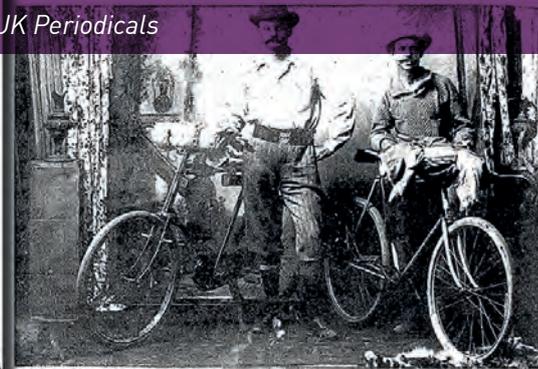


Leisure and Sport

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The Bible Society Cleanings.
Various source media, 19th Century UK Periodicals
DECEMBER, 1896.



A CYCLING TOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA.
BY THOMAS WOODVILLE HARKER.

ii. HE vrow is indeed the helpmate of her husband in every way, would be useless. I do believe the American poet at some time or other must have had visions in his dreams of this portion of the globe, for has he not written:—

Baptisms at San Salvador. [FEBRUARY, 1899.



CALABAR COLLEGE, KINGSTON, JAMAICA.

THE following graphic letter from S. B. Burton, Esq. F.R.G.S., of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, will be read with great interest:—

"Newcastle-on-Tyne, December, 1894.

"DEAR MR. BAYNES,—The request

Royal Mail s.s. *Eden* on July 18th last.

"On the twelfth day out we passed

Nineteenth-century leisure and sport evolved in a culture dominated increasingly by the idea of work, both as an economic necessity and a moral imperative. The industrial and agricultural revolutions required a disciplined workforce and introduced issues of class relationships far more complex than those of older hierarchies; they were accompanied, at different points in the century, by the partial rejection and rediscovery of some values of the pre-industrial world. The need to prepare much of the population for new working habits and a more disciplined use of time was prompted by a fear of some of the consequences of rapid population growth and urban expansion. Both domestic and public behaviour, especially amongst the lower classes, were believed to need reform if social catastrophe was to be avoided. Leisure, once an ascription of the general lifestyle of a ruling aristocracy and its imitators as described by Jane Austen, became the space occupied outside the arena of work, defined largely by the use of time. Its synonyms, such as "free time", "spare time" and "time off", emerged in contrast to the time devoted to work but also as preparation for it. The catch-all description of suitable pursuits as "recreation" carried automatically the assumption that they were earned as a result of worthwhile employment but served to ready people for returning to it.

Within that overall framework, one particular set of activities—sport—acquired an additional burden of acceptable values and bureaucratised organisations whose influence stretched far beyond Britain. It adapted and sanitised some traditional activities, developed new ones, especially games, and codified participants' behaviour in the context of increasingly sophisticated class divisions, defined by the spread of

disposable income and conspicuous consumption. Paradoxically, these changes were accompanied by an assumption that a more unifying set of values would pervade the whole of society. In the event that proved impossible. Broadly speaking, the first half of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid and often chaotic social development, the middle years, epitomised by the spread of the railways, was one of more peaceful consolidation, and the last thirty years saw both the invention and wholesale diffusion of new forms of enjoyment, some rather more purposeful than others.

Leisure: Public and Private

The prime agent for moral stability was seen as the family unit, thus a great deal of emphasis was placed upon the home as the essential locus for morally safe recreation. This was set against the threats perceived from such public activities as unruly crowd behaviour and drinking alcohol which might spill threateningly into the home. The burgeoning temperance (actually largely teetotal) movement was aimed primarily at stopping that. The notion of "rational recreation" was seen as another prophylactic to what were usually identified as mindless pleasures. Given the wide disparities in Victorian incomes it was largely the middle and skilled artisan classes who proved the most successful recipients of such campaigns. Women were offered advice not only on home management but also on morally acceptable light reading for the gaps in domestic activity. Children were also identified as an increasing specialist market for implanting values through leisure which would transfer into responsible adulthood. The spate of magazines specifically for children which offered advice on hobbies ranging from

crafts to simple science and, for boys in particular, escapist adventures with wholesome heroes and desirable outcomes, were a major feature of this drive. These were reinforced by the commercial circulating libraries and, later in the century, by public ones. In many libraries the demand for leisure reading was stronger than that for useful instruction.

Possibly the most powerful symbol of this domestic focus was the increasing availability of the piano, the spread of music lessons and the accompanying notions of household harmony symbolized by the idealised image of the family at song; mother or daughter playing the piano (or other instrument) whilst father and son joined in singing suitably anodyne or comic parlour songs. The family also lay at the heart of attempts to provide suitable extra-domestic leisure activities. A considerable role was played by churches and chapels which extended their teachings across a range of sociable activities, with clubs and so on targeted at specific age groups. Amongst these was the major part they played in developing musical associations, linked primarily with the oratorio tradition.

But one of the greatest nineteenth-century British achievements was to provide a wide range of public spaces dedicated particularly to leisure. The best-known of these were the resort towns, largely but not invariably by the seaside. Most of these developments depended very largely on the phenomenal growth of cheap and speedy public transport, both in terms of the 21,000 miles of railways opened and in intra-urban facilities. The resort towns tended to be identified according to the social class of their principal

customers, from the essentially working-class Blackpool to the attempted refined gentility of Eastbourne and Bournemouth. In their use lay further divisions, from those able to afford to spend some nights away from home in rented accommodation to the much larger number who travelled on day trips, as pioneered by Thomas Cook in 1841. By the century's end others were turning to the countryside for leisure, both in terms of access to fresh air and also for instruction. That combined a developing aesthetic of rural beauty, fuelled by nostalgia for a disappearing past, which fostered drawing, painting and amateur scientific enquiry into natural history. The stimuli came from a specialist recreational press offering cheap prints of an idealized countryside and information on flora and fauna; both were reinforced by the growth of relatively cheap photography. Publications such as *Cycling* and *Horse and Hound* helped to turn the rural landscape into a commodity.

More important in local terms were the attempts made within larger towns to provide and regulate leisure spaces, especially where the countryside round many industrial towns was rigorously preserved for aristocratic field sports and remained inaccessible. Many local authorities or philanthropists provided highly formalised and strictly regulated public parks, initially for gentle strolls, preferably by family groups, but also eventually as centres for entertainment, usually by band concerts and, rather later, by genteel games such as tennis and bowls. Here there emerged conflicts which lasted well beyond the end of Queen Victoria's reign. The one free day for most Victorians was Sunday but that steadily lost its primary dedication to churchgoing. The suitability of recreations using

public spaces aroused repeated conflicts between a rampant sabbatarianism and the recognition of a basic need to escape temporarily from both work and home. The debate spread also into the growing number of buildings dedicated to improving leisure, the concert halls, museums and art galleries which burgeoned in number as the late Victorian dignitaries of such cities as Birmingham and Manchester sought to combine a competitive inter-urban pride in conspicuous display with improving their own citizens. Whilst most commercial theatres remained banned from providing entertainment on Sundays and the availability of alcohol was limited there were considerable variations in how local facilities were used. In fine weather many people just took to the streets where social gradations remained very apparent.

Sports and Games

Nineteenth-century Britain inherited a range of predominantly masculine outdoor activities. At one level there were the pursuits of the landed elite which were "sports" in the strictest sense of involving some contests with nature, including fishing, hunting and horse-racing. More common were popular traditional games which often involved huge numbers and considerable violence. The Victorians restricted and codified many of the latter, most notably the various forms of football, from the 1860s onwards. Together with cricket the modified games were tied in with a cult of masculinity which developed around the reformed and extended Public Schools and which percolated through much of the rest of society by a mixture of almost evangelical teaching ("muscular Christianity") and commercial acumen. Important agencies for this diffusion were the many sporting periodicals such

as *The Sporting Times* and *Golf* which, from the 1860s onwards, supplemented older titles such as *Bell's Sporting Life* and made possible the creation of idealised hero-worship epitomised by the cricketing doctor, W.G. Grace (1848-1915). The emphasis on personal, physical and moral development assumed participation, at least in the earlier years of life, but the reality for many from the lower social classes was the development of spectatorship and its links with commercial investments. This process exacerbated tensions which were never adequately resolved, between the ideal of the "Amateur" and the supposedly morally dubious role of the "Professional" in sport. The realities of the availability of facilities and class divisions meant that amateurs were usually drawn from the higher social groups, whilst professionals catered for the rest. Even so, there were many examples of paradox, confusion and downright hypocrisy, of which W.G. Grace was the clearest example of a "shamateur". Elite sports such as college rowing and some field athletics limited their participants to class-exclusive meetings, from which manual workers were banned automatically. It was that pattern which led a Frenchman, Pierre de Coubertin, to re-establish the Olympic Games in 1896, assuming naively that the British public school model would civilize a Europe at risk from approaching war.

Young males dominated Victorian sporting history but society found itself having to deal with older, more sedentary people as well as coming to grips with issues about health and the role of women: to class and age divisions were added gender ones. From the 1860s a number of new, or reinvented, solutions were found for this. Croquet had become fashionable in mid-century as a game which could be played by both sexes in

sufficiently spacious domestic or club premises but it was rapidly replaced in the mid-1870s by lawn tennis, a new invention. Bowls developed at the end of the century for older men and again marked key Victorian divisions, between North and South and between classes. These were essentially suburban or quasi-rural pursuits and were often suspected of encouraging frivolity rather than athleticism. This was even more the case in what eventually became the greatest of all the late Victorian middle-class boom sports, golf. Imported from Scotland, where it was wrongly assumed to be "democratic", it became exclusive, expensive, land-hungry and a magnet for aspirant social climbers. In 1850 England boasted one golf club; by 1914 there were 1,200. Around the game of golf hovered all the questions about class privilege, gender inequalities and time-wasting frivolity that were levelled at any leisure activity which seemed to threaten rather than reinforce the work ethic.

Alongside sports developed primarily for burgeoning urban populations there was a revived late nineteenth-century interest in rural leisure. The most conspicuous was the huge revival in fox-hunting and horse-racing which had been the preserve of aristocrats. The former had been expected to decline as power shifted to the urban wealthy but their aspirations fostered a revival; the number of fox hunts more than doubled in the sixty-four years of Queen Victoria's reign, from twenty-eight to sixty-one. Even more important was the parallel growth in angling and shooting. As with golf and many other leisure pursuits this was made possible by a readiness to divert wealth from commercial and professional incomes to reinforcing clubs and associations. Other country pursuits emerged with the

development of mountaineering and hill-walking in Britain's wilderness areas, activities often both physically demanding and risky. For the less strenuously inclined the countryside offered other attractions. The railway network opened up rural tourism, walking, daytrips and "improving" visits to what became heritage sites. Again, technology intervened, with the development of the bicycle, which could be used for work travel but was regarded primarily as a leisure vehicle. Cycling boomed in the 1890s, fostering magazines, cartoons, comic novels, tourist maps, support shops and rural refreshments. Although it was accompanied by the athleticism of cycle racing, around which the suspicion of professionalism often hung, leisure cycling allowed for a whole range of participation from individual expeditions to romantic saunters.

Wider Issues

Although they developed largely in Britain, many of these activities and their values were exported throughout the Empire and to trading partners. Many of the values associated with leisure and sport were deemed essential components of Britain's duty to civilize the world, an arrogant and often unsuccessful assumption. Sport often fostered international rivalries rather than cohesion whilst the domestic experience was less than smooth. Despite many moral triumphs large parts of British society remained resistant to the persuasions of "respectability". On race tracks, in the expanding music halls, in illicit gambling, many pubs and so on, the predominant values were questioned or ignored. Disreputability was to be found amongst all classes. Debates about free time were reflected in the development of the specialist press but also outside it,

in the increased range of cheap newspapers and in anguished discussions in learned quarterlies as well as in many a *Punch* cartoon. Whichever side it took, commercial publishing benefited from and reinforced the pleasure boom. *Cycling, The Fishing Gazette* and *Golf* were among many publications that channelled consumer spending and leisure time in new directions.

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