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AMATEUR IDEALS AND
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

The last fifty years have witnessed great changes in the management of Clio's temple. Her inspired prophets and bards have passed away and been succeeded by the priests of an established church; the vulgar have been excluded from the Court of the Gentiles; doctrine has been defined; heretics have been excommunicated; and the tombs of the aforesaid prophets have been duly blackened by the new hierarchy. While these changes were in process the statue of the Muse was seen to wink an eye. Was it in approval, or in derision?

In his anxiety to defend "Clio, A Muse," \textsuperscript{1} G. M. Trevelyan was too hasty in proclaiming the Götterdämmerung of "literary" history. John Osborne uses Trevelyan's own success to convince us of the continued vigor of the belletristic tradition in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{2} Perception is often more important than reality in shaping public debate, however. Trevelyan's metaphors suggest how much was thought to be at stake in the new revelation, and why the public an-
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Protagonism between the rival faiths had reached such a high pitch by
the turn of the century. The most important issue in defining profes­
sional identity was the historian’s methodology or expertise per se
but his relationship to his audience. The professional’s public image
was formed less by the actual traits of his work than by his claims
about that work. Pluralism undermined the status professionals were
trying to claim for themselves; in order to safeguard their new author­
ity, many felt they had to repudiate the old one. Public expectations
about writing and evaluating history had to be rejected lest they com­
promise that new authority. My purpose here is to examine both the
rhetoric and the reality of the debate that surrounded the profession­
al’s struggle to define his position. I will argue that in England the
continuities between the amateur and professional traditions were
more significant than the apparent conflicts. The ideals of the old
faith were decisive in forming the responsibilities of the new. Particu­
larly at Oxford and Cambridge, historical study developed in ways
that necessarily qualify generalizations about the professional’s
growing alienation from the needs and interests of a more general
public. Many mourned the death of the amateur tradition too soon.

On the face of it, the professional’s credo did challenge the assump­
tions of the “literary” tradition in explicit ways. For the historian as
man of letters, a network of values connected the separate facts of
history and gave them meaning. Insight and imaginative identifica­
tion enabled the historian to see the truth more clearly than analysis
and criticism. His authority rested on his effectiveness as a moral
teacher; his first priority was to shape history to attract and instruct a
wide general public. Professional status rested on different assump­
tions. For the professional the new research ideal of advancing
knowledge outweighed the liberal ideal of training mind and charac­
ter as the goal of learning. To support professional standards, his­
tory had to be viewed as a body of objective and systematic knowledge,
attained by technical training whose standards fellow experts deter­
mined. Although the certification of this training came more and
more to mean university study leading to an academic career, the ex­
act course 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
was qualified to make and evaluate historical judgments and to de­
terminate the priorities that should direct historical study.

The clearest of those priorities was epitomized in the cult of origi­
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nal research. Freeman paid lip service to this ideal: William Stubbs was a more important convert since he actually practiced what Freeman only preached. In his Inaugural Lecture as Regius Professor at Oxford in 1866, he looked forward to founding an historical school that would join “with the other workers of Europe in a common task” and build “not upon Hallam and Palgrave and Kemble and Froude and Macaulay” but on newly collected records and manuscript materials. The opening of archives and the outpouring of published texts and documents in the second half of the century provided the new researcher with plenty to do. So great became the volume of available manuscript materials that by 1895 Lord 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.”

The cult of original research had important implications for the shape of historical writing. The exigencies of the research ideal militated against the broad-scale syntheses beloved by the “literary” school. Stubbs, like S. R. Gardiner and Frederic Maitland, two other early professionals, was prominent as an editor. The more synthetic works of such men concentrated on specialized subjects like legal history that lent themselves to minute documentation. Early examples include Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England* (1873-78), 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 political narrative 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 eyewitness, 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."  

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." In its most extreme form, the research ideal militated against any kind of conclusive exposition at all. The assumption that having to produce written results for the public took time away from research was a central argument of those supporting the reallocation of college funds to endow research at the universities in the late nineteenth century. 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." 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 commitment to research. And Acton himself despite (or perhaps because of) his prodigious erudition left only brilliant fragments behind him.

Whatever practical constraints new standards for research imposed on the historian's work were finally less influential than assumptions about audience in molding professional identity. The rising chorus of criticism directed at "literary" historians from the seventies on reflected less a debate over style than over professional authority. Professionalism required 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." 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." But as Freeman's case makes clear, too much was at stake for early professionals to rest content with a separate but equal audience
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for their work. Professional authority depended upon convincing the public that serious history was an undertaking only trained scholars could conduct and whose merits only they could judge. The great influence exercised by "literary" historians like Froude constituted a rival authority, one that would-be professionals like Freeman felt compelled to discredit in order to distinguish their own position. Rhetorical exaggeration on both sides of the ensuing debate rapidly moved the alleged incompatibility of popular and professional standards toward a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Part of this exaggeration was inspired by changes in the late Victorian reading public, changes that increased professional anxiety about defining and maintaining standards. 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. The concerns of professional historians about the type of writing that attracted such audiences were typical of more general fears. Many commentators believed that the dramatic growth of popular literature in the second half of the century had drastically reduced its overall quality. In the same vein, 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. Professionals came to feel that they had to counteract not only the influence of Froude, Carlyle, and Macaulay, but also that of the inferior popularizers whom their success had encouraged. Freeman's defense of Macaulay and Gardiner's of Green notwithstanding, most "literary" historians were held guilty by association with vulgarized history. If Macaulay simply mirrored the most Philistine prejudices and Green provided ideas "ready-made," how much more superficial must the latest Mudie's favorite be? If writers of Froude's and Carlyle's genius misled readers with "dangerous" views, if the "striving for pictorial effect" warped the judgment of even the best minds, what damage might really unscrupulous popularizers do?

Fine distinctions were soon lost in the assault on all writing enjoyed by an audience whose frivolous taste and short attention span seemed to pose grave threats to the quality of all serious literature.
Criticisms of specific "literary" historians tended to harden into the categorical position that artistic imagination and compelling narration were completely incompatible with objective scholarship. The artist, Fisher argued, was too easily carried beyond the boundaries of his evidence: he might be tempted "to 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." 18 Picturesque history was labeled superficial by definition, producing what Mandell Creighton called "a purely external view of the course of affairs." 19 J. R. Seeley stated the professional complaint in its baldest form: "History only becomes interesting to the general public by being corrupted, by being adulterated with sweet, unwholesome stuff to please the popular palate." 20

With battle positions like these being drawn, it is 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, or that the English Historical Review felt compelled to proclaim in its first issue that "no allurements of style will secure insertion for a popular réchauffée of facts already known or ideas already suggested." 21 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." 22 Although early issues still included some materials of interest to "an educated man, not specially conversant with history," 23 true to Green's prophecy Creighton decided that the Review could not be popularized "without entirely changing its character and making it useless to students." 24

And yet, the exaggerated rhetoric of this debate implied more dramatic distinctions between popular and professional styles than actually existed. We have seen that beneath Freeman's crusty professionalism lurked the epic poet manqué. 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. 25 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. 26 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 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 justified in order to stake out new ground for themselves.

In the process, of course, they made the public all the more protective of its own turf. The resentful reactions of readers 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 example, makes clear that despite the rebuffs of the professionals, they were slow to accept their dismissal as qualified judges of what constituted "good" history. The Saturday Review and the English Historical Review 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 qualifications as historian. 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. 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 Review and the English Historical Review might be predictably complimentary of his achievements, but more popular journals labeled him rather an editor and lexicographer than an historian.

Defenders of "literary" history went on the offensive as well. We have seen how popular audiences made their preference for Macaulay and Froude a challenge to scholarly detractors of their favorites. Among the high popularizers of the nineties, men like Augustine Bir-
reill, 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.31 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.”32

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.”33 It was this position that Frederic Harrison parodied in Aethelbald Wessex, the tutor of the Freeman school who insisted that no synthesis could take place until every fact had been catalogued; he went 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.34 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.”35 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.36 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.”37

In addition to being interpreted as a renunciation of the historian’s responsibility to the general public, pronouncing “literary” history
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and scientific scholarship to be incompatible 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." The quality of popularized work tended to sink rather than improve as the market expanded. The merchandizing of history unleashed a deluge of what Trevelyan described as "publishers' books" of the type "generically known 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 pinnacled afar on frozen heights of science, not to be approached save after a long novitiate." Trying to strike a happy medium between popular and "scientific" history became considerably more of a challenge once "literary" history had been tarred by the same brush as this kind of vulgarization. This situation 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 acknowledgment of their authority, but found their definition of that authority contradicting 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' inclination to limited research rather than broad synthesis, to address fellow professionals rather than cater to the public. 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. The winning of professional authority at the expense of this cultural authority was an outcome few early professionals were willing to accept. Freeman's example confirms a wider pattern. 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 who waged such attacks, what gave the historian his stature in the first place was still conventional Victorian assumptions about history's function and value. I have shown how the exigencies of public debate exaggerated differences between "literary" and professional historians where style and audience were concerned. If we turn to consider the professional in his native habitat, the History School, we find a similar situation. The triumph of the research ideal was in many ways more apparent than real; especially at the ancient universities, the enduring vitality of liberal education provided a medium in which traditional assumptions about history's practical and moral importance continued to thrive. Historical study within the academy provided a way of salvaging the most important goals of "literary" history without the problematic literary form, but it also complicated the question of professional identity. Their continuing allegiance to history's preeminent importance as a moral and political guide in the service of a wider society prevented many Oxbridge historians from becoming alienated from the needs and interests of a more general public in the sense that many American and European scholars did. On the other hand, this allegiance left them implicitly at odds with professionalism's call for an audience of experts and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. In either case I would argue that the transition from "literary" to professional history in England was less a break than a continuum in which, by and large, the demands of professionalism accommodated themselves to the assumptions underlying "literary" history rather than vice versa.

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 "literary" 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.” 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. 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. 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 professionalism involved some specialization on their part—e.g., many of them became the “combined lecturers” who prepared students for exams in the new schools. 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 ambiguity 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 on a par with 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 postgraduate 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.” 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 Vino-
gradoff did conduct two postgraduate seminars at Oxford, but Vino­
gradoff complained that his students did not take to this continental
style of education.  

At Cambridge the professors met with more success in accommo­
dating the Tripos to specialized research, but some of the same con­
flicts arose. From the late nineteenth century, two views opposed
one another. One group valued history for its practical uses in prepar­
ing 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, theories that would in turn form the basis of a “po­
litical 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 1879
Tripos. Attempts to accommodate both approaches in the reforms of
1897 were mutually unsatisfactory, resulting in what to Maitland re­
sembled “rather the programme of a Variety Show than the sober
programme of an Historical School.” Although emphasis on out­
lines 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 encour­
aged practical rather than professional aims.

With these constraints on graduate study, postgraduate schools
grew only slowly at the ancient universities. It was rather the civic and
provincial universities, from the beginning dominated by the profes­
soriate and more heavily influenced by the occupational profes­
sonalism of scientific and technical fields, that provided the first signifi­
cant support for post-graduate work. During the first quarter of the
century, the History School shaped by T. F. Tout at Manchester be­
came “a Mecca for serious-minded young scholars from the older
universities.” Albert Pollard’s hopes of founding a research center
in London were realized in 1921 when the Institute for Historical
Research first opened its doors. Although dismissed at first as a mere
“Ph.D. factory,” the Institute gradually gained support and recogni­
tion 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 profes­
sors. For Freeman, as we recall, the discovery of practical political
lessons was more important than "the search for truth for its own sake." His proselytizing for "original authorities" notwithstanding, as a teacher he much preferred the old-fashioned mastery of great books. At Cambridge J. R. Seeley shared as much in Freeman's practical view of historical education as he did his peevish irritation at dilettantes. Seeley's belief that history was first and foremost "the school of statesmanship" (a school whose "laws" similarly endowed his own prejudices with "scientific" status) worked against specialized scholarship and an appreciation of the contemporary context of events in the same ways as had "literary" history. 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.49

Even men with more compelling professional credentials 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."50 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."51 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 Pocwicke, publicly encouraged amateur writing.52

The attitude prevalent in Seeley's time—that Regius Professors had
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a message to convey to the world at large—never really died out, de­
spite a gradual upgrading of the scholarly credentials of appointees.
Maitland turned down the chance to succeed Acton in 1901 for this
very reason: "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."53 Gardiner likewise
had rejected the chance to succeed Froude because he could not face
the lecturing requirements.54 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 sta­
ture as George Kitson Clark and R. W. Southern (who became Chi­
chele Professor at Oxford in 1961) continue to defend general educa­
tion 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.55

The belief in this importance by no means ruled out more profes­
sional standards of scholarship. But it did operate in British historio­
graphy to compromise objectivity and critical perspective, in large
part because it was so inextricably intertwined with the kind of
anachronisms implicit in the Whig view. Stressing the preservative
nature of historical innovations and reconstructing a series of pre­
cedents 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. In the work
of Stubbs and Freeman, the specifics of the Whig view had won the
eyearly professional seal of approval. Bury and Acton were less partisan,
but their reading of western history as the progress of political and
intellectual freedom offered less provincial and less immanent ver­
sions of the same assumptions.56 If there was gradual recognition of
the Whig view's particular anachronisms and fallacies of intentional­
ity among early twentieth-century professionals like Pollard and
Tout, the belief in history's political relevance 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 absolut­
ism in an attempt to reconstruct the origins of the modern state and
civil service.57 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 legitimize 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. The continued reliance on facts speaking for themselves made unconscious value judgments all the harder to detect. The compatibility of political apologetics with professional scholarship had been demonstrated by Ranke himself. Georg Iggers points out the ways 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.

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. As Kitson Clark points out, however, few of these viewed themselves as future historians: history had become a haven for students who "were not clear what else they wanted to do." 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 motivated the Cambridge Modern History, a work aimed, in Acton's words, "to bring home to every man . . . the ripest conclusions of international research." It was precisely because of his conception of its audience that Acton intended it not as a chronicle of facts for
their own sake, but a compendium whose proportions were shaped by what he judged to be their 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.62

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."63 It provided not only an ideologically stabilizing view of the national past, but the kind of mental training and character development that certified 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.64 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 professional 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.65

History had from the earliest days been one of the subjects for the Civil Service examinations. The method its study entailed was even more significant than its content. It 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 Oxbridge 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 from the historian's point of view. The increased rigor of historical studies benefitted these men not as future historians but as the future custodians of an increasingly diverse society, a society where 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
specialized and technical training 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.\textsuperscript{66}

In the culturally dominant ancient universities, professionalization of historians meant first and foremost professionalization of liberal educators in history. The Historical Association, founded in 1906, reflected this bias: its original purpose was to improve historical teaching, especially in the secondary schools, although professionals like Pollard, Firth, and Tout succeeded in moving it toward more scholarly concerns in later years.\textsuperscript{67} The control and upgrading of secondary education was a priority of early professionals in Germany and America as well, but the extent to which the ends of liberal education continued to exert their control over the way history was taught 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 equality was based not so much on specialized expertise as on an equality of “voice and status among qualified practitioners.”\textsuperscript{68} Research achievements were never the sole or even 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 specialised research and which encourage a way of academic life emphasizing teaching and, in the best sense, amateurism.”\textsuperscript{69}

In another respect, 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 underpinnings of professional knowledge, the “historical power” of judgment provided by undergraduate education prolonged pragmatic and anachronistic assumptions implicitly
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at odds with history’s claims to be scientific. This suggests that late Victorian fears about history and the historian were somewhat misaimed. Rejecting “literary” style as inappropriate 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. 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 is no coincidence that history’s popularity as a field of 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 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.

Other factors distinguished the early development of professionalism in England from that in 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. 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” in the sense that this was true in Europe. Doris Goldstein argues that the relative lack of support from government and universities made all the more important the role of voluntary organizations like the Royal Historical Society and the
British Academy in developing a sense of community among British professionals. In the United States, the hopes of Herbert B. Adams that the American Historical Association would provide a "channel through which the aristocracy of culture might, in historical matters, exert a vigorous, uplifting influence on national policies" never materialized. 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. The prestige of the German research model had been higher from the start in the United States, and graduate study developed much more rapidly. By 1910 sixteen American universities were training doctoral candidates in history, and had already produced approximately two hundred fifty Ph.D.s in history. The more egalitarian nature of the American university kept teaching an important function, but did not give it the prestige it 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 English historians. It also testifies to the lasting influence of the amateur tradition in endowing the British historian with continuing cultural authority—the kind of authority that many disciplines forfeited as the price of professionalization. The animating ideals of the amateur, the sage, the man of letters, the "literary" historian, lived on in their twentieth-century successors who continued to measure historical knowledge not in terms of expertise alone—who by believing in history's humanizing power helped to make that power a continuing reality.