THE ‘SPORTSMAN’ AND THE ‘MUSCULAR CHRISTIAN’

RIVAL IDEALS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

HUGH MCLEOD

In Thomas Hughes’ novel, Tom Brown’s School Days, the classic text of ‘muscular Christianity’, the villain Flashman and his clique are described as “fast sporting young gentlemen”. At first sight this might seem surprising as the novel is famous (or, in the eyes of some readers, infamous) for its extended accounts of football and cricket matches, bare-knuckle boxing and many other forms of sporting encounter. Moreover, to call someone a ‘sportsman’ was for many people of the time the highest form of praise. Hughes clearly could not object to Flashman’s interest in sport. The critique focused on four main points. First, Flashman was a bully: he used his physical strength to inflict pain on those weaker than himself. Second, he was a coward, as he flinched from confronting those who were stronger. Third, he was a gambler. And fourth, he ate and drank too much, with the result that he was sometimes drunk, and even when sober was less fit than he should have been. The second point was gratuitous. Courage was a virtue greatly prized by ‘sportsmen’, and in branding Flashman as a coward Hughes could not claim to be making a fair criticism of the behaviour of sportsmen in general. The first point is maybe nearer to the mark. On the one hand the ideal of the sportsman was closely linked to the ideal of the gentleman: courtesy was as important as physical prowess, and he was expected to behave with special consideration to social inferiors. On the other hand the concern of ‘sportsmen’ for physical strength and daring was always threatening to become an end in itself, overriding any attention to gentler virtues. However the third and fourth points come closest to pinpointing the differences between ‘sportsmen’ and ‘muscular Christians’. Drinking and gambling were essential parts of the sporting culture of the aristocracy and gentry; and the ability to ‘take one’s drink’, together with the willingness to

1 Hughes, Tom Brown, 180.
take risks by making large bets were among the chief ways in which masculinity was measured.

In fact there was also a working-class sporting culture, largely distinct from though sometimes overlapping with that of the upper classes, in which very similar values were prevalent. While the term 'sportsman' was generally used to describe members of the upper and upper middle classes, it might have been equally aptly applied to many working men. In this article I will look at the forms of masculinity associated with 'sportsmen' of both the working class and the upper/upper middle classes, before going on to look at the ways in which 'muscular Christians' offered forms of masculinity that were partly old and partly new, and examining the relationship between the older and newer versions. 'Muscular Christianity' was a term invented by a journalist in 1857 to describe the ideals propagated by writers like Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley. The latter disliked the term, but it stuck, and indeed remains in use today. (During the last month I have read in one paper that the new Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, is a 'muscular Christian', and in another that 'muscular Christianity' was to blame for British imperialism.) Rather than concentrating, as some of the standard literature does, on Hughes and Kingsley, I shall be using the term to describe those Christians, increasingly numerous in the second half of the nineteenth century, who claimed that sport, and physical exercise more generally, were not only fun, but had moral, religious and social value, and should be actively promoted by the church. Hughes and Kingsley were liberal Anglicans associated with the Christian Socialist movement. But as 'muscular Christianity' came to be more widely accepted, it was adopted by those of other religious denominations and other theological or political persuasions, so it should not be stereotyped by exclusive association with any one religious or political agenda. On the contrary the pervasive influence of 'muscular Christianity' in later Victorian and Edwardian Britain arose from the fact that it was adopted by people whose religion and politics were in most respects quite different. In the latter part of the article I will show that the increasing professionalization of sport in the late nineteenth century was bringing in its train new versions of masculinity which drew on both of these older traditions while being fully compatible with neither.

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1 Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit* does so sympathetically (and also discusses their longer-term influence). Hall, *Muscular Christianity* does so in a more hostile way.
THE GENTLEMAN SPORTSMAN

The word ‘sportsman’ began to be used in the eighteenth century to describe a gentleman who devoted large amounts of time to participating in and/or watching and betting on sporting events. So far as participation in sport was concerned this meant above all fox-hunting, which in the eighteenth century became a major part of the life of the English aristocracy and gentry. Many gentlemen more occasionally played cricket, though it had not yet acquired the semi-sacred status as symbol of all things English and embodiment of all national virtues which it enjoyed in the later nineteenth century. Men of these classes also bred or owned race-horses and there was some ‘gentlemen jockeys’ who rode these horses, though more often the jockeys were men of plebeian origins. ‘Sportsmen’ would bet on anything and everything, and often the betting was on individual encounters arranged ad hoc. However by the later eighteenth century horse-racing, cock-fighting and boxing were emerging as major spectator sports in which considerable sums of money were at stake and of which betting was an integral part.

The arrival of highly organized and commercialized sport was signalled by the establishment in 1792 of the Sporting Magazine. A number of similar journals followed, the most famous being Bell's Life in London, founded in 1824, which would appear to have been directed at the upper- and middle-class sportsman but covered a very wide range of sports. The paper’s own reporters specialized in detailed accounts of horse races and boxing matches, but it also gave considerable space to narratives of fox-hunts, sent in by participants. More plebeian sports such as dog-fighting were covered too, as was chess. As the Sporting Magazine pointed out in an early issue, “we profess ourselves sportsmen not moralists”,3 and the sporting papers took little notice of the ethical, religious or humanitarian objections to many of the sports practised. Indeed they frequently ridiculed such objections. Fox-hunting could be very time-consuming. During the season, from November to April, many hunts were out four or five days in the week, and some of their members aimed to miss as few hunts as possible. Sporting gentry had very close relationships with their horses and dogs, and intimate knowledge of the distinctive characters of each. They also took a close interest in the breeding of horses and dogs, so that even when not actively involved in a sporting event a lot of their time was spent in the stables and kennels.

In the case of boxing, devotees of the sport would travel considerable distances for a big match, often at short notice, since the sport increasingly acquired a cloak-and-dagger element, which became an important ingredient in the mystique surrounding it. From about 1820 magistrates in many part of the country were trying to suppress bare-knuckle prize-fights. These were often staged close to county boundaries, so that the contestants could cross into a different jurisdiction if the authorities in the place initially chosen tried to stop the fight. Information about the chosen location was therefore passed by word of mouth rather than being openly published, and fights might relocate two or three times before a safe site was found.

It is true that ‘sportsmen’ might also be responsible landowners or pursue successful political or military careers. However, for many ‘sportsmen’, sport was

3 Harvey, The Beginnings, 36.
the most important thing in their lives. This meant that the qualities most generally admired in a man were physical strength and courage, together with dexterity and skill. These qualities were most obviously manifested on the hunting field or in sporting encounters. But it was also reflected in the betting which was integral to most sports. A sportsman took risks. Fox-hunting was a dangerous sport, in which many participants were seriously injured or even killed in falls from their horse. The risks involved in betting were less lethal, but the sportsman’s trust in his own judgement and his courage in the face of possible consequences were reflected in his willingness to wager large sums, sometimes on strange and improbable bets. Violence was intrinsic to most of the sports practised at the time, and acceptance of, indeed enjoyment of this violence was seen as one of the marks of a true man. Thus Bell’s Life in 1851 devoted an editorial to ridiculing the Surrey magistrates who had held a meeting “at which a great deal of ladylike horror was expressed at prize-fighting”. Bell’s praised prize-fighting as “intended to supplant delicacy with resoluteness and vigour”, they attacked the “maudlin sensitiveness of the critics”, and claimed that if bare-knuckle were banned, the lower classes would start fighting with knives, like foreigners.4

The object of many of these sports was to kill another creature, and in many of the others the participants themselves risked death. Revelling in death took its most extreme form in rat-killing, where spectators took bets on the number of rats a dog could kill within a given time. Here the victims had no chance at all. In the many sports which involved shooting at birds or chasing small animals with dogs, the intended victim had at least some chance of escape: the excitement lay not only in the spectacle of death, but in the skill of the man with the gun or the relative speed and skill of the dogs and of the hare or rabbit. More complex were the emotions surrounding fox-hunting, where the thrill of the successfully executed kill mingled with respect for the fox who had provided a particularly exciting chase or who made good his escape. Indeed fox-hunters were sometimes described as fox-worshippers. The need to preserve foxes so that they could be hunted led to a particular contempt for those ‘vulpicide’ farmers who simply went out and shot the foxes whom they regarded as a threat to their livestock. Indeed, as James Obelkevich showed in a pioneering exploration of fox-hunting rituals, these had a quasi-religious dimension.5 Thus the ‘blooding’ of a novice hunter with the brush of a fox could be seen as a form of baptism. The Cleveland Friendly Society, a club for sporting gentry founded in 1722 had an initiation ceremony in which the new member “shall first publicly lay his right hand on a hunting horn and declare himself no enemy to cocking, smocking, fox-hunting and harriers”. Clergymen were excused from the word ‘smocking’ (a term for sex) and from laying their hand on the hunting horn.6

In those sports which took the form of a fight between presumed equals, severe physical injuries were normal and death was always a real possibility. This was true of prize-fighting, one of the most popular sports of the early nineteenth century, but also of cock-fighting and dog-fighting. These three sports had a lot in common. Afficionados took a keen interest in the physique and appearance, as well as the diet and

4 Bell’s Life in London, 5 January 1851.
5 Obelkevich, Religion, 40-44.
6 Fairfax-Blakeborough, Northern Turf, 69.
training of the contestants. They were admired for their ferocity, courage and skill, but above all for their ‘gameness’. The defeated man or animal was praised as warmly as, or even more warmly than, the victor if he showed willingness to go on fighting, even in the face of severe punishment. Indeed, some of the same concerns were transferred to the appreciation of what was arguably the most popular of all the spectator sports of the period - certainly the only blood-sport which interested women as much as men - namely public executions. Bell’s Life in London described these in considerable detail, and often in a fashion not dissimilar to the ways in which boxing matches were reported. Thus the reporter frequently commented on the physique as well as the demeanour of the condemned man or woman and, without the word being used, respect was shown to the victim who died ‘game’. Thus in 1836, when many crimes other than murder were still potentially liable to the death penalty, the hanging in Surrey of a burglar named Harley was described as follows:

The culprit was a fine athletic man and in a state of ruddy health. He was dressed in a ploughman’s frock, round which a coil of rope was fastened. He did not express any fear; but his restless unsettled gaze, his flushed cheek, and his short breathings, which were painfully audible, proclaimed his agitation. He walked with a steady step paying marked attention to the admonitions of his religious adviser. In arriving at the foot of the scaffold, he ascended the steps with a rapidity which seemed to indicate a wish for a speedy termination of his sufferings. The fatal noose having been put round his neck, and the cap drawn over his face, he begged the chaplain to let him join with him in prayer. He seemed extremely penitent; but his deportment was equally removed from hopeless despondency or extravagant enthusiasm. An immense crowd, extending to the commencement of the lane, assembled to witness the execution, which appeared to have little effect on them, as they were indulging in uproarious gaiety all the time.  

While, as indicated above, there were ‘sporting parsons’ - many of them the brothers and cousins of sporting gentry - there was an anti-clerical edge to the sporting culture. It was most evident in the first half of the nineteenth century, when bishops, concerned with the pastoral effectiveness of their clergy, were trying to take them out of the hunting-field, and when ministers of religions were leaders of campaigns to suppress cruel, brutal or immoral sports. Obelkevich quotes sneering references to the “men in black coats” in the correspondence of some Lincolnshire gentry. Bell’s Life seemed to enjoy stories which put the clergy in a bad light. Thus, under the headline “A Tipsy Parson”, they thought it worth reporting that a London clergyman had been fined for being drunk and disorderly, and they reprinted exposés by other papers of clerical abuses. As devotees of the Prize Ring they naturally resented the fact that clergymen were usually at the head of attempts to stop these fights. A typical story concerned a fight planned to take place near the Oxfordshire village of Enstone in May 1836. “The worthy parson” of that place persuaded the magistrates to stop the

7 Bell’s Life in London, 17 April 1836.
8 Ibid., 4 January 1846, 3 and 31 January 1836.
fight, but acquiesced when the pugilists, their supporters and spectators moved to a
new location on the Worcestershire border - “his Reverence retired in all the pride of
Christian meekness, delighted at having shoved the nuisance, as he called it, from his
own door to that of his neighbours”. Occasionally one gets hints of a more general-
ized critique of religion. Thus a former Bell’s reporter who wrote a history of prize-
fighting in 1880 made sarcastic references to the fact that Bendigo, a champion of the
1830s, later became a Methodist preacher:

> There is a clearer psychological connection between fighting and fanaticism,
pugnacity and Puritanism, than saints and Stigginses can afford to admit and
the facile step from preachee to flogee of parsons of all sects and times needs
no citations from history to prove.\(^9\)

However, Bell’s generally advocated a highly Erastian form of Protestantism, in terms
of which the need for religion and a church was assumed, and the main concerns were
to ensure that it was under firm state control, and to nip in the bud any tendencies
towards sacerdotalism. Obelkevich goes further and detects among the Lincolnshire
gentry and among fox-hunters more generally a drive to ‘desecrate’ Christian rites and
sacred places.\(^10\) Thus, as well as demonstrating the parallels between Christian and
fox-hunting rituals, he highlights the special thrill that sporting gentry derived from
a kill executed in a churchyard or in the grounds of a ruined abbey. Here he seems
to me to go further than the evidence supports. As already noted, fox-hunting, like
a number of other sports, incorporated quasi-religious elements. Yet in borrowing
some of the resources of Christianity, it did not necessarily challenge or replace the
older faith. In fact one of the sporting gentry quoted by Obelkevich was a devotee of
the Oxford Movement as well as of fox-hunting. Maybe it was precisely because of his
experience of and commitment to ritualistic Christianity that he was able to derive a
frisson from sporting ritualism that his less devout neighbours would have missed.

Insofar as the sporting sub-culture challenged Christianity and the churches
it did so indirectly and implicitly by fostering very different values. First, the sport-
ing world was essentially a male world, whereas the majority of church-goers were
women, and in spite of the male leadership of the churches and chapels, women
could even reach positions of prominence in some branches of Nonconformity, such
as the Quakers and the Methodist sects. Even conservative Christians recognized that
women could potentially be mobilized for good causes. Thus in 1845 when Derby
Borough Council was faced with two rival petitions, one calling for the reintroduction
of the Derby Races and the other opposing the Races, the leading advocate of horse-
racing tried to ridicule the rival petition by claiming that a quarter of the signatories
were women.\(^12\) Women were indeed beginning to be seen on the hunting-field in the
1840s, though still very rarely, and many women attended race-meetings. But boxing
and cock-fighting, not to mention dog-fighting and rat-killing, were men’s sports.

\(^9\) Bell’s Life in London, 15 May 1836.
\(^10\) Downes Miles, Puglistica, vol. 3, 3-4.
\(^11\) Obelkevich, Religion, 40-44.
\(^12\) Derby Mercury, 26 February 1845.
Moreover, ways of thinking and behaving flourished within the sporting world that would have been completely taboo in the religious world. In its milder forms this might simply mean a relaxed and tolerant conviviality, which potentially conflicted with the ‘seriousness’ and moral earnestness which pervaded the religious world in the first half of the nineteenth century, even if a degree of gradual relaxation later became possible. Here there are signs of a growing separation in the years around 1800 as the religious world became more militantly ‘serious’ and sections of the sporting world became more ostentatiously unserious. Thus the historian of the northern Turf, Fairfax-Blakeborough, notes that in the eighteenth century Races Week in York had been the occasion for parties in the town-houses of the gentry in Micklegate. But “there was a growing feeling among sportsmen at this period [about 1800, though the date is not precisely stated] that there was greater freedom, less ceremony and more hilarity possible when they met and dined and wined at an inn than at private houses”.\(^13\) The most obvious area of conflict between religious ethics and the sporting sub-culture lay in the heavy drinking which for many sportsmen was an essential part of their masculinity. It should be noted however that while religious moralists objected to drunkenness and to the drinking of spirits, teetotalism was rare before the 1830s and was initially adopted mainly by members of the more plebeian denominations, such as the Primitive Methodists, as well as by many political radicals. A more fundamental area of conflict lay in the double standard of morality which was taken for granted by many men of the upper and upper middle classes, while being condemned by Christian preachers. For ‘serious’ Christians much of the conversation at places where ‘sportsmen’ met was immoral, and while this may often have been no more than talk, for some sportsmen skill in seduction was as important a test of their masculinity as the drinking, betting and feats of horsemanship. In the early nineteenth century the hunting capital of Melton Mowbray became a mecca for a section of the sporting gentry who would rent a house for the season, and who became noted according to Itzkowitz for hard riding, dare-devil feats, heavy drinking, and patronising prostitutes, dog-fights and cock-fights.\(^14\)

Douglas Sutherland’s biography of Hugh Lowther, 5th Earl of Lonsdale (1857-1944), offers an unusually vivid and detailed portrait of a sporting aristocrat of a somewhat later generation but with many similar interests and values. Lowther was to play an important role in the transformation of the discredited sport of prize-fighting into the more respectable modern sport of boxing, and he is remembered through the ‘Lonsdale Belts’ worn by British boxing champions. As a young man in London in the 1870s and ‘80s Lowther belonged to a “brash, hard-living set of young men who put hunting above all else”. The quality they most admired was ‘bottom’, reflected in feats of drinking and seduction, “gambling for more than one could afford (always provided one paid one’s debts)”, and above all by sporting achievements.\(^15\) He “worshipped physical fitness and virility in men. For him life was a matter of the survival of the fittest”.\(^16\) “If Hugh had any Gods in his life, certainly one of them was

\(\)\(^{13}\) Fairfax-Blakeborough, *Northern Turf*, vol. 3, 46-47.


\(\)\(^{15}\) Sutherland, *The Yellow Earl*, 21-22.

\(\)\(^{16}\) Ibid., 29.
the eccentric Squire Osbaldeston.” The latter died in 1866, but some forty years later a biographical dictionary of British sportsmen described him as “still a household word in the sporting community, famous for nerve and resourcefulness”.⁷⁷ A Master of Fox Hounds, a cricketer and a successful steeplechase jockey who had fought a duel over a racing dispute, he has was best known for making and usually winning outlandish bets, the most famous being that he could ride 200 miles in ten hours. (He was less successful in his racing bets, where his net losses were said to have totalled £200,000, forcing him to sell his ancestral home.) As with many sportsmen, some of Lowther’s closest relationships were with his dogs. Appropriately enough the frontispiece of Sutherland’s biography shows the earl surrounded by dogs, and when traveling by train he booked two compartments, one for himself and one for the dogs. Like many upper class sportsmen, Lowther in the middle and later years of his life led a double life. As a “conventionalist” who “flouted convention” he was happy for his wife to rule supreme in their West End home, where only guests acceptable to her were admitted, but he met fellow men of the world and talked about racing, boxing and their extra-marital liaisons at the Pelican Club - though on one occasion discretion lapsed so far that he got into a fight in Hyde Park with another sporting gentleman, who was pursuing the same woman as himself.

In his later years, Lowther seems to have developed an interest in his Cumberland and Westmorland estates and the welfare of those working on them, and to have gained popularity by holding open house on the occasion of the annual Grasmere Sports, as well as becoming the subject of a huge local folklore. However, for most of his life he saw these estates simply as the necessary means for the financing of his several homes, his cars, his yachts and his horses. He was the kind of lord around whom legends clustered and he inspired fascination and a degree of respect, but perhaps not affection. Bluff man-to-man exchanges were his forte in dealing with tenants and workers on his estates, but his patience with anything that might be deemed in the slightest degree impertinent or inappropriate was very limited.

However the ideal of the ‘sportsman’ could also embrace gentler virtues. When people referred to a sportsman “of the best kind”, they were likely to be thinking of a person of exemplary manners and consideration, as well as a high sense of responsibility. Thus, according to *British Sports and Sportsmen*, Lord Glasgow (1792-1869) was “not only a thoroughly good sportsman, but a British nobleman of the highest type”, as exemplified not only by his kindness to horses and dogs, but by his generous support for good causes of all kinds. James John Farquharson (1784-1871) was famous for his courtesy to social inferiors, and for his patience and tolerance. As a Master of Fox Hounds “he never gave way to those outbursts of coarse and vulgar abuse on which some masters rather pride themselves” - even when his favourite hound, “Wrangler”, was fatally kicked by a horse. The 5th Earl of Portsmouth (1825-1891), as well as being a race-horse owner and Master of Fox Hounds, was “a thorough country gentleman of the old school, with full knowledge of the duties and obligations of his position”. “He lived all his life among his own people: at the country places, where he dispensed a magnificent hospitality”, he was “a practical farmer and breeder”,

⁷⁷ *British Sport and Sportsmen, Past and Present*, vol. 1, 17-18; see also Osbaldeston, *Squire Osbaldeston*. 
“he built churches and schools” and “was a broad-minded man with the most genial nature”. Some biographies of ‘sportsmen’ also mention that their hero had friendly relations with clergymen and was himself a regular church-goer.18

**THE POPULAR SPORTSMAN**

While the ‘sportsman’ was usually assumed to be a man of the higher social classes with sufficient leisure to make sport the main business, or at least a major business, of his life, there were also many men of other classes and especially working men who shared similar interests and some of the same values. Alan Metcalfe in his invaluable study of the recreations of Northumberland miners in the period c 1860-191419 argues that for many of them sport was the biggest thing in their lives, though the time which they could devote to it was necessarily very limited. Cock-fighting had once attracted men of all classes, though after it was banned in 1849 it survived mainly as a working-class sport, necessarily pursued in secrecy and often in remote locations. Some popular sports were similar to those of the upper classes, but with subtle differences. Miners coursed rabbits rather than hares, and shot pigeons, rather than grouse. Many of the sports pursued by Northumberland miners were, however, distinctive to the north-east as well as being followed exclusively by working men, for instance potshare bowling. Big changes were underway in the later years of the nineteenth century as regional sports declined in the face of sports that were organized nationally and practised in all regions, most notably association football - though football soon became a mainly working-class game, thus continuing the strong element of social segregation in the playing and watching of sport, even as the old regional differentiation was breaking down.

Miners and gentry largely played different sports, but these were underpinned by an ethos that was in many ways similar. Betting was intrinsic to nearly all of the miners’ sports, and most events were accompanied by drinking, certainly after, but often during the play. Many of the sports involved contests between and/or the killing of animals. And the qualities most admired in a man were similar to those most admired in a dog - strength, speed and skill, combined with ‘pluck’. Indeed Metcalfe argues that until the rise of football, one-to-one contests were the favoured form of encounter, in which the qualities of the individual man or dog could be fully tested, and the spectators also pitted their own judgement against other spectators in the bets they made on the likely outcome. Metcalfe relates this to the realities of life down the pit where the most prestigious job, that of the hewer, depended on physical strength, and where masculinity was on permanent trial. The prosperity of the miner’s family depended on his ‘masculine’ qualities of strength, endurance and courage. This was also the basis of the privileges which men claimed within the home. To fully justify this argument, however, a comparative study of sport in mining communities would be necessary. Certainly team games were popular among workers in other parts of

18 Ibid., 12-13, 24-25, 160; Richardson, The Life, 26, 160.
19 Metcalfe, Leisure, 67.
England, even before the rise of association and rugby football, and ‘masculine’ qualities were often on full display, albeit in different ways.

One example is that of the various forms of street football played on Shrove Tuesday in many parts of England, but often under threat in the mid-nineteenth century from modernizing town councils which regarded them as a ‘nuisance’. Among the most famous was that in Derby, suppressed by the Town Council in 1845, though there were subsequent attempts to revive it, sometimes leading to fights between players and police, and to arrests.20 By 1884 street football was ‘heritage’, and a local paper published the reminiscences of a well-known player, William Williamson, nicknamed Tunchy Shelton, who was by then living in an almshouse.21 The game started in the Market Place and the aim was to get the ball into one of the goals, placed at opposite ends of the town. The teams represented respectively St Peter’s parish and All Saints’ parish, though the latter was taken to include other smaller parishes on the north side of the town. The players were unlimited in number. On Shrove Tuesday there was a general holiday in the town and crowds of avidly partisan spectators would line the streets or look out from windows. A lot of the play took place in the river Derwent, and the only known fatality was a man drowned in the river. However, lesser injuries were frequent. Shelton had broken his ribs on one occasion and they had never fitted properly since. Shelton’s account highlights the familiar qualities of strength, willingness to take risks, courage in the face of injury, and ability to take one’s drink, together with anecdotes about memorable characters and incidents, while also adding an element of intense local patriotism. His father had been a St Peter’s man. Shelton himself “would have gladly died rather than give up St Peter’s and so would many another and some have died for it. All the lads and lassies were either St Peter’s or All Saints and the women were worst of all.” He once had a fight with a man who said he had turned his coat. “I would not have turned my coat to save my life and would not do so now.” However the intense will to win that was expected of the true footballer was modified by the need for chivalry to injured opponents. In its more extreme forms it could also lend itself to humour: Shelton recalled that Bob Yeomans, a ‘queer chap’, had once carried the ball through a sewer, coming out filthy.

For the working-class sportsman, as much as for his upper class counterpart, sporting events were a drama, replete with incident and with larger-than-life characters, recalled whether over a pint pot or a glass of port for years afterwards, and with humour playing an essential part. The adoption of nicknames was part of the dramatization, and this spread into prize-fighting and into the working class sport of pedestrianism, where the assignment of a nickname was an important mark of an athlete’s reputation - though the nickname was sometimes placed in quotation marks by those who wished to claim that this reputation was inflated. Sporting gentry also used a sporting slang. Thus in Bell’s Life, boxing was “milling” and those who attended prize-fights were “milling coves”. The fighters hit one another on the “nut” or the “gob” and a really good hit made “the claret flow”. In part, knowledge of the jargon was simply a certificate of bona fide membership of the group. But it also reflected the

20 The best account is Delves, “Popular recreation”. See also Hudson, The History.
21 Derby Local Studies Library, manuscripts, BA796.33: “Tunchy Williams interviewed”.
sportsmen’s self-image, and the ways in which they distinguished themselves both from women and from those of their own sex who were likely to make dull companions, or who might actually want to spoil their fun. Religious zealots of all kinds and clergymen in particular were believed to be prominent among these “killjoys” and “canting hypocrites” and many verbal missiles were hurled at these enemies of sport. When in the 1830s the vicar of Wednesbury led moves to stop the annual bull-baiting, an enraged bull-baiter complained to a journalist “I say it’s a nation shame. He gets his fun from sorm singing, and whoy can’t he let us have our fun.”

**THE CHRISTIAN SPORTSMAN**

Thomas Hughes would have accepted at least some of these points, and his ‘muscular Christianity’ was partly directed at sportsmen who thought religion was not manly, as well as at religious people who thought that sport was not Christian. There were parts of the ideal of the ‘sportsman’ which those like Hughes could willingly embrace, although they clearly rejected other aspects. In fact the concept of the ‘sportsman’ included a spectrum of values and ways of behaving, some of which overlapped with those of the ‘muscular Christian’, while others were very different.

Hughes fully shared the ‘sportsman’s’ delight in physical contests of many kinds and in closeness to nature. *Tom Brown* is full of blow-by-blow narratives of sporting events as well as of fishing and bird nesting. And while anxious to distance himself from “the brutal exhibition of men battering one another for money”, he shared the fascination of so many of his contemporaries with fighting: “it is no good for Quakers or any other body of men to uplift their voices against fighting. Human nature is too strong for them, and they don’t follow their own precepts.” Hughes would have agreed with those ‘sportsmen’ who declared that fighting was natural and it was fun. But the characteristic Hughesian note lay in the higher purposes to which this fighting instinct should be put:

From the cradle to the grave, fighting, rightly understood, is the business of life, the real, honestest business of every son of man. Everyone who is worth his salt has his enemies who must be beaten, be they evil thoughts and habits in himself or spiritual wickedness in high places, or Russians or Border ruffians, or Bill, Tom or Harry who will not let him live his life in quiet till he has thrashed them.

In particular, the ‘muscular Christian’s’ fists were in the service of women and children and ‘the weak’ generally. The most famous scene in *Tom Brown* is that where the hero comes to the aid of the new boy, George Arthur, who is being bullied by some of his dormitory mates because he goes down on his knees to say his prayers before going to bed. Tom’s physical bravery and healthy instincts are of course praised, but

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22 Reid, “Beasts and brutes”, 15.
the equally important point is that the physically weak may be morally stronger, and moral strength is what counts for most - though the perfection of manhood is the combination of moral and physical strength. Physical strength combined with moral weakness might merely produce a bully. Moral strength and physical weakness might mean a person with the best of intentions but incapable of doing what was needed in a crisis. A typical day in the life of a ‘muscular Christian’ might include saving someone from drowning, running a five-minute mile in order to fetch a doctor, or coming to the aid of a woman who was struck in the street. Moreover, Hughes, like Kingsley, was a fervent patriot. “I take it for granted”, he wrote in a religious periodical, “that every man who reads this Magazine will come forward [in the event of war], and give his goods, his body, his life if necessary, for the old country and her women and children.”

Speakers at the Church Congress, an annual gathering of Anglican clergy and laity at which issues of contemporary concern were discussed, offer a view of some of the arguments for ‘muscular Christianity’ that were being more widely canvassed at the time. In 1869 the Congress considered “The Recreations of the People” and similar themes were again chosen in 1874, 1877, 1878, 1880 and 1892. The first of these discussions was opened by the Rev. J. Erskine Clarke, vicar of Battersea, a mainly working-class district of London, who wanted the church to be more active in recommending and indeed supplying legitimate recreation, while continuing to condemn harmful recreations. He unreservedly approved of cricket, rowing, athletics, as well as gardening and participation in the volunteer movement. He gave more guarded approval to dancing, which was good in itself, but often pursued in unsavoury dance-halls. This was where the church could play a role by holding dances, concerts, and other entertainments in a healthy atmosphere. The theatre was good in principle, but often associated with “drinking and licentiousness”. In fact any form of amusement that was associated with drinking or gambling was harmful, and his speech was devoted as much to condemning the bad as commending the good. Other speakers placed the stress more heavily on commending the good, and on ridiculing the negative approach of many clergy. For instance the Rev. J.C. Chambers, in the most comprehensive assertion of the recreational imperative, presented his vision of a ‘merry England’, in which the parish club would stand at the centre of the recreational life of each parish. He condemned all amusements which “encourage barbarity” or involve gambling, but he equally condemned the asceticism which had alienated many men from the church:

Parson killjoy, it seems to me, would have more influence with his men and lads, if he were known to countenance their cricketing and boat-racing, their wrestling and their racing, their glees and their theatricals, and if he were not entirely taken up with the idea of cramming them with good tracts and books.

Hughes, “How to be bodily strong in a town”, 2.
Ibid., 5.
All that tends to health of mind and body is a handmaid to moral and religious culture.

He wanted to see parishes providing facilities for rifle-shooting, drilling, gymnastics, cricket, football, concerts and theatricals. The Rev. William Glaister, a curate from Nottinghamshire, welcomed these ideas on behalf of the younger generation of clergy, and went on to enthuse about the many virtues that could be learnt through playing cricket. Indeed he attributed the high level of morality in Nottinghamshire to the large number of cricket clubs in the county:

The best local Board of Health is a cricket ground, and the best moral club a Cricket Club, ten times better than all those clubs which call themselves ‘Young Men’s Christian Associations’ and the like, which are not very invigorating either to the mind or muscle.

A Hull vicar, the Rev. John Scott, provided a gym for the boys in his Sunday School. (He thought that there should be gyms for girls too, though as yet he had not attempted to do this.)

‘Muscular Christianity’ was still controversial in the 1850s and ’60s, though it was gaining ground fast, especially in the Church of England. (The Nonconformists would follow in the 1870s and ’80s.) Those who wanted the churches to be actively involved in the promotion of sport were engaged in battles on three fronts: against more conservative Christians, who saw sport as being at best a waste of time, and as potentially sinful, or at least something that could lead Christians to sin, through its bad associations; against irreligious sportsmen, who rejected Christianity because it was ‘effeminate’ and/or ‘puritanical’; and against less socially aware sportsmen who saw sport as being purely for their own pleasure, rather than something that could be socially beneficial.

Already in 1858 the first annual conference of the Young Men’s Christian Associations (YMCA) of Great Britain and Ireland discussed “Recreation and the Duty of Young Men’s Christian Associations Respecting it”. Much of the discussion related to recreation in general, though some speakers referred to sport or to specific sports. The main speaker was Dr J.H. Gladstone, who admitted that recreation “may be pushed to an extreme, and perhaps, is so by a section of the English Church which has acquired for itself the ridiculous reputation of teaching ‘Muscular Christianity’”. However, he believed that YMCAs should provide recreation and many of his arguments would become very familiar in the following years: recreation was a necessary part of a balanced life; it was healthy; it enabled people to work more efficiently; “people will amuse themselves wickedly if innocent amusements are not provided”; it could be a good means of attracting recruits to the movement. Above all those who opposed healthy amusements were “modern Manichees”. In the subsequent discussion three speakers, one of whom specifically recommended cricket, clearly favoured the inclu-
sion of recreation in the YMCA programme, while only one speaker was definitely opposed, but three seemed to have reached no clear conclusion.\textsuperscript{30}

In the years following sport did become an increasingly important part of YMCA life (in spite of the aspersions of the Rev. William Glaister). At its inception in 1844 the Association's objectives had been strictly religious, but by the early 1860s the Manchester branch was also holding social gatherings and had a Society of Arts, as well as a considerable educational programme. At this stage its aim was “Promoting the Improvement of the Moral and Spiritual Condition of Young Men”. However, by 1873 this remit had extended to embrace “the religious, moral and social welfare of the young men of Manchester and its neighbourhood”, and it offered “facilities for Intellectual Improvement and Social Intercourse”. A cricket club had been set up in 1871 and by 1873 there was also a Swimming Club and an Excursion and Rambling Club. In 1875 the relevant section of the programme was headed “Recreations of a manly and healthy character”. The gymnasium, opened in 1876, was said to be the best in Manchester. In the opening ceremony the president “trusted that that part of the Association’s premises would not become too popular to the exclusion of the other parts. The great object of the institution was to promote Christianity among young men: but there was no objection to a little muscular Christianity”. 1876-1877 was indeed a boom year for the Manchester Association with over a thousand new members and associates joining (the latter, the majority, being men “of good moral character” but not church members).\textsuperscript{31}

In the course of the 1880s clubs were also formed for cycling, football, athletics and lacrosse. There were similar trends in Birmingham, where by 1880 the Association aimed to promote “the Religious, Intellectual, Social and Physical Welfare of Young Men”. They too had a gym and they claimed to encourage “all such manly and healthful pursuits as will tend to improve the physique of the members and associates, and make them the better fitted for active business life”. The place of sport in the YMCA reached a high point in the early twentieth century. The Birmingham Association’s new headquarters, opened in 1904, included “the most up-to-date gymnasium in the midlands” and at this time the \textit{Birmingham YMCA Record} was devoting six of its twenty pages to sport.\textsuperscript{32}

Many other Associations were building grandiose new premises at this time. A souvenir booklet marking the opening of a new Leicester headquarters in 1901 recalled that the association had collapsed in 1870, when “it could not afford very attractive rooms ... . It had no gymnasium and only a small library.” A revival in 1883, following the visit to Leicester by the American evangelist D.L. Moody, led to improved premises with a gym as well as active support for foreign missions - “The Christian side of the Association has never been allowed to drop into the background.” But, while stressing their spiritual work, they also noted that:

\textsuperscript{31} University of Birmingham Library, YMCA Archives, A27: Annual Report of the Manchester YMCA, 1860-1863, 1873, 1875, 1877 [henceforth YMCAA].
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., YMCAA, A47: Annual Report of the Birmingham YMCA, 1880; \textit{A Tale of Two Buildings}. 
Young men must have plenty of outlet for their physical energy, and it is the province of the YMCA to provide such an outlet, to the accompaniment of healthy moral surroundings, thus athletics are fostered in liberal fashion. A splendid new gymnasmium is provided in the basement of the new buildings, and it has been fitted up in such a manner as to make it one of the best gymnasiums in the provinces. A competent instructor (Mr C.R. Robson) is engaged, and nightly many young men participate in the pleasures of organised muscular exercise.  

There were also opportunities for cricket, rugby, soccer, hockey, cycling, chess and draughts. The winter programme for 1906 included a photo of Mr A.R. Yapp, who was holding meetings for 'Men Only': “Mr Yapp is a Young Man’s Man. A friend called him ‘A mass of masculinity!’ He stands well over 6 feet, and as his photograph suggests, is proportionately broad. His messages are characteristically broad, straight and manly in presentation.” Many of the typical concerns of ‘muscular Christians’ remained the same in the 1900s as they had been in the 1850s, though by this time they faced much less opposition from fellow Christians, and they had become more uninhibited in their claims for the moral as well as the physical benefits of sport. They continued to revel in physicality, in muscular power and in bodily efficiency - and in this they would have been at one with the ‘sportsman’. But they always insisted that physical efficiency was not an end in itself, but that it made for greater efficiency at work - and not only in business, but in religious work too. Muscular Christians also had a continuing need to refute the claim that Christianity in general and the YMCA in particular were unmasculine. The prominent Congregational preacher, J.H. Jowett, addressing the Birmingham YMCA in 1907, welcomed the ways in which the Y had broadened its remit since the time of his own youth:

In the past the YMCA had been associated in the public mind with a flabby,emasculated piety. Goody-goody young men could not do the work of the strong Son of God. He wanted young men of strong will, clear head and fervent will to get hold of other young fellows. They could do it better than the clergy or ministers because they were not paid to do it… . It was not their business, it was a crusade.

But their longest running controversy was with those Christians who wanted a clear separation of the ‘spiritual’ from the ‘secular’, and who argued that sport, and indeed most other forms of popular recreation, belonged to a worldly sphere which was no concern of the church - and which Christians might be best advised to avoid altogether. In 1860 the Sheffield Broad Churchman, Rev. Samuel Earnshaw, was deploring the fact that some over-zealous Christians placed prohibitions on things never

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33 Ibid., YMCA, A49: Leicester YMCA Souvenir, 1901, 3-7, 11.
condemned in the Bible, including sport and the theatre. In 1907 Canon Denton Thompson, addressing the same meeting of the Birmingham YMCA mentioned above declared:

It was Christianity that sanctified the whole of life. That idea was well represented in the YMCA building by its reading rooms, study room, play room, and smoke room, all under the same roof as the room where they held religious meetings. Many of these arguments could as well be used in support of women's as of men's sport. As mentioned above, the Anglican Church Congress frequently debated the church's responsibilities in the field of recreation, and in the earlier years the focus was mainly on the needs of men and boys; but in 1892 several speakers also emphasized the needs of women and girls, and for the first time one of the main speakers on this topic was a woman, Miss Stuart Snell, the manager of a gymnasium in Kensing- ton. By the end of the nineteenth century some YMCA branches were providing sporting facilities for women or sponsoring activities in which both sexes took part. Thus the Leicester YMCA hosted “Ladies’ Drill and Gym” on Thursday evenings and “Ladies’ Physical Training” on Fridays. The cycling club at the Birmingham YMCA included “Ladies’ Days” in its programme, and its Record gave an account of one such, which turned into an 80-mile run. The Northamptonshire Nonconformist, a journal published in the later 1880s and '90s by the young men of College Street Baptist Church, Northampton, included a sports column, “Thews and Sinews”, which sang the praises of sports of all kinds for women as much as for men - provided they did not involve gambling or cruelty to animals. And indeed as early as 1861 Thomas Hughes was recommending the benefits of physical exercise for both sexes - although in practice all of his efforts seem to have been channelled into sport for men.

The most fundamental feature therefore of ‘muscular Christianity’ was not its muscularity, or even the forms of masculinity embodied by its adherents, but its use of sport not only as something to be enjoyed for its own sake or as a source of status, but also as a means towards religious, moral and social ends.

Christian educationalists valued sport as a school of ‘character’. A classic example was Edward Thring, headmaster of Uppingham School from 1853 to 1887, who was one of the most energetic and articulate promoters of public school sport.

\[36\] Wickham, *Church and People*, 152-153.
\[39\] Leicester YMCA Record, October 1904; University of Birmingham Library, YMCAA, A46, A49: Leicester YMCA Prospectus of Winter Work 1905.
\[40\] McLeod, “Thews and sinews”.
\[41\] On this see also Gill, “How muscular was muscular Christianity?”
\[42\] Here my main source is the highly detailed and broadly sympathetic account in Tozer, *Physical Education*. A more critical popular account by Winner, *Those Feet*, argues that Thring was obsessed with the dangers of masturbation, and promoted sport in order to focus the boys’ thoughts on things other than sex.
who, like all the headmasters of major public schools in his generation, was an Anglican clergyman, was the first to appoint a teacher of gymnastics and fencing (in 1860), and in 1857 he had made sport compulsory. Swimming, skating and rambling were practised mainly for fun; gymnastics for training the body; athletics for building the competitive spirit; but most important of all were cricket and football, because they placed the needs of the team before the desires of the individual player and because they taught the lessons “never cheat, never funk, never lose temper, never brag”. Thring sometimes referred to sport in his chapel sermons, praising “the joy of strength and movement” and also courageous acceptance of defeat.

The “sporting parson”, a figure often derided in the era of church reform of the 1830s and ’40s, became a new role-model for Christian youth in the later part of the century. But where his Georgian predecessor had typically been a “hunting parson” at home with the gentry and large farmers of his own and neighbouring parishes, the late Victorian and Edwardian “man’s man” was a cricketer, footballer or boxer with a special mission to young men and teenage boys of the working class. One boxing parson, the Rev. A. Osborne Jay, vicar of Holy Trinity, Shoreditch, a very poor district of London, even gave his name to a teenage gang, “Father Jay’s Boys”, which achieved notoriety when one of its members was killed in a fight with a rival gang in 1892. A footballing parson, Rev. Llewellyn Gwynne, was centre-forward for Derby County in the 1880s, before going on to be Bishop of Khartoum and then Deputy Chaplain General during World War I. Gwynne’s relatively modest educational record made it very unlikely that he would have been appointed to an English see, but his footballing prowess made him ideal for a missionary bishopric and for a leading role in ministry to the armed forces. Sportsmen were especially valued as military chaplains, as achievements on the football or cricket field were seen as the best means of securing the respect of the men. But from the 1870s a growing number of clergy, first Anglican, but then Nonconformist and Catholic too, were providing sporting facilities for the young men and boys (later for young women and girls too). Often they participated enthusiastically themselves.

THE PROFESSIONAL SPORTSMAN

It is well known that many of the top football and rugby teams of today originated from church teams founded in the latter part of the nineteenth century. For instance, Aston Villa grew out of a cricket club established in the early 1870s by the members of a Wesleyan Young Men’s Bible Class. Everton began in 1878 and also grew out of a cricket club - in this case one founded by the minister of St Domingo Methodist New

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43 McLeod, Piety and Poverty, 155.
44 Snape, Clergy under Fire, 186, 188-189.
45 In the Lancashire cotton towns in the 1920s around half the cricket and football teams were based on a place of worship, and well over half the teams playing rounders (an exclusively female sport) and tennis, table tennis and hockey (sports played by both sexes). See Williams, “Churches, Sport and Identities”.
46 Lupson, Thank God for Football.
Connexion chapel. Southampton (“The Saints”) started as St Mary’s Young Men’s Association Football Club. It was founded at a meeting in 1885 chaired by the sporting curate of St Mary’s Anglican church. According to St Mary’s parish magazine, “All connected with [the Young Men’s Association] are believers in muscular Christianity, and think that the advantage of strong developed limbs, a supple frame, and a quick eye cannot be overestimated.” Northampton rugby club (also known as “The Saints”) started in the 1870s as Northampton St James, its founders being members of the Mutual Improvement Association at St James’ church. And one could go on and on with further examples.

However, as these and similar clubs rose in sporting importance their links with the churches that founded them often became more tenuous. The Football Association permitted the payment of players from 1885 and Aston Villa was among the first teams to go professional. To maintain their position as the top team in the Midlands, and soon as one of the top teams in England, they had to recruit outstanding players (often from Scotland) regardless of religious affiliation. Moreover, they had to keep winning. There were similar trends in rugby, where in 1895 the Northern Union, which favoured payments to players, broke away from the strictly amateur Rugby Football Union. Cricket, which had never banned professionalism, uniquely mixed amateurs and professionals (“gentlemen” and “players”) at the top level, though the superstar of late Victorian sport, W.G. Grace, was a “shamateur”, who earned more in “expenses” than top professionals did in wages. The biggest earning professionals in this period were jockeys, though modern boxing was rising out of the ashes of the disgraced sport of prize-fighting, and offered professionals the possibilities of large earnings during their usually brief careers.

Many aspects of professional sport were alien to ‘sportsmen’ and ‘muscular Christians’ alike. Most obviously, since professional sport was all about winning, anything else could be sacrificed to further this end. W.G. Grace was particularly notorious for sharp practice, including the intimidation of umpires. In football and rugby it was alleged that the need to win at all costs had led to an increase in violent play. Moreover football and rugby teams soon became bound up with the identity, indeed the ‘honour’, of the surrounding community. Intense rivalries developed between neighbouring teams, resulting sometimes in fights between rival fans or attacks on players and referees. As professional sportsmen emerged as popular heroes and role-models and professional teams became the chief focus of local patriotism, older ideals of ‘fair play’ or of the ‘gallant loser’ became largely outmoded. Admittedly an outstanding player could gain extra credit for magnanimity and ‘clean’ play, but these qualities were worth nothing if he did not keep on scoring goals or hitting runs. Moreover, the idea of sport as part of a balanced life in which the physical took its side beside the intellectual and the spiritual, and play took its place beside work, no longer fitted with a world where for some very prominent people play had become work, and where for many of their followers sport, rather than being one part of a balanced

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57 Rae, W.G. Grace, 102-104.
58 Rae, W.G. Grace, 191-193.
49 “The football slaughter”.
50 Maguire, “Images of manliness”.
life, had become the meaning of life. Masculinity certainly remained a key aspect of the sporting professional. He was admired for all the qualities of physical strength, combined with dexterity, endurance and courage, which had marked the sportsmen of earlier generations. Some were, like W.G. Grace, physically formidable, and derived some of their charisma from their presence. But the second most successful batsmen of the later Victorian era, Bobby Abel, was notably undersized and derived his popularity both from his skill as a grafter and from his modest personality. The essential point was that both delivered the goods, and went on doing so season after season. Abel, who came from an impoverished working-class background was all too aware that being a professional sportsman was a very precarious way of earning a living and that only by constant practice and careful study of his own mistakes and failures could he retain his place in the team, elbowing out the many other talented players who were vying for his place.\textsuperscript{51} Abel also recognized the advantages of a disciplined life-style. But professional sportsmen, like other professional entertainers, lived on a knife-edge, and heavy drinking was frequently their means of reducing the tensions inherent in their way of life.\textsuperscript{52} The contrast with muscular Christianity was particularly stark, as religiously motivated propagandists for sport saw it as the antidote to the temptations of the pub. ‘Sportsmen’ were often keen drinkers, but for them beer or wine (depending on the social class of the drinker) were aids to conviviality rather than a way of coping with stress. Professional sportsmen were unlikely to be anti-clerical or irreligious in the way that some ‘sportsmen’ were, and indeed some were personally devout, but their religion was of little relevance to their performance on the field - though it might be important to their supporters, insofar as the community whose honour the football team or the boxer was championing might be defined in religious rather than geographical or national terms. However, the fact that they were Catholic, Protestant or Jewish made little difference to the way they played, as opposed to the interpretation that others gave to their victories and defeats.

\textbf{THE SECULAR SPORTSMAN AND THE MUSCULAR CHRISTIAN}

‘Sportsman’ and ‘muscular Christian’ were agreed in regarding sport as ‘manly’ and in celebrating the strength, the skill and the courage displayed in many different sports. They gained great pleasure both from playing and from watching, and they also made claims for the benefits of sport for society and nation. However, the moral and religious ethos associated with these two sporting sub-cultures was quite different, and they often had different ideas as to the kind of social benefits they were expecting. This was partly a matter of social class. The ‘sportsman’ was typically a member of the gentry or aristocracy and able if he wished to enjoy far more leisure time than was available to other classes. He expected and usually received deference. Some of the sports practised by these classes, such as shooting and yachting, excluded all but

\textsuperscript{51} Kynaston, \textit{Bobby Abel}.

\textsuperscript{52} Collins and Vamplew, \textit{Mud, Sweat and Beers}, 104-105.
the very rich, while others, such as fox-hunting involved a somewhat wider section of the rural population, though anyone below the ranks of the well-to-do farmer was unlikely to be on horseback. The ‘muscular Christian’ was more likely to belong to the middle class or lower middle class and to be committed to the gospel of work. Sport might indeed be the part of life that was dearest to him, but it was likely to be limited to Saturday afternoons and sometimes weekday evenings, and it was often justified by the claim that it enabled one to work more efficiently - not a claim made by ‘sportsmen’. Muscular Christians also believed that sport could promote social harmony - though in this case it was the fact that the clergyman or Christian employer participated on equal terms alongside their parishioners or employees that was intended to strengthen the bonds between them. This more democratic style was also reflected in support by clergymen for the National Amateur Rowing Association founded in the 1890s to challenge the elitism of the Amateur Rowing Association, which excluded working-class rowers.

But the biggest area of difference between ‘muscular Christians’ and other sports enthusiasts may have lain in attitudes to gambling. As suggested earlier, bets were an integral part of most of the sports that were popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, the only major exception being fox-hunting. Betting had of course attractions of many different kinds, but the most important was that it allowed the spectators to feel that they were not passive onlookers, but that they too were involved in a contest which depended on their skill and maybe their daring, though not their physical prowess. The most innovative aspect of ‘muscular Christianity’ - and the one that most often led its practitioners into conflict with other players and followers of sport - was the attempt to promote sport while excluding gambling. Gambling (often in combination with drink) came to be seen as the embodiment of all that was corrupt. Betting was dishonest, as it was a way of getting money without working for it; it led to crime, as those who had lost then stole; it meant hungry children as “the shilling that ought to have gone to the grocer’s shop went on a horse”; it was addictive, as those once started on a gambling career poured more and more money into their craze. According to the prominent Congregationalist preacher, R.F. Horton, gambling was wrong in itself, whereas alcohol (the other main target of Nonconformist moralists) was not wrong if taken in moderation, and sexual immorality was “the misdirection or abuse of that which is not only legitimate but hallowed by God”. There were many rational arguments against gambling, but the depth of revulsion which it provoked in its critics led them often to resort to metaphorical language. According to one Methodist writer, for instance, betting was a “moral plague” that was “rapidly infecting every branch of the community, and invading the home and the church”, and he included it together with other forms of immorality and crime among the “ulcers on the body, indicating a pervasive poison in the blood”. By

53 Howat, Village Cricket, 15-17, 89-101, gives several examples of rural clergy, the earliest being in 1820s, who founded cricket clubs, including some who also played for the team.
54 Lowerson, Sport, 100-101.
55 These arguments are taken from Woodcock, “Betting”; see also Munting, “Social opposition”.
contrast the images “muscular Christians“ associated with approved sports, such as football, athletics, swimming, and above all cricket, were those of physical, mental and spiritual health - they were “vigorouls”, “sound“ and “robust”. They promoted “courage, presence of mind and self-reliance”. They brought “joy”, “animation”, “a bounding pulse“ and “a blithe heart”.57

57 These are taken from the paper by Colonel Onslow, “Physical Recreation”, at the Church Congress in 1892.
Papal Zouaves illustrate the ambiguity of ideals of Christian manliness: courage and strength but also obedience, sacrifice and sentimentality.

[Cover of a song of the zouaves, Brussels, c. 1870; Louvain, KADOC-KU Leuven]