

Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought*. Cambridge University Press, 1985. Illus., index. pp. x + 244. \$80.50.

Norman Vance's book should be welcomed as a solid scholarly addition to those works that have recently been published and which have enlightened our understanding of the Victorian 'frame of mind'. *The Sinews of the Spirit* is an obvious extension of his exploratory effort 'The Idea of Manliness', that excellent chapter in Simon and Bradley's *The Victorian Public School: Ideas in the Development in an Educational Institution* (1975). Vance's book sits nicely alongside Bruce Haley's *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (1978), Mark Girouard's *Return to Camelot. Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (1981) and Tony Mangan's *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (1981); this body of literature presents a comprehensive insight into a significant aspect of Victorian culture which was so influential in shaping attitudes towards sport.

Vance leads the reader, in an elegant manner, through the complexity of competing and overlapping issues which moulded pre-Victorian and Victorian views on both manliness and Christianity. He achieves his objective by setting out the dimensions of Christian manliness as synthesised and expressed by noted period novelists Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. The influences on manliness were disparate: the vigorous Christian virtues preached by St. Paul, the moral, political and national overtones of Scott, the 'sturdy sporting' and military manliness of the Wellingtonian era, the pragmatic moralism of Trollope, and the revived cult of chivalry. This was compounded further by the infectious religious atmosphere of the 1840s and 1850s. Both authors followed paths of 'embattled Christian activism' which was greatly inspired by the thoughts and works of Coleridge, Arnold, Maurice and Carlyle.

Kingsley was more the theologian. He preferred the term manly Christianity to the widely-used phrase 'muscular Christianity' and his interpretation of Christian manliness very much reflected contemporary religious concerns. He rejected Newman's opinions on the inconsequential nature of the physical world. Ascetic privations, he believed, encouraged effeminacy. He promoted the view that men should glorify God in their bodies as well as in their spirits. His vision evolved continuously as he was affected by emerging intellectual literature and prominent social problems. It represented the moral and physical strength that was attractive in the 'eyes of God' and that would ultimately be tested in 'the service of Christ' in campaigns against individual injustices and 'the bracing work of social improvement'.

Hughes charted a parallel course but was shaped in his views by different forces. His school and college experiences and the personal encounter with Maurice figured prominently. A vigorous moral and practical Christianity emerged which owed a great deal to the Mauricean idea of Christian socialist co-operation. Like Kingsley, his physical manliness included a sense of chivalric service and Christian mission which, to quote from his chapter 'Muscular Christianity' in *Tom Brown at Oxford* worked 'for the protection of the weak and the advancement of all righteous causes'.

The main portion of the text is taken up with outlining the origins and development of the ideal in the period between the 1832

and 1867 Reform Bills. Vance's final section concerns, 'The Unmanning of Manliness', looks closely at both the maintenance and transformation of the ideal in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The Boys' Brigade, Eric Liddell and John Buchan are suggested as examples of institutions and individuals who remained faithful to the original notion. The pervasive and secular versions of the ideal, which permeated the public schools as athleticism and which captured the interests of the British people in the years of imperial expansion along with the adventurous and jingoistic fiction of Ballantyne and Henty, and the 'well-muscled physical vigour' of the Great War provide examples of the changing perspectives. Throughout, Vance maintains a balanced approach. It is a book rich in sources, eloquent in style and thorough in its contextual analysis.

It is difficult to review this book however, without thinking of Henry Harrington's dictorial dissertation 'Muscular Christianity: A Study in the Development of a Victorian Idea' (Stanford, 1971) and published, by demand, by University Microfilms International in 1976. Side by side, the structures of the two texts are remarkably similar. Harrington pays close attention to Scott, Trollope, Coleridge, Maurice, Carlyle, Arnold and Newman. His concluding section covers the decline, or the secularisation, of muscular Christianity. It is impossible to check if Vance owed anything to Harrington's foray due to the absence of bibliographic references. What is certain, however, is that two authors have approached a similar problem from different perspectives. Harrington focussed on muscular Christianity itself, whereas Vance probed beyond this concept searching for an ideal which spawned this term; in comparison his work is more comprehensive and more systematic in its analysis. Researchers with an interest in the diffusion of the ideal throughout the empire will find Vance's work invaluable although, at slightly over \$80, somewhat expensive.

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