The Poetry of Henry Newbolt

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CHAPTER TWO

Schools, Memories and Hopes

The Wanderer

To youth there comes a whisper out of the west:
"O loiterer, hasten to where there waits for thee
A life to build, a love therein to nest,
And a man's work, serving the age to be."

Peace, peace awhile! Before his tireless feet
Hill beyond hill the road in sunlight goes;
He breathes the breath of morning, clear and sweet,
And his eyes love the high eternal snows.

WE OF THE LATE twentieth century like to regard ourselves as quite different from the Victorians, even to the extent of assuming that because they did not discuss sex as publicly, or write about it as extensively as we do, they were too prudish and ignorant to enjoy it. Although that assumption has now been disproved by Peter Gay in his study of bourgeois experience in the hundred years up to 1914, we are still inclined to dismiss Victorian values as if they bear little relation to our own. Yet while human nature and humanity's basic values may not be eternal and immutable, they do not vary greatly over time and across space. What does change (and sometimes sharply, as in the years between the beginning of the Boer War and the end of World War I) are the forms in which people hold their values, the respective priorities they accord them, and the objects and symbols in which they invest them.
These are the differences that make the late-Victorian age, in which Newbolt’s life-code was formed, appear to possess values dissimilar to our own, and these are the differences we need to examine in order to understand the ideals and aspirations that motivated him.

Enormously important to the Victorians was the investment of their values in institutions (and the traditions enshrined in institutions) such as the Empire, the Crown, and the family, and nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the development of the public school system in Britain during the nineteenth century. Moreover, this system can be seen not only as a discrete element of nineteenth-century education, but also as an interesting reflection and extension of Victorian parental values, with, indeed, some very similar strengths and weaknesses. Just as Victorian parents gave their children space to be children (to a much greater extent than had their eighteenth century forbears), so public schools gave their boys the space to be boys. And just as Victorian parents, in an age of accelerating change, managed to protect their children more effectively than they developed these children’s independence, so public schools, as enclosed institutions, tended to insulate the boys from life and to be better at encouraging conformity than originality.

Public schools may sometimes have magnified or exaggerated values taught at home, but they essentially upheld and promoted a set of beliefs and a code of behaviour that both mirrored and informed the attitudes of a wide spectrum of society. To Newbolt, his experience at public school was to shape him for the rest of his life, and certainly to inform the poetry he would write and the values he would express and uphold.

In beginning an examination of Newbolt’s education, however, it is at once apparent that his schooling was not quite the “typical” one we might have expected for a man so associated with the conventional public school spirit of his day. He had no formal schooling until he was ten, but was taught Latin and French by his brother and sister’s governess, and was tutored three times a week by the Second Master of the local grammar school, a kindly and enthusiastic man named William Simpson Bamber. It was he who persuaded Newbolt’s mother that her son had the ability to get a scholarship to Eton and who recommended the preparatory school that would coach him for the examination. And so, aged ten, Newbolt left home for the first time and travelled from urban
Walsall, in Staffordshire, to Caistor in the bare and sweeping country of the Lincolnshire Wolds.

Many prep schools of the period were miniature models of the public schools for which they were preparing their boys, with similar régimes, similar classroom practices, and, of course, organized games. The school at Caistor, run by Newbolt’s father’s old Cambridge tutor, Anthony Bower, was not like that at all. Reminiscent in spirit of Wordsworth’s Hawkshead, it was a place where boys were encouraged to roam the surrounding countryside, and where Bower sat at his desk at the far end of a large, communal schoolroom, summoning each class in turn to sit on semi-circular benches before him and to recite their lessons to him (to the frequent accompaniment of a hail of blows from his cane). Newbolt remembered him fondly both in his autobiography and in his semi-autobiographical novel, *The Twymans*, and also in this letter to a close friend of his, Alice Hylton (Lady Hylton):

Anthony Bower was the son of a tanner in a small Lincolnshire town...; Old Mr. Turner...the local magnate, visited the National School there & was so struck by the boy’s cleverness that he sent him to Cambridge where he took high honours in both classics & maths. & was a successful tutor. My father & all his friends & relations were his pupils: he was devoted to my father & that is what he means when he says that: “Harry had twined himself round my heart before I saw him.” He was endlessly good to me, & the best teacher I ever had, & one of the most interesting & charming companions for a keen boy imaginable: he taught me chess, shooting, poetry, birds, history, war, Virgil, Xenophon—all in the remote wolds of Lincolnshire.²

Bower thought of himself as first and foremost a mathematician, and this, Newbolt speculated, was why there was so much learning by heart when it came to Latin and Greek. Here, boys did not merely memorize verse; they were made to learn and to recite entire pages of the Latin Primer, “rules, examples and all.” But as if to offset this mechanical learning, Bower would get the boys to follow in Latin or Greek what he would read aloud to them in translation, thus making his pupils at least acquainted with many more classical texts than was usual. (In fact, so well acquainted was Newbolt with the *Aeneid* when he went on to Clifton that he had some difficulty in persuading a master there that the excellence of his “unseen” translation was due to knowledge of the text, and not of the cheater’s crib.)³ And thus began a life-long delight with, and
knowledge of, the classics that was to permeate Newbolt’s writing, showing up not merely in his easy familiarity with appropriate quotations and allusions, but also in his choice of classically heroic themes and protagonists.

If Newbolt’s classroom experience was somewhat unusual for his day, then so were his experiences outside it. There were no officially organized games at Caistor. The Second Master, Mr. Letch, would sometimes help the boys to hire a field for cricket or football, and there were clubs for these games, but it was compulsory neither to join a club nor to play a game. Most of the half-holiday afternoons were spent by the boys wandering about the surrounding country, and it seems likely that it was here in the wide green openness of the Lincolnshire Wolds that Newbolt’s deep love of the English countryside began to develop:

I have never undervalued games, and they were as salutary and enjoyable at Caistor as elsewhere: but I am sure that we gained greatly by our informal wanderings in that wide and idyllic landscape. ... It contrasted perfectly with the county of my birth, where neither the closed parks nor the ruined mining districts seemed to belong to any universal form of life. Here, though the hills were mostly bare and the fields not always sunlit, we were unconsciously affected by the character of the country—it was consistent and immemorial, in a word, bucolic. Virgil and Theocritus could have turned it all to a poetry of their own kind. We learned much about reaping and rick-building and the edible qualities of swedes, and a good deal more about rams and lambs than boys in orthodox schools can ever know. 4

It was this mixture of the pagan haunting of his imagination by the countryside itself and the obviously satisfying introduction to procreation (which local farmers seemed happy to give the boys) that Newbolt remembers with particular pleasure, and there is certainly apparent in his later writing both a deep sensitivity to natural beauty and a relish of robust, masculine (though never “off-colour”) expression.

There was inevitably a darker side to school life, particularly in an institution where there were very few adults, and where twelve- and thirteen-year-old prefects wielded rather too much power. In his description of prep school life in The Twymans, published in 1911 (twenty-one years before the first volume of his autobiography, My World As In My Time), Newbolt talks of “the triviality and savagery of school life,” 5 and while this has been moderated to “the keen triviality of our years there”
in the autobiography, he does admit that there were "bleaker days and darker ones than any I have tried to describe." But we are left with little choice but to assume that the lighter days outweighed the dark, and certainly the abiding impression that he gives of these years is one of eagerness, energy, and a genuine, deep enjoyment of both the formal and the informal lessons that Caistor and its surrounds had to teach him.

In the end, it was not an Eton scholarship for which Newbolt sat, but one to Clifton College, a school founded in the same year as he was born (1862), and chosen because Anthony Bower was impressed with the results it was currently achieving. When Newbolt arrived for his week of examinations there, he caught his first sight of the School Close and began his deep attachment to Clifton at that moment, absorbing with keen delight a picture that stayed with him for the rest of his life. He first describes this arrival in *The Twymans*:

... [P]resently the drowsy-paced cab emerged from a terrace into the glare of a wide white road which at first descended by a gentle slope. On the left side of it stood a row of substantial houses taking the sun comfortably on their backs among lilacs and laburnums: on the right was a long range of black paling with a guard of netting above it, and behind both a line of young lime-trees. Even now, while the leaves still hid the view from him, Percival [the young hero of the book] heard again and again the sweet crack of bat on ball: then as he drew level and looked between the trees he saw that which took his breath with an entirely new delight. In the distance were buildings—large and stately they seemed, but he hardly thought of them—in front lay a wide green sward, level as a lawn, flooded with low sunlight, and covered in every direction with a multitude of white figures, standing, running, walking, bowling, throwing, batting—in every attitude that can express the energy or the expectancy of youth.... [S]omething broke over his spirit like a wave: he took it for the tide of joyful anticipation, but I think it was more than that—the inrush of an idea, the sudden perception, however vague and distant, of the meaning of the scene: a glimpse, behind the mere beauty of the white young figures shining so coolly in the slant evening sunlight, of the finely planned order and long-descended discipline they symbolised.

He then, with a few minor changes, quoted the passage in its entirety in his autobiography, realising, perhaps, that he had captured the magic of that first sighting as well as he was ever going to, but going on to remind his readers of the shared nature of the experience:
My vision of Clifton Close is not a merely individual experience. It is a touch, a password between all those who have seen it. My friend and contemporary Quiller-Couch [to whom The Twymans was dedicated] emphasised this when he humorously suggested that I must have borrowed my rhapsody from him. He wrote to me after reading it, “But was it you or I, who heard the crack of bat on ball and caught his breath at first sight of the Close? It was I, Sir, and here I catch you a-hugging one of my best memories!”

And this point is further emphasized by the fact that Quiller-Couch also unashamedly quoted the entire passage in his unfinished autobiography, Memories and Opinions, right down to the quotation from his own letter. Acknowledging that he, too, could never better the description, he ends by exclaiming, “What a bank is friendship!” This illustration of Newbolt’s contention that others beside himself were almost instantly drawn to the place, and in such similar ways that the words of one could do for another, reminds us not only of the impersonality of values at that time, and in what they were so often invested, but also of the strength of the bonds that could be forged between men by the nature of that common sharing. Men who had been to the same public school forged particularly strong bonds, of course, but there was also a wider sympathy that existed among all public school men, a sympathy that could be shared, too, by women who had had fathers, brothers, sons at these institutions.

Public schools in England had gone through considerable reforms during the nineteenth century, inspired to a great degree by the famous example of Thomas Arnold’s headmastership at Rugby from 1827 to 1842. His model of Christian leadership and discipline gradually took over from the bullying, brutality, Spartan conditions and lack of discipline that had characterised so many public schools up until then. By the middle of the century, a public school idea had emerged that promoted self-discipline and partial self-government among its boys; that taught them both to submit to authority and to exercise authority; that placed over them a stern but just and Christian headmaster; and that encouraged outdoor activities in rural, and often very beautiful English country settings.

This public school idea, coming about as a result of Arnold’s and his followers’ reforms, was the guiding light that inspired both the old and the newly founded public schools throughout the second half of the
nineteenth century. But the methods used to promote the idea, and the ideals that were emphasized, shifted in the years that followed Arnold's death. By the time that Newbolt attended Clifton in the 1870s, two vital elements of public school life were the concept of chivalry (which involved the notion of service) and organized games, neither of which came from Arnold. Indeed, while Arnold was simply uninterested in organized games, he was actively opposed to any belief in chivalry: "If I were called upon to name what spirit of evil predominantly deserved the name of Antichrist," he thundered, "I should name the spirit of chivalry—the more detestable for the very guise of the 'Archangel ruined' which has made it so seductive to the most generous spirits." But in spite of the fact that Arnold believed that the chivalric code was undesirable because it put personal allegiances and the concept of honour before God and before justice, that code had become deeply engrained in the fabric of the public school ethos by the 1870s.

It was in the 1870s, too, that Imperialism finally won wide acceptance, and the idea of service to the Empire (coupled very often with service to the poor or disadvantaged at home) became a creed widely taught and believed in public schools. Moreover, the whole notion of service was closely bound up with notions of chivalry, particularly for adherents of Christian Socialism, a movement many public school masters either belonged to or absorbed elements from, and which advocated both sport as a character-builder and the service idea of helping those less well-off than yourself. It was an age in which public school graduates were groomed to serve in far-flung outposts of the Empire, or, if not there, then in law, church, the military, or government at home, or in the almost incredible number of missions, institutes and clubs that sprang up at this time to aid various types of disadvantaged people. To serve one's country in the chivalric tradition: that was the ideal sent forth by the public schools and widely upheld by the public at large.

Newbolt was accepted into "the finely planned order and long-descended discipline" of his sunlit vision at a time that has been described as the golden age of the public schools, when the chivalric code of duty, service, patriotism, heroism and brotherhood was promoted with a passion that would remain with Newbolt throughout his life. Again, however, as with Caistor, there was a less-than-usual element to his stay there. Ironically, some might say, Newbolt—the supporter and extoller of public schools—never had to contend with the homesickness, the
petty tyrannies and childish cruelties, the hard-won lessons of survival that all go to make up the fairly primitive world of the dormitory, for he was never a boarder at Clifton. When news of his acceptance came, his mother decided to move from Walsall and buy a house close to the school, possibly so that her small family might not be continually split up during school terms, but almost certainly because, as the widow of a vicar, she could not have afforded the high boarding fees for her two boys (for Frank was also to attend Clifton). And so a house was bought in Worcester Crescent, directly opposite where Newbolt had had his first view of the Close, and the school became a year-round physical presence, with the additional bonus of allowing relationships with certain influential masters to deepen into friendships as visits were exchanged between their families and his.

In many public schools of the period, such a move by his mother might have been disastrous for Newbolt, as day-boys were often neglected and despised by the boarder élite, but Clifton was unusual in having a large number of day-boys who were wholly accepted into the society of the school and in having two Houses for them, North Town and South Town, with housemasters to look after them.12 His brother, Frank, certainly remembered their position as day-boys to have been a very satisfactory one: “My brother and I (living so near the Close), enjoyed, in our own estimation, all the advantages of home as well as those of a great school. If we lost something we never knew what it was. The first day of a new term was as welcome to me as any first day of the holidays. . . .”13 What the two boys lost, one suspects, was that very element of boarding school that has produced so many unhappy memories of the harshness of public school life: the fact of boarding itself. With a loving home to return to each evening, any less pleasant side of Clifton must have seemed wholly compensated for by its educational and social advantages.

Newbolt was in North Town, and was particularly fortunate in his housemaster, George Hyde Wollaston, universally known as “the Bear” or “Old Bear,” who would remain a friend for the next fifty years. The different influences of Clifton masters important to Newbolt together did much to aid him in forming his mature vision, and it was Wollaston whom Newbolt considered to have been his greatest “benefactor,” as he put it. Although he never took a formal class from Wollaston, Newbolt was a frequent visitor at his large family house in College Road, happily close to Worcester Crescent, where he received a perpetual education in
“books, poetry, languages, pictures, music, travel—every taste that makes life delectable and passionate, and with it all a thing more difficult to describe: a kind of way of seeing life and taking it, a continual sense of meaning.”  

14 If The Twymans can be believed (and Frank Newbolt called its portraits of Wollaston and other masters “almost photographic”), Wollaston had much tact and compassion when it came to dealing with his young charges. Catching Percival, who we can only assume also to have been Henry, preparing to bestow a chaste yet obviously ardent kiss upon the girl of his present dreams—a schoolfriend of his sister’s—Bullingham (Wollaston) gives him an uncomfortable and silent twenty-four hours before presenting him with a copy of Dante’s Vita Nuova, on whose flyleaf he has written, “Good is the lordship of Love, for that it draws away the mind of his servant from all things mean.”16 An understanding man, indeed.

However, when it came to writing the autobiography, Newbolt chose not to reveal this incident, but instead to illustrate Wollaston’s great influence on him by presenting his housemaster as an avid correspondent with boys who had once been in his House and were now scattered “in every corner of the world,” many of them presumably serving the Empire. This letter writing would go on in Newbolt’s presence, so that he was made acutely aware, from a very immediate source, of being part of a continual brotherhood—one that had begun before he came and would go on long after he had left the school:

[Wollaston] would sit night after night writing to them, and breaking off now and again to read out a passage from the letter he was answering, or to tell us some stirring anecdote of one of his correspondents. He had to a high degree the power of creating prestige and enhancing loyalty, so we came to feel we were living in a world of heroes. It was true: but it was through him that the truth was found for us and handed on. This way and that, giving and receiving, he had an influence that can hardly be measured.17

This feeling of brotherhood with those who had belonged to the same institution, shared in the same traditions, and then gone out into the world and become “heroes” was evidently a seed deeply implanted by Wollaston, and one that was to grow and develop into a mature belief in the efficacy of such a brotherhood, bound together by a set of values and a code of conduct that was not only shared, but passionately believed to be good. It was Wollaston who led Newbolt towards this ideal, and he
remained an important figurehead, as well as friend, in Newbolt’s life, until his death early in 1926, about which Newbolt wrote: “I can’t tell you how his going empties the world—many other lights have gone, but it has never darkened more perceptibly than now. I only had one mother, and one Wollaston—now I am just a leaderless fellow like the rest.”

Newbolt was sixty four when he wrote that, and the long arm of Clifton was as firm as it had ever been.

Another master who both extended Newbolt’s classroom lessons and influenced his feelings about Clifton as an institution was the Upper Fifth master, Sidney Irwin. Irwin came to Clifton in the same year as Newbolt, and from the start he was deeply involved in the school and all that it stood for. The present Head of History and Archivist at Clifton, Derek Winterbottom, tells us:

He loved Clifton, too, and had strong feelings about morals, manners and loyalty. We ourselves are not important, was his message, but Clifton is and we derive our importance from serving her. It was he who later on successfully persuaded the school to adopt the motto “Spiritus intus alit,” from a phrase taken from well-known lines of Virgil.

The motto was intended to be read not simply as a divine spirit giving life to the world, but as a divine spirit giving life to the school and every person in it, and this is what Irwin tried to give Newbolt—a sense of the spiritual and inspirational, particularly through his teaching of the classics.

A year after Newbolt had moved up from his form, Irwin offered to read the Odyssey with him in his spare time, and not only brought the text alive for him in a way that was excitingly new, but gave him “a continual suggestion of feeling, of mystery, of the underlying significance of things.” These readings allowed Newbolt a temporary escape from what he sometimes felt to be a rather mundane school routine, with an often flat and uninspired curriculum and no more than a “practical interpretation of ideals.” To read the Odyssey with Irwin was to take a voyage in a familiar yet ghostly and romantic country, where the senses were continually stirred and the intellect excited. To Newbolt, Irwin, with his Delphic manner, was less a teacher than a deliverer of oracles, and, when the Odyssey was thus handed to him, “every word of its language was instantly intelligible, and all its people were alive with a
heroic vitality that for the time made my daily world recede into a background of insignificance."\^{21}

One master whose class periods were never flat or uninspired, and who was highly regarded both intellectually and as a particularly gifted teacher, was T. W. Dunn, a master important to Newbolt again because he fired his mind and his imagination in a way that made learning invigorating and intoxicating. He ostensibly taught Newbolt German for two hours a week, but his teaching-theory made German only one of many subjects covered:

His theory was a sane one—he called it the Doctrine of By-products. He accepted the whole school system, athletics included, because he believed that the real gain was never the primary object of pursuit—it came as it were round the corner by a divine dispensation which looked like mere good luck. In reliance on this principle he would spend the whole hour in talking to us with give-and-take freedom about Democracy in America (for example) and his trust was that we should be absorbing Schiller and Goethe all the time, as men take wine while appearing to be mainly intent on walnuts.\^{22}

Newbolt's description presents Dunn as being both eccentric and inspiring, and helps to make a little clearer, perhaps, why his Clifton education left such an enduring mark on him; it is not given to everyone to have three such compelling, influential, and generous teachers at the same time. Moreover, in an age of particularly unadventurous education, there was all too often a tendency for the authority of schoolmasters to derive more from the fact that they acted in loco parentis than from their ability as inspirational or stimulating teachers. But Newbolt had only praise for the teaching of the masters at Clifton, even if he found the curriculum uninspired at times.

Many critics of this period in public school education have pointed to a decline in the education offered and in the kind of individualism that had resulted from earlier, Arnoldian reforms, with an increasing move towards a fairly grey uniformity of ideas and beliefs. Or, as T. C. Worsley puts it: "If the pre-Arnold generation had provided the wild pioneers of Empire, the post-Arnold generation was to provide the obedient governors."\^{23} Worsley sees the 1870s and 1880s as a period of consolidation, in which the old wild freedom gave place to the new standardized regulation. The day of the pioneer and the adventurer was almost over. The middle-class state, with its disciplined army and its huge bureaucracy, required a different
type; while the Empire which it was busy founding as an outlet for its surplus capital goods and investments would require an army of steady, loyal, and obedient administrators.24

Many schools of this period became less adventurous educationally, less concerned to originate or advance teaching methods, and more inclined to let the syllabus formalize and congeal to the detriment of, for example, many of the sciences, music, drama and English literature. And there is little doubt that this conservatism reflected an increasing tendency of the schools to see themselves as custodians of, rather than as contributors to, the values entrusted to them, with the result that the forms in which these values were held came to be seen as over-rigid, static, and eventually as wrong.

Later, Newbolt was very aware of the restrictions placed upon him by his education at Clifton and became actively involved in curriculum development nationwide. He continued, however, to extol the masters there, and there is little doubt that as a group they had a profound shaping effect upon a boy who had lost his own father at the age of four. T. E. Brown and Edward Oakeley, for instance, neither of whom actually taught him in the classroom, both left their mark on him. T. E. Brown was a publishing poet, originally from the Isle of Man, whose poems in the Manx dialect had a certain following in England (and a large one on the Isle of Man) and were read, at least with curiosity, by the boys at Clifton. Newbolt forever remembered Brown’s awe-inspiring physical appearance, his extraordinarily forceful presence, and the power of his voice both to inspire and to terrify. In 1930, in a talk he gave on Brown for the BBC, Newbolt remembered one particular sermon preached by Brown in Clifton Chapel:

[T]he sermon, of course, was often a quiet time for straying among one’s own thoughts. I had left following the preacher’s line of country, but was not yet far away, when I became aware that his tone was rising. A moment afterwards I was brought back to full consciousness by a huge melodious roar—“Leave your dark corners, leave your spiritual dens and caves! Come forth you little moral Troglodytes, come into the daylight’s splendour—There with joy your praises tender. . . .” The sound—the real joy in it—was in our ears for weeks after; the phrase “You moral Troglodyte” became a permanent addition to our vocabulary.25
Attracted by the man, Newbolt was less sure about the poetry until, when he was seventeen, he paid a visit to the Isle of Man with the then headmaster of Clifton, James Wilson, who was also a Manx man. On the boat going over, Wilson recited beautifully, and from memory, Brown's dialect tale, *Betsy Lee*, wholly engrossing Newbolt; once on the island, he took his young pupil on an enthusiastic pilgrimage to all the places connected with Brown, thereby increasing Newbolt's understanding of both the man and the poet. Brown remained a more remote figure than some of the other masters, but the very fact that he was a working poet must, as Derek Winterbottom points out, have impressed boys who spent a good deal of their school life reading and translating Classical verse, thereby learning to become aware of what good verse was and even what a struggle it was to achieve it.²⁶

Edward Oakeley was classical master of the Upper Fourth and a housemaster who kindly and leniently waived rules so that Newbolt could see a good friend of his in Oakeley's House much more often than regulations permitted. He also was "the voluntary and enthusiastic keeper of a register, in which he inscribed all our famous athletic records and scholastic successes, as well as the doings of distinguished Old Cliftonians at home and abroad."²⁷ It is not hard to see why this would have attracted Newbolt, the register being a natural companion to, and extension of, Wollaston's evening extracts from the letters of Old Boys, and being also a physical manifestation of the continuity of Clifton tradition, of which he was so proud to be a part. Oakeley was another master who remained a friend long after Newbolt had left school; indeed, Newbolt recalls more than one visit to Oakeley's retirement château on Lake Brienz, when he would help Oakeley to revise the Register, and when the two men would sit and "talk of old times and remember all the glories of our blood and state."²⁸

The final Clifton masters who wielded an undoubted influence on Newbolt were the two headmasters who governed the school while he was there. The second to serve was the Manx man, James Wilson, who came to Clifton in the summer term of 1879, and so was Newbolt's headmaster for the last two years he was a pupil there. He was a very popular, very human, very warm man, who could roar with laughter when his rather rusty Greek let him down in class, or when a spider spun a thread from the ceiling down to his head one day, so that as he rocked back and forth in his chair, he appeared to be acting as a pendulum. He
never stood on his dignity, yet he was widely respected for his innovative teaching, by which he managed to make his classes both instructive and fun, and he was generously and wholeheartedly devoted to the school. As we have seen, he was more than happy to accompany a seventeen-year-old pupil on a visit to the place of his childhood, and to make the whole visit come vividly alive. Moreover, it was he who offered to take Newbolt with him on that trip, when he discovered that Newbolt’s father’s first wife had been married at Kirk Braddan, on the Isle of Man, and that relatives already known to Newbolt lived there. Newbolt remembered him chiefly for this generosity of spirit, for his almost total lack of self-consciousness, and for his zest for life.

He would also have remembered him for his absolute adherence to, and support of, the precepts of his predecessor, which he did nothing to change, and much to encourage. Newbolt’s—and Clifton’s—first headmaster was more than an influential master: his was also the influence of the school itself and all it stood for, for he had formed it, and through his ideals its boys were moulded.

John Percival (after whom young Percival Twyman must, at least in part, have been named) became the first headmaster of Clifton on the recommendation of Dr. Frederick Temple, the headmaster of Rugby, on whose staff he had served for two years. Not the most obvious, nor even the first choice for the position (an earlier successful candidate had accepted a job elsewhere), he was twenty-eight when he came to the school, a native of Westmorland, whose local accent he retained throughout his life, a brilliant scholar with a compelling physical presence, a Christian Socialist, and a firm upholder of Arnoldian ideals. He was also a man of his own times—of a different era at Rugby—who believed firmly in the value of organized games; the value of a classically-based corporate life deriving from Jewish, Greek and Roman traditions; and in the concept of chivalry (he named two of his sons Arthur and Lancelot), which he saw not as an Antichrist, but as a creed upholding Christian service, unity, loyalty, and especially patriotism. The ways in which he preached this chivalric doctrine will be further discussed in the next chapter. What concerns us here is his active pursuit of its ideals, in particular those which led to a great emphasis being placed on organized games at Clifton.
This emphasis was not, of course, unusual. There was at this time in the public schools a very high priority accorded to the whole notion of manliness. In his book *Godliness and Good Learning*, David Newsome discusses the shift away from the Arnoldian ideals of the book’s title—from the earlier piety and “spiritual zeal” put forward as ideal schoolboy qualities by Arnold and his followers—towards a belief in manliness and physical exuberance, as well as in the idea of service. He sees this shift as having a bearing on the standard both of education and of the values that lay behind it, with organized games becoming an important part of the curriculum, emotional displays being seen as undesirable, and serving one’s country being the foremost sentiment inculcated by the system.29

At the end of his book, Newsome compares Arnold’s ideal to the one in place by the time Newbolt went to school:

The worst educational feature of the earlier ideal was the tendency to make boys into men too soon; the worst feature of the other, paradoxically, was that in its efforts to achieve manliness by stressing the cardinal importance of playing games, it fell into the opposite error of failing to make boys into men at all. Indeed, one might go further: its code of living became so robust and patriotic in its demands that it could be represented as reaching its perfection in a code of dying.30

This last point is an interesting one and will be returned to later when considering how the public school man approached World War I. It is worth noting here, however, that not only Newbolt, but many of his contemporaries held a life-long affection for games, lived their lives by codes learned in schoolboy cricket and football matches, and used verbal images coined from their school playing fields all their adult lives. For if the concept of chivalry was an abstract expression of the form of values espoused by every public schoolboy in the 1870s and 1880s, then organized games was its concrete exemplar.

As was previously mentioned, Arnold himself was at best uninterested in organized games, which played no real part in his reforms. Indeed, except at very few schools (Harrow and Winchester, for example), games were not taken seriously until the 1860s and 1870s when they began to be seen as an essential part of the building of character and the all-important manliness. Before that, boys organized their own games, which might be no more than marbles, quoits or birds-nesting, but if it
was a team game such as cricket involved the boys in engaging and paying for their own coach. It is clear, however, that while Arnold would probably have been astounded (or even horrified) at the strength of the cult that games became, the initial thrust for their organization did stem from his own great fear that if boys were allowed to spend free time as they pleased, they would become idle and allow Satan to tempt them with all manner of moral sins—fighting, lying, bullying, and that most dreadful of all sins: sex. Games made for healthy minds as well as healthy bodies, and it came to be firmly believed that their moral influence could do nothing but good, a belief that a contemporary of Newbolt’s, Godfrey Lagden, was still upholding in 1912:

[Games] afford relief during the period of mental strain, and wholesome occupation; they enforce the practical lessons of obedience which must be learnt as part of the equipment for future command; they bring out the qualities that make successful leaders and tend to the formation of character; they foster some of the characteristics we like to think are truly British, viz. calmness in excitement or danger, resolution in difficulties, resource and judgment in action. . . . A final point in their favour is that they call into being a form of comradeship leading to enduring friendship memorable and useful in after life. . . . So that, weighing it all up, it is not hard to realise, apart from the material benefit of games, how great a moral influence for good they exercise upon the minds of youthful generations who are bound by the best traditions of school honour and ethics.\textsuperscript{31}

Of course organized games kept boys from brooding in their studies, got them out of doors, and made them physically fit. (“If not urged to manly exercise as part of a system [boys] would soon lose their vitality and become knock-kneed specimens.”)\textsuperscript{32} But most importantly games were there to provide boys with their mental and moral health, exposing them in practical terms to those virtues—loyalty, courage, endurance, the ability to lead and to be a member of a team—that were perceived as being needed by the country and the Empire. Indeed, the Imperial need for healthy, adventurous, disciplined young men of the prefect-and-cricket-captain-type had a great deal to do with why the games cult was so strong and so widely accepted in the 1870s and 1880s, when Newbolt was at school. This was the great age of Imperialism, and if chivalry seemed the fitting image for the times, then games appeared to be the ideal training ground for these Victorian knights.
The schools, therefore, continued to pursue their chivalric vision, and to enact it primarily through the football field and the cricket pitch. John Percival, as a particularly ardent supporter of chivalry, was no exception, and though not himself an athlete (he had been delicate as a child), took a great and personal interest in games at Clifton, sometimes driving the boys beyond what they were really physically capable of. Games were a passion, and in some cases an obsession. "It is I believe," Newbolt wrote, "a mere truth to say that there were very few members of the school who would not have bartered away all chances of intellectual distinction for a place in the Cricket Eleven or the Football Fifteen." But in spite of realising that "the passion for games was itself beginning to resemble a disease, and . . . cost some scholars more than they could afford in effort and injuries," Newbolt remembered vividly that "the consciousness of belonging to a militant fellowship was exhilarating and sustaining, and a great part of our happiness came from it. The days of our youth are the days of our glory and it would have been a tame existence that had never known an hour of glory. . . ."33

The school at that time had a particularly impressive run of victories, so that even those who were not in the teams felt the glory, shared in the communal glow of success, and thus bore out Percival's belief in harmonious oneness. This indeed was Newbolt's lot, for he was never in either the football or the cricket teams—"as a serious cricketer I was myself always unreliable and second-rate"34—which could be seen as yet another anomaly in the school career of the man who gave probably the most famous lines of cricketing verse to the world:

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night—
Ten to make and the match to win—
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,
But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote—
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

In fact, except for some inevitable House matches, Newbolt did not play team games but was involved in two forms of athletics that call for individual spirit: running and shooting, for which he won a total of twenty cups.
However, this was not the anomaly it seems, for in both of these sports he found chivalric parallels that were very satisfying to him. While he regarded a game between two teams as a battle, for instance, he saw a race in terms of a knightly tournament, in which "self-reliance and unflinching resolution" were the qualities being tested:

When the race is a representative one, when the runners are each of them the champion of an ardent fellowship, when they know that they contend before the eyes of a crowd which overlooks no sign of courage or judgment, but with tense loyalty follows their fortunes and almost shares the stress of their labours, then it may well be doubted whether this is not the greatest of all forms of sport. Certainly he excelled at it. In the Clifton Athletic Sports of 1881, he won the quarter-mile on the first day, and the 100 yards (in 10.8 seconds) the second day, tying for second with another boy for the challenge cup.

Rifle-shooting, too, appealed to this sense of chivalry in him, not only because it was a test of individual skill, but also because it offered a uniquely satisfying brotherhood of its own. Enrolled into the School Cadet Corps, he rose within two years to become its Captain, as well as Captain of the Shooting VIII. In spite of his dislike of the "dismal evening drills," the loss of many half-holidays, and the fact that he had to give up cricket completely, all of which he felt added up to rather a heavy price, he found "a peculiar and quite unexpected pleasure" in this form of sport. In 1880, he won the Regimental Challenge Cup for Officers, and in both that year and the next he took the School VIII to shoot in the inter-school competitions that were held annually on Wimbledon Common:

The range at Bedminster [where the Clifton boys shot], its lonely green hillside, its routine of intent skill and self-control, its picnic teas and its complete contrast to more rough-and-tumble games—I wonder whether these were the secret of our enjoyment, or whether we were all the time linking with them the joys of the great canvas town on Wimbledon Common. There was another kind of "corporate life": there... we found a new and friendly fellowship in which a hundred schools were represented, and we could meet many of the most famous shots of the country and the Empire.

Both as spectator and participant, then, Newbolt was happily involved in games at Clifton. Percival's doctrine of chivalry was, as it were, "proved" to him in concrete terms. He was not only charmed imagina-
tively and intellectually by the notion that the chivalric code could be a way of life; he felt that in seeing it in action, he was seeing its value.

Newbolt was one of those, however, who had a passion for games, but not an obsession; he never allowed them to interfere with his school work while at Clifton, and later he made it clear that he saw the limitation of their being regarded as a mere end in themselves. He felt that their value lay in their potential for training boys for the adult world, accepting the widely held belief that they were a good training for war and for the defence of the country and the Empire. Even here, though, he was not always uncritical. For instance, in 1918 (and the date must be carefully borne in mind, of course), he wrote the following passage in a book intended for schoolboys:

[You may get from the playing-fields the moral qualities, such as leadership and endurance and fair-play, which are indispensable for war, but you cannot get the scientific training which is also indispensable. . . . If our games are to be a thorough training for war, they must include throwing the bomb as well as the cricket ball, and racing not only in boats, but in aeroplanes and armoured cars. The same thing holds good in the non-military departments of life: a great deal of science is needed, and it must be taught if we are to live to the advantage of the commonwealth.]

Later in life, Newbolt was to become very interested and involved in educational reform, and this promotion of science in schools was no mere passing remark, having its roots in his own fascination with, but lack of formal training in, any scientific area while at school. He specialized in the Classics, and that meant abandoning many other subjects, though his brother, Frank, did study physics and chemistry, and he borrowed Frank's books and shared in his rather lethal experiments, carried out in the basement of Worcester Crescent. He also became fascinated with electricity, installing a floor-to-floor telephone in the house, even providing electric lights, albeit rather dim, for the dining-room table.

This opportune appropriation of scientific knowledge from a variety of sources has its echoes in other areas as well. For of his two intellectual passions—the Classics and poetry of any kind—only in Classics did he receive a thorough and intense training. The previously mentioned limitations of the school curriculum meant that, left to find his poetry where he could, he waded through far too much of the "long-dead
forest” of Southey, failed to get anything out of the Jacobean dramatists, missed out on Wordsworth’s long poems, and didn’t read Chaucer in the original until long after he had left school. Tennyson, however, he had first read on his own when he was twelve, and he continued to read him avidly all through his time at Clifton. Furthermore, as we have seen, there were generous masters there to give what they could to thirsty minds like Newbolt’s: from Wollaston he got Dante, Milton, and William Morris; from Irwin, Homer, Cowley, and Marvell; and from the Sixth Form Master, E. H. C. Smith, Shelley and Keats. But aside from this kind of good fortune, he had little help with any poetry except that studied in Latin and Greek classes, which meant that he had a wide knowledge of intricate classical forms, rhythms and meters, experience in using these himself, but a rather haphazard background in the long poetic tradition of his own country.

He wrote, by his own admission, a substantial amount of poetry while he was at Clifton, though very little survives now. His contributions to the school magazine, The Cliftonian (all reportedly sounding as if they were heavily under the influence of Tennyson), were published under deceptive initials, so cannot be reliably rescued, and a lyrical version of the story of Tristram and Iseult, he destroyed. An Arthurian story that, as Newbolt later admitted, was influenced not only by Tennyson, but also by William Morris (and an obviously early and classically Pre-Raphaelite William Morris) was his A Fair Death, which he began at Clifton, finished at Oxford, and had privately printed. It is, as we should expect, highly derivative, showing none of the metrical lightness of touch that he became capable of achieving later. The only one of his short early poems revealed in his autobiography is this one, a gloomily sentimental, but rather charmingly adolescent piece that records his mother’s dislike of church bells, a source of pain to her since her husband’s death:

E.N.’s Dislike of Bells, 1878.

Ah, when the setting sun of life
Gleams on the sea that in thy breast
So often tossed in surging strife
Lies hushed at last in windless rest,
Thou too shalt hear beside that shore
The sweet sad bells of Memory chime
The requiem of the golden time
That passed long since for evermore.38

This is accomplished enough technically for a sixteen-year-old of the time, but there is no really individual spark there yet. Newbolt himself was disappointed, but unsurprised to be beaten in his last year at school for the Annual School Prize for English Verse by Arthur Quiller-Couch, whose poem on the prescribed theme, the Fall of Athens, was judged superior to his own. Nevertheless, he had begun to write, was encouraged to write, and enjoyed the company of a group of friends who wrote together and who stimulated each other's interest in writing. He edited the school magazine in his last year, and read voraciously. Clifton, like many schools of that period, had a rather casual attitude towards the teaching of English and writing, but it certainly never purposefully stifled those whose inclinations took them that way, and for Newbolt, Head of North Town, Captain of the Rifle Corps and Head of the School in his last term, the Classics-games-poetry triangle was a happy one, as his time at Clifton was happy, perhaps unusually so.

There has been much criticism of the public school ethos, and the way in which Arnold's intentions became increasingly distorted over time, but one, more positive aspect of the ethos was that in Newbolt's time it did present values as something objective and therefore as something that could be readily shared in a way that personally-held values cannot. We have lost, or drastically reduced, our ability to share values in the twentieth century, and one result of this is our tendency to dismiss Victorian and Edwardian writers whose values were particularly widely shared and who were thus more than usually available to a broad public.

That Newbolt took for granted the virtues of the public school ethos of his time, and assumed others would share his belief in those virtues, is very much a reflection of the period in which he received his education. When he entered public school in 1876, the system was virtually unquestioned, values were to a large extent assumed to be universally held, and the reasons behind an increasingly militant ethos were still clear to the majority of masters, boys and parents.

In fact, Newbolt attended public school at a time that was dissimilar in many respects from the periods either preceding or following it. It was a golden age of great unity and great brotherhood, in which men who had gone through the same experience together had a bond between them
that would last a lifetime, a bond that produced such an apparent
certainty that many other people who came into contact
with, or read about, the system which produced it also became convinced
of the efficacy of the public school code. It was an age that could assume
that the form its values took was widely shared and also that it was shared
because the chivalric ideal that gave the values their expression was
essentially a Christian and a just system of belief.

This golden age of public schools, however, did not survive the Boer
War, not least because the schools themselves were unable to adapt with
sufficient speed to a new generation whose faith in the once unchal­
lenged ethos was shaken by the war, and whose commitment to Empire
was wavering. The ethos that had encouraged, however unconsciously,
uniformity of thought and lack of individual intellectual curiosity was
beginning to feel pressure from a less accepting set of boys who were
not able to see service to Empire or country as their ultimate goal because
they were no longer sure quite what that meant, or even, in certain cases,
whether it was justified. Indeed, by 1914, many of them had become
unable to see any ends at all in the means still rigorously promoted by
the public school system, and there were those who therefore grasped at
World War I with a strange kind of relief because it seemed both
justifiable and meaningful. But when Newbolt was at school, the
ends—service to Empire, to country, to one’s fellow man, and chivalric
conduct in all things—were eminently clear, and the brotherhood incul­
cated by the system fostered a good that was rarely questioned. We are
a questioning generation, and we would no longer agree that the sharing
of certain beliefs in itself confirms the validity of those beliefs, but we
must realise that to late-Victorians of a certain age and background, it
did. To such people, unity promoted strength, and strength gave England
her greatness, in which there was still, at that time, much national pride.

In October 1881, Newbolt went up to Oxford on an Open Scholarship
to Corpus Christi College, and so began four more very happy years, but
they were not to be years that had such a formative impact on him as
those spent at Caistor, and more particularly at Clifton. They were years
in which he matured socially and intellectually, but little that happened
there changed the beliefs that were now a part of the man. From his
autobiography, one gets the impression that Newbolt enjoyed his time
there enormously; in fact, a good, thorough-going enjoyment is the
overriding feeling that comes across in those chapters. But there is also
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the impression that in some ways this was a waiting time for him, a period of calm between the forming of a life-code and its testing in the adult world:

[T]he city is a fairy city, neither in the world nor of it, neither far from the world nor oblivious of it; it stands solitary but near by, as it were upon the cloud-hills of dawn, at the meeting-place of all yesterdays and all to-morrows, and its life is timeless. While you are there . . . the world of men will be always before your eyes, a vivid and curious spectacle for your philosophy to muse upon: but it will have no power to trouble you. You will suffer none of its anxieties, limitations, perplexities: you will be delivered from the pain of transitoriness, for though you yourself will change incessantly, it will be only as thought and feeling change, to be incessantly renewed, and in all circumstance you will be untouched—set in an unfading oasis, a point of windless calm. 39

He found it hard, at first, to come to terms with the fact that Oxford was not an institution of the same mould as Clifton. “I had hoped and believed,” he wrote, “that Oxford would be a second Clifton, with every kind of opportunity and contest and pleasure magnified in value. I found instead that there were differences, even defects.” 40 One of these “defects” was that the split between athletics and intellectual study was such that undergraduates were, in effect, called upon to choose between the two. Newbolt rejected an offer to join the Corpus Christi running team, was too light to row and too heavy to cox, and so found it “a relief to turn, without any overt act, to the Intellectuals.” 41 But he missed the dual life of games and work that Clifton had offered: “At Oxford I found to my disappointment that a man might have an affection for his College and a pride in his University, but for militant ardour there was little opportunity.” 42 And Newbolt was a man to whom such actively committed ardour was not only appealing, but was in some way necessary. He had given it to Clifton, and he would always give it to his country, but he never quite gave it to Oxford to the same degree.

Instead, he was apparently content to adjust to what it was Oxford did have to offer him, mostly good companionship (both male and female), miles of beautiful surrounding countryside to explore, a series of stimulating debates in the Union, an extremely full and enjoyable social life, and, of course, the great beauty of the city itself, and of his rooms in the Fellows’ Building—rooms that had belonged to Ruskin, and still had in them Ruskin’s sitting-room carpet and Parisian wallpaper. Here again,
Newbolt could feel a part of history and abandon himself to a world not quite real, yet wholly connected to imaginative reality:

I had never anywhere at any time been at home in a scene of such ancient peace and beauty. It gave me again and again the pure luxury of a trance—it carried me out of the natural existence of thought and activity into a region of more convincing reality, where intensity of feeling and imagination took the place of Time. That might be on a summer night, when all windows were open and not a sound to be heard but the *crake-crake* of a bird down in Christ Church meadows: or on a warm spring morning when the sun poured a flood of light across my room, in which motes danced and smoke-wreaths whirled and widened and dispersed, while the Self sat in the centre of a boundless solitude and enjoyed an Everlasting Now.43

He continued with his own writing, too, though he mentions little of this in his autobiography, other than that he finished the long poem, *A Fair Death*, begun at Clifton. There is certainly a hint, however, in Quiller-Couch’s autobiography, that Newbolt was beginning to write a good deal and to take his writing seriously. Quiller-Couch tells us that while some of his acquaintances at Oxford had already begun writing, “Others—among whom I may dare to team myself up with Anthony Hope Hawkins, Charles Mallet, A. E. W. Mason, C. E. Montague, Henry Newbolt—were more or less consciously training themselves to become writers—Newbolt perhaps the most consciously.”44

Academic work seemed, if not less important than all of this, then perhaps less exciting. Again, Newbolt got nothing like the intellectual stimulation that he had secured from the masters at Clifton. He found the tutors so intensely jealous of their own, often narrow fields that they were quite unprepared to venture beyond them:

Our tutors were good men, learned and affable, but they would not allow us more than a narrow ring to spar in when we engaged them. Again and again I remember coming to a point where a philosophical inquiry led straight to the borderland of religion. At the frontier I was always stopped. . . . We came to regard our tutors as men afraid of each other: they must each have had some philosophy of his own, but none of them could venture to expose it to criticism.45

This kind of reluctance by the tutors to engage in any kind of wide-ranging intellectual debate with their students must have made for a fairly dry education, and, in spite of some encouragement to read outside the Classics, there appeared to be an undue emphasis placed on just exactly
what had to be done to pass the exams, and no more. In Newbolt’s case, this did not lead to an entirely happy conclusion. He was taking the four-year Honours course in Classics, which involved one examination half way through—Moderations, which he took early—and a final one at the end, “Literae Humaniiores,” or Greats. He got a first in Mods with no difficulty, but achieved only a second in Greats, which was a keen disappointment to him at the time. One reason given by Newbolt for this was that his own tutor, Tommy Case, was to have been one of the examiners but was taken ill and replaced by a professor whose views Case did not agree with and had told Newbolt to ignore. How true, or even how important a factor this was, we cannot know. From his own account, Newbolt’s last term was almost unbelievably packed with other activities, but there is in the autobiography, amidst all the enjoyment of Oxford, a thread of discontent about the Classics course and the politics behind the education that runs throughout the Oxford chapters.

Education, however, is a mysterious thing, often learned rather than taught, and very early on in his time at Oxford Newbolt received what he called his “literary conversion,” essentially a conversion from the world of Tennyson to the world of Browning, which was radically to affect his own poetry. Arthur Sidgwick, his tutor for Mods, introduced him to the Browning Society on an evening when Sidgwick himself, and then Arnold Toynbee were each to read a paper on Browning’s love poetry. Both papers enormously impressed Newbolt, but it was particularly Toynbee’s thesis that Browning saw love as a dynamic and integral part of life, not as a sentimental escape from it, that was so liberating and that helped Newbolt to see the sentimental escapism of some of his own thinking:

[M]y own theory and practice of love had been tending towards the idyllic and transient, and . . . my instinctive admiration for Tennyson’s poems was in part connected with this weakness. I had first strayed into the dim-rich City of Camelot at the age of twelve, and only woken up when the picnic party for which I was bound had long disappeared without me: for seven years afterwards I had come and gone there familiarly. Then came the discovery of The Ring and the Book, and a great part of Camelot fell into ruins—little remained of it but the workmanship.46

He had, he adds, “become naturalised in the Italy of Robert Browning.” This does not mean that he ever attempted to write poems in the style of
Browning, nor, in fact, that he completely abandoned Tennyson, but that alongside his belief that poetry expresses our need for a perfect world and expresses also “our eternal aspirations,” lay the dictum that

the Poet must not be so remote as to be no longer human. He, like the rest of us, is earth-born, and must never deny his double nature. If he builds an ideal world for us, he must use the material of our actual life: otherwise he fails, he leaves us cold, we refuse to enter into his alien and unattractive Paradise.47

What happened in effect was that the Tennysonian and Pre-Raphaelite worlds of tapestry and romance were infiltrated by something altogether more robust, less Medieval, more Elizabethan. This move was probably partly due to a natural maturing of vision, but it also reflects a general move that was to become more obvious in the Edwardian period (though it was certainly apparent in the 1880s) away from Victorian medievalism and towards “Tudorism,” really meaning Elizabethanism. In an essay entitled “The Discovery of Rural England,” Alan Howkins discusses this trend, suggesting that “[The movement] represents a move from the community of the medieval village based on the Church and Latinate culture, internationalist in some sense and often associated with radicalism, to the more aggressive expansionist, sophisticated and, above all, English world of Elizabeth.”48 Newbolt’s son-in-law, Sir Ralph Furse, was to write in his autobiography about his own leaning towards the concept of Elizabethanism: “What attracted me was its many-sidedness: the way the Elizabethans touched life at so many angles, were, in short, whole men. . . . And as the typical Elizabethan lived to serve Gloriana, so I would wish to serve England.”49 That same kind of service to England obviously attracted Newbolt: Drake, Raleigh, Grenville, Hawke, Nelson, and other essentially Elizabethan rather than Medieval figures all appear in his first collection of published poetry.

This does not mean that the Medieval conception of chivalry was also left behind. To Newbolt, there was no difficulty in reconciling the world of chivalry with the more material and modern world of Elizabeth, for the patriotism implied in both was of a kind that necessarily embraced both the heroic, historical figure who fought for English greatness and glory beyond her shores, and the very particular standard of values under which he fought.