

T.M. DEVINE. — *The Tobacco Lords*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976.

There are few more impressive economic developments in eighteenth century Scotland than the rise of Scottish trade with North America and the West Indies, and in particular the growth of the tobacco trade linking the Clyde and the Chesapeake is a topic which has long fascinated economic historians of Scotland. Dr. Devine's book is, therefore, assured of a keen reception although it is unfortunate that nearly all of the key ideas have already appeared in various journals, which does diminish the overall impact. *The Tobacco Lords* is, as the title suggests, a study of the tobacco traders of Glasgow during their 'golden age', c. 1740-1790. This is a topic worthy of the best of modern scholarship which would seem to promise among other things to throw welcome light on the relationship between the tobacco trade and the home economy. But here we immediately run into a major difficulty. Few, if any, Glasgow tobacco merchants were solely traders in tobacco; most had a wide range of interests both at home and overseas, and their wealth did not derive exclusively from the tobacco trade. This means that while Dr. Devine can (and does) supply us with a comprehensive list of tobacco traders and their activities, he is unable except in isolated cases to determine what proportion of their resources as merchants accrued from the tobacco trade — which inhibits any quantitative evaluation of the trade's contribution.

The book is in four parts. The first examines the tobacco merchant community, and when taken in conjunction with Appendix I gives a comprehensive picture. Although insolvency guaranteed that new recruits were needed from time to time, there was an essential continuity among the elite, strengthened by kinship and interlocking copartnerships, an oligopolistic situation not apparently incompatible with competition. The distinctive contribution of this section is the detailed analysis of what the colonial merchants did with those surpluses which they chose not to plough back into their firms. What is not satisfactorily resolved here is the crucial question as to how these surpluses were generated. Given that the tobacco trade was composed both of a trade in tobacco from North America and of a trade in goods for sale in the Chesapeake stores, one would like to have known whether the tobacco traders normally expected and realised profits from both aspects of their trade, and how profits on the sale of stores compared with those from tobacco sales.

The examination of what the tobacco traders did with their surpluses, however acquired, is rigorous. The acquisition through purchase of land in the west of Scotland was common for economic and social reasons. Some merchants became agricultural enthusiasts but as class their contribution to improvement was limited. In industry, however, their influence was pervasive in the west of Scotland, even though Devine is guarded as to just how important their contribution was. He documents in impressive fashion a wide range of industrial investment by colonial merchants in textiles, leather, glass, coal-mining etc., sometimes as a kind of backwards integration by the merchants into the production of articles for their stores, sometimes motivated by the desire to diversify away from reliance on colonial trade. The old orthodoxy that the growth of the Scottish cotton industry in the 1780s was based on a 'transfer of resources' away from the tobacco trade is smartly knocked on the head; the financial contribution of the colonial merchants to cotton-spinning was limited.

Part II deals with how the tobacco trade was conducted, and here we are mostly on ground made familiar by Professor Jacob M. Price and others, with once again the importance of the 'store system' and the French connection underlined. Devine adds to his exposition of the store system some careful consideration of a major issue, colonial demand as a factor in the growth of Scottish domestic indus-

try, and in particular the importance of the tobacco colonies as outlets for Scottish products. This is an important theme and his conclusions should be studied with attention, and used as a basis for further research. On the complementary question of the markets for tobacco, his analysis is disappointingly brief on the markets for Scottish tobacco other than the French, e.g. the Dutch, which in most years took as much as the French, and deserves more attention than it receives here. The original element in this part is the discussion of the sources of capital in Scotland for the tobacco trade which needed considerable quantities of capital, and apparently had no trouble in raising the bulk of its requirements locally, in the west of Scotland, not from banks but from private individuals. The trade acted, therefore, as a mechanism for the mobilisation of capital resources both for use within the trade and for other activities.

In the third part, which covers the period of the American War of Independence, Dr. Devine looks at the ways in which the Glasgow merchants coped with what was potentially a disastrous position with the virtual cessation of the tobacco trade and large unrecovered debts in the colonies. But in fact only a few firms failed and most of these were relatively minor. For, despite the difficulties, the war brought compensatory opportunities of profit to many firms through earnings from government service, through clandestine trade via Canada or the West Indies, through boom prices for tobacco (and as is made clear, quite fortuitously the Scots had large stocks on hand in 1775-76).

The last part, by far the shortest, deals with the aftermath of the war and the return to normality. Eventually, with patience and perseverance, a large part of the pre-war debt owed Glasgow in the colonies was recovered, some even by way of actions in the federal courts. Dr. Devine is tantalisingly brief in his description of the way in which Clyde firms moved back after 1783 into the Chesapeake, setting up stores and renewing the export trade in goods from Scotland to the tobacco states. By the mid 1780s, exports of Scottish linen to Virginia and Maryland were back to the level they had been pre-war. Of course relatively little tobacco was imported to the Clyde after 1783, but it would have been interesting to know how much of and for how long the trade to Europe in American tobacco continued in the hands of Glasgow firms.

This is an immensely thorough and lucid book. Only a few perhaps will appreciate the level of application and width of research involved in the preparation of some of his tables. The style is sound, if sober, the analysis rigorous and while his discussion of major issues is never deficient, Dr. Devine's respect for the evidence, as befits a Scottish historian, leads him on occasion to that good Scots verdict of "notproven." The presentation is clear, although a graph of tobacco imports and re-exports would have helped, and apart from some mayhem at the end of the bibliography, the text is remarkable free from errata. This work has such strengths that all historians of trade will profit from it and other Scottish historians ought to be stimulated to relate this study of the west of Scotland to developments elsewhere in the country.

Alastair J. DURIE,
University of Aberdeen.

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Roger ANSTEY. — *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1975.

For over three decades now the historiography of British slave trade abolition, under the influence of the works of Eric Williams, has been marked by a