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Theodora Keith

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CHAPTER I

UNION OF 1603

a. CONDITION OF TRADE AT THE TIME OF THE UNION OF THE CROWNS

IN spite of the political and religious disturbances in Scotland in the sixteenth century, the trading community seem to have been able to carry on their business without much interruption and with some success. But their trade was curiously unaffected by those influences which were doing so much to transform the economic organisation of other European countries—the discovery of America and the consequent influx of silver. Capital was still extremely scarce in Scotland and manufactures were in a very backward condition, as also was agriculture. A paper amongst the manuscripts of the Earl of Mar and Kellie gives some idea of the commodities in which the Scots dealt and of the extent of their industrial development. It is entitled the “Table of Scottish Produce exported yearly¹,” and gives a list of all the commodities exported in the year 1614, together with their value. The “commodities of

¹ *Historical Manuscripts Commission Report, Mar and Kellie Papers*, pp. 70–74.

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the land” are the most valuable exports, amounting to £375,085 Scots. These include different kinds of grain, some flour and beef, £37,655; hides, £66,630; skins, £172,082; wool, £51,870; feathers, butter, lead ore, coal, £46,850. The value of the manufactures is £169,097, of which salt, cloth and plaiding, and linen yarn are the most important. The others mentioned are linen cloth, coarse cloth, knitted hose, dressed leather, gloves, leather points, sewed cushions, ticking for beds, shoes. The export of fish brings £753,354, and of foreign commodities imported and then exported again, £39,047. The total value for the year is £736,986 Scots. This does not include the “greit quantitie of lynning claythe, lynning yairne, sheip, nott etc. that is transpourtted be land dalie,” presumably to England. The most important exports were therefore unmanufactured commodities, skins, hides and fish, and the manufactures exported were those of an economically undeveloped country.

There were no companies of merchants organised for trading to particular places, as the English Merchants Adventurers, Eastland Company, etc. But the merchants of the Royal Burghs practically formed an exclusive and privileged company, for only they were allowed to engage in foreign trade. The Convention of the Royal Burghs looked after their interests, organising and supervising all the foreign trade of the country; appointing conservators to watch over Scottish interests in different places; settling disputes between merchants; and even making regulations concerning their clothing. In 1529, because many merchants trading with France and Flanders “takis with tham thar evill and wirst clais to the dishonour of the realme,” the conservator in Flanders was ordered to insist on their

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providing for themselves “honest clais,” and in case they should refuse he was entitled to seize and sell their goods, and with the proceeds to procure and pay for suitable garments¹. Scottish merchants seem to have had a reputation for “parsimony in apparrell and dyet and...exceeding industriousness and diligence.” They had not been at war with any continental nations for a long time, and their ships therefore did not require to be equipped for war as well as for trade. They were as a rule smaller than English ships, required less ballast, and in proportion to their size and the expense of sailing them, could take in a larger cargo and charge a smaller freight rate. Another reason for the cheapness of their freight was the way in which the crew lived. “The Scotts marriners go not to sea as our men goe everyone for wages in certainty and feeding on the Victueller or Owner on the best Beefe Porke Beere Biskett of the finest Wheat and to care not what they spoile of the owners..., nor how long time they protract in making their Voyage and Return. But everyone...finds himself the whole Voyage eates no Bread but Oaten Cakes made of Bean baked on the hearth and salt ffish fryed on the Coales from hand to mouth by himself, nor weares no Cloaths eyther Lynnen or Woollen (which are very mean) but those of their own cuntry makeing and at cheapest Rate....And besides...everyone in their ships...is a kind of Merchant himself and will be sure to bring some Lynnen Scotch Cloth...or Such like from home upon his own Account and make a like Returne of some Commodities which the fforeyn Markett yeildeth. Whereas in our English Shippes they are not much given

¹ *Records of the Convention of the Royal Burghs of Scotland*, 1., p. 509.

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to this thriving course as they are prohibited by the Merchants that fraight them to do it, for the marring of the Merchants own Market...The Scotts Owners of Shippes and Mariners will be able and readie to undergoe a freight to any forreyn parte for under our Owners rate, and yet by these meanes gain whereas ours loose by it¹." A good deal of the Scots foreign trade seems to have been carried on by pedlars, who, when their ship reached port, travelled up and down the country with their packs, selling to the country folk, like the Breton onion sellers of to-day. The crew of the ship may also have taken part in this peddling trade.

The Scots in their small ships did not penetrate very far afield. Their commercial connections were chiefly with France, Spain, the Low Countries, and the Baltic. There was also some trade with England. The French and Dutch trades engaged more merchants and ships than any other. There had long been a close connection between Scotland and France, commercial as well as political. According to one authority, the first commercial treaty had been made by Achaeus and Charlemagne in 787. Coming to more modern times however, in 1510 Francis I exempted the Scots nation from the payment of customs in Normandy. This was confirmed by Henry II in 1554, and at the same time the Scots were exempted from the payment of some new duties then imposed². Four years later, when Mary was married to the Dauphin, all Scotsmen were made naturalised subjects in France and all Frenchmen in

¹ *The Union of England and Scotland*, British Museum, Harleian MSS. 1314.

² *Royal Burghs*, II., p. 576. *Les Écossais en France*, Francisque Michel, I., p. 357.

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Scotland¹. Scots merchants were therefore free from all impositions laid upon strangers. These privileges were all confirmed by Henry IV in 1599². The Scots traded chiefly to Normandy, Bordeaux and La Rochelle, taking thither wool, skins, hides, plaiding, kerseys, salmon, and bringing back wines and salt³. A number of Scottish ships were also engaged in the carrying trade for France. In 1615 it was said that “the greittest number of the best schippis of Scotland ar continuallie employed in the service of Frenchmen, not only within the dominions of France, bot also within the boundis of Spayne, Italie and Barbarie⁴.”

Trade with the Low Countries was also important. The Convention of the Royal Burghs received privileges for their merchants there by a contract with some city, which was then called the Scots Staple Port, to which certain specified commodities, including all the most important Scottish exports to the Netherlands, had first to be brought. Certain privileges were granted to the Scots merchants in Flanders in the fourteenth century, but the first definite treaty with Scotland was made by Bruges in 1407. This city was the headquarters of the Scots merchants during the greater part of the fifteenth century, though they also traded with Middelburg, and the Staple was for a time established there. In 1506 some arrangement was made with Campvere, and after competition on the part of Middelburg, Antwerp and Campvere for the monopoly of Scots trade, the Staple was fixed at Campvere

¹ *Royal Burghs*, iv., p. 500. *Les Écossais en France*, i., p. 303.

² *Ibid.*, ii., p. 577.

³ *Early Travellers in Scotland*, ed. P. Hume Brown, p. 87.

⁴ *Letters and State Papers of James VI*, p. 213.

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in 1541. There it remained with but two short intervals until the Staple contract was cancelled in 1799¹. Scottish shipping seems to have been considerable in the sixteenth century, if the following incident may be believed. During Charles V's wars with Francis I, the Scots, although they were considered neutral, seized some English ships at Campvere. The Emperor then ordered his subjects in the Netherlands to make reprisal upon them, but "the Scots likewise equipped, and were so much superior at Sea (which will now hardly gain credit) that they not only confined the Dutch and Flemish Privateers in their harbour, but interrupted the Trade of those of the Provinces, Flanders, Zealand and Holland, and of the great city Antwerp itself²." The principal commodities which the Scots took to the Netherlands were cloth, skins, wool, fish and salt. They received a good deal of soap, corn and hardware, and a number of miscellaneous articles. There was also some trade between the ports on the east coast, Aberdeen, Dundee, the Fife ports and Leith, and the northern countries, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and the Baltic ports. Of this trade we have valuable information in the *Compt Buik of David Wedderburne*³, a Dundee merchant. The Baltic ports which the Dundee ships chiefly frequented were Dantzic and Königsberg, and also Stralsund and Lübeck. The imports into Scotland were principally timber, iron, flax, hemp, pitch and tar.

During the sixteenth century there was a good deal of intercourse between Scotland and Spain. In 1581

¹ For the history of the Staple and Scottish trade with Holland, see *Scottish Staple at Veere*, J. Davidson and A. Gray.

² *Historical Account of the Staple Contract between the Burrows of Scotland and Campvere*, 1749.

³ *Compt Buik of David Wedderburne* (Scottish History Society).

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“certan writis evidentis and privilegis granted be the King of Spain under his greit seill, for the weifair of the Scotis natioun” were obtained¹. The trade chiefly developed during the wars of England with Spain, when the English merchants traded with Spain under cover of the Scots trade. Several instances of this are given in the *Calendar of State Papers (Spanish)*. “Two Scotch Ships either have left or will shortly leave London....One of them is of 150 tons burden called the New Ship of St Andrews...loaded with wrought iron and tin and lead in pigs and a quantity of English serge. The goods bear the leaden seal of Edinburgh, but are made in England and the seal is placed on them to deceive....The other ship is from Little Leith...carries similar merchandize. The value of the cargoes is estimated at £14000.” The Editor, in a note to this reference, says, “The above is given as a typical instance of the continual trade in English merchandize with Spain under cover of Scottish merchants during the period when all commercial communication between England and Spain was prohibited².” In 1603 the Venetian Secretary in London writing to the Doge, in reference to the question of peace with Spain, says that James I has often been helped with money by Spain, “especially before Spanish and Flemish commerce came to Scotland. It was then that the revenue which ordinarily did not exceed 100000 crowns, was greatly increased, as the King was able to tax the seaports³,

¹ *Royal Burghs*, I, p. 126.

² *Calendar S. P., Spanish*, 1587–1603, No. 191.

³ No tax was laid on imports into Scotland until 1597, when all merchandize was required to pay 12d. of every pound's worth. An *ABC* of the value of all wares was then drawn up, but was superseded in 1612 by a new book of rates.

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which were growing rich, by imposing customs upon wine and other commodities¹." In another letter the Secretary declares that the revenue in Scotland has increased to 400,000 crowns, "thanks to having an open trade to France, Spain and all the northern countries."

The political connection with England before the Union was slight, and the commercial relations of the two countries were also of little importance. There was some trade in linen cloth and yarn, salt and sheep from Scotland; and from England were brought wheat, beer, bark, woollen cloth, etc. The Scots frequented chiefly the ports of London and Newcastle, but Plymouth and other harbours in Devonshire and the West were also visited. There was also some trade by land, but the disturbed state of the Borders on either side made peaceful traffic difficult. There was no Scots conservator in England, and though the King suggested in 1599 that one should be appointed, because of the complaints of merchants trading thither, the Convention of Burghs declined to do so. They declared that a conservator was not "necessar to thair estait bot rather hurtful and chargeabill to the samyn²." Some figures given in "An Estimate of the Customes and Subsidies of Tonnage and Poundage as well Inwardes as Outwards payd by Scottishe Merchantes for VII yeares," from 1597 to 1603, shew that the trade was but small. In London the duties inwards paid for the seven years amounted to £743. 19s. 4d., and outwards to £595. 0s. 7d. The duties paid at the outports were £1366. 18s. 6d. and £1679. 12s. 6d. respectively³. In Scotland the customs

¹ *Calendar S. P., Venetian*, p. 69.

² *Royal Burghs*, II., p. 48.

³ *S. P. Domestic, James I*, v., 47.

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paid for a year, 1605–6, on the English trade were £1083, paid by Scots and English merchants¹.

As yet the Scots had not penetrated across the Atlantic. Fynes Moryson says that though the “Scots are very daring...they have not hitherto made any long voyages rather for want of riches, than for slothfulness or want of courage².” They had not yet been inspired by the general impulse of the sixteenth century to compete for the “golden ball of trade.”

b. NEGOTIATIONS FOR COMMERCIAL UNION

James VI, on his succession to the throne of England, was extremely anxious that his two kingdoms should be fused into one homogeneous whole; that Scotland and England should lose their separate names and nationalities, and become the kingdom of Great Britain. For the first few years of his reign he made great endeavours to accomplish this end, but English hostility and Scottish indifference were too much for him, and with the growth of other interests in England the project was allowed to drop. One of James's first acts when he came to England was an “Act authorising certain Commissioners of the Realm of England to treat with Commissioners of Scotland for the weale of both Kingdoms³.” Commissioners were appointed in Scotland also, and the two deputations met, discussed conditions and drew up a Treaty of Union, to be proposed to their respective Parliaments. Some of the articles were afterwards incorporated in the two acts—

¹ *Register of the Scottish Privy Council*, vii., p. 392.

² *Early Travellers in Scotland*, p. 87.

³ 1 Jac. I, c. 2.

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“An Act for the utter Abolition of all memory of Hostilitie and the Dependances thereof between England and Scotland¹,” and “An Act anent the Union of England and Scotland².” The latter declared “That all the particular hostile Laws...maid be Scotland aganis England as Enemies sall be abrogat and in all tyme cuming all utterlie extinguished.” The other clauses of the treaty were not carried into effect. A number of the articles dealt with the subject of commerce, though an entire commercial union was not suggested. It was proposed that there should be free trade in the native commodities of either country, with the exception of wool, sheep, sheepfells, cattle, leather, hides and linen yarn. This “mutual liberty of exportation and trade” was to serve “for the inward use only of either realm.” Commodities of which the export or import was prohibited for either country were to be prohibited for both. Otherwise import and export were to be free for subjects of either kingdom. Import from France was excepted until inquiry should be made into the extent of Scottish privileges there. Imported foreign goods that had paid custom once were not required to pay it again on passing from one country to another. The fisheries within fourteen miles of the coast were to be retained by each nation respectively. Merchants of either country were to be allowed to join the companies of the other, which meant that Scots merchants might join English companies, as the Scots had no associations of merchants³. Certain sources of future difficulties are

¹ 4 Jac. I, c. 1.

² *Acts of Parliament of Scotland*, iv., p. 466.

³ For the clauses of the treaty see Spottiswoode, *History of the Church of Scotland*, II., p. 148.