

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar. *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. Pp. 505. Can\$24.95 paper, Can\$60.00 cloth.

Over the past decade and more, the study of professions and professionalization has attracted considerable attention. Much of that interest has come from social scientists interested in defining the attributes of a profession, and in establishing models that emphasize exclusionary practices, credentialism, and selfish protectionism. These studies, at worst mechanistic and reductionist, often demonstrate little regard for the historical context that shaped and was shaped by professional practice and activity. In this meticulously researched and gracefully written addition to the Ontario Historical Studies Series, R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar take a decidedly historical approach to the subject, locating the professions and their transformation in the changing matrix of social, intellectual, and political authority over time. Because the very idea of a profession "is a historically grounded concept," they argue, "its meaning must emerge from a close study of the ways in which people understood it in the past, rather than by ahistorical theorizing" (p. xii). The book touches upon a number of subjects, including the nature of professional work and the changing context of professional education, and, in an interesting distillation of the entries in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, the authors provide a career profile of professional gentlemen, their material circumstances, and their place in the social hierarchy. The result is a study that transcends both its limited regional focus and the distortions of theoretical abstraction, and makes a decidedly important contribution to our understanding of the ebb and flow of cultural authority, indeed of the very meaning of the term profession in nineteenth-century life.

The first half of the book centres upon the trinity of gentlemanly professions, divinity, medicine, and the law. In the Georgian and early Victorian colonial world, the authors observe, the social authority of professional men derived from their liberal education, their orthodox political and constitutional views, and their "gentlemanly" character, as much as from their skill as practitioners. Armed with these attributes of respectability, lawyers, clergymen, and medical doctors assumed their place among the Upper Canadian ruling class. But their authority was hardly uncontested. The Anglican and Presbyterian churches faced competition from Baptists, Methodists, and Congregationalists; the orthodox medical profession faced the challenge of irregular and unlicensed practitioners (especially from the homeopaths); and

the legal profession faced the challenge of antimonomopolists, who argued for reform of the law and the judiciary and advocated the introduction of arbitration or conciliation courts that would dispense with lawyers altogether. The challenge of popular radicalism meant an erosion of the privileged position of the gentlemanly professions. This was evident in the attack upon the clergy reserves and church establishment, in the transition from sponsorship to merit as the fundamental prerequisite for entrance into the legal profession (note the Attorney's Admission Act of 1857), and finally, in the compromise worked out between orthodox and homeopathic practitioners. This hardly turned the world upside down, however. Despite the levelling agenda of radical antimonomopolists, there would be no free trade in medicine and the law, and the Anglican and Presbyterian churches gradually accommodated themselves to the painful reality of disestablishment, shielded in part by the commutation clauses of the clergy reserves settlement. In *Gidney and Millar's* opinion, there was no abrupt jettisoning of the Georgian idea of the gentlemanly professions in the Victorian period. Rather, "the language of the Georgian professional gentleman . . . [was] transmuted but not abandoned, and . . . would be preserved, albeit in much modified form, within the ideology of modern professionalism" (p. 382).

The second half of the book deals with the reconstruction of the ideals of professionalism in the last half of the nineteenth century. The story here involves the withering of the Georgian notion of the learned professions, the new emphasis on scientific education and technical expertise in the Victorian era, the claims of professional competence emanating from civil engineers, educators, dentists, pharmacists, and architects, and the extent to which these "parvenues" secured their authority through a connection to university-based instruction and training. Obviously, others' claims to professional status would raise uncertainty among the traditional professions as to "who was then a gentleman?" This was especially the case when women began to lay claim to a place in the professional order. Yet, if the hegemony of the gentlemanly professions was challenged, much would remain unchanged over the course of the nineteenth century. On the whole, the professions remained "resolutely white, resolutely of British stock, resolutely male; and largely from comfortable, if not privileged backgrounds" (p. 383).

This is an admirable study, and no one interested in the impulse to professionalize can dare ignore its important insights. If there is a weakness to the book, it derives from the authors' decision to interpret professionalization as an aspect of occupations in transition and of the waxing and waning of cultural authority and status which accompanied that transformation, rather than as an aspect of a broader process of class formation and reformulation in a constantly changing capitalist system of production and state formation. The

virtue of Gidney and Millar's approach is that it allows us to understand clearly the circumstances, motivation, and ideological assumptions of each of those groups who made claims of professional competence over time, the rivalries that divided them, and the accommodations that were achieved between them. The problem is that in this telling of the tale the links being forged between the professions and the reform-minded bourgeoisie throughout the nineteenth century remain obscure. That accommodation became especially obvious in the age of the social gospel and the era of progressive reform, yet we learn little about it here, although the authors hint at it now and then. Two important questions arise as a consequence. To what extent was the cultural and social legitimacy of the various professions, old and new, secured by their involvement in the turn-of-the-century reform movement? And, to what degree is it possible to see the professionalization process as an aspect of class formation? It has always struck me as curious that the most notable interpreters of an emerging professional society, such as Harold Perkin, Thomas Haskell, and Robert Wiebe, have treated professionals as a class apart. In some ways, of course, they are. But such an approach also renders it unlikely that we will soon see an equivalent of E. P. Thompson's "making of the working class" emerging with respect to those who rule. Perhaps if Gidney and Millar were to carry the story forward into the twentieth century, building upon their vast knowledge about the professions and their social authority, and upon their careful use of evidence and respect for the canons of historical scholarship, a broader analysis of the professions' place in the larger ruling order might be possible. Of course, such a study, if it were to succeed, would repudiate a static view of class, and favour a dynamic and historically contingent study of class formation. On the basis of this superb volume, I would encourage the authors to entertain a project of that sort.

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Noël Baillargeon. *Le Séminaire de Québec de 1800 à 1850*. Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1994. Pp. 410.

L'abbé Noël Baillargeon poursuit, avec une constance exemplaire, la publication de son histoire du Séminaire de Québec. Le premier volume, paru en 1972, a été suivi d'un deuxième en 1977 et d'un troisième en 1981. Le quatrième vient de paraître après un intervalle un peu plus long. Comme