

Philathlete Extraordinary: A Portrait of the Victorian Moralizer Edward Bowen

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Mid-Victorian England saw the emergence of a novel kind of schoolmaster—the athletic pedagogue.¹ The introduction of games into the curriculum of the English Public School for a variety of reasons: expedience, image or idealism² by forceful and despotic headmasters such as Temple of Rugby, Thring of Uppingham and Almond of Loretto, in harmony with developments at Oxford and Cambridge, created for him a fresh image; one which in time was adopted to a greater or lesser extent in the schools of the empire, the late nineteenth century middle-class grammar schools and the secondary schools of the post Balfour Education Act of 1902.³

The reasons for the new allegiance to games were complex and included idealism, casuistry, pragmatism, popularism and escapism. To encourage games was to promote a form of moral training, or perhaps usefully to hide personal indulgence beneath an enveloping cloak of moral respectability; to play well frequently meant a successful teaching career; to be seen on playing fields was to ensure classroom popularity; to hit or kick a ball in the afternoon was to obtain welcome relief from tedious lessons with bored boys in the morning.

The new philathletes were of broadly two types: the games-master of laurelled brawn and little brain and the games-playing master often in possession of a sound measure of both cerebral and muscular ability. The former were sometimes casuists who through self-interested excess eventually succeeded in making a vice out of an alleged virtue; the latter were frequently idealists who attempted through altruistic exhortation to make a virtue out of what eventually became a vice.⁴ Possibly the most zealous of these idealists was Edward Bowen.

What is it? forty, thirty more?
You in the trousers white,

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What did you come to Harrow for,
If we lose the match to-night?
If a finger's grasp, as a catch comes down,
Go a thousandth part astray—
Heavens! to think there are folks in town
Who talk of the game as play!⁵

This fragment is from an impassioned verse written by Bowen and entitled *Lords 1878*. Bowen was assistant master at Harrow School from 1859 to 1901. He was something of a polymath-classicist, theologian, astronomer, military historian, poet, but pre-eminently vigorous athlete: “a splendid walker, a zealous oar, an indefatigable football player, a good cricketer,” a fearless mountaineer. In his obsession with physical activities he was more than a mere enthusiast; he was the personification of the Victorian “athletic pedagogue,” a robust agonist who urged the sons of the privileged classes of Britain and its Empire to play games, not simply for their physical benefit but for their spiritual well-being. In short, he was a didactic moralist to whom games meant far more than play.

Bowen was extraordinary in his philathleticism for four reasons, which we will explore in this paper: his passion for the playing field demonstrated in an impressive range of activities, was of an intensity which few, if any, of his colleagues could match; his exemplary performances on Harrow grass or clay and elsewhere, were quite exceptional; his verse celebrating the delights of games, in contrast to a multitude of contemporaries,⁶ possessed on occasion poetic lyricism and he became the verse chronicler of an ethic; and perhaps most remarkable of all, by virtue of the unshakable nature of his athletic orthodoxy, despite heretical educational, religious and political views, he earned substantial respect in a self-assured upper class school system, in which other provocative radicals earned only contemptuous dismissal.⁷ A study of Bowen, Victorian idealogue, serves a valuable purpose. In the curious composition of his character, he represents both cliché and critique, and a consideration of the man demands a subtlety of historical perspective which both reflects the reality of his own life and that of the ideology which he dramatically epitomized.

Physical and moral health obsessed the Victorians. In its pursuit they “invented, revived or imported . . . a multitude of athletic recreations:” the well-knit body was their model for a well-formed mind⁸—and a soundly-built character. Drawing on the fashionable physiopsychology of the day, Victorian authorities on medicine, psychology and physiology argued that the individual temperament was predisposed to particular social and moral diseases but that this predisposition could be modified by training: a training that should be both mental and physical in deference to the fact that the mind and body were in constant interaction. Moral soundness was dependent on physiological condition. And all must be in balance. Over-development of faculty

led to the pathological state. In essence, as Bruce Haley has written, “Victorians thought of ‘mind’ and ‘character’ as dynamic moral forces, and, needing to conceptualize these forces they chose physiological models as the most logical means: the laws of the body were those of the mind and the health of one was the health of the other.”⁹ Bowen was wholly Victorian in his subscription of the interrelationship of “the physical and moral nature of man” and the ameliorative qualities of training which he called “the force of habit.” This force, he wrote “extends over all parts of the human organization . . . it is not a mere property of the constitution, with a single action, and bearing no special marks of adaptation to distinguish it from other faculties or properties; but by a clearly defined law its influences are separable into two classes according to the sphere of its operation: the effect being to stimulate the active powers of the mind and body.”¹⁰ As befitted an exponent of Victorian epistemological orthodoxy Bowen, moral physiologist and inspirational pedagogue, was a legendary lover of “athlete recreations”: a zealot with a talent for play, organization and song. In a whimsical and nostalgic piece of doggerel entitled “Giants” he once looked back to a Golden Age of games players:

There were wonderful giants of old, you know,
 There were wonderful giants of old;
 They grew more mightily, all of a row.
 Than ever were heard or told;
 All of them stood their six feet four,
 And they threw to a hundred yards or more,
 And never were lame, or stiff, or sore;
 And we, compared with the days of yore,
 Are cast in a pigmy mould.¹¹

In reality as we shall see, as the paradigmatic schoolmaster-athlete, Bowen overshadowed predecessor and successor in his devotion, as performer, protagonist and propagandist, to games and games-fields.

Reflecting on the efforts of his lissome boys on the playing fields of Eton, William Cory, author of the most famous of boating songs, lamented his own physical incompetence:

I cheer the games I cannot play;
 As stands a crippled squire
 To watch his master through the fray,
 Uplifted by desire.¹²

In energetic contrast, Edward Bowen at Harrow made full use of his athletic ability. His physical feats were prodigious. As moral exemplar he played football until within weeks of his death at the age of sixty-five. On one famous occasion toward the end of a match at Harrow between Eton and Harrow masters in which Harrow were clearly getting the worse of it, “the brunt of the game fell upon the backs, among whom was Bowen. He seemed to feel that

by a supreme effort he might save the game; he threw himself completely into it, and became as aggressive in attack as he was brilliant in defence.”¹³ The game was saved. Bowen was nearly sixty at the time and the influence of his effort on the schoolboys on the touch line may be imagined. Many years later an Old Harrovian recalled with amused affection Bowen’s whole-hearted robustness on the football field that led to such achievements: “He used to kick wildly, and was a dangerous man to be near . . . one was certain to receive a hack on the shin. In consequence, he received many in return but he took it all as a matter of course.”¹⁴ At cricket his inspirational efforts were more modest (and more controlled) but still marvellously impressive. “Until he was fifty he was a first-rate field, especially at long leg and kept wicket well to the last.”¹⁵ When the All England eleven played Twenty-two of Harrow and District in the eighteen-sixties his performance is reputed “to have been wonderful.” Bowen himself, without false modesty, is reported to have claimed that “he never dropped a catch in the long field on the Harrow ground.”¹⁶

On his death the *Harrovian* declared that “few things would be more difficult than to convey . . . to a stranger an idea of Bowen’s influence upon athletics at Harrow.”¹⁷ It was all-pervasive. Harrow games and Edward Bowen were as intrinsically linked as Victorian “soma” and “psyche.” In an obituary verse E. W. Howson, a colleague, wrote with perspicacity:

The fields with his presence is haunted
Where daily to football he passed,
Through forty long winters undaunted,
The playmate of youth to the last.¹⁸

In the pursuit of the perceived unity of moral and physical laws athletic longevity was not his only virtue, physical stamina was another. Bowen created, perpetuated and played in an “Office Hours” football match for Old Harrovians held every year in London in the Christmas holidays. It was a Bowenian device for ensuring the fitness of his beloved boys softened by their sedentary occupation in city firms. As the title suggests, the game lasted privileged public school “office hours” from ten o’clock in the morning to four o’clock in the afternoon. Others limped off exhausted at suitable moments throughout the day to enjoy the splendid sides of beef behind the goals: Bowen inevitably remained on the field of play for the whole six hours!¹⁹

II

Such athletic habits were developed in the first instance as a student at Trinity College, Cambridge in the 1850s. Cambridge, the source of English Agnostic Muscularity, was then the academic residence of the muscular don Leslie Stephen. Stephen, “the delicate boy . . . transmogrified into a rowing tough,” who “was most at ease when his legs were moving fast”²⁰ was a strenuous tutor who openly despised the traditional “fusty, musty dons,” filled his

rooms with the “din and jargon of rowing men” and followed his boat mile upon mile on the towpath “clad in a filthy shirt and grey flannel trousers with a large purple patch in the seat and damning the eye of any cox on the river who would not give way.”²¹ To add to the embarrassment of orthodox academics, Stephen was an impressive walker and a formidable athlete, who invented the University Sports and won the mile and the two mile races. He was insatiably competitive and once challenged a friend to run three miles while he walked two—and won by two hundred and thirty yards! His was the supreme influence at Cambridge of the period, and he “set a new fashion in dons.” He laid great stress on the relationship between mind and body: “There are,” he argued euphemistically, “as all moralists know, certain values which depend upon our physical organs.”²²

Bowen, a moderate but enthusiastic games player at Blackheath School,²³ embraced the new values with delight. He was oarsman, athlete, and walker. Walking was a particular enthusiasm. Bowen subscribed to Stephen’s view that a long walk was a moral agent of great power! And like Stephen he thought little of walking from Cambridge to London, some fifty-two miles, when the occasion demanded it. But as his biographer noted:

His most celebrated walk,—and one very rarely accomplished—was a little later . . . The walk was from Cambridge to Oxford; and the time occupied over the feat was twenty-six consecutive hours, beginning at midnight, Edward Bowen having been delayed towards the end for some four hours by the unfortunate breakdown of his companion, whom he had to leave behind, and without whom he finished the great effort. He sometimes in after days spoke of the completeness for the moment of his exhaustion. Body and nerves were both utterly tired out. Opposite St. Mary’s Church it was about two o’clock in the morning—he leaned heavily for a few minutes against a lamp-post. A policeman came up and doubted his condition. “Where have you come from?” was the query. “Cambridge,” was the weary answer, which scarcely reassured the officer of justice.²⁴

The distance was over ninety miles and Bowen was always justifiably proud of his effort. Later he was reputed to have walked from Cambridge to Harrow for his interview for a teaching post, and on his departure he is understood to have informed Charles Vaughan, the doubtless astonished and quite unathletic headmaster, that he intended to walk all the way back.²⁵ In later life he remained “a very great walker.” He travelled on foot around the entire coastline of England and Wales “as well as over a great deal of the country inland.” On these occasions, he frequently took a few favored Harrow boys with him who found the excursions “extremely hard work.” In consequence “afternoon tea was a much esteemed institution. . . . It was usually in some wayside inn (and) as likely as not a worn-out boy would be stretched on the sofa, at first almost too tired to eat.”²⁶ Bowen had little sympathy. He had “a great belief in physical straining . . . he desired that the boys should have pluck and gain stamina . . . and he was not disposed to pay too much attention to weary limbs and aching feet.”²⁷ In the interest of pluck and stamina, he was a righteous and ruthless trespasser, to a degree that would “have star-

tled even a hardened poacher.” Irate farmers caused few problems. They were met with a flow of fluent French from an apparently bewildered citizen of France and would retreat in frustrated anger. He was equally determined in his other healthy habits. At Cambridge he bathed in the Cam “all through the severe Crimean winter of 1854, breaking the ice when necessary, to plunge in and out again.”²⁸

What Stephen was to Cambridge, Bowen became to Harrow. He was an innovative and inventive scholar-athlete who willingly subordinated classics to cricket. As a schoolmaster he paid particular attention to engaging the interests of the younger boys at Harrow in the physical activities he loved so intensely and which he considered so essential to their satisfactory physiological and moral development. He created an “Infants” cricket match for under fifteens, and a “Colts” match for under sixteens. He instituted a pleasant tree-planting ceremony for successful cricketers who made fifty in a school match. By the time of his death the whole of one side of the Sixth Form and Phil-athletic grounds were lined with trees commemorating “the first fifties or more made by various members of the eleven.”²⁹ His most famous innovation however, was the introduction of his “Cricket Bill” which permitted some five hundred boys to be accounted for on the cricket fields on a games afternoon *in a mere two minutes*. Previous to this boys would “toil” up the famous hill on which the school is located to the school yard to be counted in a lengthy and tedious routine, with the result that afternoon matches were completely disrupted and frequently abandoned; an educational state of affairs which Bowen could not countenance. Innovations at football included the “Torpids”—house matches for the junior boys—and the “Ones”—ties between single football players. For many years he organized a match on the first day of the holidays between the Harrow football XI and the famous “Wanderers” football team, which for a number of years in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was the most famous team in England, and which counted Bowen himself among its members.³⁰ His contribution to Harrow football was so comprehensive that a recent historian of Harrow has declared: “The development and organisation of the game was largely due to E.E. Bowen, who used inter-house contests to stir up keenness. Hence football reached a regular system of house-matches before cricket.”³¹

Orthodoxy and unorthodoxy combined in equal measure in Bowen and on occasion his obsession with exercise had quite idiosyncratic dimensions. In an age when beatings were commonplace, Bowen’s disciplinary chastisements were of a quite different and typically utilitarian nature. The novelist Horace Annesley Vachell, a pupil at Harrow during the Bowen years, remembered that:

Bowen seemed to know every cottage and tree within a five-mile radius of the Hill. Delinquents and defaulters were ordered to run or walk to Pinner and count the palings round a white-washed cottage. Or, “Boy, do you know an ash when you see one? You do, eh? well, there is an ash not

far from Ruislip Reservoir, marked on this map. Upon the north side of the ash, between two roots, three inches underground, you will find a marble which you will be good enough to bring to my house at teatime. I may offer you a cup of tea, if you are very thirsty.³²

On his death the obituary number of the *Harrovian* contained details of a wholly Bowenite action concerning an athletic colleague who on missing his train ran from Harrow to central London to a meeting in a splendidly fast time, so fast in fact that it inspired in Bowen obvious disbelief—a disbelief only removed when Bowen himself went in to London and ran back to Harrow, some ten miles “as hard as he could” and convinced himself that the feat was in fact possible!³³

However enthusiastically endorsed, to succeed idealism requires resources. Bowen not only preached, coached and organized games at Harrow, he also bought land for cricket, donated large sums for football fields, gave money for a pavilion, made many lesser contributions in the way of prizes and small gifts and on his death he left the bulk of his not unsubstantial property to the school.

III

Victorian England, as Sir Charles Tennyson has observed, was “the world’s games-master.” Through the development of ball games, it effected a world wide social revolution, little studied but of considerable historical significance.³⁴ Bowen played his part in this neglected metamorphosis. His philathletic proselytizing was not restricted to Harrow School. He made a profound contribution to the early evolution of the game of soccer—now the most popular game in the world. The origins of soccer as a mass sport dates from the creation of the English Football Association on December 8th, 1863. It was the direct outcome of the deliberations of the members of a small number of clubs made up of public school men, among them the Wanderers and Edward Bowen. Some eight years later the Association established the Football Cup Competition and F.M. Marples in his *History of Football* records that initially: “The competition was dominated by a team of ex-public school-boys tied to no particular school or locality, known as the Wanderers, which secured the Cup on no less than five times in the first seven years, and was awarded it outright in 1878 by virtue of three successive wins.”³⁵ Despite these impressive and substantial contributions, the influence of Bowen in the early development of a game now played on every continent is seen most strikingly, not in his representative initiatives and successes, but in the fact that the Football Association Cup Competition was *based* on the cock-house football competition at Harrow School which Bowen himself fostered so assiduously,³⁶ and in the additional fact that the driving force behind the growth of the Football Association was Charles Alcock, a pupil at Harrow at the time when Bowen was energetically promoting and systematizing the game of football on the Harrow playing-fields, and an eager Bowenite apostle.³⁷ Sadly

in later years as the moral imperatives of the game were increasingly abandoned in the frenetic pursuit of success, Bowen became increasingly disillusioned with the intrusion of ugly reality into a former world of handsome ideals and withdrew from the more public pitches to the seclusion of the Harrow footer fields. Bowen was not alone in his initial idealism and his ultimate disenchantment. As James Walvin has pointed out:

Football and other sports were thought to be ideal vehicles for bringing together the country's distinct and conflicting social classes, and for a short while the rise of mass football seemed to have aided this process of social unity. Rapidly, however, football developed a plebeian and commercial tone, with its encroaching professionalisation, heavy capital investment in new stadiums, and armies of fiercely partisan supporters. Many men from the old schools who were deeply wedded to the essential amateurism of football and to a conflicting ethos of sporting behavior were slowly drawn away . . . By the late 1880s, professionalism in this, the greatest of English spectator sports, had become a *fait accompli*. Public school teams retreated into their own sporting world of strictly guarded amateurism.³⁸

During the late 1870s when the Wanderers were proving the value of a public school education to the discerning, Bowen wrote to the Commission recently set up to inquire into Examinations for the Army and the Indian Civil Service suggesting "that there should be added to the present examination a physical competition, in which the marks gained should be added to those otherwise obtained by the candidates." He advocated "proficiency not in riding, shooting or the endurance of camp life, but in those physical excellencies which are natural and customary among all boys and youths, and which give promise of future healthy development."³⁹ He made detailed proposals to the Commission and drew up an examination scheme which he maintained gave "an advantage to the strongest, most active, most healthy candidates." It was Bowen's view that the proposed 500 marks awarded for physical merit should be distributed as follows:

- i. 200 marks for speed. A time race of 300 yards. Mediocrity, i.e. 0 marks, being represented by a time of 36 seconds.
- ii. 100 marks for swimming 100 yards, 50 marks being given for ordinary, and 100 for good, swimming.
- iii. 100 marks for high jumping; mediocrity represented by 4 ft. 6 in.
- iv. 100 marks for carrying shot.⁴⁰

As a direct result of his canvassing, the Commission recommended the adoption of voluntary competition in selected physical activities. Given his zeal for athletics Bowen's suggestions to the Commission were predictable but they should not be considered without reference to further points in his letter of recommendations; his wish that the "number of marks allocated should be such as to leave intellectual merit a very clear predominance" and his plea that exercises should be avoided "which would give a marked advantage to candidates possessed of wealth and leisure and accustomed to a country life, over those of humbler circumstances." These caveats should not be overlooked. Bowen was no empty-headed, hearty philistine. The compass of his

imagination was far wider than a games field. He was a radical of pronounced views.

There is a photograph of Bowen standing proprietorially on the lawn of The Grove (one of the large Harrow Houses). It is something of a surprise: saturnine, slim, dark-eyed, neatly bearded in sober morning suit, he resembles more the head waiter of the Café Royale than the stereotypic strong-necked, broad-shouldered public school philathlete. Unconventional in appearance, he was unconventional in role; a surprising revelation to many, for as a colleague once observed:

A stranger who saw him watching every ball that was bowled on the cricket field, through a live-long summer's afternoon, as keenly as though the fate of an empire depended upon it, or heard him discussing the chances and "auguring the fate" of a candidate for the Eleven; or, again, one who watched him "dropping down the Hill" day after day, in defiance, as we now know, of all the doctor's warnings, to join, as he continued to do up to within the last week or two of his sixty-five years of life—a boy among boys—in his House football, or saw him, as I often did myself, with something of a sad foreboding, laboring up the Hill again, after the game was over, might well have been excused for thinking, that he was a man wholly and entirely given to athletics.⁴¹

In fact, there is a great deal more to Edward Bowen than his passion for games.⁴² He was an outspoken political, social and educational progressive; he embraced anti-clericalism, decried militarism, opposed jingoism, preached equality and urged modernity on the public schools. By all accounts he was unorthodox and a brilliant classroom teacher: inventive, witty and imaginative.⁴³ Among his liberal educational innovations was the Harrow Modern Side which was an attempted antidote to the classroom imbalance in the curriculum, and at the time of its introduction a unique phenomenon in the public school system. It nicely illustrates the powerful, courageous and original thrust of his radicalism. "His conception of a Modern Side," wrote a friend, "was . . . that it should be limited to some few boys—eighty, he wished—who were capable of going far in the study of modern languages, history, mathematics, and science. He regarded it as an intellectual home for the select few, and kept it so till he was overwhelmed by the rush away from the classical regime."⁴⁴ This idea of a Modern Side was the logical outcome of lengthy reflection. Early in his professional career in a school system myopically focused on classical studies and dominated by classicists,⁴⁵ Bowen had heretically and audaciously questioned the value of classics as a school subject in his contribution to F.W. Farrar's *Essays on a Liberal Education* published in 1868. In the words of E.C. Mack:

The burden of his accusation was that Latin grammar, the teaching of which passed for a classical education, was worthless as an introduction to other languages, a relatively low form of knowledge in his own account, and, worst of all, so deadening to the student's mind that, even if he learned the subject, a rare occurrence, he became an enemy to knowledge. To Bowen the prime essential was that boys consider labor joyous and intellectual growth noble, and he therefore advised a humanized classical curriculum for those who were capable of profiting by it and modern subjects for the rest.⁴⁶

His wider radicalism can scarcely be better illustrated than by his candidature for membership of the first School Board formed at Harrow to administer the local elementary school. Once again with complete disregard for the deeply entrenched conservatism of colleagues, pupils and parents, he declared his staunch commitment to a more liberal England:

I offer myself as a candidate who thinks that the education of the people ought to be under the control of the people; that all Churches and sects should be on an equal footing; that the education of their children should be compulsory on all parents; that the scale of fees should be kept low; that the instruction given should be sound and simple and should not include, in its religious portion, any creeds or doctrines to which any section of the community might object.⁴⁷

IV

In all his efforts to promote games in school life Bowen had the most serious of motives. As we have discovered he was a conventional Victorian upper class muscular moralist but he was exceptional in the extent of his enthusiasm to the public school games ethic: “No boy in the School took greater interest in the games . . . He cared for athletics, believed in them, desired to promote them. He had no sympathy with the commonplace talk about their undue supremacy; he had no wish to see them lose any of their pre-eminence.”⁴⁸ The reason for this extremism is not hard to seek. For him, as for many Victorian schoolmasters, playing fields were the first location for the training of “character:” a fact now too well known to require expansion. Henry Montagu-Butler, the distinguished headmaster of Harrow School, whom Bowen served loyally for many years, wrote of Bowen: “As to the educating effect of cricket and football, he did not care to preach; but he would never have hesitated to avow, what his actions for forty years proclaimed, that in his deliberate judgement they were second to nothing in fostering a healthy, manly, unselfish, corporate life.”⁴⁹

He did not exaggerate. Bowen’s allegiance to the ethic was complete. It was given its fullest expression in a paper entitled simply “Games,” which he wrote for a group of fellow teachers. In the paper he embraced the games ethic with the earnest and simple evangelism of a Don Quixote. Taking as his early premise the mild view that “body is as important as mind” he asked in some bewilderment why the latter was given so much care and attention while the former was left to look after itself, adding the emphatic reflection that “the common English school games are of indescribable value,” and that in the whole system of education there was nothing to equal them in merit. In further pursuit of emphasis, he neatly turned the well-aired cliché concerning the playing-fields of Eton observing “that the existence of the playing fields at Eton has been much more value to the world than the winning of the battle of Waterloo!” It is worth giving Bowen’s arguments for games at some length to catch the full force of his personal conviction:

Here one drops perforce into truisms, except that truisms spoken in the ordinary tone do not

sufficiently express my opinions, and I am driven rapidly towards capital letters. I who write have seen and played probably more school games than any one now alive; and my verdict is, 'Very good' . . . consider . . . the forbearance, the subordination of the one to the many, the exercise of judgement, the sense of personal dignity . . . Think . . . of the organizing faculty that our games develop. Where can you get command and obedience, choice with responsibility, criticism with discipline, in any degree remotely approaching that in which our social games supply them? Think of the moral-physical side of it; temper, of course; dignity and courtesy.⁵⁰

Such enthusiasm led logically to the following pontification:

I offer it as my deliberate opinion, that the best boys are, on the whole, the players of games. I had rather regenerate England with the football elevens than with average members of Parliament . . . When I reflect on the vices to which games are a permanent corrective—laziness, foppery, man-of-the-worldness—I am not surprised at being led to the verdict which I have just delivered.⁵¹

Contemporaries of Bowen were agreed, that despite his Celtic origins he had a marked Anglo-Saxon reserve.⁵² His self-control was absolute—he never lost his temper and seldom paraded his emotion. One occasion, however, could always overcome his “sensibilities:” “When, on the day of the long-expected football match, the moment has really come, and that which was to be, is, and the ball is really kicked off, and now the play has begun. There is education. There is enlargement of horizon: self sinks, the common good is the only good, the bodily faculties exhilarate in functional development, and the make-believe ambition is glorified into a sort of ideality.”⁵³ He was always deeply moved at such moments at the sight of “boyhood at its best, or very nearly at its best . . . in highest social union and perfect organic action, developing the law of . . . race and falling in unconsciously with its best inherited traditions of brotherhood and of common action.” He argued passionately and somewhat provocatively of such occasions that there lived “more soul in honest play . . . than in half the hymn books.”⁵⁴

There is in this euphoric zeal a Kingsleyian intensity; but it is *important* to recognize that Edward Bowen unlike Kingsley was not a muscular Christian but a muscular moralist. He was neither Christian⁵⁵ nor cleric. In any consideration of Bowen, David Newsome's comment on Leslie Stephen leaps into the mind: “in time, (he) outgrew his Christianity. The muscularity lasted longer.”⁵⁶ Despite the attention they now receive, subscription to the games ethic of the English public school was not the exclusive prerogative of didactic muscular Christians; others were adherents. Muscular Christianity was *not* synonymous with athleticism; the profound belief in the value of playing games which characterized the schools. Hedonists, opportunists, pragmatists and moralists, Christian and non-Christian, embraced the cult of games with a special avidity in the public schools of late-Victorian England. Some sought pleasure, some sought escape, some sought control and some sought virtue through public school playing fields. Most sought a mixture of all these things. There is substance in the complaint that we hear too much of Thomas

Hughes and too little of Edward Bowen. Both represent facets of athleticism; muscular Christianity was far from being its totality. The situation in the schools was one of complexity; a constellation of ideologies co-existed—secular and spiritual.⁵⁷

Bowen preached his gospel of the games field in prose and poetry, by precept and personification. In his panegyric “Games” he reveals his idealism; in his poem *Tom* he describes his *beau idéal*. *Tom* was one of a number of songs Bowen composed between 1869 and 1886 celebrating places, events and personalities associated with Harrow School and its games fields. *Tom*, strenuous and straightforward, is the personification of desirable late-Victorian upper-class adolescence—brave, indefatigable and strong:

Base is the player who stops,
Fight, till the fighting is o'er;
Who follow up till he drops,
Panting and limping and sore?
Tom!
but, above all, good-humored, fair and decent;

Rules that you make, you obey;
Courage to Honour is true;
Who is the fairest in play,
Best and good temperedest, who?
Tom!
and wholly unremitting in the pursuit of winning:

Some, who their Houses enthrone,
Rest, when the victory comes;
Who will go on till his own
Boasts an eleven of Toms!
Tom!⁵⁸

Tom is propaganda. It is an image of boyhood that permits no qualification. *Tom* had achieved the Covenant of Grace. He was an imitable and approved symbol, an abstraction in concrete for an unsophisticated audience with a restricted frame of reference. *Tom* is an allegory of upper-class domination. Through conquest comes identity. Victorian public school heroes are ruddy, robust and ruthless; they are equally honorable, polite and self-controlled. They comprise in short an odd amalgam of virtues, best described as circumscribed social Darwinism. Crush with a controlled good-humored smile—the Upper Class and Imperialist Credo⁵⁹ learned on Harrow clay.

Tom bears witness to the fact that the Victorian public school concept of morality subsumed within it not merely desirable individual habits but also desirable corporate mores. The games ethic involved conventions which defined group identity, promoted group unity and facilitated group continuity. The public school games field was the venue for an education in social condition-

ing. What was taught there, to borrow Kipling's term,⁶⁰ was the *Law* which prevented social fragmentation and developed social cohesion in the interest of group survival. Survival of the group was as much the object of the endeavors of public school moralists as the virtuous development of the individual. For this reason the Victorian upper-class community was addicted to the "poetry" of the games fields seeing it as a proper vehicle for the depiction of manliness. These fields were an unending source of inspirational masculine images, images which when cultivated assured survival in life's struggle. Bowen was the most famous of the Victorian moralistic schoolmaster poets. His exhortations travelled the length and breadth of England and even crossed the English Channel to effete France!⁶¹

V

Bowen apparently delighted in paradox, and beneath the social Darwinism, agnostic stoicism and moral earnestness, was an intense, exuberant sensuality. He was intoxicated by the physical experiences of the public school games fields, and in his songs he caught incomparably the sounds, scents and sunshine of the nineteenth-century playing fields of the privileged. Yet even in such nostalgic doggerel there is evidence of salvation and damnation:

Jog, jog, tramp, tramp, down the hill we run,
When the summer games come with the summer sun;
On the grass dreaming a lazy grassy dream,
List to the merry click, willow tapping seam;
Balls ring, throats sing, to a gallant tune,
Cheerily, cheerily, goes the afternoon.
Down the hill, down the hill, after dinner drop
Sulky boys, sulky boys, stay upon the top!⁶²

Bowen created in his Harrow songs an idyll of boyhood: innocent, healthy and happy. Some lived it; in middle age through his evocative imagery many came to believe they had shared it; while outside the favored world of the "Great Schools" many more wished they had had the chance to share it. To further the idyll his songs are necessarily replete with the imagery of "the long splendor of the summer days" "cricket fields drenched with dew" and the youthful beauty of "the cricketing⁶³ captain slim and sleek." The beauty of the young athlete of course, had its own attractions. Bowen shared with many Victorian bachelor schoolmasters a lifelong love affair with boys and boyhood and a passion for straight, firm limbs, a strong arm and swift grace:

O good lads in the field they were,
Laboured, ran and threw.⁶⁴

William Bowen wrote of his uncle, possibly ingenuously: "If I attempted to classify his interests, I should be inclined to say that he cared for things somewhat in the following order: boys, literature, games, history, walks, politics

. . . I think his friendship with his boys held the first place in his heart . . . he gave his life to his boys.”⁶⁵ And in his biography he recorded Bowen’s intense love for the Harrovian Ernest Reade killed in the Boer War, and recounted the moving story of Bowen, on the night news of Reade’s death reached Harrow, being seen “by a wakeful boy, whose door was open, to stop by the panel on which the name of the officer had been carved when a member of the house, and by the glimmer of the flickering candle in his hand slowly to trace over with his fingers the letters of the word.”⁶⁶ Boyhood at play is a recurring theme in Bowen’s poetry, and games are the means of youthful escape into delight:

The worse the time the better the end, and under the sky the sun,
 I go to play the cricketer’s part, and turn the bowlers on;
 And one will bowl me fast balls, and one will bowl me slow,
 And one will bowl me cunning and straight, and then the bails
 will go;
 But fast come, slow come, the grass and winds are free,
 And heigh-ho, follow the game, the world is fair to me.⁶⁷

Public schools “nostalgiciens” were trapped in this web of evocation and Old Harrovians were reduced to tears by his verses. With him they mourned the passing of youth and the onset of old age. His “Forty Years On” became “the national anthem of Harrow” sung in the days of imperial grandeur on every continent of the globe:

Forty years on, when afar and asunder
 Parted are those who are singing today.
 When you look back, and forgetfully wonder
 What you were like in your work and your play;
 Then, it may be, there will often come o’er you
 Glimpses of notes like the catch of a song—
 Visions of boyhood shall float them before you,
 Echoes of dreamland shall bear them along,
 Follow up! Follow up! Follow up! Follow up!
 Till the field ring again and again
 With the tramp of the twenty-two men,
 Follow up! Follow up!⁶⁸

Bowen is the verse chronicler of the Golden Age of Athleticism. He sang sweetly of the “great days in the distance enchanted” and “days of fresh air in the rain and the sun”; he described the great dramas of the Eton and Harrow Match played every July at Lord’s; he wrote whimsical doggerel about foot-balls and cricket bats; and he composed possibly the most beautiful and tender elegy in the poetry of the cricket field for a fellow lover of Harrow games, Robert Grimston:

Still the balls ring upon the sun-lit grass,
 Still the big elms, deep shadowed, watch the play;
 And ordered game and loyal conflict pass the hours of May.

But the game's guardian, mute, nor heeding more
What suns may gladden, and what airs may blow,
Friend, teacher, playmate, helper counsellor,
Lies resting now.
"Over"—they move, as bids their fieldsman's art;
With shifted scene the strife begins anew;
"Over"—we seem to hear him, but his part
Is over, too.⁶⁹

In his introduction to *Ionica*, A.C. Benson wrote of the verses of the gentle, agnostic William Cory:

Uncheered by Christian hopefulness, and yet strong in their unbelief in the ardours and passions of humanity, these poems may help us to remember and love the best of life, its days of sunshine and youth, its generous companionships, its sweet ties of loyalty and love, its brave hopes and ardent impulses which may be ours, if we are only loving and generous and high hearted, to the threshold of the dark, and perhaps beyond.⁷⁰

These words serve even more perceptively to describe Edward Bowen's varied melodies in praise of boyhood. His songs, as one commentator has remarked, are "full of a boyish joy . . . in the mimic strife of games."⁷¹

Bowen had a complex and contradictory nature and in the final analysis, the most extraordinary element in his professional life is to be found in the reconciliation between his non-conformist and conformist predilections. Historically the diversity of his talents, the eccentric whimsicality of his pedagogy, the sweetness of his lyricism count for little in the face of the prodigality of energy stimulated by his obsessive passion for games: in the late Victorian public school system the obligatory fixation. This passion ensured that although radical among conservatives, modernist among traditionalists, agnostic among Christians, he overcame these considerable disabilities and incredibly won massive esteem in a conventional, complacent educational system which ruthlessly crushed the deviant. He was forgiven his idiosyncrasy because paradoxically he was a figure of the most solid orthodoxy and a symbol of the most perfect ideological purity. He endorsed the Gospel of Games, preached it, implemented it, eulogized it and diffused it through upper-class English education. His professional life exemplified conviction, passion and influence. More than this he "cast a mantle of romance" around a moral philosophy. He not only made games noble; he made them idyllic. He is an archetypal figure in the Victorian muscular movement: player, organizer, donor, proselytizer and romancer. In his allegiance he must be seen as the embodiment of late-Victorian upper-class pedagogical priorities.

Notes

1. For a discussion of this innovation see J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 113-121.
2. Mangan, *Athleticism*, pp. 22-67.
3. The author is at present researching the dissemination of this image. For an early discussion of the matter, see for example, "Eton in India: The Imperial Diffusion of a Victorian Educational Ethic," *History of Education*, 7 (1978), 105-118, and "Imitating their Betters and Disassociating from their Inferiors: Grammar Schools and the Games-Ethic in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the History of Education Society held at Loughborough University*, (December 1982). A fuller discussion will be published under the title *The Games-Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Idea* by Allen Lane/Pelican in due course.
4. Mangan, *Athleticism*, p. 115.
5. Edward Bowen, *Harrow Songs and other verses* (London: Longmans, 1886), p. 67.
6. Sporting prosody was a popular Victorian fashion, see Mangan, *Athleticism*, p. 179.
7. In both senses of the word, see for example T.C. Worsley, *Flannelled Fool* (London, 1967), passim.
8. Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 21-22. I am indebted to Dr. G. Redmond of the University of Alberta for drawing my attention to this stimulating study of Victorian society.
9. Haley, *Healthy Body*, p. 22.
10. Bowen, *The Force of Habit* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1859), p. 6.
11. Bowen, *Harrow Songs*, p. 19.
12. William Cory, *Ionica* (London: George Allen, 1905), p. 26.
13. W.E. Bowen, *Edward Bowen: A Memoir* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902), p. 231.
14. *Harrovian*, LXII, 23, (1949), 92.
15. *Harrovian*, XIV, 3, (1901), 31.
16. Quid, "Memoirs of a Famous School Master," *Baily's Magazine* (January, 1903), 13.
17. *Harrovian*, XIV, 3, (1901), 32.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Quid, *Baily's Magazine*, 11.
20. Frederic William Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London: Duckworth, 1906), p. 64.
21. Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen. His Thought and Character in Relation to his Time* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1951), p. 29.
22. Haley, *Healthy Body*, p. 64.
23. Bowen came from an Irish Protestant family which had property in County Mayo. He was the son of the Reverend Christopher Bowen, a priest of evangelical tendencies, and the daughter of Sir Richard Steele, an Irish Baronet. Early in Bowen's life the family moved to London where Bowen was educated before going up to Cambridge in 1854.
24. Bowen, *Memoir*, p. 51.
25. C.H.P. Mayo, "Reminiscences of a Harrow Master," *Nineteenth Century and After*, LXIV, 379, (1927), 65.
26. Bowen, *Memoir*, p. 156.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
30. In the best tradition of schoolboy fiction the famous Wanderers lost to Harrow school 1-0 when the two teams met in November, 1866. In addition to Edward Bowen, who had been a master at Harrow since 1859, there were three Old Harrovians in the Wanderers' side: C.W. Alcock, J. A. Cruikshank and W.O. Hewlett. (See P. M. Young, *A History of British Football* (London: Stanley Paul, 1968), p. 96).
31. E.D. Laborde, *Harrow School: Yesterday and Today* (London: Winchester, 1948), p. 48.
32. Horace Annesley Vachell, *Fellow Travellers* (London, Cassell, 1923), pp. 25-26.

33. *Harrowian*, XIV, 3, (1901), 33.

34. Sir Charles Tennyson, "They Taught the World to Play," *Victorian Studies*, II (1959), 211-217.

35. F.M. Marples, *A History of Football* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954). Quid reported in *Baily's Magazine* that the Wanderers then "retired from further interference . . . being so far superior to any other team which entered for the competition." The team is interestingly discussed in Montague Shearman, *Football: A History* (London: Longmans Green, 1899), pp. 162-163.

36. A. Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915* (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980), p. 16.

37. For an interesting discussion of the role of Harrow School in the early evolution of association football, see Young, *British Football*, pp. 95-97. For a comment on the importance of the Harrowian, G.W. Alcock to the growth of soccer, see G. Green, *The History of the Football Association* (London: Nadrett Press, 1963), p. 47. Green writes:

"The beginning of this important phase (1870-1880) saw also a change in the position of Honorary Secretary to the Football Association. After a succession of officers in this position, a position that was to grow to one of vital importance in the years of expansion ahead, there now came C.W. Alcock, an Old Harrowian and a true lover of sport and sportsmanship. For 25 years he was to hold the administrative reins through a period in which the character, outlook, and significance of the game underwent tremendous change. The part that he played in this evolution was of the greatest significance. Indeed, it was he above all others who gave football the first real impetus that sent it rolling over hill and dale, through town and country and finally across the seven seas."

38. James Walvin, *Leisure & Society 1830-1950* (London: Longmans 1978), p. 88.

39. Bowen, *Memoir*, p. 165.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

41. *Harrowian*, XIV, 3, (1901), 27.

42. A most attractive insight into the nature of the man, is to be found in a letter he wrote to Robert Sinker, Librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge circa 1888 and biographer of the Arabic scholar and missionary Ian Keith-Falconer, who was in Bowen's Form at Harrow between 1872 and 1873. The complete letter is worth careful consideration but in the extracts below Bowen's diverse enthusiasms are paraded: his physiopsychological orthodoxy; "[Falconer's] clearheadedness in matters of intellect was after all only a reflection of the moral simplicity which was his highest and most beautiful gift;" his interest in intellectual by-ways "I remember writing to him [Falconer] once to ask about the method and time of the adoption of the Western Aramaic among the Hebrews;" above all, his love of physical exercise; "His [Falconer's] bicycling feats were one subject of common interest between us." Falconer was an amateur cyclist of some ability and won many prizes. Bowen urged him on to an exceptional performance that "it would be a pleasure afterwards to remember." The journey from Land's End to John O'Groats was chosen. It was planned at Harrow and achieved in 1882 in thirteen days—"a splendid display of strength and endurance." It was the first time the effort had been successfully undertaken and Falconer's progress (he sent regular telegrams to Bowen) was charted "with tiny red flags" on a large map in the Modem Side classroom. See *Memorials of the Hon. Ian Keith-Falconer* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co., 1888), pp. 18-21.

43. "... the memoirs and reminiscences of his pupils reveal him as the most brilliant, original and liberal-minded of teacher's" wrote Bryant in his *Harrow School*, p. 147. In 1893, Bowen's conception of the Modem Side was disputed by the new headmaster J. Welldon who wished it to become less select and to cater for less able non-classicists. Bowen resigned in protest and wrote with dignified displeasure for private circulation, a letter to Welldon summarizing the original purpose of the enterprise, its successes and its reception beyond Harrow. He wrote of its original purpose:

"It should be said that the conception of the Modem Side which was adopted at the outset was not identical with that which has been entertained at many other schools. The idea was that of a department equal of dignity and status—so far as it could be made so—to the Classical Side, professing, or at any rate desiring, to give what is, from its own point of view, a first-class training to its pupils, and protected by conditions of entrance which implied an intellectual standard. Upon this basis the Modem Side has been conducted up to the beginning of this year."

And of its influence beyond Harrow:

"The Harrow Modem Side has received the compliment, if not of fame, at least of persistent inquiry. I think that hardly any school can have established a Modem Side in the last twenty years without previously asking for information about our system. Correspondence of this nature, as well as with persons in the English Colonies and in many European countries, with the interviews which have preceded or followed, have proved a sensible addition to my own work."

From a copy of the letter to Welldon in the Marshall Collection (DMI) in the archives of the Cumbria County Record Office.

44. C.H.P. Mayo, "Reminiscences," p. 67.

45. See Mangan, *Athleticism*, Appendix VII, pp. 265-6 for details of the classicists' domination of Harrow.

46. E.C. Mack, *Public Schools and the British Opinion since 1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 64.

47. Bowen, *Memoir*, p. 163.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
49. Edward Graham, *The Harrow Life of Henry Montagu Butler* (London: Longmans, Green, 1920), p. 270.
50. Edward Bowen, "Games," *Journal of Education*, (1884), 70.
51. *Ibid.*
52. James Bryce, *Studies in Contemporary Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1903), p. 361.
53. Bowen, "Games," 70.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Bowen's nephew deals with Bowen's agnosticism with delicacy observing that Bowen was separated by a distinct cleavage from the religious opinions of the clergy (p. 191) and further commented that "from Christianity, as commonly understood and received, he was no doubt divided" (p. 201). Graham in his biography of Montagu Butler wrote of friction on one occasion between the two men "when a report reached the Headmaster that parents were alarmed at the over-liberal tendency of Bowen's lessons in divinity and the disturbing effect of it on the mind of one at least of his pupils" (p. 179). Philip Caraman in his biography of C.C. Martindale called a spade a spade and wrote of Bowen: "He wrote the best school songs . . . preached athletics and a Spartan life for all" and added, "It was remarkable how most delinquents naturally went to him; he was not a parson *not even a believing Christian.*" (emphasis added) C.C. *Martindale: a biography* (London: Longmans, 1967), p. 44.
56. It would seem that Bowen like Stephen was caught up in the crisis of belief that characterized the Victorian intelligentsia of the second half of the nineteenth century. See David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning* (London: Murray, 1961), pp. 215-16.
57. For a fuller discussion of this point, see J. A. Mangan, "Social Darwinism, Sport and Upper Class Education," *Stadion*, VI (Autumn, 1982). See especially 96-8.
58. Bowen, *Memoir*, p. 405.
59. Mangan, "Social Darwinism," 106-107.
60. The concept is most interestingly discussed in the immediate context of Kipling's ideas on society by Noel Annan in "Kipling's Place in the History of Ideas," *Victorian Studies*, 3 (1960), 335-340.
61. Bowen's "Forty Years On" was translated into French by a French schoolmaster Pierre Janelle, an admirer of Harrow athleticism, who encouraged his pupils at his Lycee to sing it "avec un élan d'idéalisme bien anglais."
62. Bowen, *Harrow Songs*, p. 54.
63. See David Newsome's biography of A.C. Benson, *On the Edge of Paradise* (London: Murray, 1979), *passim*.
64. Bowen, *Memoir*, p. 409.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 407.
68. Bowen, *Harrow Songs*, p. 1.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
70. *Cory, Ionica*, p. 32.
71. Bryce, *Contemporary Biography*, p. 359.

