwardens account books, and St. Dunstan's churchwardens account books for the periods before the mid-seventeenth century did not survive. The vestry minutes for February 13, 1619, note that John Galloway,

the sonne of William Galloway shalbe put an apprentice vnto one Iefrey Wallett citizen and carpenter of London now bound for Virginia, to goe ouer thether with him, And the Churchwardens shall ether deliver out ffortie shillings vnto the saide Wallett towards the putting of the said Iohn Galloway into apparel or els lay out so much money for that purpose. (f. 202r)

Robert Bateman signed all of these minutes with the other vestrymen and William Bateman signed the Galloway indenture as one of the churchwardens. Richard Frethorne was very likely similarly bound three years later in 1622.

Parish-indentured poor children, like Frethorne, were most often contracted as common laborers in the textile industry, husbandry, or domestic work; few received occupational training that led to self-sustaining adulthood. The Poor Law specified the length of the poor children's parish-administered indentures: "it shall be lawful for the said church-wardens and overseers . . . to bind any such children . . . to be apprentices where they shall seem convenient, till such man-child shall come to the age of four and twenty years, and such woman-child to the age of one and twenty years, or the time of her marriage" (Pickering 31). On average, parish poor children entered the labor market by the age of seven, and were regularly indentured for terms that were twice as long as youths in voluntary trade apprenticeships. The "Apprenticeship Accounts" for the parish of Alderbury Hundred in Wiltshire for the year 1619 show children as young as two and four years old bound out as apprentices.<sup>8</sup> In 1625 two-thirds of Salisbury's apprenticed poor children were under fourteen years old (Slack, "Poverty" 167). Even when children were indentured at a very young age, the Poor Law stipulated that parish contracts were "as effectual to all purposes, as if such child were of full age, and by indenture of covenant bound him or her self" (Pickering 32).

In contrast, voluntary trade apprentices were indentured by their families to established masters under whose tutelage the youths learned a trade. Confusion about the differences between voluntary trade apprentices and parish-indentured servants persists because the words “servant,” “apprentice,” and “indenture” were used interchangeably in the seventeenth century. It is the contextual or ancillary evidence that indicates the specific nature of individual indentures, including Richard Frethorne’s. The contracts for the more familiar trade apprentices differed in significant ways from the parish indentures. For one thing, they were designed to be of lasting benefit to the child. Trade apprenticeships enabled middling- and merchant-class youths to obtain skills that secured them an occupation and financial security in a respectable stratum of society. Youths of about the age of fourteen were contracted for the time needed to learn a master’s trade, but rarely for more than seven years. The contracts were entered into voluntarily, or under the auspices of parental oversight, and administered by civil courts. At the end of the contracted terms, the apprentices were recognized as freemen and citizens, and the masters were obligated to sponsor their former apprentices when they joined the professional community by securing licenses and helping to establish the former apprentices in their professional practices. In “The Politics of Pathos: Richard Frethorne’s Letters Home,” Emily Rose contends that Frethorne was a voluntary trade apprentice in Virginia with “contractual hopes of better things to come” and argues that Frethorne was moderately privileged to begin with (107). She describes Frethorne, before he went to Virginia, as a politically connected youth in England who “had Robert Bateman’s ear and Bateman had the king’s” (103).<sup>9</sup> Much of Rose’s analysis works to connect Frethorne, through Robert Bateman, to the politicized environment of the Virginia Company. Bateman was, however, not a principal player in the company or a political insider of the magnitude Rose suggests.<sup>10</sup> Robert Bateman owned just two shares in the Virginia Company and he rarely attended company meetings, although he was actively involved in the East India Company and became a member of Parliament from London. Rather, it is as vestryman and churchwarden in St. Dunstan in the East Parish that Bateman’s closest connection with Frethorne is found, and that relationship marks Frethorne as an involuntary, parish-indentured child.

The English Poor Law codified churchwardens’ civic and religious responsibilities to save their poor children from the sin of idleness with work



as the specified agent of salvation. The same economic slump that created the widespread poverty probably undermined churchwardens' efforts to indenture poor children locally. The American colonies promised to fulfill both civic and spiritual obligations the churchwardens had to their parish communities and to the poor children they supervised. John Smith in *A Description of New England* (1616) proposed that "each parish, or village, in Citie, or Countrey . . . apparell their fatherlesse children, of thirteene or fourteen years of age" and send them to work in America.<sup>11</sup> In conjunction with debates about England's poor populations, Smith encouraged parish and colonial officials to facilitate the large-scale migration of poor children who could not be provided with appropriate work in England. For a modest sum, advanced by the children's parishes, Smith said that poor children would "live exceedingly well" in the colonies (*Description* 348). Smith saw work in the colonies as a solution to the spiraling expense of maintaining the poor locally and advocated that the American colonies be allowed to assume responsibility for the poor who "offend thy laws . . . burden thy Country, abuse thy selfe, despaire in want, and couzen thy kindred" (*Description* 344). Smith insisted that the hard work performed in the colonies would compel a "gaine [that] will make them affect that which Religion, Charity, and the Common good cannot" (*Description* 346). In other words, Smith argued that work in the colonies would produce the character conversion the Poor Law was designed to elicit.

Smith's idea that Virginia could provide poor people with a beneficial correction was advanced by Virginia Company officials as well as religious leaders. In a 1622 sermon for the Virginia Company, John Donne, the dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, explicitly identified the "great use" of the Virginia colony as a means by which England could be "cleansed" of its poor people: Virginia "shall sweep your streets, and wash your dores, from idle persons, and the children of idle persons, and imploy them" (Donne 273). The key to this correction was a combination of colonial "imployment for those that are idle" and judicious oversight (Smith, *Description* 343). Sir Edwin Sandys, treasurer of the Colonial Council of Virginia in London, remarked in a 1619 letter that life for Londoners would improve with the removal of the "superfluous multitude" of poor children of which "the Citie is especially desirous to be disburdened." He argued that transporting the parish poor children to Virginia provided London with "verie beneficiall condicons" that were profitable to the children as well since "in Virginia

under severe Masters they may be brought to goodness.” According to the reasoning advanced by Sandys, Smith, and Donne, Virginia furnished parishes with a way to simultaneously fulfill Christian duty and mitigate financial and social duress.

By 1618 London began sending hundreds of its poor children to Virginia as indentured laborers; the aforementioned indenture of John Gallo-way suggests that St. Dunstan in the East participated in this process. In the beginning, transportation petitions were cloaked in the compassionate language of Christian duty or justified by the dire circumstances the children faced living in London’s streets. On July 31, 1618, the Common Council of London, the civic administrative body for London’s merchant class, endorsed a “petition of many citizens for taking up of vagrant boys and girls and transporting them to Virginia.” In a letter dated October 14, 1618, John Chamberlain mentioned this petition to fellow courtier Sir Dudley Carleton, commenting that London “is now shipping thether an hundred younge boyes and girles that lay starving in the streets.” Chamberlain said that sending the poor children to Virginia was “one of the best deeds that could be done with so little charge not rising to above 500£,” or five pounds per child. Chamberlain’s attribution of a charitable rationale for compulsory transportation reflected the Christian foundations of Poor Law administration. John Pory, a former member of Parliament and a Virginia colonial official, recorded that in 1618 “about 300 men and boys” were shipped to “enjoy” Virginia’s “commodity and wealth” (“To Sir Dudley”).<sup>12</sup> Pory’s statement that Virginia was a land of “commodity and wealth” reinforced the appearance of administrative benevolence toward the poor people sent there to work.

The year before Richard Frethorne was sent to Virginia, Virginia Company shareholders in a “Præparatiue Court” proposed “a bill to be drawne to ye Parliament howse for sendinge ye poor to Virginia” (479). Since many members of Parliament were also Virginia Company shareholders, the proposed bill was assured a favorable reception:

Sir Edwin Sandys declared further that they had taken into consideration matter of future supporte of the Plantacion to supplie if they could now other helps doe faile out of that contribucion *which* is presumed will be given by each Cittie Towne and Burrough towards the sendinge of their poore with whome they are pestered into Virginia, Which offer

beinge made vnto the lower house of Parlyament vppon an occasion of the like complainte of the poore *which* are burthensome to many parishes itt was accepted of that howse with a verie great and gratefull applause; Itt was therefore thought fitt that some choyce gentlemen might be appoynted to drawe a bill to that purpose against the next Parlyament that the poore may hereafter be sent to Virginia att the charge of the parish where they live. (479–80)

The motivation behind this proposal was not charity. It was profit. The members of Parliament and company shareholders thought too many English parishes were “pestered” by poor people whom the Poor Law required be supported at parish expense. Although the proposal did not specify that the poor sent to Virginia be children, the Poor Law only empowered parishes to indenture poor children. Parishes could not compel adults to indenture themselves and the Virginia proposal did not invest the parishes with any new jurisdictional authority. The proposal sponsored by the Virginia Company simply made it cost effective for parishes to indenture their poor children to the colonies. Under the Poor Law, when a parish indentured a poor child locally, the parish paid annual fees to the child’s master to help maintain that child. The Virginia proposal invited parishes to indenture children like Frethorne to Virginia with one-time fees to cover transportation and a year’s supply of food and clothing, thus reducing annually recurring expenses. For its part, the Virginia Company obtained an unpaid labor force at no initial cost to the company. Early in 1623 Sir Henry Spelman, a member of the Council of New England, asked that if “the binding forth of poore Children Apprentices bee made use of, by this Councill, in every County, it will bee very Eusefull to the country, and beneficiall to this plantation” (63b). That same year the Council of New England requested a “letter to be obtained from his Ma[jes]tie to the Lieu[tena]nt of every shire for the setting forth of their poorer sort of people to New England” (60b). In 1624, even after several letters—including Richard Frethorne’s—reported that indentured poor children in Virginia were in desperate circumstances, a Captain Baylie proposed that King James I should “make a plantation in Virginia or New England, by which 3,000 poor may be yearly disposed of.” In all, thousands of parish-indentured poor children were sent to English colonies in Virginia, Bermuda, Barbados, Saint Kits, and Massachusetts. Yet Richard Frethorne’s letters provide the only substantive extant account of these children’s lives as colonial servants.

In the four letters Frethorne wrote, he described the desperate circumstances in which he found himself in Virginia during the spring of 1623. The high level of literacy in the St. Dunstan in the East Parish, particularly in Frethorne households, as well as the construction of the letters, suggest that Richard Frethorne wrote the letters himself rather than through an amanuensis. The letters arrived in England in late spring of 1623 and were seized by Nathaniel Rich, who confiscated all the correspondence from Virginia that was sent aboard the *Abigail*. Rich copied and distributed the letters to Virginia Company members as part of his campaign to overturn Edwin Sandys's colonial administration. Rich served on parliamentary committees with Robert Bateman, so it is likely that Rich delivered Frethorne's letters to Bateman. However, the contents of Frethorne's letters survived because they were politically useful to Rich, who retained copies of them in his personal papers. Nathaniel Rich's papers in the Manchester Collection were available for examination until the collection was withdrawn from the British National Archives in 1969.<sup>13</sup> Susan M. Kingsbury included the contents of the Manchester Collection, including Rich's copies of Frethorne's letters, in volume 4 of the *Records of the Virginia Company of London* (1935).

In the one letter to Bateman and those to his parents, Frethorne detailed his lack of food, clothing, and shelter, as well as his fear that he would not survive if his present condition continued. Although Frethorne asked both Bateman and his parents "to redeeme me," his perception of how and why each would act on his behalf reveal the parish basis of his indentures. The Poor Law allowed parish administrators, like Bateman, to rescind an indenture contract if a master failed to maintain a child with sufficient food, clothing, and shelter. Frethorne asked his parents to "get the marchauntes to redeeme me for some litle money" but conceded that if this was not possible his parents should "get a gathering or intreat some good folkes lay out som litle sum of moneye" that could be used to repay the parish funds advanced for his indenture contract (60). Frethorne told his parents to use his letters as "the marke," to induce others to his aid (60). The Bateman brothers, who were merchants as well as parish officials, were in all likelihood the "marchauntes" he asked his parents to petition on his behalf. Although all of the letters express Frethorne's reasons for speedy redemption, differences in the way he presented his condition to the two addressees was consistent with the ability each party had to effect his release.

Frethorne's first letter from Virginia, on March 5, 1623, was the one ad-

dressed to Mr. Bateman and was written two weeks before the first letter he wrote to his parents.<sup>14</sup> The letter is more carefully organized and has a more restrained tone than those written to his parents. As the editors of Frethorne's letters for *Early American Writings*, Carla Mulford, Angela Vietto, and Amy E. Winans, observe, "Frethorne sought a legal resolution" to his suffering (194). Frethorne's primary purpose in writing to Bateman was to have Bateman "speake to the rest of the parishioners"—that is, the vestrymen and churchwardens of St. Dunstan in the East Parish—so that Frethorne "maye be freed out of this Egipt" and legally released from his parish-authorized indentures (41). It is worth noting that if Frethorne was a voluntary trade apprentice, he would instead have sought redress through the civic courts that had jurisdiction over voluntary trade indentures.

Frethorne addressed Bateman as "Right Worship," an honorific salutation indicative of an authoritative, official relationship and wholly consistent with formal petitions to parish administrators.<sup>15</sup> In his letter Frethorne presented himself as a supplicant to Bateman by labeling his letter as a "humble request" and saying, "I beeseech yow and most humblie intreat & [am] entyrelly att your mercifull handes" (42). Frethorne began his petition for redemption by disclosing several ways his Virginia circumstances violated the protective provisions of the Poor Law under which his contract was issued: "This is to lett yow vnderstand that I am in a most miserable and pittiful Case both for want of meat and want of cloathes" (41). Since he lacked the food and clothing mandated by the Poor Law, Frethorne suggested three ways the parish could ameliorate his circumstances. First, redemption was clearly the outcome he desired most. If cost was an impediment to intervention, Frethorne offered Bateman a way to defray the expense of his redemption: "[if] itt would please yow to send ouer some beife & some Cheese and butter, or any eatinge victualles" such goods "will bee good tradinge and I will send you all that I make of itt onely I would intreat the gaine to redeeme me" (41). As the last alternative, Frethorne suggested that "a smale gathering maye be made to send me theise thinges or els to redeeme me sodanly" (41). In this era, the parish was the center of charitable activity, so it is understandable that Richard also asked his parents to "get a gathering or intreat some good folkes to lay out some little sum of moneye, in meale, and Cheese and butter, and beife, anie eating meate [that] will yeald great profit" for which he "begg the profit to redeeme me" (60).

In the letter to Bateman, Frethorne employed scriptural analogies that were particularly appropriate to a parish appeal, but which also allowed him to protest the conditions of his indenture. Frethorne aligned himself with the Old Testament Joseph, whose brothers unjustly sold him into slavery in Egypt, and he pleaded for Bateman and the parishioners “not with Pharoes brother \$buttlr\$ to forgett me, as he did forgett Joseph in the Prison” (42). In the surviving transcription, the deletion of “brother” and the interlined “buttlr” are probably the work of Nathaniel Rich, done when he copied Frethorne’s letters for distribution to members of the Virginia Company. It appears that Rich meant to correct Frethorne’s seemingly inaccurate citation of Joseph’s story. However, Frethorne’s incorrect use of “brother” reinforced the parochial bond between himself, Bateman, and the parishioners, as his brothers in Christ, but perhaps also alluded to the betrayal of Joseph by his brothers. In addition, the parochial relationship was emphasized in Frethorne’s references to Ephraim, Joseph’s youngest son: “I haue suerly heard Ephrahim bemoaninge himselfe, euen soe yow maye see me bemoaninge myselfe” (42). The passage Frethorne referenced is Jeremiah 31:18, which in the King James Bible (1611) reads, “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himselfe thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullocke vnaccustomed to the yoke: turne thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.” Frethorne did not cite the passage in full, but its inclusion suggests that Frethorne was trying to assure Bateman that he had been “chastised” by his Virginia experiences. Although Frethorne’s repentance is consistent with public attitudes toward the poor and conventional expectations of Poor Law indentures, his repentance is at odds with St. Dunstan’s generosity toward its poor in general, and the Frethorne families in particular. There is no evidence to suggest that Richard Frethorne misbehaved and was, therefore, complicit in his indentures as a result. Furthermore, no such transgression is alluded to in Frethorne’s more intimate letter to his parents. It is possible that Frethorne’s repentance may be an attempt to reconcile the relative ease of his prior London life with his destitution in Virginia, preferring the assumption of complicity to powerlessness since complicity provided mechanisms for amelioration, such as supplication, which he employed with the hope of intervention. If this was so, Frethorne’s plea is yet another manifestation of his desperation.

Frethorne’s typological rendering of biblical events enabled him to re-

iterate the depravity of his condition, convey his desperation, and in a sense, suggest some parish culpability with less danger of rejection than simply pressing his point for redemption. In the Bible, at least, brothers are not allowed to enslave brothers, and mercy spares the lost child. Frethorne asked Bateman to “follow [God’s] words in the latter ende of the 20<sup>th</sup> verse of the same Chapter” of Jeremiah, which Frethorne, again, does not fully relate, but which reads: “Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely haue mercy vpon him, saith the Lord” (Jer. 31:20). The request for intercession is clear and these maneuvers provided Frethorne with a safe way to plead his case without appearing disrespectful or impudent. At the end of his letter to Bateman, Frethorne subordinated himself fully in his appeal for redemption: “I neede not sett downe the wordes of Sallomon in the 37 of Ecclesiasticus and the 6th verse because the lord hath endued *your* hart with many of those blessings And thus I comitt yow into the handes of allmightie god and intreat yow to helpe me so suddaynely as yow Can” (42).

Unfortunately, school records that would establish Richard Frethorne’s schooling do not survive. The question of narrative authenticity has complicated analyses of Frethorne’s letters. Because of Frethorne’s servant status, the employment of an amanuensis was a legitimate possibility, the use of which raises questions about voice and authorial intent. However, the surviving evidence suggests otherwise. Richard Frethorne grew up in a literate household in a parish that valued education. The vestry minutes for St. Dunstan in the East identify three generations of Frethorne males who are intellectually gifted and literate, but poor. St. Dunstan in the East sponsored a parish grammar school in addition to its affiliation with Christ’s Hospital. The churchwardens’ account books, which itemize support payments to individual parishioners, also no longer exist. On the other hand, the vestry minutes, which functioned as a summarized account of parish transactions, and which rarely identify charity for individuals, show that St. Dunstan in the East provided funding for two Frethorne boys to attend university (Cambridge and Oxford) in 1619 and in 1636. On December 19, 1619, in support of a son of Christopher Frethorne, the vestrymen approved:

a peticion exhibited to this vestry by Christopher Ffrethern in the behalf of his son what sustayned losse by fyre in Mr Marsells howse at

Tower Hill It is ordered that the Churchwardens shall giue vnto him towards the buyinge of him bookes, and apparrell for the setting of him forth to the vniuersitie ffyve poundes. (f. 201r)<sup>16</sup>

Ferdinand Frethorne graduated from Cambridge in 1620 where he was “admitted sizar at Emmanuel,” that is granted a maintenance (scholarship) by the university (Venn and Venn 180). The 1619 St. Dunstan vestry minutes say funds were given “for the setting of him forth,” which indicates initial enrollment. The recipient of these funds was not Ferdinand, then, but there is no way to know if it was Richard. The Cambridge connection and the names of Christopher’s children suggest that Christopher Frethorne may have had Puritan leanings even if the parish as a whole did not, which might account for Richard Frethorne’s biblical background and literacy. The argument in Richard Frethorne’s letter to Mr. Bateman is competent but not masterful, and consistent with grammar school training and youthfulness. The vestry minutes entry reveals another important aspect relevant to Richard Frethorne. It indicates that a son of Christopher Frethorne had already been removed to another household, that of “Mr Marsells,” by the churchwardens. That this action was administered by the churchwardens means the removal was conducted in accordance with Poor Law provisions. This notation demonstrates that in all likelihood, as a result of his brother’s parish indentures, Richard Frethorne was aware of the parish indenture process as well as terms of service, protections, and conditions that could negate contracts. It is important to remember that parish indentures did not prohibit familial interaction. The Frethornes probably maintained close relations with their indentured child since Tower Hill is only four short blocks (about three hundred yards) east of the St. Dunstan in the East Parish church.<sup>17</sup>

Previous scholarship has been reluctant to identify Richard Frethorne as impoverished. Emily Rose’s emphasis on Frethorne’s political connectedness demands that he first be identified as a voluntary, middling-class apprentice. Rose specifically states that Frethorne and his family were not poor, and gives as evidence Frethorne’s comment to his parents that “you haue given more then my dayes allowance to a beggar at the doore” (Frethorne 59). She infers that the “allowance” was monetary and that the acts of generosity Frethorne described signaled a nonpoor status for the family (Rose 104). This reading ignores two important factors. First, Frethorne’s reference to his allowance is directly preceded by his statement that “I haue



eaten more in a day at home then I haue allowed me here for a Weeke,” a proximity that shows that it was food, not money, that Frethorne’s father gave to beggars (Frethorne 59). The second factor is the generous tendencies of poor people and the charity they offered to economic outcasts like beggars who, by definition, were not local parishioners. Vagrancy laws, enacted as corollaries to the Poor Law, made begging—for food or money—a capital offense in England. Beggars were, therefore, unlikely to present themselves at the doors of middling folks (or the aristocracy) for fear of arrest. Thus this passage articulates the affinity of the Frethorne family with poor people rather than establishing a non-poor status for the Frethornes. In addition, the St. Dunstan in the East vestry minutes repeatedly identify the Frethorne families as recipients of parish alms and aid. The compassionate character of St. Dunstan in the East undoubtedly encouraged Richard Frethorne’s appeal, as St. Dunstan’s poor were valued individuals in the parish community. In Virginia Frethorne was one of many “despised poor” parish-indentured poor children without any communal protections. Frethorne protested mightily to his parents that conditions in Virginia were so miserable that “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” (58). The Poor Law designated limbless people as unable rather than unwilling to work, a condition that entitled them to relief even in less charitable parishes than St. Dunstan in the East. That Frethorne fantasized about respite in a limbless condition, or the neediest state envisioned by the Poor Law, forcefully depicts the severity of his circumstances.

The Poor Law also determined the length of Frethorne’s indenture and provides clues about his age in 1623. Frethorne told Bateman that because of the Indian attacks, “the land is ruinated and spoyled, and itt will not bee soe stronge againe not this 12 yeares” (41). The Virginia colony was established fifteen years before Frethorne arrived in December 1622. Martin’s Hundred—the Virginia settlement where Frethorne lived—was just three years old and the colonial patents did not expire in twelve years. Frethorne’s comment about “this twelve years” may, therefore, be self-referential. If Frethorne was indentured by his parish for twelve years, as was commonly done, then he was twelve years old when he wrote the letters from Virginia, because the Poor Law stipulated that parish poor boys be contracted until the age of twenty-four. A young age is also indicated in Frethorne’s let-

ters to his parents in which Frethorne twice referred to himself as “I your Child” (58). In the early seventeenth century a boy identified as a child was one who had not yet reached puberty. In addition, Frethorne emphasized his childlike vulnerability in his responses to fear. Frethorne admitted to crying a great deal more than would be thought proper of an older youth: “I thought no head had beene able to hold so much water as hath and doth dailie flow from mine eyes” (62).

It is apparent that Frethorne thought Bateman would be inclined to moderate his suffering in Virginia by supplying Frethorne with more food and clothing. The Poor Law required masters of parish-indentured poor children to provide their servants with at least two sets of clothing, shoes, a cloak, and a hat, as well as sufficient food and shelter (Cole 23). Frethorne informed Bateman that “I want Clothes for truely I haue but one shirt one Ragged one & one payer of hose, one payer of shoes one suite of Cloothes” (42). This deliberate itemization showed Bateman that Frethorne was not short one or two pieces of clothing, but had only what he wore and that so ragged as to offer little relief from the elements. In Frethorne’s first letter to his parents, written two weeks after the letter to Bateman, Frethorne detailed more fully his clothing deficiencies:

But I haue 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 bandes, my Cloke is stol- len by one of my owne fellowes, and to his dying hower would not tell mee what he did with it but some of my fellows saw him have butter and beife out of a ship, *which* my Cloke I doubt paid for. (59)

Frethorne may have withheld the theft of his cloak from Bateman because the thief was “one of my owne fellowes”—that is, another parish-indentured child from St. Dunstan in the East who was known to Bateman and the other parishioners. Frethorne’s account of the stolen cloak may seem petty, but in early seventeenth-century England such theft was a serious offense. Edward Barrett, a Hertfordshire peddler, was whipped after he confessed to stealing a cloak in 1604. Nine years later a laborer named Stephen Arundell was hanged for stealing several pieces of clothing (including a cloak) (Cockburn 17, 129). In other words, Frethorne’s allegation against his “owne fellow” was a crime for which the young man would have been whipped, even hanged, had the cloak been stolen in England.

Frethorne complained to Bateman that “I am almost pined . . . soe that I am like to Perish for want of succor & releife,” but he also reassured Bateman that when he arrived in Virginia, “we had meale and provision for twenty and there is ten dead” (42, 41). The Poor Law, and Virginia Company policy, required parishes to furnish each indentured poor child with a year’s supply of food. Yet after only three months in Virginia, Frethorne told his parents that “since I came out of the ship, I never at anie thing but pease, and loblollie (that is water gruell)” (58). Frethorne worried that “our prouision will not laste till the Seaflower come in” since “wee haue no Corne but as ships do releiue vs” (“Letter to Mr. Bateman” 41; “Letter to His Parents” 62). In the spring of 1623, the *Seaflower* was just barely overdue, so Frethorne’s fear that he could starve before it arrived shows the extent of the shortages in the colony. (He was unaware, as was the rest of the colony, that the *Seaflower* was at the bottom of a Bermuda harbor, accidentally blown up by a reckless sailor.) Two voluntary trade apprentices also described deficiencies in Virginia in 1623. Thomas Best wrote his brother on April 12 that “[m]y Master and all his household is like to be starued for want of Food. . . . I am in great danger of staruinge.”<sup>18</sup> Henry Brigg told his brother that “to lett you vnderstand how I liue it is very miserable, for here we haue but a wyne quart of Corne for a day and nothing els but Water.” Best and Brigg were both voluntarily indentured to a Mr. Atkins, a condition that should have provided them with better provisions and greater protections than those given to parish-indentured servants like Frethorne. Brigg and Best separately reported that Atkins sold them to avoid obligations to feed them. According to Best, “My Master Atkins hath sold me for a 15oli [pounds] *sterling* like a damnd slaue” after using “me baselie.” Brigg charged that “[m]y Master Atkins hath sould me & the rest of my Fellowes” who “worke hard from Sun rising to Sun sett at felling of Trees and we haue not victualls not past for xx [twenty] dayes.” There are no other records of Best or Brigg so their outcomes are unknown.

These food shortages were widely attributed to the Powhatan raids of 1622, which disrupted agricultural activity in Virginia so that colonists, according to Frethorne, “[c]ould not plant anythinge att all” (“Letter to Mr. Bateman” 41). Until the next successful harvest, the colony’s servants were largely dependent on supplies sent from England to sustain newly arrived servants. When Frethorne landed in Virginia, his parish-provided supplies were confiscated and devoured by the starving servants already in

Virginia. He reported, “those seruantes that were there before vs were all-most Pined, and then they fell to feedinge soe hard of our prouision that itt killed them that were ould Virginians as fast, as the scurvie & bloody fluxe did kill vs new Virginians” (41). The *Seaflower* disaster imperiled the colony, and various other troubles meant only two of the ten vessels scheduled for Virginia actually arrived with supplies in the spring of 1623. As a result, food was scarce and what was available was expensive. Edward Hill, a Virginia planter, complained that “[a] hogshead of Meale is here at xj<sup>li</sup> [11 pounds] Corne is at xxx<sup>s</sup> [30 shillings] a bushell.”

The hunger of Frethorne, Best, and Brigg was not experienced by colonial elites who, though inconvenienced by the high costs of food or an occasional unavailability of meat, had sufficient nourishment, even luxury goods. In response to the food crisis in 1623, William Rowsley, a surgeon in James City, asked friends in England to “send me a Hoggeshed of Beife, & some Neates Tongues.” Rowsley explained that people were unwilling to sell food “for they all feare want” and claimed there was no “flesh to be had at any Rate.” At first glance, Rowsley seemed to indicate that even he could not purchase food. Rowsley’s letter revealed, though, that he was able to buy provisions—“I bought me one Cowe at xviii<sup>li</sup> [twenty-eight pounds] price”—and that he was secure enough to forgo purchases when the price was too high: “I haue offered x<sup>s</sup> [ten shillings] for a Hen and gone without.” A personal inventory of supplies sent to colonist Robert Bennett shows that in the spring of 1623, when Frethorne’s rations were so meager, Bennett received “19 Buttes of exclent good wyne, 750 jarse of oylle, 16 Barelles of Resones of the Sonne, and 18 Barelles of Rysse, tooe halfe hoghedes of Allmondes, 3 halfe hoghedes of wheate and one which was staved at seae, 18 hoghedes of Olives and some 5 ferkenes of butter and one Chesse” (220). Bennett commented that this shipment, which arrived on the *Abigail* with Frethorne, was “the beste that I received since I came in to the lande” (220). Rowsley likewise reassured his brother in England that “[m]y wife and I haue . . . the best fare therefore we are contented we fare as well as any people in the land.”

George Sandys, the company treasurer living in Virginia, attributed some of the servants’ sufferings to profiteering. He accused the Virginia Company of deliberately undersupplying—by half—its immigrants as a way to reduce initial overhead: “manie come ouer wthout anie provision, and those you set out *your* selues so furnished to halues (a maine Cause

of their debtes and deaths and of *your* small retournes) that they make a dearth of a plentiful Harvest” (65).<sup>19</sup> Sandys questioned how “shall ser-  
vants be fed and Clothed” when “wee [are] vnable to supplie anie one of  
their wants without the ruine of others” (67). Other colonists blamed the  
hunger and deaths on company propaganda such as “A Declaration of the  
State of the Colony and Affaires in Virginia” that portrayed Virginia as a  
land of plenty. The company published “A Declaration” in 1620 to counter  
“vnworthy aspersions” that “vnjustly staine and blemish that Countrey” by  
describing widespread hunger and want (308). The “Declaration” insisted  
that Virginia “Abound[s] with all Gods Naturall blessings: the Land replen-  
ished with the goodliest Woods in the World, and those full of *Deere*, and  
other Beasts for sustenance . . . [with] Rivers full of excellent Fish . . . [and]  
both Water and Land yielding Fowle in very great store” (308). There was  
indeed much game in Virginia, but hunting privileges were reserved for  
the colonial aristocracy and those who controlled weapons and ammuni-  
tion supplies. Settler Thomas Niccolls derided these fulsome depictions as  
the work of “some lying Virginians” and complained to Sir John Wolsten-  
holme: “If the Company would allow to each man a pound of butter and  
a pound of Cheese weekely they would find more comfort therein then by  
all the *Deere*, Fish, & Fowle is so talked of in England of which I can assure  
you *your* poore seruants haue not had since their coming into that Coun-  
trety” (231). Frethorne also complained to his parents, “as for deare or veni-  
son 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” (58).

Servants like Frethorne were dependent on their masters, but middling-  
class planters and tenants, many of whom had indentured servants, found  
it difficult to secure sufficient food for themselves and their servants, both  
before and after the Powhatan War, because the “chiefe Comanders” con-  
trolled the price for and distribution of food. In a letter to Joseph Farrar,  
Peter Arundel, a settler at Elizabeth City, remarked, “I can get no releife  
though I offer to pay for it” (231). Conscientious masters, like Arundel,  
agonized over the need to reduce food allowances to servants because  
they did not have, and could not purchase, sufficient provisions. Arundel  
worried that, “I haue not at this tyme to mayntaine me & my people till  
Haruest but a little more than halfe a bushel of English meale” (230). Some  
masters were unwilling to share their individual stores with their servants  
and no law compelled them to do so. John Rolfe was disturbed by the pro-

pensity of masters to “putt out” servants to scavenge for themselves, especially when most of the masters had “plenty.” In 1621, Rolfe notified Edwin Sandys, who controlled a majority of Virginia Company shareholder votes, that the Colonial Council in Virginia encouraged masters to abandon their servants when it was financially advantageous for the master: “The proportions of Victualles brought for those 100. men fell so short that Captain Welden and *Mister Whitakeres* were forced (notwithstanding *our* plenty) to putt out 50. or thereabouts for a yere, by the Governors and Councelles advise” (246). Although the crisis of 1622–23 was attributed to the Powhatan attacks and, therefore, considered unprecedented and temporally isolated, evidence indicates that the crisis merely intensified, and justified, existing practices. Frethorne’s master, William Harwood, was the first governor at Martin’s Hundred, but for reasons unknown Harwood was relieved of duty a month after the Powhatan attack and replaced by Ralph Hamor. Harwood retained some official standing until his death in 1629, yet so few records survive from Martin’s Hundred that it is not clear if Harwood continued to receive the means to sustain himself and his servants, of which Frethorne was one, after Hamor replaced him. In his last letter, Frethorne disclosed that Harwood intended to put him out to forage for sustenance. Frethorne’s desperation is palpable as he told his parents, “What will it bee when wee shall goe a month or two and never see a bit of bread. as my *Master* doth say Wee must doe, and he said hee is not able to keepe vs all, then wee shalbe turned vp to the land and eate barkes of trees, or mouldes of the Ground” (62). Virginia settler George Harrison bluntly assessed the consequences of these measures and said more servants “have died since than were slain in the massacre; and no hopes of a great many” others (113–14).

Christian ideals may have inspired efforts to send parish-indentured poor children to the colonies, but profit maintained the practice. Very quickly, the poor children became a crucial component of the colonial economic system because the free labor they performed stabilized the risk for middling planters and thus contributed to the sustained viability of the colonial communities. Pory acknowledged on September 30, 1619, that in Virginia “our principall wealth (I should haue said) consisteth in seruants,” rather than tobacco exports (“Letter”). The pressure to improve colonial profitability and the great distance from parish oversight eroded basic protections the children were supposed to have under the Poor Law. There was

at the least a tacit agreement that the Colonial Council in Virginia would provide custodial surveillance, but some of the counselors who controlled the distribution and disposition of parish-indentured poor children in Virginia also profited from their labors, and often acted to preserve self-interest above the welfare of the servants. Another impediment to traditional forms of oversight, according to Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker in *The Many-Headed Hydra*, was Virginia's implementation of martial law, which "reassert[ed] class discipline through labor and terror" in the form of whippings and executions that established "new ways of life and death" for the indentured children whose efforts for self-preservation were increasingly criminalized (30). Colonial court records are rife with allegations of servant misconduct (running away, stealing food, "impudent" behavior) that resulted in overly harsh penalties. Many indentured servants who demanded freedom, for instance, were convicted of impudence and sentenced to additional years of servitude, even if the original contracts had expired before the servant requested freedom.<sup>20</sup> The isolation imposed by the colonial condition meant that the parish-indentured children lived in an unregulated, nearly anonymous environment. Contemporaneous estimates by Nathaniel Rich and John Smith indicate that approximately 8,500 poor children were sent to Virginia as indentured servants between 1619 and 1625, yet names were recorded for only 165 of these children and fewer than 1,250 survived more than a couple of years.<sup>21</sup> Parish-indentured poor children were not supposed to be servants for life, but conditions were such that most of the poor children in Virginia were, in effect, indentured until death.

Although many of the deaths could be attributed to preventable causes—poor diplomacy that incited the Powhatan raids, undersupplying the settlers, and withholding servants' food—the greatest killer in the spring of 1623 was a contagious disease carried to the colony on the *Abigail*. Lady Margaret Wyatt, like Frethorne, arrived on the *Abigail* and wrote that the ship was "so full of infection that after a while we saw little but throwing folkes ouer boord" (232). When the *Abigail's* infected passengers intermingled with the established colonists, the Virginia population was reduced by half. Frethorne was exposed to the disease on board the ship and at Martin's Hundred. Although Wyatt and George Sandys blamed the deaths on some "stinking beere" ingested first by the ship's passengers and later by the desperate colonists, there are indications that the epidemic was a form of plague that recurred with frequency in England.

The high mortality rates for indentured servants that resulted from these practices were problematic for colonial officials in England not, generally, because of the human suffering involved, but as evidence of mismanagement that reduced revenues. As the number of deaths mounted, colonial factions attributed culpability to rivals. Nathaniel Rich appropriated all of the correspondence sent from Virginia on the *Abigail* when it returned to England in the spring of 1623, including Frethorne's letters. As a rival of Edwin Sandys in his administration of the Virginia Company, Rich wanted information he could use to undermine his adversary. Rich copied correspondence from the *Abigail* and distributed it to company members, the descriptions of which indicate that Frethorne's letters supplied Rich with the most compelling evidence for administrative neglect. A specially convened company court on June 18, 1623, addressed Rich's allegations that "divers Masters in Virginia doe much neglect and abuse their servantes there with intollerable oppression and hard vsage" and that "divers Passengers came ouer with slender and scantt provisions to maynteyne them after their Arryvall" ("A Court" 442, 439). On July 1, 1623, company members discussed "priuate letters that came by the last shippes from Virginia" that reported "his Majesties subjects there were in a verie great want and like to be starved" ("At a Court" 458–59).

The Virginia Company's official response blamed the starving immigrants for violating company policy and demanded that they "goe better provided here after to Virginia since the published Declaration (though given to every man that went) did not seeme to haue effected itt" ("A Court" 440). Rich charged that the principal reason for the excessive fatalities was "[t]he sending of so many people . . . before the Contrey was fitt to receaue them both either for lodging or Prouisions: a thing *which* to vs seemes vnexcusable [and] . . . [b]y stuffing of their Shippes in their passages with too great a number, for the lucre & gayne it seemes of the owners of the Shippes" ("Notes of Letters" 160). While the company was quick to express outrage and formed a committee to "consider of the best course they cann how these greeuances and abuses may be redressed and reformed," the interrelated motives of public perception and profit are evident in the company's concern that abused servants will be "burdensome to the Colony" ("A Court" 439). The company publically promised to alleviate the hardships but privately claimed it had no funds to do so. John Smith condemned the colonial practices of those whose "aime was nothing but present profit." He was particularly critical of investors and administra-



tors “in London who were never there, that consumed all in Arguments, Projects, and their owne conceits; every yeare trying new conclusions and altering every thing yearely as they altered opinions, till they had consumed more than two thousand pounds, and neere eight thousand mens lives” (*Advertisements* 272, 270).

Richard Frethorne’s letters compelled the Virginia Company to reexamine colonial practices, but how Mr. Bateman, and Frethorne’s family, responded to the letters may never be known. Nathaniel Rich, who exposed the contents of Frethorne’s letters to external scrutiny, knew Robert Bateman and probably delivered Frethorne’s letters to him. There is no evidence to indicate the impact Frethorne’s letters had on either of the Batemans, personally or as parish administrators. If Bateman had, as Frethorne described him, “a hart with many of those blessings” that make him merciful, then questions about his reactions must still contend with what Bateman knew about Frethorne’s life in Virginia (42). If, for instance, Frethorne’s letters were Bateman’s primary source of information on the colonial situation, he had evidence that though suffering, Frethorne had survived the transatlantic crossing—when many died—and he survived the epidemic that killed half the colony. The other reports of death and disease that arrived on the *Abigail* substantiated Frethorne’s claims so that it was possible for Bateman to conclude that Frethorne was incredibly fortunate. Such an interpretation of Frethorne’s circumstances was all the more likely since, unbeknownst to him, Christopher and Joane Frethorne (his probable parents) were dead. They died within days of each other in December 1622 and at the same time that Richard arrived in Virginia.

Steve Hindle, in *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c 1550–1750*, asserts that “the bind[ing] out of pauper children was arguably the most controversial issue in the judicial interpretation of the Elizabethan poor law,” especially when they were contracted to masters in the colonies (195). This was more true of the rural communities Hindle studied. However, in most cities documentary evidence indicates otherwise, and there are valid reasons for the urban perspective. Even in closely knit urban parishes like St. Dunstan in the East, Bateman had only to walk London’s streets to see hungry, diseased children who had no prospects for health, food, or work. In fact, St. Dunstan’s parish registers show that dozens of infants and children from elsewhere in the city were abandoned on the parish’s streets, many were found dead, and hundreds of parish-

ioners were killed by plague during the 1620s and the 1630s, perhaps even Frethorne's parents. When the hardships of Virginia were weighed against the destitution in London, questions about urban churchwardens' motivations for indenturing poor children to Virginia become quite complicated. Add to this quandary the inflated representations of readily available food and work in Virginia, and it becomes understandable why a compassionate churchwarden, like Bateman, agreed to indenture his parish's poor children in Virginia.

In his letters, a scared and desperate Richard Frethorne pleaded to Bateman and his parents, "doe not forget me." The intimacy Frethorne shared with his parents and Bateman and the content of his letters show that Frethorne did not fear being forgotten as a child or parishioner. Rather, Frethorne wrote to remind Bateman, and to have his parents remind Bateman, of St. Dunstan in the East's parish obligations to him under the English Poor Law. Frethorne's letters are usually read as evidence of the harsh conditions early Virginia colonists endured. But life was not universally harsh and we misread Frethorne's letters when we divorce their contents, and his indentures, from the context of the 1601 Poor Law. Richard Frethorne is representative of a large colonial population of unfree children that is almost entirely undocumented and thus easily overlooked. Frethorne's letters complicate interpretations of colonial indentured servitude as a route to individual improvement and provide us with opportunities to examine the place of poverty in early colonial endeavors. Frethorne's letters demand that we "doe not forget" that parish-indentured children, like Frethorne, were crucial to the English colonial legacy in America.

#### NOTES

1. Of the other people who immigrated between 1607 and 1699, 33,200 were slaves, 2,300 were convicts, and 66,300 were free. See Fogleman 44.
2. Salinger's thorough assessment of scholarship on indentured servitude demonstrates the tendencies of scholars to concentrate on nonparish indentures.
3. See Slack, *English Poor Law*—.
4. For the entire text of the legislation, see Pickering.
5. The St. Dunstan in the East parish register for births, deaths, and marriages is incomplete for the years between 1600 and 1630, with months (even years) in which no events were recorded. The register does show that in St. Dunstan in the East there were three adult male Frethornes fathering children: Christopher

and two John Frethornes. Both of the John Frethornes had sons named Richard, neither of whom is the Richard who wrote from Virginia. One of these Richards died shortly after birth in 1617; the other Richard, who was the son of the parish clerk, completed his pewterer apprenticeship in January 1621, obtained his freedom, became a citizen of London, and worked as a coppersmith. Therefore, the Richard who wrote to Bateman was likely Christopher's son (St. Dunstan in the East "Vestry Minutes"; Ricketts 99).

6. The generosity of St. Dunstan in the East's seventeenth-century poor relief was negatively articulated by Arthur West, a Victorian-era rector of the parish, as "expensive, and as destructive of self-respect, as any hospitality of the monasteries had been" (*Church* 55).
7. *Sea coals* was the term given to mineral coal used for heating and cooking. Artifacts sold by the parish included halberds, swords, armor, and crests.
8. I want to thank the Jervoise family for allowing me access to their family documents, including the Alderbury Hundred records, at the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester.
9. Rose argues that Frethorne is from the parish of Frethorne in Gloucestershire, from which he took his unusual surname, and that Bateman is a family friend. Rose also identified Frethorne as a voluntary trade apprentice.
10. Virginia Company records listed shareholders in rank order, not alphabetical order or by the amount of the investment. Bateman's name appears in the middle of the B list, indicating his moderate status (Virginia Company, "Declaration" 319). The largest shareholders were Thomas West, Lord DeLaWare (forty shares), and William, the Earl of Pembroke (thirty-two shares); Sir Edwin Sandys owned nine shares. Moderate investors typically had four to eight shares. There is no record of Bateman in the State Papers of King James I, and he is not mentioned in the correspondence of John Chamberlain or Dudley Carleton, court observers whose letters provide the most comprehensive information about persons in and around the Jacobean court.
11. *Fatherless* did not only mean orphaned. A child's whose father was unable or unwilling to work was also regarded as fatherless because the child had no parental support.
12. Pory, the Virginia Company secretary in Virginia (1619–22), was allied with Nathaniel Rich in the latter's campaign against Edwin Sandys discussed later.
13. The location of the Manchester Collection is presently unknown.
14. Nathaniel Rich's transcription of Frethorne's letters to his parents contains only one salutation, at the beginning of the first letter, dated March 20, 1623 (Frethorne, "Letter to His Parents"). The document has, however, three signatory closures, the last two accompanied by the dates of April 2 and April 3, 1623, indicating that Frethorne composed on three different occasions.
15. Italics indicate expansions of words abbreviated in the manuscript. Kingsbury's transcriptions contain whole phrases and sentences in italics, but without any notations to explain why the italics were used. Because no pattern of use is dis-

- cernable, and because expansions are usually identified by italics, Kingsbury's italics have been converted to regular typeface.
16. Ferdinand Frethorne is also listed as Frederic Fretheren from St. Dunstan in the East (Venn and Venn 180). Robert Frethorne attended Cambridge from 1631 to 1633 but did not take a degree; Christopher (son of John, the parish clerk) Frethorne graduated from Oxford in 1637 (Foster 536). There is little information about men who attended or graduated from either Oxford or Cambridge before 1600. The surviving records for Oxford and Cambridge list graduates; there is very little surviving information about boys who were enrolled, attended, but did not complete their degrees.
  17. It was possible for a child who was indentured locally to be allowed to live at home. Seventeenth-century London was compact and parishes were small, comprising only a few blocks of space. There were nine parishes, including St. Dunstan in the East, in a 600-by-200-yard section of London that was bordered on the east by Tower Hill (and the Tower of London), and by Fish Street to the west (and the old London Bridge), Tower Street to the north, and the River Thames to the south.
  18. Thomas Best's and Henry Brigg's letters were, like Frethorne's, sent from Virginia to England aboard the *Abigail* and intercepted by Nathaniel Rich. Rich did not copy the Best and Brigg letters in full, but created abstracts that contained details that he found most politically useful (Rich, "Notes Taken").
  19. Rich added a parenthetical comment "meaning the company" to further identify Sandys's "your selues." George Sandys, the youngest brother of Sir Edwin Sandys, served as treasurer in Virginia from 1621 to 1625.
  20. See Rich, "Notes of Letters" 4.158–59 and Smith, *Advertisements* 268. See also the petition of the widow Jane Dickenson for her freedom dated March 30, 1624.
  21. According to Smith, "The Company in England say 7. or 8. Thousand: the Councell in Virginia say but 2200. or thereabouts" (*Advertisements* 302, fn 4). Rich charged that more than 8,000 lives were lost. See Rich, "Notes of Letters" 158–59. See also Linebaugh and Rediker 59.

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