American Society of Church History

Tom Brown's Schooldays and the Development of "Muscular Christianity"
Author(s): William E. Winn
Source: Church History, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Mar., 1960), pp. 64-73
Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the American Society of Church History
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3161617
Accessed: 24/07/2011 20:08

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Cambridge University Press and American Society of Church History are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Church History.
The Broad Church movement, of which “muscular Christianity” was one of the most influential expressions, represented a type of liberalism within the Church of England. Benjamin Jowett claimed that the name “Broad Church” was first proposed in his hearing by Arthur Hugh Clough and that it had become a familiar term in circles at Oxford a few years before 1850. In July 1850, A. P. Stanley, writing on the Gorham controversy in the Edinburgh Review, said that the Church of England was “by the very conditions of its being, not High or Low, but Broad.” The term “Broad Church,” however only began to be used generally from October 1853, when an unsigned article by W. J. Conybeare, entitled “Church Parties,” appeared, also in the Edinburgh Review. F. D. Maurice believed that Conybeare invented the name.

In the years previous to 1850 the Evangelicals had begun to lose much of their vigor, and their hold upon the public was not so strong as it had been during the prior generation. This was largely due to their increased narrowness and rigidity, as the traditional doctrines became more fixed and technical, and to their neglect of general learning. In his article, W. J. Conybeare wrote concerning a dominant wing of the Evangelical party:

Dr. Arnold has justly described their literary organs as “a true specimen of the party, with their infinitely little minds, disputing about anise and cummin, when heaven and earth are coming together around them.” And he defines an Evangelical of this class to be “a good Christian, with low understanding, a bad education, and ignorance of the world.” The only objection to this definition is that their ignorance is not limited to worldly affairs, but extends impartially to things sacred and profane.

A period of skeptical languor throughout England had set in. Neither a disintegrating Evangelicalism nor a failing Oxford movement could relieve powerful minds of doubts resulting from the findings of natural scientists and German theologians. Many intellectuals went into the wilderness in search of something in which they might believe. J. A. Froude, the historian, once a disciple of Newman, took refuge in Carlylism; Arthur Hugh Clough, the poet, broke away from Oxford and resigned his fellowship; F. W. Newman wrote the Phases of Faith and gave up his early Evangelicalism; Matthew Arnold broke with
orthodoxy and wrote poems of divine despair; Frederick Robertson struggled for his faith and John Sterling's faith disappeared.

But out of this skepticism and connected with it there arose the religious influence which was to the middle of the nineteenth century what Low Churchmen were to its beginning. Coleridge's teachings were the main source of the Broad Church movement, beginning with his *Aids to Reflection* of 1825. Another important source was the teachings of Thomas Arnold. Coleridge and Arnold were both champions of liberty and both encouraged broad learning. Coleridge died in 1834 and Arnold died as a fairly young man in 1842, but both only "lived in the seedtime, not in the time of the harvest, which began about 1848 and which in a sense has continued ever since."  

The name "Broad Church" has often been misinterpreted. Indeed, F. D. Maurice, whom popular usage has designated as the chief theologian of the movement, denied as late as 1860 that he knew what "Broad Church" meant. He suggested that if it meant anything, it applied to the followers of Archbishop Whately with whom he did not wish to be identified. However, Maurice, who hated parties above all things, would not have objected to being identified with the term as it was used in Stanley's article of 1850. Stanley merely insisted that the Established Church was not a party and that the history and constitution of the Church of England allowed for all different sides of spiritual truth. But Conybeare, in his 1853 article, used the name in a party sense as applying to those Liberal teachers who had long existed in the Church of England, along with Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals.

Much confusion has arisen from the fact that following the violent controversy which started in 1860 over the publication of *Essays and Reviews*, there was a tendency to label all liberals within the Church of England as "Broad Churchmen" without taking into consideration the extreme differences among these liberals. Although the Broad Church movement was never organized in any way, it did contain two distinct groups of liberal thinkers. The first group was closely associated with Oxford and tended to be more critical and theoretical than the second group which was composed mainly of men who had been students at Cambridge. The first included Whately, Dr. Arnold, Stanley, Matthew Arnold and Jowett. These men were predominantly Aristotelians in that they placed great stress upon formal logic. Like Aristotle they emphasized the importance of collecting, arranging and classifying facts, and, again like Aristotle, they tended to think of God as first cause of things rather than as Person. The second group included Coleridge, Wordsworth, Maurice, and in many respects Tennyson and Browning. These men were predominantly Platonic in method. They were interested in facts, but, like Plato, they were interested much more
in principles. They tended to think of God in personal terms. Both groups generally welcomed progress in science and in the textual criticism of the Bible, but the second was less hostile to tradition and to church authority than the first. The men in the first group were of necessity completely out of sympathy with the Oxford movement, which was partly a reaction against their kind of liberalism. On the other hand, the Cambridge group, although often in opposition to the Oxford movement, held much in common with the leaders of that movement. These Broad Churchmen, taken together, were united against terrorism and the suppression of truth and thus became the medium through which the Church gradually regained contact with the modern forces in the world. They greatly contributed to the contraction of the sphere of the pure fundamentalism of High Churchmen like Pusey and Evangelicals like Bishop Samuel Wilberforce.

Related to both of these groups within the Broad Church movement was what came to be called "muscular Christianity." The two most influential leaders of this development were Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, author of Tom Brown's Schooldays, probably the most important book ever to be written about Public Schools.

Muscular Christianity first made its appearance in Kingsley's novels, especially in Westward Ho!, the novel which proved to be such a powerful propaganda agent in the recruitment of soldiers for the Crimean War. Although Kingsley was the founder of muscular Christianity, he detested the phrase and asserted bitterly that he had received the label at the time when he was active in the Christian Socialist campaign.

In the development of his muscular Christianity, Kingsley was indebted to F. D. Maurice for the belief in God's law—the thesis that all things advance steadily from worse to better. But the primary influence was Thomas Carlyle. From Carlyle, Kingsley took over the gospel of work and a love for Old Testament morality.

Early in his studies Carlyle had become acquainted with the traditions and legends of Scandinavia, and he conceived a strong affection for the Vikings. Later he combined the romance of the Northmen with English industry in such a way that labor took on a poetical significance.

He combined his observation of prosaic facts with his collection of poetical material. The Northmen were the heroes in whom he delighted, and he made them the heroes of his poem of industry. . . . By thus awakening the associations of a remote past, and filling up the background of his picture with the shadowy forms of giants, doubly to be reverenced because, like Greek demigods, they were slated to be the progenitors of modern labourers, he gave to the scene of industry a fanciful glow.

Carlyle had also been attracted by the Hebrew prophets. It was in their language that he veiled his admiration of force and vigorously
denounced his adversaries. The Saturday Review complained thus of Kingsley's imitation of Carlyle:

Mr. Kingsley constantly assures us that every prosperous farmer is a Viking, and that whatever happens is in accordance with Mr. Kingsley's fancy of God's will; and he states this with such an easy simplicity, that we see not only how congenial Mr. Carlyle's teaching is to him, but how absolutely he is incapable of criticising any set of opinions or forms of expression that once take hold of his imagination.8

Kingsley's governing idea "consisted in a high appreciation of the perfection to which manhood might be brought."9 "I have to preach the divineness of the whole manhood..."10 The world belonged to God, he would say, not to the Devil. He detested the view that bodily weakness could be identified with spiritual strength and disliked all forms of asceticism and Manicheism. There was no place in his thought for celibacy in either man or woman. Indeed, he went so far as to suggest that the love of a man for a woman was the greatest force for good in the world. The Saint's Tragedy, his book about Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, was written to demonstrate the wickedness of a system that persuaded a girl to practice asceticism within marriage.

Kingsley introduced into literature the huge British hero who always fought victoriously and who spread the doctrines of the English Church. He extolled the merits of massive unconscious goodness as exemplified by the scions of the English squires. "To read the Bible and kill Spaniards was the whole duty of the ideal Briton of Elizabeth's time, according to this authority."11 With war he was fascinated. Accounts of the miles of hungry, wounded men in the Crimean War hardly roused him and, in conversation with Florence Nightingale, information concerning "missing stores" interested him very little. It was the unwounded soldiers that caught his imagination. In Brave Words for Brave Soldiers he wrote, "The Lord Jesus Christ is not only the Prince of Peace; He is the Prince of War too." As Kingsley grew older he wrote and did many things which encouraged jingoistic nationalism. Justin McCarthy claimed that he "out-Carlyled Carlyle in the worship of strong despotisms and force of any kind," and that "when two sides were possible to any question of human politics, he was sure to take the wrong one."12 Una Pope-Hennessy stated that Kingsley's career "seems to have depended on spasms of sympathy, and not to have been determined by any process of intellectual development."13

There were many similarities between the originator of muscular Christianity and its other chief advocate, but there was one interesting difference. Whereas Kingsley disapproved of the label "muscular Christian," Thomas Hughes championed it just as he gloried in being called a "latitudinarian." In 1870 when Hughes was in the United States he chose to speak about muscular Christianity to the students at Harvard
University. Tom Brown, his most famous literary creation, was enrolled "in the brotherhood of muscular Christians," and Hughes commented:

As his biographer, I am not about to take exception to his enrollment; for, after considering the persons up and down her Majesty's dominions to whom the new nickname has been applied, the principles which they are supposed to hold, and the sort of lives they are supposed to lead, I cannot see where he could in these times have fallen into a nobler brotherhood.14

Dr. Thomas Arnold played an important role in shaping Hughes's distinctive interpretation of muscular Christianity. Although the Rugby headmaster, the man whom Richard C. Mack has called England's greatest educator, seems never to have shared Hughes's enthusiasm for athletics and is not to be identified altogether with the Doctor of Tom Brown's Schooldays, he nevertheless did much to prepare Hughes for this particular movement.

Especially influential in this direction was Arnold's concept of "moral earnestness." An exponent of the gospel of work, he was constantly preoccupied with the great struggle between righteousness and evil. This struggle, Arnold held, extended to all events of life, because all individuals, especially boys under the age of thirteen, were fundamentally wicked. As an educator he saw it as his duty to instil in his students something of his own sense of "moral earnestness."

At Rugby, Arnold's influence upon the students may be classified under two categories. First of all there was his influence upon the intellectuals, the students who fully understood and sympathized with his major aims. Upon these boys Arnold exercised too much control. They came to rely too much upon a personality for whom there was no intermediate state between right and wrong. He put too much pressure upon them to develop both morally and intellectually, and he encouraged them to become men at too early an age. William Charles Lake, who admitted that his Rugby experience did him considerable harm, recorded his own reaction to Arnold's powerful personality.

Arnold said gravely: "Now, Lake, I know you can do well if you choose, and I shall expect you to do so." Those few words altered my whole character, intellectually at all events. Whatever I was, I was never an idle boy again, and my one wish was to be well thought of by Arnold.15

The result was that many of these cleverer boys experienced difficulties in their later years. When they were no longer under the shadow of their master, they suffered despair and skepticism. This is clearly seen in the poems of Arnold's son Matthew, as well as in the lives of others like Lake and Arthur Clough. In his later age, Clough wrote about "my strange distorted youth," and in his Epilogue to Dipsychus the elder Clough protests against the extreme moral earnestness of the young: "They're all too pious," he exclaims. "It's all Arnold's doing. He spoilt the public school."16

Although Arnold's influence may have been in some ways unsalu-
tary upon his more gifted students, this cannot be said of those "ordinary" boys with whom he was less intimate and who did not fully comprehend his moral and intellectual ideals. Lake was probably right when he expressed the opinion that it was the average boys who gained most as students at Rugby under Arnold and who benefited most from the example of Arnold in their adult years. Such were the majority of the students, those like the unknown author of *Recollections of Rugby*, and, above all, Thomas Hughes.

In his muscular Christianity, Hughes further developed Arnold's teaching that a moral struggle takes place at every point in life. Reviewing *Tom Brown's Schooldays, The Edinburgh Review* stated that only a graduate of Rugby could attach so much importance to the "merest trifles." The magazine added that the author found as many morals in a boxing match "as Mr. Ruskin does in the twist of a gar-goyle's tail, or in the shape of a wallflower's root." On the other hand, Lord Elgin was of the opinion that it was Hughes's great achievement that he was able to convey the deep moral significance which seemingly petty school incidents possessed. This was one of the reasons why Elgin believed that the fight about which *The Edinburgh Review* jested, that between Tom Brown and Slogger Williams in Hughes's novel, would stand comparison with the celebrated fight between Hazlitt's Bill Neate and the gas-man.

Hughes remembered Arnold as "essentially a fighting man." Returning to speak to the students at Rugby about the school as it had been some fifty years earlier when he had been a student there under Arnold, Hughes said that he and his fellow-students had been trained for the "fight to which we had all been pledged at our baptism." Indeed, they had the feeling that they already were participating in a fight between good and evil, between Christ and the Devil, a fight that required all their physical, intellectual and moral powers.

Especially repugnant to Hughes was the belief held by some that Christianity was no faith for fighters, "for men who have to do the roughest and hardest work in the world." One of the most common objections made against the Gospel, said Hughes, was that it was not suitable for such men. To the contrary, urged the man who had been Colonel of the Volunteer Bloomsbury Rifles, Christians were under the obligation to fight with their bodies, minds and spirits against whatever was false, and therefore Christ could "call them as plainly in the beating of a drum to battle as in the bell calling to prayer." The greatest fighting in history had been done by those who believed that they were fighting under the leadership and with the help of God. He admitted that war was evil and stated that Christians should have nothing to do with it unless "it is the clear path of supreme duty," but a battlefield
Tom Hughes had a natural love for pugilism, and as boxing coach at the Working Men’s College, the school founded by himself and other Christian Socialists in London, he formulated moral and intellectual values for that sport. “To knock someone down, and post hoc, almost propter hoc— to be a good fellow and a Christian ever afterwards,” was the creed of muscular Christianity, according to Vernon Rendall. Hughes’s advice about fighting that is found at the close of the chapter entitled “The Fight” in Tom Brown’s Schooldays is worth recording:

As to fighting, keep out of it if you can, by all means. When the time comes, if it ever should, that you have to say “Yes” or “No” to a challenge to fight, say “No” if you can—only take care you make it clear to yourselves why you say “No.” It’s a proof of the highest courage, if done from true Christian motives. It’s quite right and justifiable, if done from a simple aversion to physical pain and danger. But don’t say “No” because you fear a licking, and say or think it’s because you fear God, for that’s neither Christian nor honest. And if you do fight, fight it out; and don’t give in while you can stand and see.17

According to Hughes, England’s ancient games originally had been closely related to the Church. The Church had stimulated interest in these games through annual feasts of dedication to which each village sent its champion. Hughes had romantic boyhood memories of these “feasts” and seriously regretted their passing away. Their effect, he believed, had been on the whole “humanising and Christian.” They had brought together all the people and had thus created better understanding among the classes. This understanding, said Hughes, would have continued to exist if the gentlefolk and farmers had not turned to other amusements and forgotten the poor. Class amusements, whether of the rich or poor, always ended up as “nuisances and curses to a country.” The merit of such games as cricket and hunting was that they were “still more or less sociable and universal; there’s a place for every man who will come and take his part.”

Games also served the important function of strengthening the body. Since man was born with a body as well as a mind, Hughes stated, the body should be given just as careful treatment as the mind. Man’s body was a God-given gift. Therefore, man would be judged by the way in which he took care of this gift. Since the body and the mind reacted upon one another, the man who exercised properly would be able to do far better mental work.

Like his muscular Christian friend Charles Kingsley, Hughes had no particular concern for intellectual aims. As a student at Oxford he demonstrated little concern about the revolution being brought about
by the Tractarians, and he was more interested in sports than in lectures. He himself did not have a very commanding intellect, and his sympathies were with the Squire in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* who did not send his son to school in order that he might learn Greek particles. In his famous book ethical purposes are achieved through organized games rather than through intellectual pursuits. Concerning a football match, Hughes wrote: "This is worth living for; the whole sum of school-boy existence gathered up into one straining, struggling half-hour worth a year of common life." Following the game, Old Brook tells the boys in the Schoolhouse: "I'd sooner win two Schoolhouse matches running than to get the Balliol scholarship any day." And near the end of the book, Tom Brown says to a young master, a game "is more than a game. It's an institution."

While he was never a nationalist in the sense that Kingsley was, Hughes did have his prejudices and admitted that he was something of a Philistine. On his first visit to the United States he told a sophisticated audience at the Music Hall in Boston, "I am before all things an Englishman—a John Bull if you will—loving Old England and feeling proud of her." As a young man writing to the girl to whom he was engaged concerning the nature of their married life, he suggested that the two occasionally would visit points in England but not travel abroad. "I don't like any foreign nation much from the little I know of them, and I am certainly a most thoroughly prejudiced John Bull." But despite remarks like these, Hughes actually travelled extensively and developed into a rather remarkable international statesman. During the American Civil War he played a major role in preventing war between his own country and the United States.

As a muscular Christian, Hughes is a more important figure than Kingsley because of Hughes's influence upon the development of secondary schools. Edward C. Mack and W. H. G. Armytage in their scholarly biography of Hughes say that "it is no exaggeration to say that *Tom Brown's Schooldays* made the modern public schools." Thomas Arnold brought about the reforms in the schools which made them congenial to the rising middle class in England, but the novel by Hughes "spread Arnold's fame abroad in a way that neither Arnold nor Stanley could spread it." And the schools that mushroomed after 1857 "tried to be as much as possible like the Rugby of Hughes's dream." 18

But the Rugby of Hughes's book was not altogether like Arnold's Rugby. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays* Hughes emphasized certain aspects of Rugby life. And as early as 1858 *The Edinburgh Review* called attention to the fact that in the novel the author "viewed every part of
the subject through the medium of the doctrines of a school of which Mr. Kingsley is at once the ablest and the most popular teacher.”219 This was particularly true of the picture presented of Dr. Arnold.

At the time when Tom Brown’s Schooldays was being written the late Dr. Arnold was being accused of having turned his students into prigs. With this in mind, Hughes emphasized the human side of the Doctor and minimized the radical and awesome side of the headmaster. Arnold “has become a glorified boy scoutmaster whose strenuous spirituality has been made palatable to Englishmen by presenting it under the guise of the honest manliness of a Kingsley hero.”220 And instead of recognizing Arnold’s great intellectual endeavour, the Doctor was portrayed as a sort of patron saint of games.

Thus the schools after 1857 tended to model themselves after the version described by Hughes rather than the real Rugby under Arnold. Athletics became stressed to a point that frightened even the author of Tom Brown. In order to gain popularity with the boys, the masters began to minimize intellectual responsibility. This process continued until and after Bertrand Russell’s complaint:

Masters are selected largely for their athletic qualifications; they must conform, at least outwardly, to a whole code of behaviour, religious, political, social, and moral, which is intolerable to most intelligent people; they must encourage boys to be constantly occupied that they will have no time for sexual sin, and incidentally no time to think.21

Muscular Christianity also often resulted in further oversimplifications of the Christian faith. A later generation of muscular Christians would, like Bruce Barton, turn Christ into a supersalesman, and a still later generation would, like Norman Vincent Peale, convert God into a cosmic bellhop. And “self-reliance, under the pressure of preparation for the business world, tended to degenerate into the competitive spirit.”222 The Young Men’s Christian Association, another outgrowth of muscular Christianity, would in many areas become largely secularized.228

But the results of muscular Christianity have not been all negative in character. It is difficult to overestimate the part this school of thought played in bringing about sanitary reform. At the time when Kingsley and Hughes were propagating their views there were countless people, educated and uneducated, who looked upon disease as the punishment of the Almighty upon sin. For these people, sanitary measures represented attempts to resist the decrees of Providence. But against such a perversion of religion, muscular Christianity calling for mens sana in corpore sano and closely allied with medical science was a powerful force. And it should be acknowledged that the physical education programs that have been developed in the schools, despite abuses, have not been without value.
But more important still has been the part that muscular Christianity has played in combating the weak pietism that so often masquerades as Christianity itself. John Henry Newman rightly reminded muscular Christians that our Lord "has substituted meekness for haughtiness, passiveness for violence, and innocence for craft,"24 but Kingsley and Hughes were correct in their strenuous objections to any identification of Christianity with escape, sickness, or lack of courage. In this regard, many of those who are most contemptuous of this school are in some respects muscular Christians themselves.

5. Principal John Tulloch made the interesting observation that "Mr. Maurice's great deficiency as a theologian is just his deficiency in certain critical qualities that belonged to Whately and others and gave a historic breadth to many of their conclusions." John Tulloch, Movements of Religious Thought in Britain During the Nineteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1885), p. 260. A dominant influence upon Maurice was the teaching of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen. The 1848-49 correspondence between Erskine and Samuel Brown reveals concern by these two men with the "I-Thou" conception. H. Howard Williams, "I and Thou," The Expository Times, Vol. LXIX No. 2. (November, 1957), pp. 50-52.
8. Ibid., p. 582.
12. Ibid., pp. 264, 625.