

J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School. The Emergence and Consideration of an Educational Ideology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp.xv+345. £25.

The study of ritual and rhetoric is central to sports history. Sport itself is a ritual; what is written and said about it exemplifies the meaning of the ritual. Anthropologists have known this for some time; historians, as opposed to chroniclers and hagiographers, must recognise this simple truth if sports history is to prosper. Tony Mangan, having appreciated this, has written a model of what sports history can achieve.

Not that his book, as its title, and more particularly its subtitle, shows, would claim to be exclusively sports history. It is a study in educational theory and practice, linked to the games cult that affected so much of British social and economic life in the nineteenth century. But, in his analysis and exposition of what happened in six different yet representative British (he includes Loretto) public schools, Mangan demonstrates how devotions to sport totally transformed that educational practice and theory, so powerful was its impact.

Prior to the revolution in private school education in Britain, schooling was nasty, brutish and short, with a sufficient minimal leavening of classical education to train a minority capable of sustaining the clerical and pedagogical finishing schools of Oxford and Cambridge. The industrial and imperial century imposed increased demands upon both schools and universities (principally upon the former) as a wealth of commissions of inquiry attests. To cope with the need for managers, colonists, administrators, civil servants and yet more schoolmasters, both the number of fee-paying schools and fee-paying pupils increased. Mangan makes a case for the theory that a significant cause of the fostering of organised games was the need to maintain order in schools that had suddenly become overpopulated. No longer were individual (or even a deux) rambles sufficient: boys in unprecedented numbers had to be regimented and controlled.

But this is only part of the explanation. There was growing ideological commitment to the concept of fitness, to the achievement of which mental and physical training were to be combined. If Mangan's book has a weakness it is in failing to explore fully the territory Haley has so ably ventured into in his book *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*, published in 1978 but finding no place in Dr. Mangan's bibliography. The two should be read together to obtain fuller insight into the intellectual origins of the phenomenon Mangan so ably describes. It is a pity, for instance, that he so glibly uses the phrase 'muscular Christianity' without considering it necessary to define its metamorphosis from a description of 'a man who fears God and can walk a thousand hours' (first used in 1857) to a term that encapsulated the whole Godliness, games and good learning ethos that informed private school education by the last quarter of the century.

Mangan is so sensitively aware of the importance of the phrasing of the rhetoric in sermons, school magazines, memoirs and reminiscences, aware also of some of the same literary sources that Haley uses, for example Wilkie Collins *Man and Wife* (1873), that it is a matter of regret that he has not chosen to examine, say, Charles Kingsley and the less tractable phenomenon of John Ruskin more closely.

I would extend this cavil to Mangan's rather too delicate handling of the sexual import of much of athleticism's ritual and rhetoric. To be sure he mentions it; but a more knowing analysis of unconscious double entendre in so much of what was written could have, as it were, fleshed out chapter eight of this study. Mangan has such a keen and loving eye for the cadence and significance of the often lamentable yet highly illuminating prose and verse that conveyed the cult's menage to acolyte, neophyte and outsider alike, that his perceptions would have made this book even more valuable. For example, *Baxter's Second Innings* (1892) is too perfunctorily dealt with; and it is surely remiss to pass over the case of Dr. Vaughan's homosexual difficulties at Harrow in a short footnote (277) and an even shorter textual comment (44).

These criticisms, it will be observed, are of the sort provoked by a wish for fuller treatment of certain topics rather than a stricture upon its actual content. Mangan has achieved that rare thing in authors - leaving us wishing he had written a longer book. The text is but 219 pages, the balance being made up by appendices, notes, bibliography and an unfortunately less than adequate index.

In this book Mangan takes us through the development of athleticism in his six chosen schools - Harrow, Uppingham, Marlborough, Lancing, Stonyhurst and Loretto. He briskly dismisses the claims of Arnold of Rugby to have initiated the movement, justly upholding those of such men as Vaughan of Harrow, Cotton of Marlborough, Walford of Lancing, Almond of Loretto, Thring of Uppingham and their like. Variously impelled, they, and eventually the Jesuits of Stonyhurst, altered the British public school beyond recognition. It is a measure of Mangan's success that he makes us realise that the most profound change in the nature of such schools was due to the effects of athleticism. Patterns of expenditure, extension of property, the house system, the recruitment of masters, the manners and mores of pupils, their dress, their slang, their attitudes to society both at home and abroad were determined by the advent of organised games. The scholarly curriculum barely altered, save in the increased time devoted to boat, bat, and hall - no doubt to the detriment of education suited to the increasingly technocratic age that was looming as certain as the Great War.

The transformation did not occur without opposition, and once again we would wish fuller treatment of those who by direct criticism in committee and journal, by *Loom of Youth* retrospective revelation, or by deliberate schoolboy aestheticism made their protests. Mangan mentions, but does not elaborate.

Yet at the end his case for the agency of change and his detailing of its manifestation remains unchallengeable. This is a splendidly rich book, highly readable, cogent and intelligent, It is based upon very hard work in archival sources, in school magazines, in neglected memoirs and arcane memorabilia. Sports history, done properly, is no soft option as Mangan's bibliography shows. The ritual and the rhetoric must be both mined and teased out of unlikely, dull and otiose matter, then presented in a manner that engages and convinces. The economic historians now engaged upon the history of sport are demonstrating that their calling is not demeaned by attention to games: Mangan has performed a similar service for those of us generalists who see in sports history both intrinsic worth and a vital key to the understanding of an age.

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