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Amateurism and the Victorians

VISITORS to Victorian Britain were often surprised by the amount of time devoted to sport amongst the middle and upper classes. Despite their reputation as sober and pious capitalists, even the business élite often seemed to be more interested in play than in work. The innovative and organizing genius of the Victorians for games turned out to be more durable than the philosophy of self-help or the evangelical revival, and Oxford athletes may have had more influence than the Oxford Movement. The vigour and scope of Victorian sport was quite remarkable, ranging from the subtle infiltration of the Field and the reorganizing of established activities like racing, boxing, and cricket to the wholesale transformation of the ancient forms of football and tennis. The new codified kinds of play, devised for the most part in the third quarter of the century, have become so commonplace that we tend to take them for granted as somehow logical and necessary results of industrialization. But this is to miss the point. The new games were certainly well suited to the life of the large industrial city, requiring only limited amounts of time and space, and utilizing improved communications to create national organizations that came into being to regulate the sporting life of the nation. Yet these changes in social conditions cannot explain the style and spirit in which the new sports were played nor the cultural centrality they came to have. For this we must look to the growth of the public schools and the distinctive range of ideas brought to bear on secondary and higher education in the mid-nineteenth century. Understanding the rise of the 'gentleman-amateur' is the key to understanding the cult of athleticism.

1. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of élite education in the nineteenth century was the changing status of games. The sons

of the landed and the wealthy had always played games at school, but until the middle years of the century their masters had taken little or no interest in such activities save for the occasional intervention to prevent a particularly brutal affray or to stop boys rampaging around the land which bordered the school. At some of the most famous schools the authorities actually attempted to forbid organized games. In a famous outburst, Samuel Butler, the head of Shrewsbury from 1798 to 1836, condemned football as 'more fit for farm boys and labourers than for young gentlemen', although he later gave up the struggle and provided a football pitch so as to keep the game within the school boundary. The head of Westminster was determined to put a stop to the rowing matches that had been organized by the boys from the late eighteenth century. After successfully preventing the annual race with Eton in 1834, he tried to stop another race between local boys and the scholars. Such measures were deeply unpopular. Despite the efforts of what one of his charges called this 'cowardly, snivelling, ungentlemanlike, treble damnable shit of a Headmaster', the boys rowed their race between Vauxhall Bridge and Putney. The Master of Balliol similarly tried to spike the guns of one of the members of the first Oxford Boat Race crew in 1829 by requiring Johnathon James Toogood to go to a logic lecture on the day of the race. But the oarsman lived up to his name and contrived both to attend to his academic duties and to row in a race at Henley that was the subject of much speculation in *Bell's Life* and wagering amongst the 20,000 spectators lining the banks. Even the great Thomas Arnold of Rugby, who was mistakenly idolized by subsequent advocates of public school sports, had no time for games himself. The public schools may have been decadent, but he intended to reform them in the classroom and the chapel, not on the games field.[1]

The contrast with late Victorian and Edwardian educators is quite striking. Jesus College, Cambridge, head of the river for eleven consecutive years from 1875, was said to be 'nothing but a boat club'. This was not quite fair as the college excelled at other sports too; it was only in academic matters that it lacked

[1] T. J. L. Chandler, 'The Emergence of Athleticism', in *Proc. XI HISPA International Congress*, ed. J. A. Mangan (1987), pp. 27–32; C. Dodd, *The Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race* (1983), ch. 1.

distinction. Of twenty-nine freshmen entering the college in 1895, seventeen went on to represent the university in rugby, soccer, cricket, or rowing. The official support for games at Oxford and Cambridge permitted 'rowing men' to spend 790 of the 800 or so days of their nine terms 'on the river', or so at least claimed an indulgently ironic Leslie Stephen, who combined academic achievement with a lifelong devotion to Cambridge rowing. In this, of course, the ancient universities were merely reflecting the public school devotion to games, which was perhaps their most outstanding characteristic in the second half of the century. Whereas boys who loved sports might have been pronounced 'idle' by earlier generations, Victorian schoolmasters were inclined to reserve that word for those who did not care for games. 'Any lower boy in this house who does not play football once a day and twice on half holiday will be fined half a crown and kicked', read a notice at Eton, whose headmaster from 1884 until 1905 was Edmond Warre, a former Fellow of All Souls whose enthusiasm for the classics was only surpassed by his dedication to the Eight. Nothing pleased him more than the sight of his crew all pulling strongly and smoothly together on the Thames. The long domination of the dark over the light blues in the Boat Races of the 1890s was put down to the fact that more Etonians went to Oxford than to Cambridge. Prospective intellectuals might go to King's, but rowing men preferred Christ Church and the Thames. Seven of the Oxford crew who set up a record time for the Boat Race in practice in 1897 were Etonians and so was the cox. The prestige of Eton and Harrow as the leading schools in the land was almost as much a matter of sporting prowess as of ancient lineage. Harrow had been on the point of collapse in the 1840s until a new regime of manly exercise was introduced under the headmastership of Charles Vaughan. By 1864 the public schools investigated by the Clarendon Commission were commended for 'their love of healthy sports and exercise' which despite the excesses of the fagging system and the brutality of punishments had helped to teach Englishmen 'to govern others and to control themselves'.[2]

[2] J. A. Mangan, '"Oars and the Man"', *BJSH*, Dec. 1984, pp. 249–53; J. Chandos, *Boys Together* (1984), pp. 336, 328.

This official worship of the 'all devouring gods' of sport would certainly have come as a surprise to the young Lord John Russell, who in 1803 went up to Westminster where he found 'the boys play at hoops, pegtops and pea-shooters'. Earlier at Eton the games in favour were 'hopscotch, headimy, peg-in-the-ring, conquering lobs [marbles], trap-ball, chucksteal baggage and puss in the corner'. In addition to such childish games, there was the Eton Wall Game itself, which was played between those who boarded in and those who boarded out (collegers and oppidans), and involved a ferocious scrimmage running the length of the wall with the Slough Road. The Wall Game was in fact banned by the headmaster, Dr Keate, from 1827 to 1836 because of the divisions and brutality it encouraged amongst the boys. Though an important ritual at Eton, the Wall Game was less significant than the other form of football played on a more regular basis and known as the Field Game, involving two sides of eleven players who were not permitted to handle the ball. At other schools similar forms of football emerged according to local traditions and the requirements of the terrain. At Winchester football was particularly violent and boys were regularly carried off to the hospital with broken bones. None of this deterred their fellows who waited to take the place of the injured.[3]

Endurance and courage were the qualities most admired by the boys. The hero of Winchester football was known as 'Pruff' because he was said to be 'proof against pain'. A furious *mêlée* known as the 'rouge' at Eton, the 'hot' at Winchester, and most ominously the 'squash' at Harrow was the main feature of such games. Old boys like Thomas Hughes and his friend Sir Arthur Arbuthnot were fond of reliving the scrimmages of half a century earlier and passing judgement upon individuals according to their performance. 'We could neither of us call to mind having seen him in the thick of the scrimmage. He was generally hovering outside, looking for a chance to run with the ball' was their puzzled, dismissive verdict on a former pupil who later distinguished himself for valour in the army. By the time these two were mulling over their schooldays, values that had then been mainly prized by the boys alone had come to be proclaimed as

[3] I. and P. Opie, *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (1984), p. 4; Chandos, *Boys Together*, Appendix, pp. 352–4.

the cultural property of the system itself. This was the paradox of the nineteenth-century public school.[4]

What had been little more than a free-for-all between two sides, where a boy could make a name for himself by his 'pluck', gradually became the testing ground of 'character'. Good scrimmagers had naturally tended to be good fighters, and fighting had enjoyed pride of place in the life of the unreformed public school. Boys at Harrow happily fought gangs of navvies building the railways and Etonians had clashed regularly with the butcher-boys of Windsor. George Boudier of the Upper Fifth successfully took on a professional pugilist in 1838 and became a school hero. So did a pupil named Wyvill, who thrashed a burly soldier. He in turn complained to the school and was asked to identify the boy. 'Boy!' the guardsman exclaimed. 'Why, that's the biggest man in tuttens' (the twin towns of Eton and Windsor). From time to time this love of combat went tragically wrong. The most notorious instance involved the youngest son of Lord Shaftesbury, who died in 1825 after a fight with another boy that lasted two and a half hours. This match had been properly arranged as a prize-fight might have been, each boy having a 'second'. Significantly Shaftesbury refused to prosecute through the courts in what had been a fair fight between equals. Aristocratic morality required that what had been a duel by fists should be respected, even when the participants were only thirteen and fourteen years of age.[5]

Violence and pain were taken for granted not only between the boys but as a means of discipline. Masters flogged boys and older boys flogged younger ones. This was so much a part of everyday school life that only exceptionally severe punishments seemed worth recording. 'I got an uncommon flogging this morning,' wrote a boy at Winchester in the early nineteenth century, 'the blood ran through my shirt and into my breeches.' Boys, of course, sometimes got their own back on masters by throwing them in ponds or even by organizing a 'rebellion' against the authorities. Schoolboy revolts were fairly frequent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Troops had to be called in on one or two notorious occasions in what one authority has called 'an irregular but continuous warfare against adult

[4] Chandos, *Boys Together*, p. 77. [5] Ibid., pp. 141–2.

government . . . part of an approved way of life, an educational exercise and a display of independence prescriptive by honour for all aspirants to the respect of their peers'. Nor was such behaviour confined only to privileged youths who refused to concede what they saw as 'the liberties' of the pupils to masters of lesser birth whose duties were merely academic. Grammar school boys had their own rites of violence often involving the locking out of masters from the school until certain customary rights had been reaffirmed. 'Barring out', as it was called, was a ritual of reversal where the pupils occupied the buildings and locked out the masters, who tried to force down doors and climb in windows; naturally the boys resisted with great ingenuity and ferocity. This was almost a form of sport. 'If it had not all the pleasure of a real siege and battle except actual slaughter, I don't know what pleasure is', reflected a former enthusiast of what was a declining custom in the Victorian age. Similarly an article in the Eton school magazine for 1847–8 regretted the passing of the old order when 'there used to be rebellions and the school was full of fun'.[6]

Alongside such antics there was the habitual campaign against the wildlife of the neighbourhood. 'Toozling' was a special word for the chasing and killing of small birds, and the diary of a young Harrovian added duck-hunting and beagling to the list of schoolboy field sports. Boys were highly skilled in such things and often noted down their kills, as their fathers might do in the game-book of the estate. At Shrewsbury the boys organized their own fox-hunt with eleven different 'runs'; all the parts, including that of the fox, were played by the boys. Masters at the school were instructed to stop the hunt partly because of complaints by farmers, and partly because the 'hounds' were not averse to shredding new copies of their Latin primer to lay a trail. Worse, the text in question was written by a certain Dr Kennedy, the headmaster of the school. 'Boar' hunts were another feature of Shrewsbury which involved the chasing and killing of a common pig. 'As disgraceful [an act] as ever schoolboy was guilty of', a remorseful participant later confessed, though boys at Marlborough,

[6] J. Walvin, *A Child's World* (1982), p. 48; Chandos, *Boys Together*, pp. 167, 341; K. Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England* (1975), p. 26.

celebrating the founding of the school in 1843 with a frog-hunt around the grounds, might have contested this claim. They were also most adept at killing squirrels and rabbits with little canes topped with lead called 'squalers'.[7]

This brutal and disorderly dimension was one of the aspects of the public schools that Thomas Arnold and his followers set out to reform. Arnold himself had little use for games, but those whom he chose as his masters during his headship of Rugby from 1828 to 1842 saw the potential of sport as a source of discipline and morality more readily, especially in relation to the selecting of senior boys to impose discipline through the prefectorial system. From their earlier rejection of rough games, headmasters shifted their ground around the middle of the century, formally adopting and 'civilizing' what had long been part of the 'informal curriculum' of the boys. The 'scrum' became a prized institution of the public school. Cricket, which after all had been a popular game amongst the upper classes as well as the common people for long enough, began to be perceived as a way of imparting the values of team spirit and co-operation. 'The discipline and reliance on one another, which it teaches are so valuable . . . it merges the individual into the eleven; he doesn't play that he may win but that his side may win', muses the young master in a famous passage from *Tom Brown's Schooldays*; Thomas Hughes modelled this character on G. E. L. Cotton, who had been a master at Rugby and became head of Marlborough in 1853 after the last of the great pupil revolts had forced the previous occupant into resignation. Cotton believed that organized games would keep the boys together on the school's grounds and stop them roaming round the country poaching and causing havoc. 'New' sports would drive out the old. A trio of young games-playing masters were appointed to introduce the Rugby style of football into the school, joining in the games that were still played in ordinary clothes. One master at Marlborough used to throw himself into the scrum wearing a top hat. A. G. Butler, the rugger-mad head of Haileybury, could be seen pacing up and down the touchline roaring on encouragement, 'his figure presenting to view an immaculate shirt and a pair of red braces would be seen dashing

[7] J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (1981), chs. 1 and 2, esp. pp. 19, 32; Chandler, 'Emergence of Athleticism', p. 5.

into the fray, now emerging triumphant with the ball held aloft and at another moment bowled over in the mud like the humblest forward, eventually retiring from the field to the great detriment of his clothes but none to his dignity'.[8]

The 1850s was the crucial decade in public school sport. It was in 1852 that the Philathletic Club was formed at Harrow by senior boys but with behind-the-scenes prodding from Charles Vaughan, the headmaster, and the following year Cotton sent out the circular to parents that came to be regarded as a classic exposition of the new public school athletic system. Finally Edward Thring, whose brother had played a leading part in organizing football at Cambridge in the mid-1840s, took over Uppingham Grammar in 1853 and turned it into a great games-playing and most successful boarding-school in a matter of a few years. The encouragement of organized sports spread very quickly. The prize for the most athletic of all Victorian headmasters should perhaps go to a Scotsman, Hely Hutchison Almond, who went from Glasgow University to Balliol College, Oxford, and thence to Loretto School near Edinburgh, which he ruled for forty years from 1862. Every moment had to be filled with useful or energetic activity and there was a timetable that showed exactly how time was to be spent. There were compulsory games every day. Even the school uniform with its open shirts and long shorts looked rather like a football strip. If ever a man took Kipling's maxim of 'filling the unforgiving minute' it was Almond. Rugby was the main game and its virtues were extolled in the school song 'Go like blazes'. Running was another of Almond's enthusiasms and boys would be cheerfully chucked out into the depths of a bad Scottish winter when 'the roads were hedge high with snow' and 'every now and then they would fall into a drift'.[9]

Gradually sport ceased to be a means to a disciplinary end and became an end in itself. The culture of athleticism steadily came to dominate the whole system of élite education. Daily games created an ever more bizarre and elaborate hierarchy of athletic distinction. From playing in ordinary clothes boys soon moved

[8] Mangan, *Athleticism*, pp. 22–8; B. Haley, *The Healthy Body in Victorian Culture* (1978), p. 164.

[9] I. Thomson, 'The Acceptance of a National Policy for Physical Recreation in Scotland, 1872–1908', Ph.D. thesis (Stirling Univ., 1976), ch. 4; Mangan, *Athleticism*, pp. 48–58, 85.

on to shorts and flannels, and by the Edwardian period photographs of the first eleven reveal poised young men in striped blazers and special caps staring out at the world with supreme self-assurance. The athletic élite ran the school for the masters who delegated routine discipline to these 'bloods'. With their 'waistcoats flashing blues and reds' they would literally swagger round the school, lords of the young life they surveyed. The right to do up this button or undo that, to wear one kind of tie and not another, to show one inch of cuff or two, to carry a cane or wear a boater at a certain angle, were integral parts of what became primarily a hierarchy of physical achievement. For brains alone would not bring such rewards. Even Arnold had been wary of 'mere intellectual acuteness', though he would doubtless have been distressed at the contempt for the life of the mind displayed by some of his successors. 'Cleverness, what an aim!', fulminated Coterill of Fettes, 'Good God what an aim! Cleverness neither makes or keeps man or nation.' No wonder Kipling complained of 'flannelled fools at the wicket and muddied oafs at the goal'. Even the redoubtable Thring of Uppingham once had to warn his charges of the dangers as well as the joys of sport, taking as his text 'For he hath no pleasure in the strength of a horse, neither delighteth he in any man's legs.'[10]

But these were rare moments of self-doubt or criticism in what was otherwise a panegyric on the virtues of sport. Schools like Harrow spent vast sums on extending their playing-fields (from eight acres in 1845 to 146 in 1900). Charterhouse moved out of the City to Godalming in 1872 partly so that their pupils would have more room to develop their sporting skills. It seemed parents were less anxious about academic achievement than that their sons should be brought up in a sporting setting with broad acres and connotations of aristocratic grandeur. Most significantly this pattern was copied by the heads of ambitious grammar schools like Ripon, Bristol, and Worcester, who were increasingly drawn from the ranks of public school masters. Even where extensive playing-fields could not be purchased, the panoply of houses, teams, school colours, songs that surrounded the culture of athleticism were carefully reproduced and proved remarkably

[10] Mangan, *Athleticism*, ch. 7 and p. 109; P. McIntosh, *Physical Education in England since 1800* (1968), p. 63.

successful in attracting the fees of socially ambitious parents of modest means. Networks of influence spread out from the ancient schools via the movement of masters to and fro. The values of the public schools seeped into secondary schools through such men as A. B. Haslam, former captain of football and head boy of Rugby. As he told appreciative parents at Ripon Grammar School speech day in 1884, he 'believed in the old phrase "mens sana in corpore sano" and that Wellington was right when he said the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton'.[11]

Going on to university, and that usually meant Oxford or Cambridge, was unlikely to be a difficult transition for the public school sportsman. The academic demands of the ancient universities were not particularly onerous and the college system fitted into the pattern of communal living and rivalries learned in school houses. Colleges became almost as serious about their prowess in sport as the public schools and furnished themselves with similarly splendid facilities. Fenner's in Cambridge and the University Parks in Oxford were the scene of first-class cricket. The two universities had a history of playing together since the first Varsity Boat Race in 1829 organized by Wordsworth's nephew, who also played in the first Oxford and Cambridge cricket match two years earlier. The Boat Race has become a British institution and annual cricket matches were played from 1839. However, despite the Boat Race varsity sport was desultory and restricted until the 1860s when contacts of all kinds grew very fast to include athletics, golf, football and rugby, cross-country, tennis, boxing, hockey, and swimming by the 1890s. The universities played an important part in establishing common rules for rugby and football as young men converged on them from different schools each of which in the early days had different ways of playing (several of the most ancient schools like Eton and Harrow have persisted in keeping their old games alongside the standardized rules that permitted them to play others). Boys from Rugby, where handling of the ball was permitted, could not agree on how to play with Etonians and Harrovians, who did not allow handling. Moreover the latter

[11] J. A. Mangan, 'Imitating their Betters and Disassociating from Their Inferiors', History of Education Society: Annual Conference (Dec. 1982), esp. p. 5.

resented the suggestion that they should bow down before the customs of another more recent, and as they saw it, inferior institution. In order to avoid games being confined to old boys of the same school two former pupils of Shrewsbury, de Winton and Thring, tried to act as honest brokers by drawing up common rules for football in 1846 mixing the handling and the kicking game. Rugby School published the rules of their own game in the same year and throughout the 1850s a number of different versions of football were played with the Cambridge compromise form being the most widespread, though this is by no means certain.[12]

As young men came down from university or left their public schools to join the professions or go into business they sought ways of continuing the games they had enjoyed. The Blackheath Club was founded in 1858 to play a handling and hacking game on the lines of Rugby School, while a year later the Forest Club was 'the creation of a few enthusiastic old Harrovians' advertising for games in *Bell's Life* in 1862 'on the rules of the University of Cambridge'. Meanwhile in Sheffield a club had been set up by old boys of Sheffield Collegiate School in 1858 who were mostly drawn from prominent manufacturing families with a few surgeons' and solicitors' sons as well. They were introduced to 'football' (probably the kicking game) by their public school-educated masters. This was also what happened in Wales with the arrival of a former undergraduate and fellow of King's College, Cambridge, the Revd. Rowland Williams, as the Vice-Principal of St David's College, Lampeter, in 1850. Games were played against Llandovery College, which had ambitions to become an English-style public school, after a rail link was established between the towns in 1857. In Scotland, Edinburgh Academicals were founded in 1857–8 by former members of Edinburgh Academy, whilst Merchiston and the Royal High School soon joined in as did Almond of Loretto, who turned his years at Balliol to good account and introduced the kind of handling game he had played at Oxford. Migrant members of the liberal professions brought the game to Glasgow and the core of what

[12] E. Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), p. 298; E. Dunning and K. Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* (1979), ch. 3; J. Arlott (ed.), *Oxford Companion to Sports and Games* (1976), pp. 294–6.

was later to become the Scottish (Rugby) Football Union was soon in place, playing friendly fixtures under rules laid out in 'the Green Book'. Thring, the energetic headmaster of Uppingham, who with his brother had earlier sought to bring some order into the game, tried again in 1862 when he drew up the ten basic rules of the 'simplest game' of football containing the modern essentials of the offside rule, permissible forms of tackling, goals (a ball thrown into the goal was not allowed), and goal-kicks. These rules stated that 'hands may be used only to stop a ball and place it on the ground before the feet'. The following year a committee of Cambridge men in which the main public schools were represented, revised the existing regulations more or less along the lines of Thring's proposals making no mention of running with the ball.[13]

At the same time in autumn 1863 a meeting was called of old-boy clubs recently founded in the London area to agree the basis upon which they could play each other. They decided to call themselves the Football Association and initially proposed draft rules that permitted both holding the ball and hacking (the kicking of opponents' shins). However, the deliberations at Cambridge along with a letter from the Sheffield Football Club urging that hacking be forbidden and that the hands ought not to be used convinced the bulk of the London group. There may have been an element of conflict between the old and the new public schools hidden within the argument over rules with the Clarendon schools insisting on their right to dictate to the rest and Rugby stubbornly refusing to abandon its tradition of handling. But, the distinctions were still fairly fluid at this stage and compromise might well have been possible had it not been for a sharp clash of personalities and the confusing issue of hacking. It was not until 1895 that a myth of origin was formally set out by Rugby School in the famous plaque in honour of William Webb Ellis, who, it was alleged, 'with a fine disregard for the rules of football as played in his time, first took the ball in his arms and ran with it, thus originating the distinctive feature of the Rugby game. AD 1823'. The claim to ownership of the game was based upon the most

[13] T. Mason, *Association Football and English Society* (1980), pp. 22–3; D. Smith and G. Williams, *Fields of Praise* (1980), p. 23; A. M. C. Thorburn, *The Scottish Rugby Union* (1985), p. 2.

flimsy evidence and designed primarily to counter the later pretensions of rival northern clubs. This schism will be discussed later; what matters here is to stress that no clear-cut distinctions were established before the 1860s and 1870s. Football or 'soccer' as it came to be known and rugby football had common roots in popular tradition. They were innovations rather than inventions. In the end football belonged to the people not to any public school. The new Football Association was even willing to permit a limited amount of handling at first and the real stumbling-block to agreement turned on the issue of hacking which the Blackheath representative called 'the true form of football'; 'if you do away with it,' he thundered, 'you will do away with all the courage and pluck of the game, and I will be bound to bring over a lot of Frenchmen who would beat you with a week's practice.' But Morley, the honorary secretary of the Football Association, was adamant that 'if we have hacking, no one who has arrived at the age of discretion will play at football, and it will be entirely left to schoolboys'. The practicality of a game for 'men in business' who had 'to take care of themselves' was the decisive factor. When the handling clubs formed the Rugby Football Union in 1871 one of their first decisions was to outlaw the old footballing maxim that 'you kick the ball if you can, and if you can't you kick the other man's shins', although rugby remained a more obviously physical and aggressive sport than football. Despite the success of soccer in most of the Clarendon schools, rugby was frequently advocated in the new public schools precisely because it was thought to require more courage. Courage shorn of cruelty, a civilized sort of simulated battle, that was what the country needed and the public schools set out to provide it.[14]

2. THE BODY IN VICTORIAN CULTURE

What underlay this obsession with sport amongst the rapidly swelling ranks of the middle classes as well as in the higher reaches of society? Only the sons of manual workers were thought not

[14] G. Green, *Soccer, the World Game* (1953), pp. 31–3, quoting FA minutes of Dec. 1863; Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians*, ch. 5.

to require the experience of games, and at elementary school they generally had to make do with repetitive gymnastic drill if they were given any exercise at all. The fortunate few had all the space and the time they could want. They were an embryonic leisure class and no account of the brave new world of games should forget just how much those with resources in land or capital profited from the staggering expansion of the nineteenth-century economy. Many worked so that few could play. There were more affluent young people with more time on their hands than ever before, and in that sense it is hardly surprising that so much effort should have been spent having fun. Yet the study of urban conditions and of rising middle-class incomes cannot alone explain the character of Victorian sport and sportsmanship, which involved a shift away from gambling and spectating towards hard team-work, fair play, and physical exertion. The gratuitous expenditure of energy in organized groups according to carefully drafted laws is a very special way of having fun.

A wide range of cultural influences was evident in the character of amateur sport: the distinctiveness and significance of the new games was a product of the interplay of such diverse phenomena as changing attitudes to mental and physical health; the redefinition of masculinity and the new concept of 'manliness'; divisions within the Church of England and the desire to promote active religion; the influence of the biological and evolutionary theories of Spencer and Darwin; the powerful ethic of commercial competition and imperial endeavour linked to the equally strong traditions of élite solidarity and the assimilation of new wealth. The idea of the healthy mind and body merged into a garbled Darwinism that was itself often intermingled with notions of Christian and imperial duty. All this was contained within a framework where the fierce individualism that was required for economic success had to be balanced against the need for social cohesion and political stability.

The Victorians were much preoccupied with matters of health. The medical profession grew enormously in the first half of the nineteenth century producing over eight thousand university-trained doctors (more than in the whole preceding history of the profession) and building seventy new hospitals by 1860. Student doctors were often keen sportsmen and the honour of founding the first rugby club goes to Guy's Hospital in 1843. The rapid