

To my good friend

Cliff Relander

with all my regards,

Brewster Coulter

This is a chapter  
from my doctor's thesis

## THE IMPORT TRADE OF COLONIAL VIRGINIA

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A survey of some of the more important commodities that the Virginia merchant imported from Europe, the West India Islands, and Africa may serve to show how eighteenth-century Virginians clothed themselves, how they furnished their homes, and how they secured the tools they needed to make a living. Indeed, it may also reveal to us a fuller picture of the world in which all colonial Americans lived and a broader understanding of the character of British trade and manufactures during a vigorous, but at the same time, an obscure period in the commercial history of the British Empire.

## EUROPEAN MANUFACTURES

The colonial Virginians had all the necessities they wished for the adornment of their persons or for the furnishing of their homes just as though they lived in Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> These goods came largely from London, Bristol, Liverpool, Whitehaven, and Glasgow, in or near which were huge warehouses where merchandise was collected and later shipped to America. Actually, the warehouses of London were scattered for miles along the Thames River, while those belonging to merchants in Glasgow were not in the town itself, but in Greenock and Port Glasgow, little places lying further down the Clyde.

Virginia received large quantities of many different kinds of goods from the warehouses of London, especially woollens. There were fine serges from the West of England, cheap "plains" from Wales, long bays, shalloons, and other worsteds from Norfolk, and inexpensive worsteds of all kinds from the northern counties, particularly the West Riding of Yorkshire. Prominent among the varieties of woolen cloths that the merchants exported to Virginia were the coarse, ribbed kerseys and rough, thick-napped duffels. The colonial planters used the former to make coats and trousers for themselves, their overseers, and their families and the latter to make coats for their slaves. From every part of the British Islands textiles and knitted wear flowed into London's warehouses for distribution abroad. Scotland sent its tartans and stockings, as

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<sup>1</sup> Answers to the Queries of the Lords of Trade for the year 1741, dated Aug. 26, 1741, LC British Transcripts, PRO, CO 5. vol. 1325.

well as cheap linens. Ireland sent its fine linens. And from London and its environs came cheap silks. Indeed, the export trade in English cloth had been concentrated in London ever since the beginning of the Tudor period. London was so important in overseas commerce that by 1777 the city shipped out more woolen manufactures than all the other ports of England put together.<sup>2</sup>

As a by-product of London's dominant position in the English cloth trade, the manufacturers of many other wares intended for export sent them to London for sale. For example, the "common trading guns" manufactured at Wolverhampton, in Staffordshire, went via London to Virginia where the back-country farmers bought them.<sup>3</sup>

Besides serving as the distributor for a wide assortment of British wares, the great city on the Thames had many manufactures of its own. High-grade saddlery and other leather products; the best brass and iron mongery, like survey instruments; hoes and axes; the finest cabinetmakers' work; carpenters' and blacksmiths' tools; the best guns; gun powder; lead shot; gunflints; the best clothing, hats, and haberdashery were all made in or around London.

In addition, most of the Continental European and Asiatic products passed through London's warehouses on their way to Virginia. There were the best white or brown German osnaburgs, which were of coarse, unbleached linen much desired in Virginia as clothing for house servants. There were the finest Cologne millstones from Germany, as well as good burr millstones and low-grade silks from France. Good Italian silks came to London from Mantua and other cities in northern Italy. Brown linens and fine blanketing came from Holland. The finest "Persian" silks, and the best calicos and chintzes came from the Orient, as did spices. Choice West India peppers and ginger, drugs, medicines, fancy groceries like anchovies, olives, and Portuguese fruits all came to the central market in London, and from there went on to Virginia.

Drawing into its markets the manufactures of Britain, continental Europe, and Asia, and having its own special products, eighteenth-century London was the world emporium of trade. Since Londoners imported goods from and exported goods to the whole world, trade with Virginia was just one among many branches of the city's commerce.

In comparison the situation in Glasgow was quite different.

<sup>2</sup> L. B. Namier, "Brice Fisher, M.P.: A Mid-Eighteenth Century Merchant and his Connexions," *English Historical Review*, XLII (1927), 516; James A. Williamson, *A Short History of British Expansion* (new ed., London, 1930), I, 253; David Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce* . . . (London, 1805), III, 603.

<sup>3</sup> Invoice of goods bought of William and David Allason in 1762 in the books of Invoices and Inventories, Allason Papers, Va. State Lib.

It was the second source of goods for Virginia, although in 1760 it was a small town with only 27,000 inhabitants. Glasgow's incoming commerce was based on sugar and rum from the West Indies and tobacco from the American plantations, with English capital providing much of the wherewithal to trade. In return, Glasgow shipped the native products of Scotland to the new world. Many of these did not differ substantially from those of England, but some were special to the country. Chief among the latter were many plaids or tartans which the Scots made in the Lowlands from Edinburgh and Stirling to Glasgow. Scottish osnaburgs, which were cheaper than the German ones and provided much of the summer clothing of the slaves, were manufactured around Glasgow. Plaid hose were made throughout the country from the Orkneys to the English border. And to promote its American trade Glasgow brought linen cloth from Germany, Holland, and Ireland, as well as goods of all kinds from England, including very large quantities of cottons from Kendal in Cumberland. In the English woolen industries the word "cotton" may once have meant "shoddy," for these cottons were coarse woolen fabrics. In Virginia where they provided winter clothing for the slaves they were known as "Negro cottons." Incidentally many of the "Scottish" commodities were made in Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

Whitehaven, in Westmoreland County, England, where many Scotsmen had settled, was one of the lesser, perhaps the least of the five chief towns that traded with Virginia. Like the other towns it gathered in its warehouses some goods from every part of England to supply the stores established by its merchants in America. To Virginia, however, Whitehaven was chiefly known as a source of Kendal cottons, cheap or coarse felt hats, cheap saddlery, saddlery, grindstones, iron pots, cast iron "Dutch" ovens, and pewter whisky stills.

Liverpool, in Lancashire, was a much more important depot for American trade than Whitehaven. It was an outstanding source of salt, refined white sugar, Irish sheeting, Kendal cottons, cheap friezes, cheap kerseys, yarn hose, bottles, and glassware. Its merchants also exported high grade earthenware dishes and other wares, such as were made in Josiah Wedgwood's potteries in Staffordshire.<sup>5</sup> And they shipped to Virginia large quantities of rough ceramics like stone bottle jugs and chamber pots, iron work such as nails, hoes, cards for combing wool and cotton

<sup>4</sup> Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce*, III, 325; Francis Fauquier's Answers to the Queries, dated Jan. 30, 1763, LC Transcripts, PRO, CO 5, vol. 1330, p. 390; M. Postlethwayte's article on Scotland, *Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph M. Hower, "The Wedgwoods: Ten Generations of Potters," *Journal of Economic and Business History*, IV (1932), 288

fibers, and cutlery that was made in Sheffield and Birmingham, as well as the best rope and twine.

Bristol was the last but not the least of the five towns which handled most of Britain's trade with the Old Dominion. It supplied the colonies with glass bottles, earthenware from the Staffordshire potteries, copper whisky stills, nails, paving stones, salt, cheese, and Irish linens. This city distributed many cheap woolens of Welsh manufacture such as the untwilled and undyed Welsh and Brecon plains and cottons. It was further the chief source of the fine woolens that were made in the west of England. Some of these woolens were phenomenally good. In 1758 Francis Jerdone, a merchant in Virginia, ordered a good overcoat from Bristol. He specified that it must be made after the best manner and fashion, very warm, and of such substance as would keep out the rain for twelve hours.<sup>6</sup>

The great variety of world products in the London market and the special local products of the other English towns make the Scots' supremacy in the store trade seem almost like a paradox.<sup>7</sup> Yet two factors do a good deal to explain it. The Scottish traders in Britain were not all domiciled in Glasgow. One of the important Virginia houses in London was that of Neill Buchanan, subsequently the Buchanan and Hamilton concern. Everybody closely connected with it in England or Virginia, including the Buchanans who came from Glasgow to the factors in the colonies, was a Scotsman. John Hyndman, who was a merchant in London in the 1760's and 1770's, was likewise a Scotsman. In fact, he had been one of the employees of Neill Buchanan. The mercantile combinations that included John Hook and David Ross, who were of Scottish origin, had their English depot in Whitehaven.

The second explanation is that the Scottish merchants and traders did not try to make a living by selling Scottish manufactures only. Rather they made a business of buying goods popular in Virginia, obtaining them not in Scotland but in those places where such goods could be obtained most cheaply. In the days before the Act of Union of 1707, when Scotsmen were not allowed to trade with the colonies, enterprising traders had gotten around the prohibition by going to Whitehaven where they purchased a stock of English goods. Then they engaged a vessel and sailed to Virginia serving as their own supercargo. After the Act of Union had opened the trade to Scottish merchants trading

<sup>6</sup> Francis Jerdone's letter from Louisa County in Va., Feb. 25, 1758 to Messrs. Morgan Thomas and Company (Bristol), and his letter of June 5, 1741, to Mr. Neill Buchanan: "... Bristol where the very cheapest and best cottons come from." Jerdone Papers, Lib., Coll. of William and Mary.

<sup>7</sup> The consignment trade with London, that most of the larger Tidewater planters engaged in, was in a different category.

from their own country, these men continued the practice of going to England for the merchandise that sold best in Virginia. That is to say, they regularly went to Whitehaven, and frequently to Liverpool. In the early days, some of them may have gone to Bristol and London. These last two stops did not prove very feasible, however, and from 1735 when the Scottish trade had become well established, traders generally had the goods that they could obtain best and cheapest from Bristol or London shipped by the merchants there directly to their stores in Virginia. In this way they avoided the grievous expense of freight and insurance in coastwise shipping. Actually the expense of shipping merchandise to London may have been a real factor in enabling the lesser towns to compete with the metropolis. On the other hand, the merchants had to limit their practice by their frequent necessity of buying goods where they had credit. Many of them were so largely restricted to obtaining their wares from the Glasgow warehouses that they could do no more than William Allason planned to do when he opened his store in Falmouth in 1760. "I propose," he said, "that we shall import a few goods yearly . . . from the places they can be had easiest and on the best terms."<sup>8</sup>

The Scotsmen were so successful in their trading on this basis that the English merchants of Whitehaven, Liverpool, and Bristol had to do the same to compete on equal terms with them. Certainly the merchants of all of these towns were using the same general methods by the middle of the century. They obtained the greater part of their wares from their home port and shopped around for the rest. The result was that slight variations, between say London and Bristol, in the price of woolens could cause an extensive, though generally only a temporary, shift in the flow of commerce. By this time, however, the practice the Scots had inaugurated had given them a major place in the Old Dominion's trade.

Merchants from London were the only ones who did not go over to the shopping around policy to any great extent. They did not really have to do so; London's great central market for goods, and the presence in it of the best market for the English domestic tobacco trade, enabled the city's merchants to compete on equal terms with merchants from the lesser seaports of Britain. In addition, the London merchants were interested largely in the consignment branch of the tobacco trade, engaging in the store trade to a limited extent only.

The words "cheap" and "coarse" have been used purposely to characterize a great many of the English manufactures. They were adjectives much used by the eighteenth-century traders to

<sup>8</sup> William Allason's letter of June, 1760, to his brother Robert Allason, Allason Papers.

describe the wares they dealt in. Their merchandise was inexpensive, and often it was much inferior to the best that could be produced. Sometimes it was of excessively low-grade. After complaining that his osnaburgs were so very thin and narrow that he would never be able to sell them profitably, Francis Jerdone pointed out that the cottons and other woolens from Mr. Mauduit, a London draper or wholesale cloth merchant, justly deserved his complaint. Several pieces were moth eaten when opened, while the cottons were so bad that nobody cared to buy them. "I entreat you," he begged in 1762, "to send me more substantial cotton, than what you did last Voyage, for such thin stuff will neither keep out wet or cold."<sup>9</sup> A good many articles were in a defective or unmerchantable condition before they left the English warehouses. In 1771, Peter Lyons, a planter and lawyer who handled many mercantile cases in Virginia, received an expensive piece of cambric that was "very coarse, full of holes, and unfit for use."<sup>10</sup> John Hook received a whisky still from Whitehaven in 1773. After looking at it he wrote to his partner that he would never get another still from Whitehaven, for the workmanship was clumsy, the pewter was the brittlest stuff he ever set eyes on, and there was no cap to the worm.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to those goods that were defective before they left the warehouses in Britain, a great many articles suffered damage in transit. Water leaking through the decks or the bottoms of vessels was the chief destroyer. Rats did almost as much damage as water. Trunks and boxes sometimes broke loose during storms and went hurtling around the hold, damaging their contents and everything with which they came in contact, including the vessels. Careless handling was another serious menace. Many a bale or bundle fell overboard while a ship was being loaded on the Thames, or elsewhere in Britain, or while it was being unloaded in Virginia. Much merchandise was also damaged by being sent to the wrong river in Virginia, that is any river except the one to which the goods were addressed, and had, therefore, to be freighted around Chesapeake Bay and up the rivers in sloops or flatboats. In these cases the packages banged around a good deal during the additional voyage. Thieves did even more damage, however. On one occasion Samuel Athawes, a merchant in Lon-

<sup>9</sup> Francis Jerdone's letters of April 18, 1741, to Mr. Neill Buchanan and March 10, 1762 to Messrs. Farrell and Jones, Merchants in Bristol, Jerdone Papers.

<sup>10</sup> F. N. Mason, ed., *John Norton & Sons, Merchants of London and Virginia* (Richmond, Va., 1937), 190. See "Invoice of Merchandize to be ship'd by Mr. John Norton & Sons on Accot. of Peter Lyons," *ibid.*, 190-92.

<sup>11</sup> John Hook's letters of June 10, 1773 to David Ross and Dec. 28, 1773 to Mr. Walter Chambie, in Whitehaven, John Hook MS letter book, Va. State Lib., Richmond, Va.

don, sent some goods to Lord Fairfax. One of the packages was landed in the York River, left there awhile, and was then freighted around to Falmouth on the Rappahannock. The other package was also landed on the York River. But it was carried first to Urbanna, where the naval (customs) office on the Rappahannock was located. Thereafter somebody forwarded it to Falmouth. By the time that William Allason, who took charge of the goods for Lord Fairfax, received the packages both had been broken open and robbed of a large part of their contents. The ideal practice was for the shipper to send trunks, bales, and packages directly to the consignee. However, of all Virginians only the Scottish traders were able to force the ship captains to take proper care of their goods. William Beverley of Blandfield stated: "I find the Scotch, who are the principal Importers of Goods from London, insist that the Captains shall sign their Bills of Lading, deliverable at a particular Landing on the River, whereon they reside. . . . By this means they receive their Goods in due Time and proper order, and without any Inconvenience whatever. I wish therefore, as I am told this is the constant Practice, you [Samuel Athawes] wd. insist upon their acting in the same Manner, because I am frequently ill-used in this particular."<sup>12</sup>

The commerce of Virginia, besides being subject to the trials and tribulations of coarse, cheap, and sometimes defective merchandise, as well as to damages in transit, was plagued by all sorts of frauds. The situation lent itself to fraud. Consumers in the Old Dominion were to a very considerable extent unable to exchange goods, and even when they did send back the articles they had ordered they met with so much opposition from the merchants in Britain that many a consumer felt bitterly frustrated. George Washington considered it was practically impossible to return any article save those giving obvious evidence of fraud. He also found that only when he made his purchases a year before he needed them could he expect to make a change. How otherwise, he wrote, "can a Person who Imports bear requisites only submit to lay a year out of any particular Article of Cloathing, or necessary for Family use, and have recourse to such a tedious and uncertain way of relief as this, when possibly a Tradesman would deny the Goods and consequently refuse them. It is not to be done, we are obliged to acquiesce to the present loss and hope for

<sup>12</sup> Louise Pecquet du Bellet, *Some Prominent Virginia Families* (Lynchburg, Va., c. 1907). See "The Fisher History," II, 764; William Allason's letter of June 12, 1768 to Mr. Samuel Athawes; Robert Beverley's letter of April, 1771 to Samuel Athawes. Both Edward Athawes and his son Samuel had much trouble with damaged tobacco, as well as with merchandise, but they were by no means the only merchants to have difficulties. Allason Papers.

future redress,"<sup>13</sup> Robert Beverley, of Blandfield, returned merchandise only to find that instead of receiving compensation his merchant in London deprecated the damages and defects, while he extolled the principles of tradesmen from whose warehouses he had obtained the articles.<sup>14</sup>

Hence the Virginians suffered from frauds galore. Francis Jerdone, for instance, received mohair buttons for kerseys when, as he complained, kersey coats and trousers were always mounted with metal buttons.<sup>15</sup> George Washington wrote his merchant in London that: "It is needless for me to particularize the sorts, quality, or taste I would choose to have them [the wares he ordered] in unless it is observed; and you may believe me when I tell you that instead of getting things good and fashionable in their several kinds we often have Articles sent us that could have been used by our Forefathers in days of yore. 'Tis a custom, I have some Reason to believe, with many Shop keepers, and Tradesmen [who were wholesale merchants or "warehousemen"] in London when they know goods are bespoke for Exportation to palm sometimes old, and sometimes very slight and indifferent Goods upon Us. . . ." <sup>16</sup> William Reynolds, a merchant in Yorktown, ordered some mirrors, but he received instead of the kind he ordered and described, mirrors mounted in white fretted ornamental frames. In Virginia such mirrors were unmerchantable, as the white frames would be ruined by fly specks and the carved work would become encrusted with dust because of the carelessness of the servants.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps defects of all kinds were so common because low-grade goods constituted the bulk of the merchants' wares. As Francis Jerdone wrote in 1742: "Nothing so contributed towards a cheap purchase [of tobacco] as good Ozens [osnaburgs] Cottons and other coarse goods." The year before he observed that fine cloth, as cambrics, did not sell well in the stores that were so high up in the country, in Hanover County. And in 1775 William Allason reported that there was but little trade in Falmouth because all kinds of coarse goods were so scarce.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> George Washington's letter of Sept. 20, 1765 to Robert Cary and Company, John C. Fitzpatrick, *Writings of Washington*, II, 429.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Beverley's letter of Aug. 18, 1765 to . . . , Robert Beverley's MS letter book, LC.

<sup>15</sup> Francis Jerdone's letter of April 16, 1742 from Hanover Co. to Neill Buchanan, Esq., Jerdone Papers.

<sup>16</sup> George Washington's letter of Sept. 28, 1760 to Robert Cary and Company, Fitzpatrick, *Writings of Washington*, II, 350.

<sup>17</sup> William Reynolds' letter of March 12, 1774, to Mr. John Norton. Photostat copies of William Reynolds' two MS letter books, Colonial Historical National Park, Yorktown, Va.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Jerdone's letters of Aug. 17, 1742 from Hanover Co., and July 13, 1741 from Paumonky River, both to Neill Buchanan, Jerdone Papers; William Allason's letter of March 10, 1775 to Thomas B. Martin, Esq., Allason Papers.

Goods of inferior quality seem to have been an inseparable accompaniment of a large scale commerce in cheap, therefore, low-quality English manufactures. In the 1500's and thereabouts similar, but also worse, complaints were made by French and other European buyers of the cheap woolens of Yorkshire.<sup>19</sup> Still the French purchased the English wares in spite of their numerous defects either because they were so cheap or because they were accustomed to using them. The Virginians certainly had the habit of using British manufactures, for during the Revolutionary War, notwithstanding the interdiction of British goods by the Continental Congress, they still desired them. Frenchmen, Dutchmen, and Danes who traded with the Americans found that if they wanted to do business they had to vend British commodities.<sup>20</sup>

#### NORTHERN MANUFACTURES

A number of wares came to Virginia from the northern colonies. Philadelphia was an important depot for the distribution of necessities from the world over to the Shenandoah Valley as well as to other backwoods areas. Merchants in Philadelphia, New York, and in the New England port towns were considerable distributing agents for West India sugar products especially after 1760, as well as chocolate and coffee, some Portuguese salt and Madeira wine. The source of the sugar is very uncertain, but merchants often inferred that they had smuggled a considerable part of it in from the French and Dutch sugar islands.<sup>21</sup>

The northern colonies also supplied Virginia with certain products of their own making. In some of the towns there were sugar refineries and distilleries that produced the refined white sugar the colonists used on their dinner tables and "Continent" rum. Often this carried the label "New England" or "Philadelphia" to denote the place where it was made, while William Byrd, II, who belonged to the affluent class who consumed only the West India product, said that the poor people who drank the North American rum called it Kill-Devil because it was very bad. Much cider, salt fish, cheese, soap, and candles came from the North. Leather, particularly the kinds used in making the uppers of shoes, shoes, the leather breeches that were much worn in the Old Dominion, and some linen found a large market. Lumber and various kinds of wooden ware, iron manufactures of many varieties, including some malleable iron bars, knives, axes, and saws that

<sup>19</sup> Herbert Heaton, *Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries*, Oxford, 1920.

<sup>20</sup> Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce*, III, 591.

<sup>21</sup> Governor Gooch's letter of Oct. 5, 1732, to the Bd. of Trade in LC British Transcripts PRO, CO 5, vol. 1323, pp. 79-85.

were made expressly for use in Virginia and the Carolinas were staple northern commodities.<sup>22</sup> Philadelphia, which was the chief supplier of northern goods, also provided some silver ware, particularly silver coffee pots, and high-grade furniture, such as the twelve black walnut chairs with leather seats and the two walnut dining room tables that one Virginia merchant purchased.<sup>23</sup>

#### SUGAR PRODUCTS FROM THE WEST INDIES

Of very real importance to the commerce of Virginia were the large quantities of rum, muscovado sugar—a coarse brown sugar obtained as the first sugar product in the process of separating the sugar from the molasses—and molasses from the West Indies. The British islands of Barbadoes, Antigua, St. Kitts, and Jamaica were the most important producers of sugar and rum. Of these, Barbadoes, the chief of the British sugar colonies, was, according to the available records, the biggest source of supply to Virginia. However the rum from Antigua and St. Kitts was more expensive as a rule and, therefore, was probably better. Some sugars were also smuggled in from the French colonies. As references to the subject are very meager, only this can be said: It would seem as if most of the vessels that smuggled French sugar picked it up on voyages that were officially to Jamaica. However, Jerdone's customers desired Barbadoes rum rather than that from any other island, while Allason's customers preferred Barbadoes sugar to that from Guadaloupe.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that the British sugars may have been more carefully prepared than the French products which were reputed to undersell the English ones. On the other hand, the colonists might have fallen into the habit of liking the English products or merely that the particular French sugar in question had suffered in its shipment to Virginia.

Little can be said about the quality of West India sugars. While there seems to have been considerable grade variation, the Virginians for the most part accepted the ordinary sugars that came from the warehouses of the sugar merchants on the islands

<sup>22</sup> Archibald Ritchie's letter of Aug. 17, 1763, to William Allason. This letter is in the boxes of loose Allason papers, Va. State Lib.; William Byrd, II's letter of July 12, 1736 to Lord Egremont, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XXXVI, 220-21; William Palfrey's letter of Dec. 20, 1767 to a Virginia merchant, from microfilm copy of William Palfrey, Letters to Virginia Merchants, Dept. of Research, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc. Original letters are in the Harvard Coll. Lib.

<sup>23</sup> Invoice of goods shipped from Philadelphia on June 9, 1770, by Willing and Morris, in Hooe, Stone and Co., Alexandria, Va., book of Invoices, June 15, 1770-June, 1784. The MS Hooe Papers are in the N. Y. Pub. Lib.

<sup>24</sup> John Glassford's letter from Glasgow of Aug. 10, 1761 to Mr. Neil Jamieson, in vol. I of the Papers of Neil Jamieson, LC; Francis Jerdone's letter of Sept. 14, 1743 to Neill Buchanan, Esq., Jerdone Papers.

without comment, interpreted the different qualities in terms of prices and left it at that.

#### SLAVES AND SERVANTS

In the eighteenth century labor (Negro slaves and white indentured servants) moved from one owner or employer to another through the agency of the merchants. Whether as slave traders, or as contractors of convicts and indentured servants, or as subcontractors who received the name "soul drivers" because they herded groups of servants through Virginia from one county court house to the next attending the markets, these traders regarded the men whose bodies or whose services they vended just as a regular commodity of commerce.<sup>25</sup>

Unskilled Negro slaves from Africa formed the outstanding group in the labor market. The vast majority of these slaves came from the great middle stretches of the coast of Guinea from Gambia on the north, from Sierra Leone, the Grain Coast (Liberia), the Ivory, Gold, and Slave Coasts (Dahomey and Nigeria), and from the Niger River Delta, Cameroon, and Gaboon, to Angola on the south.<sup>26</sup> The Negroes from these different countries varied considerably in physique and temperament. In Jamaica and South Carolina, the planters' first preference was for the big-boned Negroes from the Gold and Slave Coasts which were the best of all, their second for the Gambia Negroes and then for the larger of the Angolas. The slaves from Calabar (Cameroon) on the terribly unhealthy Bight of Benin were the least liked, for in addition to their thin, slight physiques, they had a noticeable tendency to commit suicide. The preference of the West India and Carolina planters was probably based on their need for strong laborers to do the heavy work required in the sugar and rice fields, and frequently to get the kinds they wanted, they paid the highest prices given for slaves.<sup>27</sup>

In Virginia, on the other hand, the work required of Negroes was sufficiently light so that a powerful physique was not a prereq-

<sup>25</sup> "Diary of John Harrower, 1773-1776," *American Historical Review*, VI (1900-01), 77. "Soul drivers," wrote John Harrower, "are men who make it their business to go on bd. all ships who have in either Servants or Convicts and buy sometimes the whole and sometimes a parcell of them as they can agree, and then they drive them through the Country like a parcell of Sheep untill they can sell them to advantage, . . ."

<sup>26</sup> Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1933), 30-31.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Gov. James Glen of S. C. to the Bd. of Trade, 1754: "As Negroes are sold higher here than in any part of the King's Dominions we have them sent from Barbadoes, the Leeward Island, Jamaica, Virginia, and New York, . . ." The letter is quoted in Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, 1930-35), IV, 313.

uisite. And as so much mental trouble is the result of physical breakdown, it seems possible that the Calabars were less prone to commit suicide in Virginia than in the sugar colonies. Consequently, the tobacco planters did not have to be so particular about the part of Africa from which their slaves came. "Much always depends," wrote Francis Jerdone in 1762, "on the looks and healthiness of the slaves. Young ones from 12 to 18 years old [are] always more saleable than older ones: If they look well and are all made, the Country they come from is not much regarded."<sup>28</sup> Hence it was that relatively few slaves from the Gold and Slave Coasts ever reached Virginia. Most Negroes whose home in Africa is mentioned in the Naval Officers' lists or in advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette* came from Gambia, Angola, or Calabar. In many cases, however, the people who recorded the information did not bother to say more than "Guinea" or "Africa."<sup>29</sup> In addition to the slaves that came from Africa others came from the American colonies chiefly the West Indies.

In the seventy or eighty years before the Revolution slave traders imported a great many Negroes from Africa. They brought 6,371 in the nine years from 1699 to 1708. In 1746 alone the number was nearly two thousand, and in 1752, the high water mark in importation, there were four thousand two hundred new arrivals from the Coast of Guinea.<sup>30</sup>

During this time, moreover, a considerable number of Negroes continued to trickle in from the West Indies. Some planters liked West Indian slaves because they were "seasoned," that is they were more or less adjusted to the clothing, work, and climate of English America. Other planters bought them because they could get easier credit arrangements from the West India dealer. Where the Liverpool, or Bristol slaver, wanted payment in three months, the dealer in Antigua or Barbadoes would arrange for payment in

<sup>28</sup> Francis Jerdone's letter of Oct. 10, 1762 to Messrs. Buchanan and Simson: "As to the price of negroes here I cannot certainly inform you how they have been sold this summer: According to what I have heard the first ships sold the choice at £38 Sterling exclusive of duty which is 5 per cent paid by the buyer. After that the next ships fell to £36 and £34 as the sellers could agree with the buyers: Much always depends on the looks and healthiness of the slaves. Young ones from 12 to 18 years old [are] always more saleable than older ones: If they look well and are all made, the Country they come from is not much regarded, much likewise depends on the season of the year they arrive here." Jerdone Papers. In a "Computation of Negroes required for the use of the American Plantations," of 1750, occurs the following: "As no Gold Coast Slaves are required for North America . . ." Donnan, *Documents*, IV, 219 n.; *ibid.*, 234 n.

<sup>29</sup> Donnan, *Documents*, Naval Officers' Lists, IV, 173-234.

<sup>30</sup> The trade was opened to everyone in 1698. Edmund Jennings' letter of Nov. 28, 1708 to the Bd. of Trade, *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1708-1709*, pp. 156-58; LC British Transcripts, PRO, CO 5, vol. 1326, pp. 295-301, and vol. 1327, p. 532.

one year, and if he could not get it then, he would wait another year, perhaps even longer before suing. Delayed payments seem to have been rather common and were either the cause or the consequence of low-quality goods. Before 1680 most of Virginia's Negroes came from Barbadoes. Thereafter nearly all of them came directly from Africa. One reason for the change was that Africa was an infinitely larger source of supply. But it was also true that by 1710 Virginians had changed their attitude toward the importation of slaves from the West Indies: they felt that Negroes imported from the islands were either transported for crimes or infected with diseases.<sup>31</sup> In 1772 Benjamin Harrison, of Berkeley, believed that Negroes sent from other colonies were undesirable because they always had some bad quality.<sup>32</sup>

A further though inconsiderable number of Negroes entered the stream of Virginia's commerce as the natural result of the process of settling up estates after the death of the owner. Slaves were such precious property that they could be entailed like land. However, they were not quite so valuable, for the law said that in the settlement of an estate when the personal property was not enough to pay off the indebtedness the entailed property could be sold—the slaves first, and only then the land.<sup>33</sup> Although there is no way of telling how many entailed slaves were sold to settle estates, slaves were sold again and again as a result of estate administrations. The slaves and cattle of Benjamin Waller, deceased, of Caroline County, in 1739; five hundred slaves of William Byrd, III, in 1761; and one hundred and thirty-nine Negroes belonging to Francis Willis, of Gloucester County, in 1766, were thus sold.<sup>34</sup>

In northern Virginia during the bad years of the late 1760's and early 1770's there was much local buying and selling of small numbers of slaves. Most of those that entered the market the merchants obtained from their owners by execution for debts when the debtors failed in their last efforts to raise money. For example, the right and title of one John Morgan to two Negro slaves and his one sixth share in three others was sold at Tappahannock in December, 1767, in order to satisfy a debt due to Archibald Ritchie.<sup>35</sup> In 1771 William Allason, of Falmouth, believed that the cheapest way to buy Negroes was at the sheriffs' sales. And in

<sup>31</sup> *Journals of the House of Burgesses, 1702-1712* (Nov. 30, 1710), 286-87.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Harrison's letter of Aug. 13, 1772 to William Palfrey, in microfilm copy of William Palfrey's Letters to Virginia Merchants in Dept. of Research, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc.

<sup>33</sup> William W. Hening, *Statutes at Large*, IV (Feb. 1727-1st George II), 7; LC British Transcripts, PRO, CO 5, vol. 1330, pp. 261-64.

<sup>34</sup> *The Virginia Gazette*, Nov. 2-9, 1739, and Jan. 16, 1761; MS account book of the mercantile business of Francis Jerdone, 1750-1772, Ledger, p. 257, Lib., Coll. of William and Mary.

<sup>35</sup> *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, Dec. 17, 1767.

1774 Allason sold two Negroes of one Mungo Price to settle executions for debts that the latter owed Allason and three other creditors.<sup>36</sup>

While it is not possible to find out much about the distribution of the slaves sold in the Old Dominion, two facts seem to stand out faintly from the general obscurity. First, most Negroes seem to have been sold to planters in the populous eastern and central counties. Secondly, there seems to have been a gradual westward movement of the slaves. In 1760 and again in 1766, slaves belonging to plantations in Gloucester County were sold at Hanover Court House. From 1770 to 1774, William Allason purchased Negroes for Thomas Bryan Martin, Esq., of Frederick County, as fast as they came up for sale. In July, 1771, David Ross auctioned off a hundred slaves at Richmond. A few more remained unsold. Of these John Hook sold two in Bedford County for Mr. Ross. Incidentally, the chief auction sales were on the James and Appomattox Rivers at sundry places near the fall line, as Bermuda Hundred, Osborne's, Richmond, and Petersburg. This was especially true after 1760 when sales in the York River area, chiefly at Yorktown and West Point, gradually declined.<sup>37</sup>

The above mentioned trifling commerce in local slaves was one of the consequences of the increased economic strain that appeared in Virginia after the French and Indian War. The people were ready enough to buy slaves, but found trouble in paying for them. In a period of depressed tobacco, grain, and flour markets, making any payment was a more difficult matter than it had been formerly. So the imports from the Guinea Coast of Africa dwindled, throwing Virginia back upon two sources: the West Indies which became a more conspicuous, if not a larger, source of labor, and secondly upon sheriffs' sales.<sup>38</sup> As the numbers of slaves obtained by these means were inadequate to meet the demand, there developed an extensive increase in the hiring of Negroes.

The policy of renting slaves rather than buying them was a new one. In earlier days it was considered a cheaper and wiser plan to buy them. "... to live in Virginia without slaves," wrote the Reverend Peter Fontaine in 1755, "is morally impossible.

<sup>36</sup> William Allason's letter of June 19, 1771, to Mr. Hugh Hamilton, a merchant of Yescomoco, Allason Ledger 2, p. 262, Allason Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Account book of the mercantile business of Francis Jerdone, 1750-1772, pp. 205, 257, Jerdone Papers; William Allason's letters to Thomas B. Martin, Esq., from 1770 to 1774, Allason Papers; *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, July 4, 1771, and *passim*, the advertisements of slave sales. Sales on the York River declined in number but increased on the James River; John Hook's letter from New London of Dec. 16, 1771 to Mr. D. Ross, in the MS John Hook Letters and Papers in the Duke Univ. Lib.

<sup>38</sup> Donnan, *Documents*, IV, 153 n.

Before our troubles [that came with the French and Indian War] you could not hire a servant or slave for love or money, so that unless robust enough to cut wood, to go to mill, to work at the hoe, etc., you must starve, or board in some family where they both fleece and half starve you. There is no set price upon corn, wheat and provisions, so that they take advantage of the necessities of strangers, who are thus obliged to purchase some slaves and land. This of course draws us all into the original sin and curse of the country of purchasing slaves, and this is the reason we have no merchants, traders, or artificers of any sort but what become planters in a short time.

"A common laborer, white or black, if you can be so much favored as to hire one, is a shilling sterling or fifteen pence currency per day; a bungling carpenter two shillings or two shillings and six pence per day; besides diet and lodging. That is, for a lazy fellow to get wood and water. £19.16.3 current [Virginia currency] per annum; add to this seven or eight pounds more and you have a slave for life. . . ."<sup>39</sup>

The basic situation behind the Reverend Mr. Fontaine's statement—the lack of mobility of labor—continued to be an important factor. But two other implications—the one that the need for blacksmiths, carpenters, and shoemakers on a plantation was continuous, and the other, that even if the demand were not continuous there was no occasion for renting out spare labor—do not jibe with the later situation. In some cases where a child inherited a plantation, his Negroes were hired out until he became of age to take over the management of his property. However, most of the slaves whose labor was rented out seem to have been artisans. Symptomatic, perhaps, of the greater financial strain in the northern part of the colony was the fact that in 1773 William Allason was twice involved in the hiring of Negro artisans. On one occasion he wanted one of Mr. Bayley Washington's slaves, a carpenter, to work on his newly acquired plantation in Fauquier County, and he was instrumental at another time in helping the widow of ——— Blair, a merchant at Nomini, rent out her Negro blacksmith.<sup>40</sup> There seems to have been considerable need for the services of Negro artisans for short terms, perhaps only for the time the plantations were being expanded long before Allason and others began to develop their plantations in Fauquier and other counties in northern Virginia. Apparently not every farm or plantation had a blacksmith, or at least not a permanent

<sup>39</sup> Peter Fontaine's letter of March 30, 1757 to Brother Moses, James Fontaine, *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family*, Ann Maury, ed. (N. Y., 1872), 348-52.

<sup>40</sup> William Allason's letters of March 14, 1773 to Mr. Bayley Washington and of Nov. 25, 1773 to Mr. Stephen Donaldson, Allason Papers.

one, although the large plantations seem to have had their own carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths, and tanners.<sup>41</sup> On the Rappahannock, men of affairs like Robert Carter and merchants like Archibald Ritchie had blacksmith's shops that catered to the needs of the public.

Although white servants were much less numerous than Negro slaves, they were an important type of labor. The Reverend Hugh Jones, in the first quarter of the century, said the English ships that supplied the colony frequently brought over white servants, mostly from Ireland, who were of three kinds. The highest type came over upon certain wages by agreement for a certain time. Others, commonly called Kids, were bound by indenture to serve four or five years. The last group consisted of convicts or felons, whose company the British did not miss. These served from seven to fourteen years.<sup>42</sup> The white servants who came into closest competition with the slaves were the unskilled, chiefly the convicts—English, Irish, and Scottish. They were used for the most part in Maryland and the poorer parts of Virginia where the people were unable to afford the outlay of capital needed to buy slaves. Hence it was in 1739 that while the York River area had shown a marked inclination to buy Negroes rather than white servants, the Rappahannock and Potomac River areas were still good markets for unskilled white labor. Gradually northern Virginia developed, became richer, and grew out of the servant stage, as it were, of economic evolution. By 1765 tidewater Rappahannock was ceasing to be a market for white servants, whereas people in the northern part of the Valley of Virginia were eager enough for such servants, as were the upper parts of southern Virginia from Charlotte County westward to Botetourt County and as far northward as Amherst County.<sup>43</sup>

White servants were, in fact, mostly low-grade labor, as slaves were high-grade labor. The former were used largely during depressions when the people were too poor to buy slaves and during the heights of a prosperity period, as in 1751 and 1752 when the demand for labor was so great that the supply of slaves had

<sup>41</sup> T. J. Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port* (Durham, N. C., 1931), 18.

<sup>42</sup> Hugh Jones, *Present State of Virginia* (London, 1724), 53.

<sup>43</sup> William Johnston's letter of June 20, 1739 to Neill Buchanan: ". . . it is generally talked of here that you have contracted to send in the Convicts. I wish it may be true, (if you have them on good terms) they will answer on Potomack and Rappahannock, but not here [in Hanover County]; people being more inclinable to buy negroes"; Archibald Ritchie's letters of Oct. 7, 1764, Sept. 28, 1765, Dec. 17, 1767, and Dec. 7, 1768 to William Allason in the boxes of loose Allason papers in the Va. State Lib.; David Ross's letter from Petersburg of March 23, 1772 to John Hook, Merchant at Bedford Court House, loose Hook Papers, Va. State Lib.; John Hook's letter of Dec. 28, 1773 to Mr. David Ross, Hook's letter book, Va. State Lib.

been exhausted before the demand was satiated. During the middle periods, either of expansion or recession, the demand was for the most efficient labor—for slaves. Thus it was that during a wave of expansion in 1739 white servants were not wanted in Hanover County, but they were wanted again in 1751 during a peak of prosperity.<sup>44</sup> In keeping with their role as low-grade labor was the unhappy fact that some servants who were sold as skilled artisans turned out to be frauds. One runaway indentured servant was described as follows: "he was sold for a bricklayer, but knows nothing of the business. . . ." <sup>45</sup>

Really skilled labor was in a different category, for white artisans from the British Islands, Germany, and the northern colonies provided throughout the eighteenth century the greater part of the skilled labor used in Virginia. Negroes did a great deal of rough shoemaking and blacksmithing. They served as assistants to white artisans in most jobs. But the white man had to provide broad technical experience and higher skills. Hence it was that indentured artisans were in great demand when there was little call for unskilled labor. In 1737 William Beverley wrote that he would sell his land only if he were paid in money or in tradesmen [artisans] and gardeners. Thomas Jett in 1774 said that while indentured servants did not sell so well on the Rapahannock as they formerly had, he thought that good farmers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, weavers, carpenters and joiners, bricklayers, plasterers, and wheelmakers were still in demand.<sup>46</sup>

Throughout the century when a gentleman wanted to build a fine house he sought for European trained artisans to do the work. "As I propose building an House and doing it upon the most easy Terms," wrote Robert Beverley, of Blandfield, "I have taken this opportunity to [ask you] to procure me an House joiner [of] a good character both as a workman and a well behaved Man."<sup>47</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Britain's trade with colonial Virginia was typical of her trade with all of her American colonies. The towns in England and Scotland that sent goods to the one colony were the same towns

<sup>44</sup> *The Virginia Gazette*, June 13, 1751. See advertisement of David Jameson.

<sup>45</sup> *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie, Sept. 22, 1775.

<sup>46</sup> William Beverley's letter of Aug. 22, 1737 to Capt. James Patton, Kircubright in William Beverley's MS letter book, N. Y. Pub. Lib.; Thomas Jett's letter of March 12, 1774, to Mr. Samuel Gist, Merchant in London, in a letter book, Lib., Coll. of William and Mary, where it is catalogued as "Letter book containing copies of letters written by the Virginia representative of John Morton Jordan and Co."

<sup>47</sup> Robert Beverley's undated letter to John Backhouse on p. 59 of Robert Beverley's letter book, LC.

that exported their manufactures to the others. There were differences between towns and colonies, some of which were important, but in the last analysis they were variations in degree only. Thus in the Virginia trade Glasgow played a large role comparable to that which Liverpool had in the commerce of South Carolina. Yet both towns traded with each colony. The "Scotch" merchant class, the visible evidence of Scottish trade, was noticeable everywhere, although nowhere in the continental American colonies did it have the mercantile importance it had in the two tobacco plantations of Maryland and Virginia.

In materials, too, any specialization that existed in the flow of trade to Britain's oldest dominion in the new world was on a broad and general basis and was by no means cabined and confined to an exclusive trade in a few particular items. Quantatively the traffic was concentrated in the field of low priced goods suitable for working people and the frugal. But in no way did this mark out Virginia as being different from the other colonies. Britain's whole trade was focused in those very fields. Thus England led the world in the coarse woolen manufacture and commerce. Less than one-quarter of her woolen industry was concerned with the manufacture of the finer grades of wool such as came from Spanish and South Down fleeces. Her foreign trade rested but little on fine cloths. Her great exports of woolen goods consisted of the plains, kerseys, kendal cottons and blankets made from the heavy, coarse, and short wooled fleeces of the native English breeds of sheep. The same general characterization was true of other textiles and of hardware of all kinds.

In other colonies and other places some of these ordinary goods entered into particular trades and sometimes gained a name from that business. The firearms used in the Indian trade of Pennsylvania and South Carolina were known as "trading guns." But it was a substantial fact that they entered into trade in Virginia. Many a retailer who had never even seen an Indian, regularly sold such common "trading guns" to the back-country farmers and backwoods frontiersmen with whom he dealt.

Moreover, the defective goods that were all too well known to the colonial Virginian and some of which were perhaps uniquely a part of the Virginia trade fell into two categories that were prevalent throughout the colonies. Goods exported from England suffered severely during the ocean voyage from storms, rats, and bilge water. And as the vast distances prevented the colonist from exchanging the goods he disliked, many a "sharp" English tradesman palmed off his second-rate wares on the long-suffering colonial.

Likewise with respect to the human element in commerce, servants and slaves, Virginia dealt in broad classifications. When

times were poor the planters wanted servants; when times were good they wanted slaves. As long as they had two hands and two feet and did not have fits the Virginians did not care where they came from. And so they received everything under the sun.