

## EQUAL FEATS UNEQUALLY REWARDED

PETER FIDLER: CANADA'S FORGOTTEN SURVEYOR, 1769-1822

By J. G. MacGregor

McClelland and Stewart, 265 pages, \$10

Reviewed by H. GEORGE CLASSEN

The modern surveyor dwells in a sort of professional twilight. His educational standards are flexible, his identity distressingly fluid. He has to keep on top of an awesome welter of legal, technical, and mathematical details, battle bloodthirsty mosquitoes and beady-eyed subdividers, and is rewarded with vast public indifference. When last did a movie or television play feature a surveyor?

Is it any wonder then that surveyors cast a nostalgic eye upon their illustrious predecessors, whose ghosts still stride our landscapes and our history books like colossi?

But all is not well even in these entrancing vistas. The muse of history scatters fame with a fickle hand, and equal achievements are most unequally rewarded. This, says J. G.

MacGregor (the author of six other books on similar themes) is disturbingly true of Peter Fidler and David Thompson, and the purpose of his book is to remedy the situation and to do for Fidler what J. B. Tyrrell did for Thompson.

How far he has succeeded, the future may tell. Fidler's explorations lack the romantic sweep of those of his contemporary rival—such as Thompson's overland journey to the Pacific or his determination of the source of the Mississippi River—but he left a number of detailed official journals, which yield much information about the fur-trading days in the Prairies. These journals form the backbone of the book, fleshed out heavily with accounts culled from the writings of other traders and officials.

The story proceeds chronologi-

cally, but there is no development and consequently no suspense—just one meticulously chronicled tribulation after another—and the reader soon gives up trying to keep track of the peripatetic action and lets the procession of dates, places, Indians, harassments, winterings, and anecdotes wash over him like gentle autumn rain. The style is homespun.

Yet there is an unmistakably authentic flavor to this book, a feeling of exactly what it was like to be a fur trader in the far-off days when the West was truly wild. This is due entirely to the author's own absorbing interest in his subject, and his evident familiarity with the rugged land which Peter Fidler crisscrossed in canoe and saddle. This is plainly a book for kindred spirits.

THE GLOBE MAGAZINE

## THE PROFESSIONS: STATUS IN DECLINE

By FRASER ROBERTSON

The Ontario Legislature, at the behest of a group of engineers who no longer find much compensation in the glory of professional status, is reported about ready to turn doctors, lawyers, dentists, architects, land surveyors and engineers into trade unionists. Although some members of these professions are not much pleased by the prospect, the move is overdue. For too long now, the word professional, once honored, has been confused with the word mercenary. When knighthood is for sale, surely bargaining should be permissible; and do not forget that in this day and age anything that is for sale must be strictly regulated.

Several years ago, the Association of Professional Engineers spent some agonizing hours debating the propriety of graduate engineers' seeking the protection and the advantages offered mere tradesmen under the Labor Act. Considering that the engineers obtained professional status by act of Parliament, the nostalgia seemed a little bit artificial. Nevertheless, some valuable information was brought out.

Those who claimed it was unseemly for engineers to join up with the trade unionists argued that the nature of the training and of the activities he aspires to makes the engineer answerable only to his own conscience, guided by standards rather than directed by rules. It was on this basis that the engineers sought and obtained legal recognition as members of a profession.

That definition of professional has been hallowed by time. The priest, in theory, was answerable only to God. The professional soldier despised the mercenary who put money or preferment before honor. The barrister was the servant of no man, only the servant of the law, whereas solicitors were men of affairs who could be hired. Doctors, as distinguished from barber-surgeons, were masters of a mystery, rather than practitioners of a trade.

There was, of course, a great deal of humbug to the professions in the days of their greatest glory. Quite as

much, indeed, as there is now. In real life, an honest tradesman, artisan or journeyman had as much if not more chance of being regarded as honest, even though he could not aspire to being deemed a gentleman. But somehow, as education of the masses has progressed, the nice distinction of words has become blurred. Perhaps the elevation of teachers to the status of professional educators has had something to do with gradual abandonment of those fine old words that indicated a man had learned his job thoroughly, probably by working at it during a period of apprenticeship.

Nowadays, the distinction seems rather to be that a professional is a person who learned his trade in university, while the tradesman went to a trade school. A further distinction sometimes seems evident, in that professionals on occasion seem to think book learning and a diploma are all they need.

Of more real importance, however, is the argument that seems to have impressed the Labor Department at Queen's Park. It is that few men these days can afford or are permitted to exercise the privilege of being their own masters. Far more engineers work for hire than ever hang out their professional signboards.

This is the trend of the times. We very rapidly are moving toward the medieval system under which nearly every man was accountable to a master. The trade union is an ideal instrument for this purpose, whereas the professional association, which only establishes, at best, guidelines to its members, allows far too much freedom for a state bent on planning and regulating everything. We may honor those who argue in favor of more rather than less true professional conduct, but they are fighting a losing battle. They might just as well go quietly and exchange their individuality for their Social Security number and put themselves under the protection of the new class of great men in the modern hierarchy.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, THURS., MARCH 9, 1967