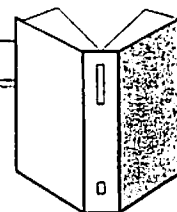


LITERATURE ACTIVITY



The Fate of an Indentured Servant

CHAPTER
2

Religious and political prisoners as well as petty criminals were sometimes sent to the colonies as indentured servants instead of being imprisoned. James Revel was a young Englishman who was "transported" to Virginia as punishment for a crime he had committed. He eventually returned to England and wrote a remarkable poem about the fourteen years he spent as an indentured servant.

As you read the excerpt below from Revel's poem, try to imagine what life was like for many indentured servants working on southern plantations.

PART IV

At length, it pleased God I sick did fall
But I no favour could receive at all,
For I was Forced to work while I could stand,
Or hold the hoe within my feeble hands.

Much hardships then in deed I did endure,
No dog was ever nursed so I'm sure,
More pity the poor Negroe slaves bestowed
Than my inhuman brutal master showed.

Oft on my knees the Lord I did implore,
To let me see my native land once more;
For through God's grace my life I would amend
And be a comfort to my dearest friends.

Helpless and sick and being left alone,
I by myself did use to make my moan;
And think upon my former wicked ways,
How they had brought me to this wretched case.

The Lord above who saw my Grief and smart,
Heard my complaint and knew my contrite heart,
His gracious Mercy did to me afford,
My health again was unto me restor'd.

It pleas'd the Lord to grant me so much Grace,
That tho' I was in such a barbarous place,
I serv'd the Lord with fervency and zeal,
By which I did much inward comfort feel.

Thus twelve long tedious years did pass away,
And but two more by law I had to stay:
When Death did for my cruel Master call,
But that was no relief to us at all.

The Widow would not the Plantation hold,
So we and that were both for to be sold,
A lawyer rich who at James-Town did dwell,
Came down to view it and lik'd it very well.

He bought the Negroes who for life were slaves,
But no transported Fellons would he have,
So we were put like Sheep into a fold,
There unto the best bidder to be sold.

from "The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon's Sorrowful Account of His Fourteen Years Transportation at Virginia in America," by James Revel, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 56, 1948

Questions to Think About

1. What hardships did James Revel endure as an indentured servant?
2. How did he view the enslaved Africans on the plantation?