
NEW TITLES

History
**TOBACCO CULTURE:
The Mentality of
the Great Tidewater
Planters on the
Eve of Revolution**

by T. H. Breen
Princeton, 1985
216 pp. \$19.95



The Best York River

Of late, scholars have become increasingly interested in the attitudes of colonial Americans. Breen, a Northwestern University historian, looks at Virginia's 18th-century elite: the Carters, the Lees, and other Tidewater tobacco planters. Why, he asks, did these men, so dependent on Britain for fashion and trade, become leading agitators for independence?

Tobacco growing was a year-round endeavor at which only a few "crop masters" truly succeeded; most planters had to struggle to live up to their ideal of financial, and thus moral, independence. All left commercial matters to British agents, who sold Virginia tobacco in the London market and brought back expensive clothing, cut crystal, and other luxuries that the Anglophile planters yearned for.

The planters' taste for fine goods and their crop's long growing season led to mounting debts. The agents usually extended credit, but economic depressions in Europe during the 1760s forced them to call in loans. The planters complained to no avail: "I dread very Much," wrote Robert Beverley to his agent in 1764, "from the Appearances of this Day that [the colony] will be condemned forever to a state of *Vassalage & Dependence*."

Under increasing financial stress even such resolute landowners as George Washington had to give up tobacco for wheat. By becoming mere "farmers," the members of the Tidewater gentry were able to survive. But the loss of personal autonomy and of a mode of life based on honor and shared assumptions embittered these men—and made radical political realignment thinkable.

RENAISSANCE ESSAYS

by Hugh Trevor-Roper
Univ. of Chicago, 1985
312 pp. \$22.50

Because he attracted such wide attention with his books on 20th-century history (e.g., *The Last Days of Hitler*), it is often forgotten that Trevor-Roper is first and foremost a specialist on the Renaissance. He is also one of those historians who range easily from political analysis (as in his treatment here of the origins of

Europe's Thirty Years' War) to interpretations of culture and ideas.

In an essay on the influence of the Swiss-born physician-mystic Paracelsus (1493?-1541), Trevor-Roper shows how the alchemist's ideas about the chemical properties of the microcosm (man) and the macrocosm (the universe) led to some sound medical practices. Paracelsus held, for instance, that diseases were not just imbalances of "humors" but invasions of parasites; his prescriptions of chemical potions (such as laudanum) often brought relief and encouraged the wider use of medications.

Trevor-Roper pens two excellent studies of the giants of Renaissance humanism, Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) and Erasmus (1466-1536). Their hopes for preserving a balanced world, based on humanism and Christian faith, animated by "the spirit of confidence, gaiety, good-humored raillery, and love of life," were disappointed after Martin Luther divided Christendom in 1517.

But the quest for balance did not cease. It survived, among other places, in Robert Burton's tome *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). The intent of the Oxford librarian's *omnium gatherum* was to cure melancholy "at its base" through highly individualized behavioral prescriptions. Counseling moderation (the depressed scholar should escape from books), Burton even recommended the Anglican Church because it was a happy medium between "popish" formality and Calvinist severity. But since Burton's advice was more utilitarian than theological, it is hardly surprising, notes Trevor-Roper, that his "best-selling propaganda for conformity . . . is never cited by the clerical champions of orthodoxy."

WILLIAM MARSHAL: The Flower of Chivalry

by Georges Duby
Pantheon, 1986
155 pp. \$15.95

William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, faithfully served five kings of England during his long (1145?-1219) and heroic life. Two years before he died, while acting as regent, the Anglo-Norman earl repelled an invading French force at the Battle of Lincoln, thus assuring continued control over the island by the Plantagenet kings. The battle (in which Marshal himself