

# From Amateur to Professional: The Case of the Oxbridge Historians

ROSEMARY JANN

“What was wrong with the historical reaction at the end of Victoria’s reign, was not the positive stress it laid on the need for scientific method in weighing evidence, but its negative repudiation of the literary art, which was declared to have nothing whatever to do with the historian’s task.”<sup>1</sup> Writing in 1945, G.M. Trevelyan was overly pessimistic in assuming that this “negative repudiation” had completely destroyed “literary” history in an age of professionalization; John Osborne uses Trevelyan’s own success to convince us of the continued vigor of the belletristic tradition in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Both Trevelyan’s anxieties and the fact that they proved unfounded are significant, however, for they help us to focus on important issues in the emergence of professional historiography in England. The general purpose here is to evaluate some of the anomalies in the way professional identity evolved for many British historians. The continued prestige of popularized historiography and the relative depreciation of research in determining professional status suggest the relative insulation of the Oxbridge historians from important changes that marked American and continental historiography and other professionalizing disciplines as well.

A closer examination of what Trevelyan calls “the historical reaction” of the late nineteenth century suggests that the most important issue at stake in defining professional identity was not expertise or methodology *per se* but the historian’s relationship to his audience. What was being repudiated in the attack on the stylistic conventions of the amateur tradition was not artistry so much as expectations about writing and evaluating history that were seen as compromising or challenging professional authority. The amateur historian, considered in part I, was in the older sense of the term a “professional” man of letters.<sup>3</sup> His success depended upon his ability to satisfy a wide general readership; literary art was a primary means to this end. The new occupational professionalism examined in part II derived its authority from a much narrower audience of fellow experts; assaults on the literary tactics of the amateur tradition became its most effective rhetorical device for signalling this shift in the bases of authority. The preoccupation with style was misleading, however, for it obscured far more significant continuities, discussed in part III,

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<sup>1</sup>G.M. Trevelyan, *History and the Reader* (London, 1945), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>John W. Osborne, “The Endurance of ‘Literary’ History in Great Britain: Charles Oman, G.M. Trevelyan, and the Genteel Tradition,” *Clio*, 2 (1972), 7-17.

<sup>3</sup>Phillip Elliott, *The Sociology of the Professions* (New York, 1972), pp. 55-56 discusses the overlap between the gentlemanly and occupational models of professionalism, particularly at the universities. On this point see also Sheldon Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons* (New York, 1968), pp. 90-91.

between the amateur and professional traditions. Reinforced by the prevailing model of historical interpretation in England and by the continuing dominance of liberal education at the ancient universities, amateur assumptions about the function of history and the historian more than held their own against demands that increasing specialization and expertise determine professional status. For these and other reasons, generalizations about the professional's growing alienation from the needs and interests of a more general public need to be qualified in the case of the early professional historian in England.<sup>1</sup>

## I

As Trevelyan also pointed out, "until near the end of the nineteenth century, literature was held to mean not only plays, novels, and *belles lettres*, but all writing that was above a certain standard of excellence."<sup>2</sup> This included major works of history: Thomas Arnold's *History of Rome* (1838-43), Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution* (1837), or James A. Froude's *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey* (1856-70). It was an age in which a man's religious and political convictions outweighed his scholarly credentials in appointments to Regius Professorships of Modern History; an age in which a banker like George Grote, a lawyer like Henry Hallam, or a politician like T.B. Macaulay could expect and receive an international reputation for historical research. Such amateurs could expect, in fact, to produce best sellers that would rival the popularity of contemporary fiction, as did Macaulay's *History of England* (1849-55) or J.R. Green's *Short History of the English People* (1874), and that would be extensively bought and read by a growing audience of educated readers.

Certain shared assumptions about history's nature and purposes dictated the consciously literary or imaginative approach of these men of letters. They were deeply committed to the Romantic assumption that empathy, not analysis, was the key to understanding history. They believed that to recreate and understand the full truth of human events, an act of the imagination was necessary for both historian and reader. Assuming with Macaulay that ideal history was "a compound of poetry and philosophy,"<sup>3</sup> they quite naturally borrowed the same techniques that the literary artist used to shape and enliven his fictive worlds. They consciously cultivated the "grand style" for portraying major events out of

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<sup>1</sup>For such generalizations see, for instance, Richard A. E. Brooks, "The Development of the Historical Mind," in *The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature*, ed. Joseph E. Baker (Princeton, 1950), p. 137 or J.R. Hale, *The Evolution of British Historiography* (New York, 1964), p. 56. Although T.W. Heyck's concern is not professionalization *per se*, he uses historians as one example of the withdrawal of intellectuals from the needs and interests of the general public in his "From Men of Letters to Intellectuals: The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Nineteenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (1980), 158-83.

<sup>2</sup>G.M. Trevelyan, *Clio, A Muse and Other Essays* (London, 1931), p. 160.

<sup>3</sup>T.B. Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, ed. Lady Trevelyan (London, 1866), I, 162.

a conviction that history's greatest moments deserved to be treated on an epic scale. While not all the "literary" historians believed with Carlyle that history was "the essence of innumerable Biographies," there was tacit agreement with Froude's position that one of history's main purposes was to uplift the reader by placing him in sympathetic communication with "the illustrious natures who have shaped the fortunes of the world."<sup>7</sup> In the hands of a Macaulay, a Carlyle, or a Froude, historical figures assumed the proportions of full-scale heroes and villains, sometimes acting out their roles in the historical present tense, thinking out loud for the reader's benefit, or speaking dialogue fashioned from source documents. In order to secure the reader's involvement and identification with other forms of action, Carlyle and Froude would sketch the outlines of an event and then invite the reader to supply its exact details from his imagination, or to "sympathize successively" with each side by imagining themselves as participants. Elsewhere the reader might be offered details of terrain and weather accessible only to an eyewitness; he might be addressed by Carlyle as if actually present on an historic site, or drawn by Macaulay into a narrative that gradually shifted into the present tense as suspense mounted. This same interest in recreating the mind of the past widened the range of source materials to include many formerly beneath "the dignity of History." Ephemeral journalism, political pamphlets, diaries, folklore, songs and other evidences of popular opinion were sought out as the truest sources of insight into the spirit of an age, and the most direct means of empathizing with it.

There were of course manifest liabilities to this kind of writing. Strict accuracy could be compromised for the sake of verisimilitude. We finish Carlyle's account of the fall of the Bastille in the *French Revolution* moved by its drama, but unaware of the key role played by the cannon of the *Garde Française*. The line between poetry and history becomes even harder to discern amid the frankly impressionistic "masses of colours" intended to make volume III look like a "smoke-and-flame conflagration in the distance."<sup>8</sup> Neither Carlyle nor Froude was very fastidious about the paraphrases and interpolations he supplied to make documents read more smoothly or more pointedly for his purposes. Even more disconcerting are the stage directions Carlyle scatters through Cromwell's speeches, his own intrusions as a participant in the historical narrative, or his invention of events, dialogue, and narrators. Constant attempts to foreshadow, to charge men and events with symbolic meaning, too often infused historical actions with a significance not present at the time. Brilliant portraiture too easily lent itself to exaggeration and oversimplification. Macaulay's James I, for instance—"two men, a witty,

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<sup>7</sup>Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, centenary ed. (London, 1896-99), II, 86. James Anthony Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (London, 1867), I, 24.

<sup>8</sup>James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of His Life in London 1834-1881* (London, 1884), I, 75.

well-read scholar, who wrote, disputed, and harangued, and a nervous, drivelling idiot, who acted"<sup>9</sup>—was clearly better suited for narrative impact than for complex political analysis.

Macaulay's self-conscious manipulation of historical perspective was only a more heavy-handed version of the conscious artistic control exercised by all the "literary" historians. Its justification lay in their belief that historical study was pre-eminently didactic. In Victorian eyes, historical study would amount to little more than unscientific antiquarianism without some attempt to organize and systematize it, and the historian would be morally remiss if, out of a misplaced devotion to objectivity, he merely recorded events without comment. His duty was to make history instructive by selecting detail so that the larger patterns emerged and "correct" judgments could be drawn. The compelling narratives that attracted readers were themselves the means to a moral end: the demonstration of providential order in human history. Typical was Arnold's assumption that history's "scientific character" was established by demonstrating the functioning of moral "laws" in the past, and that to despair of so doing might lead the historian and his audience "to the extremity of scepticism."<sup>10</sup> In an age when rapid change was eroding the traditional religious sanctions for social order and moral authority, men sought in history some "higher unity of system" that could give permanence to their values.

The search for an underlying continuity that could make progress seem traditional began and ended with the needs of the nineteenth century. Inevitably, the order these historians desired for the present and future controlled the patterns that they could perceive in the past. For Carlyle and Froude, history vindicated the neochivalric antidote they prescribed for the laissez-faire atomism of the present; for Arnold and Green, it vindicated the gradual triumph of constitutional democracy. Insofar as the "Whig view" is as much an attitude toward the past as a political position, Macaulay was typical of them all. He allowed the end of the story—in his case, the mid-Victorian triumph of industrialism, capitalism, and liberalism—to compel selected past events into a purposive sequence leading inevitably to the present.<sup>11</sup> Despite their concern for empathy, these historians often distorted the specific historical context of events in order to fashion them into anticipations or prototypes of issues decisive for their own society.

Preaching the virtues of accuracy and impartiality as they all did was simply no guarantee of either when each had so much invested in proving particular interpretations true. It was not that these men of letters failed

<sup>9</sup>Macaulay, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, II, 167.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Arnold, *Introductory Lectures on Modern History*, 2nd ed. (London, 1843), p. 306.

<sup>11</sup>See also J. W. Burrow's discussion of the ways Victorian Whigs, in an attempt to arrange some compromise with the Humean tradition, made progress traditional and innovation preservative, *A Liberal Descent* (Cambridge, 1981).

to recognize or appreciate the importance of the new “scientific” historiography. Green and Carlyle might criticize the limitations of Germanic methodology, but they no less than the others acknowledged the importance of extensive scholarly preparation and rigorous cross-examination of authorities. If most of them relied on the standard printed sources of their day, Froude conducted extensive archival research, and Carlyle and Macaulay used a wide array of primary sources to reconstruct the spirit of the age. Their use of results, more than the means by which they obtained them, made their histories “unscientific” by later definitions. Too often their conviction of the righteousness of their favored causes was the real, if subconscious, determinant of a fact’s truthfulness. In the long run, their anxiety to find order in history undercut empathy and understanding for those events that did not fit into the scheme they had “discovered” in the past, and their duty to make moral judgments and vindicate a cause contaminated the objectivity of their investigation. However, in their very weaknesses as scholars lay their value as “Victorian sages” for the public at large. Their powerful impulse toward order and value made impossible—indeed, undesirable—the distance and impartiality exalted by professionalism, but it gave the past an intelligibility that promised to stabilize the present and guide the future of an entire culture.

## II

The status of the “literary” historian rested on assumptions called increasingly into question by the evolving spirit of occupational professionalism in the closing decades of the century. For the historian as man of letters, a network of values connected the separate facts of history and gave them meaning. Knowledge of the “truth” about the past depended more on insight and identification than on analysis and criticism. The historian’s authority rested on his effectiveness as a moral teacher; his first priority was to shape history to attract and instruct a wide general audience. The new professionalism placed the demands of the discipline over those of the public at large. To support professional standards history had to be viewed as a body of objective and systematized knowledge, whose verification, mastery, and advance were the responsibility of fellow experts. Such knowledge could be attained only by technical training, whose standards these experts determined. Although the certification of this training came more and more to mean university study leading to an academic career, the exact source of training and employment was less important than the expertise such experience guaranteed. This expertise would provide a basis for attempts to convince the public that only the professional historian was qualified to make and

evaluate historical judgments and to determine the priorities that should direct historical study.<sup>12</sup>

The ascendancy of the research ideal in the second half of the century was the force behind the systematizing of historical knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Where liberal education treated learning as a training for mind and character, the research ideal placed top priority on the advancement of knowledge, and by implication on the original research and rigorous methodology it necessitated. Like the ideal itself, this methodology had been defined by German example. Niebuhr's and Ranke's insistence that reconstruction be based as much as possible on strictly contemporary—and preferably documentary—sources, and their development of the first really critical methods for evaluating evidence, had inspired the earliest claims that historical research could aspire to “scientific” accuracy. Among England's earliest advocates of the cult of original research were E.A. Freeman and William Stubbs. It was the professor's duty to “devote himself heart and soul to the advancement of knowledge” in his field, Freeman argued; “I wish no one to read me instead of my authorities.”<sup>14</sup> In his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor at Oxford (1866), Stubbs identified professional study with original research by looking forward to “the founding of an historical school in England, which shall join with the other workers of Europe in a common task; which shall build, not upon Hallam and Palgrave and Kemble and Froude and Macaulay, but on the abundant collected and arranged materials on which those writers tried to build whilst they were scanty and scattered and in disorder.” Under Stubbs “the special study of some character or period in the original authorities” became part of the Examination Statute.<sup>15</sup> As was true of two other

<sup>12</sup>This definition is offered as a consensus that avoids some of the knottier problems of how to define professionalization. It draws from William Goode, “Community within a Community: The Professions,” *American Sociological Review*, 22 (1957), 194-200; Bernard Barber, “Some Problems in the Sociology of the Professions,” *Daedalus*, 92 (1963), 669-88; Everett C. Hughes, “Professions,” *Daedalus*, 92 (1963), 655-68; and Phillip Elliott, *The Sociology of the Professions*, p. 5. Opposing definitions of professionalization with particular relevance to Victorian and Edwardian England are surveyed by Elliott, pp. 55-56, and by Susan F. Cannon, *Science in Culture: The Early Victorian Period* (New York, 1978), pp. 147-63. Andrew Abbott's analysis of differences between public and professional perceptions of professional status suggests that in some respects the case of the British historian is a variation of conflicts inherent in professionalization: “Status and Strain in the Professions,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 86 (1981), 819-35.

<sup>13</sup>For a discussion of the research ideal, see Sheldon Rothblatt, *Tradition and Change in English Liberal Education* (London, 1976), pp. 157ff.

<sup>14</sup>E. A. Freeman, *The Methods of Historical Study* (London, 1886), pp. 17-18, 270.

<sup>15</sup>William Stubbs, *Seventeen Lectures on the Study of Medieval and Modern History*, 3rd. ed. (Oxford, 1900), pp. 14, 110.

leading historians of the early professional school, S.R. Gardiner and Frederic W. Maitland, Stubbs was prominent as an editor. He provided an early model for the new historian: a patient researcher who stayed as close as possible to the original sources. The opening of archives and the outpouring of published texts and documents in the second half of the century provided this new researcher with plenty to do. So great became the volume of available manuscript materials that by 1895 Acton feared “a lifetime spent in the largest collection of printed books would not suffice to train a real master of modern history” in his own day. Nevertheless he stood by his claim that “History, to be above evasion or dispute, must stand on documents, not opinions.”<sup>16</sup>

The assumptions underlying the research ideal spawned a new genre of historical writing that purposefully eschewed broad-scale narrative syntheses in favor of more specialized subjects that, like legal history, lent themselves to minute documentation. Early examples include Stubbs’s *Constitutional History of England* (1873-78) and Maitland’s *History of the English Law before the Time of Edward I* (with Frederick Pollock, 1895) and *Domesday Book and Beyond* (1897). When a professional undertook a more comprehensive narrative history like S.R. Gardiner’s *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (1863-87), he carefully distinguished his approach from the conventions of “literary” history. Resisting the conjectures of a Macaulay or a Hume, Gardiner preferred simply to present the evidence in as much detail as possible, leaving final judgments to the persevering reader. To avoid the distortions of the Whig view, he steadfastly refused to foreshadow results; to prevent his knowledge of the outcome from influencing his reconstruction of events, he sent his drafts off to the publisher before continuing the narrative. He considered picturesque detail untrustworthy and, even if true, trivial. Rather than trying to make the reader feel like an eye-witness, Gardiner instead asked his audience “to supply a chorus of doubt, and to keep in mind that they read, not an account of that which certainly happened, but of that which appears to me to have happened after such inquiry as I have been able to make.”<sup>17</sup> Histories of Gardiner’s scope were becoming the exception rather than the rule in the professional camp, however. More typical in some respects was the *Cambridge Modern History*, organized according to a “judicious division of labour” among specialists who were enjoined by Acton to be strictly impartial: “this is essential not only on the ground that impartiality is the character of legitimate history, but because the work is carried on by men acting together for no other object than the increase of accurate knowledge.”<sup>18</sup> In its most extreme form, the research ideal militated against any kind of

<sup>16</sup>Lord Acton, *Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History*, ed. William McNeill (Chicago, 1967), pp. 329, 332.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted in Frederick York Powell and Charles Firth, “Two Oxford Historians,” *Quarterly Review*, 195 (1902), 560.

<sup>18</sup>Acton, *Essays*, pp. 397-98.

conclusive exposition at all. Mandell Creighton claimed that Stubbs resented all distractions from editing manuscripts, and “wrote his *Constitutional History* more because something was expected of him than because he enjoyed doing it.”<sup>19</sup> J.H. Round, who had proclaimed in 1895 that in history as in science “‘the minute sifting’ of facts and figures is the only sure method by which we can extend knowledge,” grew increasingly resistant to summarizing any results. He turned down Acton’s invitation to contribute to the *Cambridge Modern History* on the grounds that preparing even such a specialized synthesis would be “alien” to his research priorities.<sup>20</sup> And Acton himself despite (or perhaps because of) his prodigious erudition left only brilliant fragments behind him.

The assumption that having to produce written results for the public took time away from scholarship was a central argument of those supporting the reallocation of college funds to endow research at the universities in the late nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> In the case of history, it became conflated with a more sweeping assumption: that writing capable of attracting a wide audience by definition compromised the professional’s commitment to accuracy, impartiality, and truth. The real issue was not style itself but the bases of professional identity and authority. Professionalism demanded that history be shaped not by the demands of the marketplace but by the criteria of what J.R. Seeley called a “sufficient corps of specialists . . . to whose judgment historians might appeal with confidence.”<sup>22</sup> H.A.L. Fisher viewed the problem in the same light: “so long as history is allowed to be concerned with truth, the true historian will prefer to be judged, not by the public, who enjoy his style, but by the one or two specialists who can test his facts.”<sup>23</sup> But too much was at stake for the early professionals to rest content with a separate but equal audience for their work. Professional authority depended upon their convincing the public that serious history was an undertaking only trained scholars could conduct and whose merits only they could determine. The great influence exercised by the “literary” historians constituted a rival authority, one that many professionals felt compelled to discredit in order to distinguish their own position. The success of such writers had, as Freeman pointed out, convinced the public that all history was merely a form

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<sup>19</sup>J.N. Figgis and R.V. Laurence (eds.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the First Lord Acton*, (London, 1917), I, 309.

<sup>20</sup>J.H. Round, *Feudal England* (London, 1895), p. x. “Minute sifting” is an allusion to Lord Kelvin’s presidential address to the Royal Society in 1871. The comment about research is quoted in P.B.M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism* (The Hague, 1978), p. 56.

<sup>21</sup>See, e.g., C.E. Appleton, “Economic Aspects of the Endowment of Research,” *Fortnightly Review*, 22 o.s. (Oct. 1974), 521-22. See also essays by Mark Pattison and A.H. Sayce in *Essays on the Endowment of Research* (London, 1876).

<sup>22</sup>J.R. Seeley, “Political Somnambulism,” *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 43 (Nov. 1880), 43; the essay attacks Carlyle as a “literary historian pure and simple.”

<sup>23</sup>Herbert A.L. Fisher, “Modern Historians and Their Methods,” *Fortnightly Review*, 62 o.s. (Dec. 1894), 811.



of literature, which amateurs were equally capable of creating and judging. Where the physical scientist had long since laid claim to an expertise unchallenged by the layman, the historian struggled on against assumptions that in his field every side still had "an equal 'right to their own opinion.'" As a result, the level of "nonsense" tolerated in historical writing remained far higher than in other subjects.<sup>24</sup> The professionals' attack on the assumptions and methods of "literary" history was part of a larger attempt to assert a new status for themselves and for their "science"; it became a primary means of drumming the amateurs out of their ranks, and of repudiating those claims by their audience that threatened to compromise the standards upon which professional authority rested.

The urgency of the professional effort to define and maintain standards was increased by changes in the late Victorian reading public. The rise of mass culture and the rise of specialization were not only contemporaneous but in important ways mutually reinforcing. In the same period that historical study was being professionalized, a rapidly expanding lower-middle class, educated in the Board schools and newly enfranchised, was becoming affluent enough to create a market for an accessible literature that could both entertain and further educate them.<sup>25</sup> The concerns of professional historians about the type of writing that attracted such audiences were typical of more general fears: many commentators believed the dramatic growth of popular literature in the second half of the century had drastically reduced its overall quality.<sup>26</sup> Freeman blamed circulating libraries for justifying historical books merely to supply the season's demand for new titles.<sup>27</sup> Stubbs blamed the stream of "trashy books" and superficial journalism on publishers trying to exploit the taste of the "half-educated" for "sensational and picturesque" historical writing. In 1876 he charged that even the "older quarterlies" were being flooded with articles that were "read by, and therefore written for, men who care just enough about such matters to induce them to read fifty pages of cleverly arranged, not too exhausting argument. They share the ephemeral character of the rest of our popular literature."<sup>28</sup> If they were clearly to distinguish their own position in the public mind, the professionals could ill afford to discriminate between the Carlyles and Macaulays on the one hand and the inferior popularizers encouraged by

<sup>24</sup>Freeman, *The Methods of Historical Study*, pp. 86, 90-1.

<sup>25</sup>Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago, 1957), chaps. 13 and 15.

<sup>26</sup>See, e.g., Margaret Oliphant, "The Byways of Literature," *Blackwood's Magazine*, 84 (Aug. 1858), 200-16; Thomas Wright, "On a Possible Popular Culture," *Contemporary Review*, 40 (July 1881), 25-44; B.G. Johns, "The Literature of the Streets," *Edinburgh Review*, 165 (Jan. 1887), 40-65; and Edward Dowden, "Hopes and Fears for Literature," *Fortnightly Review*, 51 o.s. (Feb. 1889), 166-83.

<sup>27</sup>E.A. Freeman, "The Art of History-Making," *Saturday Review*, 17 Nov. 1855, p. 52.

<sup>28</sup>Stubbs, *Seventeen Lectures*, pp. 58-59, 114, 61-62.

their success on the other. If some “literary” historians would find an occasional defender among the professionals, most were held guilty by association with vulgarized history. Fine distinctions were lost in the assault on all writing enjoyed by an audience whose lack of discrimination and diligence seemed to pose grave threats to the quality of all serious literature.

The line of attack taken by the early professionals tended to harden into the position that artistic imagination and compelling narration were not just dangerous, but completely incompatible with serious research. J.R. Seeley and E.A. Freeman, the most vocal publicists for professional history, agreed that the historian had to resort to “tricks of style” to hold the interest of those “who read for pleasure or amusement and not from true love of knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> “History,” wrote Seeley, “only becomes interesting to the general public by being corrupted, by being adulterated with sweet, unwholesome stuff to please the popular palate.” Popular history’s hero-worship and myth-making were particularly vulnerable to professional attack: “the principle of thoroughness soon sets us doubting whether any great men will come safe out of the critical crucible.”<sup>30</sup> Freeman noted with a certain grim satisfaction that textual criticism tore away all shreds of likelihood from the fables most beloved by a resentful public.<sup>31</sup> Picturesque history was labeled superficial by definition. It led to what Creighton called “a purely external view of the course of affairs.”<sup>32</sup> Fisher summed up general fears when he argued that the artist might too easily be carried beyond the boundaries of his evidence: that he might “add a touch here and a touch there, ignore the inconvenient little facts, and traduce the inconvenient little persons, until his canvas ceases to represent the original, although it may be full of power and beauty and psychological insight.”<sup>33</sup> While no particular advocate of scientific history, Frederic Harrison took the same view: “the long labour of preparation, the slow evolutions of change, the infinite complexity of circumstance—all this the poet or dramatist condenses into a few telling passages and rapid dialogues.”<sup>34</sup>

Given these assumptions, it was no wonder that the self-proclaimed dullness and aridity of works like Creighton’s *History of the Papacy* or Stubbs’s *Constitutional History* were held up as tokens of their professionalism. Actually, the exaggerated rhetoric of the debate implied clearer distinctions between popular and professional styles than actually

<sup>29</sup>Freeman, *Methods of Historical Study*, p. 99.

<sup>30</sup>J.R. Seeley, “History and Politics - Part IV,” *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 41 (Nov. 1879), 32; “The Teaching of History,” in *Methods of Teaching History*, ed. G. Stanley Hall, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1896), p. 194.

<sup>31</sup>Freeman, *Methods of Historical Study*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>32</sup>Mandell Creighton, “Picturesqueness in History,” *Cornhill Magazine*, 75 o.s. (March 1897), 305.

<sup>33</sup>H.A. L. Fisher, “Modern Historians and Their Methods,” p. 812.

<sup>34</sup>Frederic Harrison, *Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill and Other Literary Estimates* (London, 1900), p. 233.

existed. Far from abandoning the public to vulgarized history, Freeman hoped to improve their taste and judgment and made some stylistic and scholarly concessions to hold their interest. In fact, he was condemned for being too picturesque by the even more trenchantly professional J.H. Round.<sup>35</sup> J.B. Bury's pronouncement that "history is a science, no less and no more" did not preclude a significant role for literary art and imagination.<sup>36</sup> Maitland was acclaimed as a stylist even by those who did not read him; modern appreciations of Stubbs reveal far more artistry than his own disclaimers allowed for.<sup>37</sup> The length and detail of professional histories limited their audience, but the professionals' well-publicized disparagement of popular taste did far more than the quality of their prose style itself to alienate the general reader. While the boundaries of professionalism were still being drawn, many of the new historians adopted a harder public line about the literary dimensions of history than their own work supported in order to stake out new ground for themselves.

Nor did all the ambiguities lie on the professional side of the debate. James Anthony Froude and John Richard Green were similarly caught between rival constituencies while definitions of the historian were still in flux. Froude owed his somewhat undeserved reputation as a "constitutionally inaccurate" historian to the long, vitriolic series of attacks launched by Freeman in the *Saturday Review*, a journal that had early taken on the responsibility for distinguishing good from bad—that is, scientific from "literary"—history.<sup>38</sup> Froude had in fact done far more "original research" than Freeman; although he was an exceptionally careless copyist, the use he made of his data—to apologize for Tudor repression—was the real provocation to a scholar of Freeman's Whig leanings. Freeman stated his case in terms of professional standards, but professional jealousy played a role as well. The source of his indignation was not inaccuracy alone, but Froude's "original sin"—his failure to serve

<sup>35</sup>E.A. Freeman, "On The Study of History," *Fortnightly Review*, 35 (o.s.(March, 1881)), 329. For Round's attacks, see particularly *Feudal England*, pp. 391, 393.

<sup>36</sup>J.B. Bury, *Selected Essays*, ed. Harold Temperley (Cambridge, 1930), p. 3. See Doris Goldstein's analysis of tensions and ambiguities in Bury's position, "J.B. Bury's Philosophy of History: A Reappraisal," *AHR*, 82 (1977), 896-919.

<sup>37</sup>On Maitland see Andrew Lang's comments in "History as she ought to be wrote," *Blackwood's Magazine*, 166 (Aug. 1899), 266. On Stubbs see Burrow, *A Liberal Descent*, pp. 137, 145-46, and Robert Brentano, "The Sound of Stubbs," *Journal of British Studies*, 6 (1966-67), 1-14.

<sup>38</sup>For an account of the *Saturday Review's* campaign against "literary" history, see Merle Bevington, *The Saturday Review: 1855-1868* (New York, 1941), pp. 233-46. Freeman began to review Froude's *History* with vol. VII in 1864; see Bevington pp. 343-44 for a complete list of reviews. Freeman continued his attacks in reviews of Froude's *Life and Times of Thomas Becket* in the *Contemporary Review*, 31 (March 1878), 821-42, 32 (April 1878), 116-39, 32 (June, 1878), 474-500, (33 Sept. 1878), 213-41, and summed up in "Last Words on Mr. Froude," in the *Contemporary*, 35 (May 1879), 214-36. He first used the term "constitutional inaccuracy." "Froude's disease" had become a catchphrase for chronic inaccuracy by 1898; see Charles Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, trans. G.G. Berry (London, 1898), p. 125.

"any proper apprenticeship to historical writing." His errors were "just the sort of things which superficial writers care nothing about, just the sort of things which superficial readers think it hypercritical to complain of; but . . . just the sort of things by which scholars judge whether a book is to be trusted or not." Freeman particularly resented the fact that these superficial readers awarded fame to one "with whom truth is nothing," while to those scholars "who had spent their lives in the minute study of history" (like S.R. Gardiner and himself) fame came "only slowly and painfully."<sup>39</sup> Clearly to Freeman recognition by fellow experts alone was not enough to validate fully the professional's authority. He wished for the public's esteem as well. He must have turned in his grave when Froude succeeded him as Regius Professor at Oxford in 1892.

Green's position was more consciously anomalous than Froude's. Although a reviewer for the *Saturday* and a medievalist with close personal and scholarly connections to Freeman and Stubbs, Green was known as a popular historian. His avowed mission was to use popular history "to get right notions into the heads of the Many-Folk, of Herr Omnes."<sup>40</sup> He criticized continental research for being too narrow, too inconclusive, and too relentlessly political, and fashioned his own best-selling *Short History* into a synoptic social and intellectual history for a wide general audience. While *Blackwood's* applauded Green for clearing away the "scaffolding" of authorities and footnotes, other critics disparaged the *Short History* as a "mere popularising of other people's views." Some reviewers objected to his Whig biases, and others attacked his accuracy in revenge for Froude's treatment by "the Freeman school," but they agreed in blaming many of his errors on Green's desire for literary effect.<sup>41</sup> Green strained between the two identities of the historian. Precisely because he never expected the *Short History* to win him "historic fame" with the professionals, he continued his own specialized studies of the Angevin kings in the hope of eventually satisfying them that way. Disparagement of the *Short History* also spurred him to write the more detailed *Making of England* (1882). Only with that book's success did he note "the cessation at last of that attempt, which has been so steadily carried on for the last ten years, to drum me out of the world of historical scholars and set me among the 'picturesque compilers.'"<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, Green found himself similarly caught between popular

<sup>39</sup>E.A. Freeman, "Froude's Reign of Elizabeth - Vol. III," *Saturday Review*, 27 Oct. 1866, p. 519; "Froude's Reign of Elizabeth (first notice)," *Saturday Review* 16 Jan. 1864, pp. 80-81; "Froude's Reign of Elizabeth (concluding notice)," *Saturday Review*, 30 Jan. 1864, p. 143; *Methods of Historical Study*, p. 102.

<sup>40</sup>*Letters of John Richard Green*, ed. Leslie Stephen (New York, 1901), p. 445.

<sup>41</sup>Margaret Oliphant, "New Books," *Blackwood's Magazine*, 118 (July 1875), 90; James Bryce, "John Richard Green," in *Studies in Contemporary Biography* (1903; rpt. New York, 1927), p. 142; J.S. Brewer, "Green's History of the English People," *Quarterly Review*, 141 (April 1876), 286; James Rowley, "Mr. Green's Short History of the English People: Is it Trustworthy?" *Fraser's Magazine*, 92 (Sept. 1875), 408.

<sup>42</sup>*Letters of John Richard Green*, pp. 258-59, 482.

and professional demands in preliminary discussions about what eventually became the *English Historical Review*. When his friends James Bryce and Humphry Ward suggested the founding of a “purely scientific organ of historical criticism” like those of France and Germany, Green urged them to appeal to a wider audience by including biographical sketches and summaries of current events and by demanding literary excellence of all contributions. He admitted, however, that striving for commercial success would almost inevitably dilute the review’s professional standards and alienate those “who desire a scientific organ of ‘historical research.’” He finally turned down the post of editor because he knew he “did not possess that confidence of historical scholars which the editor of such an organ *must* possess”<sup>43</sup> in order to make it professionally respectable. As if to confirm the growing gap between popular and professional audiences that Green had tried to bridge before his early death, the *English Historical Review* adopted a decidedly professional tone. Its first issue (1886) warned that “no allurements of style will secure insertion for a popular *réchauffée* of facts already known or ideas already suggested.”<sup>44</sup> Apparently there was continued anxiety that the *Review* might be “too popular,” but Mandell Creighton, its first editor, discounted that possibility: “My fear is lest it die of dullness; but oh how the dullards croak with dread lest the atmosphere in which they live should by any chance be rarefied.”<sup>45</sup> Early issues still included some material of interest to “an educated man, not specially conversant with history.”<sup>46</sup> True to Green’s prophecy, however, Creighton decided that the *Review* could not be popularized “without entirely changing its character and making it useless to students.” He soon gave up all pretense of paying contributors, and “by strict economy . . . the *Review* was just made to pay its own way.”<sup>47</sup>

The alleged incompatibility of popular and professional standards was rapidly becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. The resentful reactions of that public whose taste and judgment were so widely impugned joined with professional fears of appearing “too popular” to accentuate further the differences between the two positions. The public’s treatment of Gardiner and Stubbs, for instance, suggests that despite the rebuffs of professionals, they were slow to accept their dismissal as qualified judges of what constituted “good” history. The *Saturday* and the *EHR* might approve of Gardiner’s leaving out the “tawdry trappings” and “tinsel embroidery” that vulgarized popular works; for them and for the *Academy* Gardiner’s admitted deficiencies as a writer in no way detracted from his qual-

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 433-36.

<sup>44</sup>“Prefatory Note,” *English Historical Review*, 1 (Jan 1886), 5.

<sup>45</sup>Louise Creighton, *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton* (London, 1904), I, 337.

<sup>46</sup>“Prefatory Note,” *English Historical Review*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup>Louise Creighton, *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, pp. 343-44.

ifications as historian.<sup>43</sup> But more middle-brow periodicals resented Gardiner's failure to fulfill their expectations about historical writing. Finding "the actors depicted in a small weak way," the *Athenaeum* for instance disputed Gardiner's protest that the period in question was "wanting in dramatic interest"; even had that been true, the reviewer went on to note, "the writer should have concealed the fact with the utmost art." Gardiner apparently took to heart other criticism of his disproportionate detail and somewhat improved the readability of later volumes of his *History*. But readers continued to plead in vain to know "his thoughts" and the moral of his story. If some reviewers finally acknowledged Gardiner's stature as a scholar, they continued to believe that his lack of proportion, conclusiveness, and vivid characterization prevented him from being an historian in the full sense of the word.<sup>44</sup> Stubbs found himself in a similar position: the "casual critics" of history whom he attacked in his Oxford lectures "had their revenge in deciding that my writings were not literature." The *Saturday* and the *EHR* might be predictably complimentary of his achievements, but more popular journals labeled him rather an editor and lexicographer than an historian.<sup>45</sup> Defenders of "literary" history went on the offensive as well. Among the high popularizers of the nineties, men like Augustine Birrell, Andrew Lang, and Hugh Crothers attacked professional works for leaving the reader "adrift, without human companionship, on a bottomless sea of erudition," and called for more readable narratives in which the audience could be uplifted and emotionally involved.<sup>46</sup> Lang was far from defending the rhetorical excess preferred by the "vile herd," considering it as injurious to good art as to good science. But he warned that "from Mr. Froude the public will never be won, till some scientific historian writes about his topic as agreeably, with less bias and more accuracy."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup>"Gardiner's Personal Government of Charles I.," *Saturday Review*, 22 Dec. 1877, p. 774; J.K. Laughton, "Gardiner's History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate 1649-60, Vol. III," *English Historical Review*, 13 (1898), 167; J.R. Seeley, "History of the Great Civil War," *Academy*, 21 May 1887, pp. 353-54; see also F. York Powell, "S.R. Gardiner," *English Historical Review*, 17 (1902), 275-79.

<sup>44</sup>"Gardiner's History of England," *Athenaeum*, 21 March 1863, p. 392; "Prince Charles and the Spanish Marriage," *Athenaeum*, 8 May 1869, pp. 629-30; see also A.V. Dicey, "Gardiner's History," *Nation*, 11 April 1895, p. 280; F.W. Warre-Cornish, "Gardiner's Protectorate," *Quarterly Review*, 187 (April 1898), 446-70; G.L. Beer, "Gardiner: An Appreciation," *Critic*, 38 (1901), 546-47.

<sup>45</sup>William Stubbs, *Seventeen Lectures*, p. vii. F.W. Maitland, "William Stubbs," *English Historical Review*, 16 (1901), 421 claims Stubbs as a fellow professional while admitting his defects for the general audience. H. Adams criticizes Stubbs for the same defects, "Stubbs' Constitutional History of England," *North American Review*, 119 (1874), 235.

<sup>46</sup>Samuel Crothers, "That History Should be Readable," in *The Gentle Reader* (New York, 1903), pp. 167-200; Augustine Birrell, "The Muse of History" in *Obiter Dicta* (New York, 1887), I, 196-223; Andrew Lang, "History as she ought to be wrote."

<sup>47</sup>Lang, "History as she ought to be wrote," pp. 268, 272.

It was not just history's literary value that was at stake here: the cult of objective research seemed to threaten the very intelligibility of the past. At the turn of the century, even fellow professionals worried because "many of the ablest and most learned historians restrict their efforts to the determination of the facts by scientific process and deem it futile to attempt more."<sup>53</sup> It was this position that Frederic Harrison parodied in his "The History Schools: An Oxford Dialogue" (1893). There a tutor refutes his tutee's defense of Macaulay and Froude by insisting that no synthesis could take place until every fact had been catalogued, going so far as to wish that "histories were not published at all in the current English of literature, but were plain and disconnected propositions of fact." Satire aside, Harrison was concerned that the "paleo-photographic" method of research might be able to accumulate vast amounts of data but made it impossible to master or use them.<sup>54</sup> John Morley, just as aware of the shortcomings of "literary" history, concurred with Harrison's reservations about "history for its own sake." Like so many Victorian readers, Morley did not "in the least want to know what happened in the past, except as it enables me to see my way more clearly through what is happening today." From his point of view, scientific history was simply becoming "narrow, pedantic and trivial. It threatens to degenerate from a broad survey of great periods and movements of human societies into vast and countless accumulations of insignificant facts, sterile knowledge, and frivolous antiquarianism."<sup>55</sup> The hostility and mistrust of the general public inspired the stereotype of the scholar who was incapable of decisive judgments and feared that practical applications sullied his pure intellectuality.<sup>56</sup> They were also at the root of suspicions that researchers sought merely sinecures, so that "the endowment of research may degenerate into the research of endowment."<sup>57</sup>

In addition to being resented as a renunciation of the historian's responsibility to the general public, attacks on "literary" history actually worsened the very situation the early professionals had wanted to correct. As Lang put it, "men of real information are demoralised by writing for the public, while the non-specialist (the abandoned 'populariser') is a person of contemptible character."<sup>58</sup> The quality of popularized work tended to sink rather than improve as the market expanded. The merchandising of history unleashed a deluge of what Trevelyan described as "publishers' books" of the type

<sup>53</sup>Charles Colby, "Historical Synthesis," in *Congress of Arts and Sciences*, ed. Howard Rogers (Boston, 1906), II, 48. This is part of the proceedings from the session on Historical Sciences, held as part of the 1904 St. Louis Exposition.

<sup>54</sup>Reprinted in Frederic Harrison, *The Meaning of History*; see pp. 105, 135-37.

<sup>55</sup>John Morley, *Critical Miscellanies* (London, 1886), III, 9; *Diderot and the Encyclopedists* (London, 1886), II, 212.

<sup>56</sup>James Hobson, "The Academic Spirit in Education," *Contemporary Review*, 63 (Feb. 1893), 240.

<sup>57</sup>James Bryce, "The Future of English Universities," *Fortnightly Review*, 39 o.s. (March 1883), 387.

<sup>58</sup>Lang, "History as she ought to be wrote," p. 268.

generically know as “Criminal Queens of History,” spicy memoirs of dead courts and pseudobiographical chatter about Napoleon and his family. . . . The public understands that this kind of prurient journalism is history lightly served up for the general appetite, whereas serious history is a sacred thing pinnaled afar on frozen heights of science, not to be approached save after a long novitiate.<sup>59</sup>

Trying to strike a happy medium between popular and scientific history became considerably more of a challenge once all “literary” history had been tarred with the same brush as this kind of vulgarization. This left those readers who had in earlier years formed the audience for the great reviews and Victorian histories with far less literature of comparable excellence, and further emphasized the fragmentation of the norm for serious history, once identical with the literary masterpieces of Macaulay, Carlyle, and Froude.

This fragmentation placed the early professionals in an anomalous position. They were struggling to win public acknowledgement of their authority, but found their definition of that authority contrary to the public's. The amateur ideal had taught the public to measure the historian's authority by the moral uplift and practical guidance he provided. Professional authority was based on specialized expertise, applied to advance knowledge for its own sake. The susceptibility of the amateur ideal to vulgarization only reinforced the professionals' natural inclination to limited research rather than broad synthesis, to address fellow professionals rather than cater to public tastes. The general audience might be willing to acknowledge the authority of professional expertise, but insofar as they saw it as by choice exercising no relevant power over their lives, they withheld the cultural authority of the historian from men who were to them “merely” scholars.

If we examine more closely the assumptions beneath the rhetoric, however, we find that the winning of professional authority at the expense of this cultural authority was an outcome few early professionals were willing to accept. Attacks on “literary” amateurs were a publicistic way of aggrandizing the historian's position; calls for more professional levels of training were a way of increasing his authority. But for many of those very historians who waged such attacks, conventional Victorian assumptions about history's function and value were still what gave the historian his stature in the first place. Notwithstanding the often self-defeating stridency of their rhetoric, many of these historians wished to make professional authority reinforce, not replace, the cultural authority defined by the “literary” historians. Their continuing belief in history's pre-eminent importance as a moral and practical guide in the service of a wider society left such historians implicitly at odds with professionalism's stress on an audience of experts and the pursuit of knowledge for its own

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<sup>59</sup>G.M. Trevelyan, *Clio, A Muse*, pp. 174-75.



sake. Particularly at the ancient universities, this belief combined with related assumptions about liberal education to prevent the Oxbridge historians from becoming alienated from the needs and demands of a more general public in the sense that many American and European scholars did. The transition from “literary” to professional history in England was thus not a break but a continuum on which, by and large, the demands of professionalism accommodated themselves to the assumptions of “literary” history rather than vice versa.

### III

The university was the natural home of the new professional historian, and virtually all of the early professionals held academic positions from the eighties on. From the beginning, however, historical study at Oxford and Cambridge was divided between the liberal ideal and the research ideal in ways that paralleled the rivalry between popular and professional historiography outside the academy. The first step toward professionalization had been to gain recognition of history as a distinct academic discipline, apart from moral science or humane letters. The first set of university reforms established an examination school in modern history at Oxford in the 1850s; a separate Historical Tripos was established at Cambridge in 1873. Attempts by the first Oxford Reform Commission to empower a German-style professoriate met with vigorous and ultimately successful opposition from the tutors, however. The key issue was whether history was “to provide useful citizens of the State, or furtherers of historical research.”<sup>60</sup> To the tutors, who defended the liberal ideal of education as character formation, men whose major purpose was the advancement of knowledge and the training of fellow professionals were “unsuitable and even dangerous instruments” for the moral education of the young.<sup>61</sup> Their position weighed most heavily in the Oxford University Bill of 1854. New schools and chairs were created, but the tutors were able effectively to exclude the professors from having any significant impact on college governance or the examination process, especially after mandatory lecture attendance was dropped in 1861. Their continued strength foiled efforts to enhance the power and status of the professoriate in 1872, preventing professors from becoming *ex officio* chairmen of the new Boards of Faculties and influencing the colleges to reduce the funds reallocated to the professoriate.<sup>62</sup> Here was a case where the tutors’ status as professional teachers conflicted with the professoriate’s desire for institutional power commensurate with their own status as professional scholars. It is true that part of the tutors’ increasing

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<sup>60</sup>Sir Charles Oman, *On the Writing of History* (New York, 1939), p. 230.

<sup>61</sup>E.G.W. Bill, *University Reform in Nineteenth Century Oxford* (Oxford, 1973), p. 97.

<sup>62</sup>Arthur Engel, “Emerging Concepts of the Academic Profession at Oxford 1800-1854,” in the *The University in Society*, ed. Laurence Stone (Princeton, 1974), I, 349.

professionalism involved some specialization on their part—for example, many of them became the “combined lecturers” who prepared students for exams in the new schools.<sup>63</sup> But this specialization remained compatible with and subordinate to the college-based ideal of liberal education. The professors might have gained the apex of the pyramid of academic prestige, but the Oxbridge tutors continued to exercise effective control over the educational process. Thus from the beginning confusion existed about who controlled historical knowledge and for what ends.

In the case of history, this control placed significant limits on professional training. When Charles Firth became Regius Professor at Oxford in 1905, he renewed the call for professional training comparable to that of the continent. His suggestion that the History School require a thesis based on original sources—something he viewed as a necessary preliminary for post-graduate work—met with concerted resistance from tutors and lecturers, who charged that it was incompatible with the chief purpose of the Honors School: “a liberal education through history.”<sup>64</sup> Even Firth’s claims that the school could accommodate both forms of education failed to mollify them, and his proposals met with little success in his lifetime. He and Paul Vinogradoff did conduct two post-graduate seminars at Oxford, but Vinogradoff for one complained that his students did not take to this continental style of education.<sup>65</sup>

At Cambridge the professors met with more success in accommodating the Tripos to specialized research, but some of the same conflicts arose.<sup>66</sup> From the late nineteenth century, two views opposed one another. One group valued history for its practical uses in preparing citizens and statesmen for their duties in society. Its proponents—men like J. R. Seeley and Oscar Browning—felt that study should be organized around subjects about which a student could formulate and test theories which would in turn form the basis of a “political science.” A. W. Ward represented the “pure” historians, who believed that history should be studied for its own sake, an aim best served by specifying periods whose facts had to be determined and mastered. The political scientists controlled the shape of the 1873 Tripos. Attempts to combine both approaches in the reforms of 1897 were mutually unsatisfactory, resulting in what to Maitland re-

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<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 347-48. Engel also points out that while the number of professorial chairs increased to 47 in 1892 from 25 in 1850, there were still not enough for these to be viewed as the normal promotion for college dons; see p. 351. The interdependence of specialization and academic professionalism discussed by Rothblatt, *Tradition and Change*, pp. 185-86 was, in the period I discuss, not yet decisive in determining professional advancement for tutors.

<sup>64</sup>A. T. Milne, “History at the Universities: Then and Now,” *History*, 59 (1974), 40.

<sup>65</sup>R. W. Southern, *The Shape and Substance of Academic History* (Oxford, 1901), p. 18.

<sup>66</sup>The following account is drawn from Jean O. McLachlan, “The Origin and Early Development of the Cambridge Historical Tripos,” *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 9 (1947-49), 78-105 and from George Kitson Clark, “A Hundred Years of the Teaching of History at Cambridge, 1873-1973,” *Historical Journal*, 16 (1973), 535-53.

sembled “rather the programme of a Variety Show than the sober programme of an Historical School.”<sup>67</sup> Although emphasis on outlines increased under Acton and on research techniques under Bury, not until the 1929 reforms was the domination of political science conclusively broken. And even then, the sections on economic and constitutional history tended to remain issue-oriented and encouraged practical rather than professional aims.

With these constraints on undergraduate study, post-graduate schools grew only slowly at the ancient universities. It was rather the civic and provincial universities, from the beginning dominated by the professoriate and more heavily influenced by the occupational professionalism of scientific and technical fields, that provided the first significant support for post-graduate work. During the first quarter of the century, the history school shaped by T.F. Tout at Manchester became “a Mecca for serious-minded young scholars from the older universities” seeking the professional’s specialized skills.<sup>68</sup> Albert Pollard’s hopes of founding a research center in London were realized in 1921 when the Institute for Historical Research opened its doors. Although dismissed at first as a mere “Ph.D. factory,” the Institute gradually gained support and recognition as a center for advanced work.

The slow progress of a more professional training at the ancient universities was in significant ways reinforced by many of the professors themselves. Despite their public advocacy of more professional standards, many of them continued to operate on assumptions about history’s practical importance that furthered the ideal of liberal education at the expense of the research ideal. Seeley and Freeman are good examples. If their well-publicized attacks on “literary” history warned the general reader of the incompatibility of professional and public needs, within the academy they in effect accommodated both. Seeley’s belief that history was first and foremost “the school of statesmanship” (a school whose “laws” simply endowed his own prejudices with “scientific” status) worked against specialized scholarship and a grasp of the contemporary context of events in the same ways that the amateur approach had. Sheldon Rothblatt makes clear that Seeley advocated more rigorous intellectual standards as a means of producing better leaders, not better historians; he was himself a better example of the professional teacher, rather than the professional scholar.<sup>69</sup> Freeman’s dogma that “history is past politics, politics are present history” made him Seeley’s counterpart at Oxford. He originally opposed the reforms of the fifties on the grounds that the purpose of undergraduate study was not to cram budding specialists with information, but to train their minds in the principles of political phil-

<sup>67</sup>Quoted by McLachlan, p. 95.

<sup>68</sup>Milne, “History at the Universities,” p. 39. Tout explicitly modeled historical training on the research methods of the “experimental sciences”: see H.B. Charlton, *Portrait of a University, 1851-1951* (Manchester, 1951), p. 88.

<sup>69</sup>Rothblatt, *Revolution of the Dons*, p. 179.

osophy. He had not changed his mind when he returned as Regius Professor in 1884. He objected to the professoriate's effective exclusion from the examination process, a process that encouraged cramming rather than the study of original authorities for their own sake. In actual practice, he valued the close reading of texts not as a means to original research but as the heuristic model closest to that of the old school of *Literae Humaniores*. Far from styling himself a professor of the German type who was "bound to utter something new every time he officially opens his mouth,"<sup>70</sup> he structured his lectures to reveal general principles and laws that would enable his listeners better to play their part in the present: this, he suggested at his Inaugural, was an object higher than "the search for truth for its own sake."<sup>71</sup>

Even men with more compelling credentials as scholars continued to let the practical priorities of the larger society dictate the ends of historical study. Stubbs shared Freeman's belief that scientific scholarship was only a means to an end. In the same inaugural lecture where he called for the founding of a research school on the continental model, he also stated that his aim was "to train not merely students but citizens . . . to be fitted not for criticism or for authority in matters of memory, but for action" in the greater community. He viewed history as "next to Theology itself . . . the most thoroughly religious training that the mind can receive."<sup>72</sup> Acton echoed Stubbs's views thirty years later when he became Regius Professor at Cambridge. He thought modern history had a particular value for "men in general" because it was filled with "inestimable lessons" still relevant to the present. He rated its gift of "historical thinking" higher than that of "historical learning" because better adapted to the "formation of character and the training of talent." Notwithstanding his call for strict impartiality, he enjoined his students "to try others by the final maxim that governs your own lives, and to suffer no man and no cause to escape the undying penalty which history has the power to inflict on wrong."<sup>73</sup> At the turn of the century, Firth at Oxford and George Prothero at Edinburgh were other advocates of original research who also acknowledged history's importance as a moral and political guide. H.W.C. Davis was making the same claim as Regius Professor at Oxford in the twenties, and his successor, Maurice Powicke, publicly encouraged amateur writing.<sup>74</sup> The attitude prevalent in Seeley's time—that Regius Professors had a message to convey to the world at large—never really died out, despite a gradual upgrading of the scholarly credentials of appointees. Maitland turned down the chance to succeed Acton in 1901 for this very reason:

<sup>70</sup>E.A. Freeman, *Historical Essays, Fourth Series* (London, 1892), p. 201.

<sup>71</sup>Freeman, *Methods of Historical Study*, p. 40.

<sup>72</sup>William Stubbs, *Seventeen Lectures*, pp. 21, 10.

<sup>73</sup>Lord Acton, *Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History*, pp. 311-12, 359.

<sup>74</sup>McLachlan, "Cambridge Historical Tripos," p. 87; E.S. de Beer, "Sir Charles Firth 1857-1936," *History*, 21 (1936-37), 4; Oman, *On the Writing of History*, p. 253; Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Pathology of English History," *New Left Review*, 46 (1967), 32.

"The Regius Professor of Modern History is expected to speak to the world at large," he argued, "and even if I had anything to say to the W. at L., I don't think I should like the full houses and the limelight. So I shall go back to the Year Books."<sup>75</sup> Gardiner likewise had rejected the chance to succeed Froude because he could not face the lecturing requirements.<sup>76</sup> Given the public mission associated with many professorial chairs, it was quite appropriate that Charles Oman and G.M. Trevelyan should win them after distinguishing themselves as popular historians. Up to the present, men of such stature as George Kitson Clark and R.W. Southern (who became Regius Professor at Oxford in 1961) continue to defend general education as the primary end of historical study at their universities and to lament the loss of direction earlier furnished by the belief in history's practical importance.<sup>77</sup>

This belief by no means ruled out more professional standards of scholarship. But it did operate in British historiography to compromise objectivity and critical perspective, in large part because it was inextricably intertwined with the kind of anachronisms implicit in the Whig view. Stressing the preservative nature of historical innovations and reconstructing a series of precedents linking past logically and directly to present gave the subject a ready-made continuity, itself taken as proof that history was a "scientific" discipline, not a random collection of facts. From this "scientific" order proceeded "laws" with continuing relevance to the present. In the work of Stubbs and Freeman the specifics of the Whig view had won the early professional seal of approval. Bury and Acton were less partisan, but their readings of western history as the progress of political and intellectual freedom offered less provincial and less immanent versions of the same assumptions.<sup>78</sup> If there was gradual recognition of the Whig view's particular anachronisms and fallacies of intentionality among early twentieth-century professionals like Pollard and Tout, the belief in history's practicality was kept alive by the continued emphasis on constitutional development and political science in the history schools. The increased prestige of bureaucratic efficiency in government at the turn of the century simply encouraged new anachronisms as administrative historians rehabilitated absolutism in an attempt to reconstruct

<sup>75</sup>C.H.A. Fifoot, ed., *The Letters of Frederic William Maitland* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 349.

<sup>76</sup>Milne, "History at the Universities," p. 37.

<sup>77</sup>Kitson Clark, "A Hundred Years of the Teaching of History," p. 552; Southern, *The Shape and Substance of Academic History*, p. 18.

<sup>78</sup>Doris Goldstein in "J.B. Bury's Philosophy of History: A Reappraisal" stresses Bury's departures from the providentiality in nineteenth-century assumptions about history. My reading of her evidence sees his agreement with the Victorian tradition as more significant than his differences. See in particular Bury's belief in the practical value of historical study, discussed on p. 914.

the origins of the modern state and civil service.<sup>79</sup> In other words, the details of the interpretation changed, but the impulse underlying the Whig view—to use evidence of precedent and tradition to explain and thus legitimate a present or desired political order—remained unquestioned. In some respects early professional research methods actually encouraged rather than eliminated present-mindedness. By isolating historical phenomena from other relevant aspects of their context, narrow specialization made heteronomous interpretations more rather than less likely.<sup>80</sup> The continued reliance on facts speaking for themselves made unconscious value judgments all the harder to detect.<sup>81</sup> The compatibility of political apologetics with professional scholarship had been demonstrated by Ranke himself. Georg Iggers points out the way Ranke's "hermeneutical" emphasis on political documents and on the self-justifying "individuality" of the state constructed from them served inherently conservative ends by excluding as irrelevant to historical understanding factors such as the economic or social analyses offered by socialism. It is noteworthy that this "classical" model of historical study remained firmly entrenched in both England and Germany well into the twentieth century, despite challenges raised elsewhere by a variety of more sociologically-informed approaches to history.<sup>82</sup>

Persisting belief in its practicality helps explain why history became the "queen of the liberal arts" at least temporarily in the early twentieth century. In the first quarter of the century, nearly one third of the undergraduates at Oxford were reading for the History School; as many as two hundred took the History Tripos each year in the late twenties and early thirties.<sup>83</sup> As Kitson Clark points out, however, few of these viewed themselves as future historians: history had become a haven for students who did not know what else to study. Many of these were destined to fill posts in domestic and imperial administration at a time when the British government was assuming new functions at home and abroad. History seemed suited in a number of ways to serve their needs. In addition to providing a genealogy for the new bureaucratic elite, it also afforded a more general frame of reference from which to view and to understand the problems they would encounter. G.N. Clark argues that it was in part a shortage of modern studies capable of supplying such background that

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<sup>79</sup>I disagree with P.B.M. Blaas's Kuhnian view that the early professional school had overthrown the Whig paradigm by the early twentieth century. Some of his own evidence suggests that the change was far from so conclusive and not complete so early. See, e.g., his remarks on administrative history, *Continuity and Anachronism*, pp. 293-95, 364, 373.

<sup>80</sup>Blaas, p. 367.

<sup>81</sup>Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Pathology of English History," pp. 41-42.

<sup>82</sup>Georg Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, Conn. 1975), pp. 21, 30-31. Jones offers a more polemical account of the connections between political apologetics and historiographical conservatism in "The Pathology of English History."

<sup>83</sup>Jones, "The Pathology of English History," p. 31; Kitson Clark, "A Hundred Years of the Teaching of History," p. 538.

motivated the *Cambridge Modern History*, a work aimed, in Acton's words, "to bring home to every man . . . the ripest conclusions of international research." Precisely because he anticipated an audience of generalists, Acton conceived this work not as a chronicle of facts for their own sake, but as a compendium whose proportions were shaped by a subject's relative philosophical importance to world history. The *History* represented not so much a scholarly advance as a codification of nineteenth-century assumptions about what constituted "universal" history.<sup>84</sup>

Remarks by R.W. Southern suggest a more important class dimension to history's early twentieth-century popularity. In his eyes, the tutors' success in keeping historical education general and unsystematic worked to "enlarge the minds of men who would meet just such conditions in the world they were to rule." Historical study "met a large variety of intellectual and practical needs in the last days of British supremacy in the world."<sup>85</sup> It provided not only an ideologically stabilizing view of the past, but the kind of mental training and character development that legitimated the new ruling elite. As Phillip Elliott has pointed out, opening the competition for the Home and India Civil Service in the late nineteenth century wound up giving the universities a new purpose at a time when they seemed to have lost their sense of direction.<sup>86</sup> The ideal candidate for higher level administration was not the specialist but the generalist, the man whose liberal university education had cultivated in him the mental properties that would enable him to handle any situation. This model of leadership drew far more from the older ideal of the gentlemanly professionalism than from the occupational professionalism of the expert or specialist. It tended not to open the governing elite to the business and commercial classes, but to institutionalize the connection between the new professional classes and the older social elite.<sup>87</sup> History had from the earliest days been one of the subjects for the Civil Service examinations. The method of its study was even more significant than its content. Historical study had the advantage of providing practical information while offering the kind of intellectual discipline and character formation that distinguished liberal education from utilitarian training. The Oxford history schools were all the more effective in continuing to train the gentleman professionals of the future precisely because they failed to make themselves more professional in the occupational sense. The increased rigor of historical studies benefitted their students not as future

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<sup>84</sup>G.N. Clark, "The Origin of the Cambridge Modern History," *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 8 (1945), 57-64; Felix Gilbert, "European and American Historiography," in *History*, by John Higham with Leonard Kreiger and Felix Gilbert (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), p. 345.

<sup>85</sup>R.W. Southern, *The Shape and Substance of Academic History*, pp. 5, 17.

<sup>86</sup>Elliott, *The Sociology of the Professions*, p. 47; see also Christopher Kent, *Brains and Numbers* (Toronto, 1978), pp. 17-18.

<sup>87</sup>Elliott, pp. 49, 54-55. See also Joseph Ben-David and Z. Zloczower, "Universities and Academic Systems in Modern Societies," *European Journal of Sociology*, 3 (1962), 45-84.

historians but as the future custodians of an increasingly diverse society, a society whose control depended upon a more complex but not necessarily a more technical or specialized understanding of problems and issues. Such attitudes also suggest reasons for the more rapid development of professionalized study in history at the provincial and civic universities, since these were patronized by the classes largely shut out of the ancient universities and less influenced by the stigma attached to utilitarian training.<sup>88</sup>

In the culturally dominant ancient universities, professionalization of historians meant first and foremost professionalization of liberal educators in history. The Historical Association reflected this bias: from its beginnings as a professional organization in 1906, its major purpose was to improve historical teaching, especially in the secondary schools.<sup>89</sup> Although the control and upgrading of secondary education was a priority of early professionals in Germany and America as well, the extent to which the ends of liberal education continued to exert their control over the teaching of history in England is distinctive. At the ancient universities, specialization and rationalization accommodated themselves to liberal education, not vice versa. In history as in other disciplines a professional hierarchy developed with the more research-oriented professoriate at the top. But this hierarchical principle was implicitly challenged by the egalitarianism of the tutorial ideal, in which one's standing derived not so much from specialized expertise as from an equality of "voice and status among qualified practitioners."<sup>90</sup> Research achievements were never the sole or even the most important criterion for rewards within this system. These factors help account for the continued high priority placed on teaching over research at these universities. A.H. Halsey and M.H. Trow's generalizations about British academics today hold true with particular force for historians: "they reinforce and reflect a set of attitudes which may be distinguished from professional careerism through specialized research and which encourages a way of academic life emphasizing teaching and, in the best sense, amateurism."<sup>91</sup>

In other respects, of course, their commitment to teaching made historians like other academics members of "the key profession," to borrow H.J. Perkin's term. In the early twentieth century they began to control the process by which other professionals were selected and educated. But in the case of history they controlled it by supplying mental discipline more than a body of expertise. Rather than reinforcing the theoretical under-

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<sup>88</sup>Ben-David and Zloczower, "Universities and Academic Systems," pp. 63-64, A.L. Halsey and M.A. Trow, *The British Academics* (London, 1971), p. 40.

<sup>89</sup>Milne, "History at the Universities," p. 43. A typical result of efforts to professionalize teaching is William A. J. Archbold (ed.) *Essays on the Teaching of History* (Cambridge, 1901).

<sup>90</sup>H.J. Perkin, *Key Profession: A History of the Association of University Teachers* (New York, 1969), p. 5. See also Ben-David and Zloczower, pp. 69-70.

<sup>91</sup>Halsey and Trow, *The British Academics*, pp. 239-40; see also their survey of attitudes toward teaching and research, pp. 280ff.



pinnings of professional knowledge, the “historical power” of judgment stressed in undergraduate education prolonged pragmatic and anachronistic assumptions implicitly at odds with history’s claims to be scientific. This suggests that late Victorian fears about history and the historian were somewhat misconceived. Attacks on “literary” history did not entail loss of faith in history’s moral and political utility. Many historians did turn away from the needs and interests of the general public, but not to the needs and interests of fellow professionals exclusively. They aided the process—implicit in professionalization—whereby knowledge became the domain of an elite, but not by establishing a monopoly of expertise over knowledge in precisely the way other professionals did. Making historical study more rigorous enhanced its prestige more than its autonomy; that prestige attracted more members of a social elite seeking credentials of general intellectual ability than it did future historians. The “literary” historians had assumed that history’s purpose was to make the world morally and intellectually intelligible to a wide audience; for the Oxbridge historians, historical study became a primary means by which a liberally educated ruling class could command society.<sup>32</sup> The withdrawal of historians into the academy did not signify so much a break with the wider society as a different way of influencing it. It was no coincidence that the popularity of historical study began to decline after 1930. With the final dissolution of the constitutional bias of historical study and of the credibility of the Whig view, history could no longer offer the same comprehensive and practical explanation of the past. At the same time, the new research methods introduced by scholars like Namier only underscored the growing intractability of professionals where such explanation was concerned.<sup>33</sup>

Other factors distinguished the early development of professionalism in England from that of Europe and America. Joseph Ben-David notes that the dominance of the ancient British universities ruled out the kind of competition that spurred advances in research and technical training in Germany.<sup>34</sup> Felix Gilbert cites the importance of government support and control in stimulating historical study and shaping the educational and archival bureaucracies on the continent. He also notes that the acceptance of critical methods and scholarly standards in England was imitative and incomplete because it “did not arise from a need to adjust the universities to the requirements of a changed political structure”<sup>35</sup> in the sense that this was true in Europe. In the United States, the hopes of Herbert B. Adams that the American Historical Association would provide a “chan-

<sup>32</sup>Ben Knights, *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 211-12 makes this argument for university education in general.

<sup>33</sup>See, e.g., Blaas’s account of the lack of cooperation Col. Wedgewood met with from Namier and J.E. Neale for his proposed biographical history of parliament, pp. 332-34.

<sup>34</sup>Ben-David and Zloczower, “Universities and Academic Systems,” p. 66.

<sup>35</sup>Felix Gilbert, “European and American Historiography,” p. 336.

nel through which the aristocracy of culture might, in historical matters, exert a vigorous, uplifting influence on national policies” were never fulfilled. Without such an alliance between the patrician intellectuals and the academicians as existed in England, the professionals turned inward to their own concerns and the men of letters stopped writing of their own accord.<sup>96</sup> The prestige of the German research model had been higher from the start in the United States, and graduate study developed much more rapidly.<sup>97</sup> By 1910 sixteen American universities were training doctoral candidates in history, and had already produced approximately two-hundred fifty Ph.D.s.<sup>98</sup> The more egalitarian nature of the American university kept teaching an important function, but did not give it the prestige enjoyed in Britain. The assimilation of history to the liberal ideal helps explain why the status contradictions between teaching and research, endemic in academic professionalism, never became so acute in the case of the English historians. It also testifies to the lasting influence of “literary” history in endowing the British historian with continuing cultural authority—the kind of authority that many disciplines forfeited as the price of professionalization.

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

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<sup>96</sup>Higham, Kreiger, and Gilbert, *History*, p. 14.

<sup>97</sup>Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, 1965) and Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York, 1976) examine the different relationships between teaching and academic professionalism in American universities.

<sup>98</sup>Higham, Kreiger, and Gilbert, *History*, p. 19. The Ph.D. and D.Phil. degrees were not introduced at British universities until near the end of the first world war.