

GEOFFREY HOLMES — *Augustan England: Professions, State and Society, 1680-1730*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982. Pp. xiv, 322.

Let us be clear at the outset what this book is *not*. It is not an account of England in the Augustan period. Quite specifically, it is a social and institutional history of the professions during the half-century when, according to the author, they were transformed in character and numbers. With this caveat, *Augustan England* is an extremely useful addition to the historiography of the period, sharpening our awareness of the development of an important occupational segment of the population, and deepening our understanding of English society on the eve of the industrial revolution.

What was a profession, and how was it distinguished from other occupations? It was a means of livelihood, basically intellectual in nature, requiring a lengthy vocational training which terminated in a recognized qualification. The traditional "great professions" were the Church, the Law and Medicine. However, at the end of the seventeenth century the professions were in a state of flux as they underwent rampant growth in the number of practitioners and in the occupations that were recognized as professions. A number of occupations of shadowy status, for example, scribes (real estate brokers) and apothecaries (pharmacists), emerged as fully-fledged professionals by 1700. Other professions like teaching, the army, the navy and the civil service became much better paid in the Augustan period, while their status improved correspondingly. New professions sprang up: architecture, music, estate stewardship, surveying. Even landscape gardening and journalism won recognition. Humbler professionals were able to call themselves "Mr." or "gent." by the eighteenth century; nor were eyebrows raised by the appropriation of "esq." by barristers and physicians.

Why did the professions proliferate and flourish around 1700? Holmes convincingly argues that it was because of England's growing prosperity, economic complexity, urbanization and social mobility. Moreover, between 1689 and 1713 England was engaged in warfare of unprecedented magnitude. Because she was victorious, warfare added tremendously to her wealth, and spurred invention and innovation in many fields. The professions became easier of access, since the conception of them as exclusively learned occupations was fundamentally modified. Holmes thus revises Lawrence Stone's thesis of an increasingly immobile society after 1660. Enrolment at Oxford and Cambridge may have declined after the Restoration, but the number of clergy, lawyers and teachers increased, as did virtually every other profession. Holmes's estimate is that all the professions grew by 70 percent after 1680, to reach a combined total of 55,000 to 60,000. The single largest profession continued to be the Church, followed by the permanent civil service, law and teaching. These occupations remained the favourite preserve of sons of the gentry, but as apprenticeship replaced university training, and as the cost of access cheapened, they offered many avenues for upward social mobility. "In this way, by a curious paradox that same transformation of the professions which was so vital a force for social change in England became, almost by the same token, a powerful tranquillizing and stabilizing agent as well" (p. 18).

To me the chapters on medicine are the most fascinating in the book. The Augustan period witnessed a fusion of the three main branches: physicians, apothecaries, and surgeons, so that by the end of the period they became known by the common name "doctor". Since 1518 the Royal College of Physicians had enjoyed the exclusive right to license physicians within a seven-mile radius of London. Unfortunately it made entry to the college difficult; consequently numbers languished at a time when the demand for medical services was growing more insistent. Country physicians were licensed by bishops who, though conscientious, were markedly more lenient in their requirements than the Royal College. The fact that it took six to twelve years to train as a physician at Oxford or Cambridge, whereas the excellent schools at Padua, Leyden, Rheims or Edinburgh granted a degree in two years or less, led

to an exodus of bright students to the continent and to Scotland. Oxbridge meanwhile continued to base its training on book-learning. Dissection was frowned upon; instead reliance continued to be placed on tried and untrue (and painful) remedies — purges, vomits and bloodlettings.

The sclerotic attitudes of Oxbridge and the Royal College left an opening through which apothecaries and surgeons were not slow to step. The rise of apothecaries (ancestors of the modern G.P.) was encouraged by 1) the fact that most people could not afford physicians' fees; 2) the voyages of discovery, as well as peace with Spain after 1604, which led to the preparation of a vast new menu of exotic drugs from the east, including many pain-killing palliatives; and 3) the plague of 1665 when most physicians fled London, while most apothecaries stayed, "gaining in abundance both patients and general admiration" (p. 185). In a landmark ruling by the House of Lords in 1704 apothecaries won the right to charge for giving medical advice as well as selling drugs. This ruling established their status as doctors.

Surgeons rose even higher from lowlier social origins. Tracing their descent from medieval barbers they gradually added the setting of broken limbs, pulling teeth, and the treatment of venereal disease to their repertoire. Frequent warfare from the 1650s onward furnished ample opportunity to hone their skills. But their full flowering had to await the development of the science of anatomical dissection after 1700. Then Surgeons' Hall and the sixteen new eighteenth-century London hospitals blossomed as teaching centres. Cutting for kidney stones seems to have become the favourite operation of the eighteenth century. Holmes challenges the dismal assessment of Thomas McKeown as to the effectiveness of doctors in healing illness before the nineteenth century, concluding that "surgeons of late-Augustan England were, at their best, the most persuasive of all ambassadors for medicine as a profession." It cannot be denied that sensitive medical practitioners have at all times done a great deal to relieve distress, and even effect cures, but McKeown is probably right that the medical profession had minimal impact on human mortality figures before the introduction of the "miracle" drugs 40 to 50 years ago. Furthermore, it would have been appropriate for Holmes to acknowledge the point made by Keith Thomas in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, that even as late as the early eighteenth century the "cunning folk" of rural England probably accomplished more healing and relief of pain than all the physicians, surgeons and apothecaries put together, and at a fraction of the cost.

These minor reservations apart, the book can be recommended as offering a convincing argument for the dynamism and intellectual creativity of Augustan England, and as an illuminating contribution to the social history of that half-century.

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GREGOR DALLAS — *The Imperfect Peasant Economy: The Loire Country, 1800-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. Pp. xiv, 352.

In the 1920s a Russian economist, Alexandr Vasilevich Chayanov, published a book based on data assembled by agricultural specialists working for the pre-revolutionary *zemstva*. Chayanov's *Theory of Peasant Economy* argued that peasant behaviour could not properly be understood by using the concepts of marginal analysis. Peasant farmers, he concluded, did not look upon their labour as a variable cost, nor did they set output targets as a function