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arnolds of the bushveld

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The development of secondary education in South Africa in the 19th century involved the fusion of two strands, representing the influence of the Victorian public school on the one hand, and, on the other, the tradition embodied in the Scotch school and the Scotch schoolmaster.[1] The conception of what makes a school — its organisation, activities, structure of authority, and the roles of its head, assistant masters and hierarchy of pupils — this distinctive conception which grew up in a group of imporant boys' boarding schools in Britain (mostly in England) between about 1828 (when Arnold took over Rugby School) and the death of Queen Victoria was spread in South Africa by men who, as products of, or as masters in, these schools, had learned to admire this model and as teachers or administrators in the Cape and elsewhere recreated it in the schools they ran. Further contributing factors were the popularity of this model in literature and among parents and employers, and thereby its growing influence in the educational systems of Britain and the Empire. In the end it came to predominate at the expense of the Scotch tradition, whence several key educational figures in the Cape in the 19th century had sprung, and which continued to supply a stream of valuable teachers for South African schools. The results of this predominance can be seen not only in the handful of boys' private schools established in South Africa in varying degrees of likeness to Arnold's Rugby, from "Bishops" down to the newest private school on the Rand, but, no less strikingly, in the English-speaking government schools for boys up and down the country, whose structure, ethos, and activities show many obvious derivations from the Rugby model, and many more resemblances to it than they show to other possible models in the English-speaking world or in continental Europe. Many of these characteristics can also be seen in Afrikaans-speaking government schools. Whereas, in the earlier period, aspects of the model had been introduced piecemeal, locally, and on the initiative of individuals, we can see in the Milner period in the Transvaal a clearly articulated administrative policy of creating, at the hands of "public school men" recruited for this purpose, a system of state secondary education explicitly modelled on the later Victorian public school. (So successfully was it achieved that very few boys' private schools were established in the Transvaal before 1945.)

What have South African schools made of this model? Which of its distinctive features have become most prominent, and what changes and adaptations have been made? Before these questions can be answered it is necessary to look at the original model itself, and examine the functions which it developed to fulfil.

Our starting-point is Thomas Arnold and the reforms of Rugby School which he is credited (rightly or wrongly) with having achieved between 1828 and 1842. To state it briefly, these were a combination of new roles and responsibilities for staff and pupils, and a new "philosophy" or set of educational goals, leading to a new conception of what constituted a "school". The biggest single change was in the way the sub-culture of boy-life in what were then considered large boarding schools was made susceptible to the authority and influence of the desired values, mediated, by a headmaster, housemaster and class teachers who enjoyed a new status and a wider sphere of concern regarding the lives of their pupils; and by senior pupils who were awarded privileges in return for new disciplinary responsibilities **as agents of the head.** In the half-century before Arnold (and this held true even in his own day and in his own school) it was the case that no boarding school of 200 or more boys was safe from large-scale rebellion. Arnold's changes suggested a formula whereby large boarding schools could become, in a disciplinary sense, viable, and teacher-values could prevail, at decisive points, over pupil-values. The legend which, for various reasons, developed around Arnold's achievements after his early death led to the establishment of new public schools, and the model

was further elaborated by reforms introduced by later headmasters (some of them Arnold's disciples, and some not) affecting the activities of the boys in their work and their play. Those affecting their play — notably the introduction of organised (later compulsory) games from the 1850s onwards — may have contributed even more markedly than anything Arnold proposed to the disciplinary viability of boarding schools. What developed into the "cult of athleticism" had far-reaching results not just for schools but for the whole of British society (and, indeed, the Empire). Among its educational consequences was a change in the "philosophy", or set of goals, of the public schools in the later Victorian period. The "scholarly Christian gentleman", as the desired product of this educational system, gave way to a type exhibiting qualities of "manliness", leadership, and the ability to play various kinds of team game involving balls of various sizes.

Parallel with these changes, that aspect of the Arnoldian formula which involved the conception of the "school" as a special kind of living organism, a self-conscious **community,** was elaborated to convert a small group of haphazardly associated schools (the "Clarendon" public schools) into a **system,** a much wider community of institutions indentifiable both by certain characteristic forms of interaction with each other, especially at sport and cadet corps activities, and by certain symbols. Some of these symbols were specific to individual schools: Old School ties, membership of Old Boy associations and participation in their activities; others, such as accent and manner, were more generalised and served to indicate membership of the new caste which became ever more clearly identifiable after 1870, the caste of those who recognised each other — and who enjoyed thereby a definite social status — as **public school men.**

It was thus a developing model which, in the closing decades of the 19th century, became available to those men who were creating — or adapting — schools in South Africa in the likeness of the English public school. As I have suggested, these were not just the private schools like "Bishops", St. Andrew's, Michaelhouse and Hilton, but a host of government schools like Dale College (Kingwilliamstown), Graaff Reinet High School, Grey High School (Port Elizabeth) — just as schools in the Transvaal (in the Milner period) and in Natal — like Durban High School — were soon to follow.[2] The main characteristics of this developing model involved, as has been shown, certain distinctive conceptions of the role of headmaster and staff; an internal organisation and hierarchy of discipline based on prefects and a "house" system; compulsory organised games; uniform, assembly (whether in hall or chapel) and a range of other phenomena designed to emphasize the concept of the school as a self-conscious community, attracting to itself the loyalty both of its past and of its present members, and aiming to exert on its pupils an emotional hold not just during their schooldays, but for life.[3]

It is not enough to describe the development of this model in Victorian Britain, and to note its spread in South Africa. It is also necessary to ask why: why did this system grow up in this form in Britain? What functions did it fulfil? Was it imported into South Africa to serve similar ends? It is easier to answer the question that relates to Britain than to South Africa. The development of the **system,** to which I have drawn attention, involved an extraordinary phenomenon. By the close of the Victorian period a network of between 60 and 100 boys' public schools, together with a closely related system of preparatory schools modelled on similar lines, had come into existence[4] in order to serve the by now common expectation among upper and upper-middle-class parents that they would hand over to these schools the responsibility for the socialisation of their sons for between four and ten crucial formative years. This transfer of socialising function was not merely for the purposes of academic instruction, for we know that many pupils (and the young Winston Churchill is a good example) derived little specific academic benefit from the process: what parents were doing was handing over their sons to an institution which was not merely **outside** the family, but one which had the aim and the capacity to generate powerful sentiments which might be different from or even in opposition to, those of the family — even to instil loyalties to the school or "house" in preference to the home and family. The generality of parental consent to this kind of emotional traffic is surprising enough in itself, but it is the more astonishing when one considers a few further facts

about the Victorian public school. There is an abundance of evidence[5] that during the key stages of the development of the model — e.g. from (say) 1850-1900 — parents had very good reasons to be aware that exposure of their sons to the process of socialisation involved in attendance at a typical public school meant greatly increased risks of exposure to killer epidemic diseases, to forms of "immorality" which the schools professed themselves helpless to combat, and to living conditions characterised by hardship, squalor and varying degrees of sadistic brutality at the hands of masters and fellow-pupils. Yet, in spite of these, parents persisted in handing over their sons for the vital years of their development.

Various possible reasons suggest themselves to account for this apparent heartlessness. First, the distribution of secondary education in Britain meant that boarding schools were inevitable for some middle-class boys, and the expanding numbers of Britons working overseas in the 19th century who looked to Britain for schooling for their sons provided a further and substantial number of clients with little choice in the matter. Secondly, over against the purely scholastic provision offered by the schools, which was not always better than that offered by other types of education, there was the over-riding advantage of admission to membership of the new caste — membership which was to have demonstrable benefits by 1900 in terms of entrée to jobs, to clubs, to commissions in the army, and in social life generally, to the extent that it became the case in England, and according to a Fellow of All Souls may still be the case today, that the first testing question, whether from prospective employer or potential mother-in-law, is less likely to be "Where does he come from?" or "What does his father do?" than **"Where did he go to school?"**[6]

The demand for public school education, which, as we have seen, was exhibited in the face of a number of powerful deterrent factors, was therefore a demand for entrée to an élite which constituted the new estate of the realm which came into being in later Victorian Britain, a group of men who regarded themselves as being in important respects equal because they had a public school education in common — and this held true despite variations in the standing of greater or lesser, "major" or "minor", public schools. And here emerges a third possible reason for parental defiance of the risks involved in their sons' attendance at such schools, particularly the hardship and cruelty which they knew existed but to which they largely turned a blind eye. The most significant aspect of public school education, which ensured entrée to the elite of "public school men" because it guaranteed that the candidate had been through the authentic form of socialisation, was not any form of scholastic certification such as matriculation (in classics or in any other subject) but, rather, the experience with a training in team games, were held to ensure the development of the desired personalitiy type with the desired values. Cruelty, squalor (moral and physical), and the rigours of compulsory games in all weathers were thus the essentials in a process of **hardening** or **toughening** which guaranteed in young men that characteristic prized by the late Victorians (and not least by Cecil Rhodes) perhaps above any other: **manliness.** In this respect, attendance at a public schools had some of the character of the initiation rites, involving varying "testing" forms of suffering, real or symbolic, by which pre-literate societies all over the world have marked the transition from boyhood to full manly status.[7]

It is not difficult to identify the sociological functions of such a process in the 19th and early 20th century Britain. Social and political change within Britain herself predicated a move away from the traditional mechanisms of recruitment and patronage, based on kinship and landed wealth, and what I have called the new estate furnished a supply of personnel who had the qualifications and the values, and the common loyalty, which were considered appropriate. Britain's expansion overseas similarly called for a new set of educational desiderata: qualities such as leadership, physical fitness, and a sense of fair play were valuable in the process of first carving out and then governing an Empire. It is significant that two recent historians, Colin Cross and Correlli Barnett, whose books have set out to describe the rise and fall of the British Empire, have considered it necessary to begin their task by describing at some length that institution, the British public school, which was so central to the creation and the man-

agement of that Empire.[8] That it might also have been crucial to its decline is another story: historians will disagree as to whether the conformity and unimaginativeness said to have been bred by the system, which were valuable in some situations, were fatal in others. Certainly, in Britain herself, the premium on "character" rather than intellect or expertise, and a worship of classics which involved a despising of the natural sciences, had had certain demonstrably damaging consequences for the nation's position as a leading technological and mercantile power.

At the time that schools in South Africa took over this model — lock, stock and barrel — there were good reasons for believing that it had a similar functional appropriateness. Character, leadership and manliness were clearly of more advantage than academic learning, whether in the veld or in the commercial jungle of the cities. Aided by the climate, games-playing established itself in South African schools without any need of reference to the British public school's rationale of games as a substitute for rebellion and sex. Together with a hierarchy of internal discipline which gave pupils the experience both of the subordinate role and of the "officer" or prefect role, games helped form the character and train for leadership. Where Britain since the 1920s and '30s has agonised over the appropriateness of leadership training given to a privileged élite, the racial hierarchy rendered the nurture of such doubts unlikely in South Africa. Whereas the Anglican Church in South Africa became a vocal opponent of apartheid when it affected church congregations or the living conditions of its black or coloured adherents, its own "public schools" were pointedly embarrassed at any suggestion that they should broaden their élite basis to admit non-White pupils. Thus the élite connotations of the public school model can be regarded as functionally appropriate to the existing social and political system of South Africa, but there is one significant difference. In Britain the new estate was an élite with conscious loyalties, in the first instance to specific schools, and then to schools of the public school system generally: thus they accorded status, gave preference in appointments to jobs, etc., to products of their own old school and also to others identifiable as public school men. Very little of this appears to have applied in South Africa, and there seems little evidence of an Old Boy network specifically benefitting the products of Michaelhouse or Durban High School or St Andrews or SACS — all of them heavily influenced by the public school model — at the expense (say) of products of humbler platteland schools. (One reason for this is the extent to which private and government schools share similar institutions and values — which have, of course, a common origin.)

"Charterhouse at Mafeking": Mr Michael Ashley has culled this reference from the Charterhouse school magazine via the Michaelhouse magazine in 1900 to confirm the explicit associations between English public school products such as the Old Carthusian Baden Powell and the qualities of character and conduct most admired in South Africa at the turn of the century.[9] But did such qualities — for example, the leadership training which the schools boasted — continue to have functional appropriateness in South Africa down to the mid-20th century and after, a period which saw the withdrawal of English-speaking South Africans from political leadership in the country — and even, perhaps, from effective political opposition? Have the products of those English speaking South African schools which are closest to the original model demonstrated in the world of business a style of leadership and a scale of values which we could all regard as admirable? Possibly it became true that the public school invention of the games cult need no longer to justify itself by reference to leadership training, in a society in which both Afrikaners and English-speakers had subordinated almost all concerns to the worship of rugby and cricket, perhaps partly in relief at finding a politically neutral activity they could share.

The Victorian public school model continues to serve as a reference-point, conscious or unconscious, in the English-speaking high schools of South Africa, and much of the machinery sanctified by Arnold and his successors is still observable in school life. But it would seem safe to say that South African schools are falling behind the post-Victorian British public school in counter-acting the anti-intellectualism which has accompanied the games cult, in seeking to cultivate, by aesthetic and social-work experience, quali-

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by all its pupils in a considerable portion of its activities. Instead of having one prestige team in each age group, there can be teams for everybody. If pupils do not qualify for external competition, there are house matches and leagues within the school. In athletics, in addition to the record for the able performer to aim at, there are points for standards which the boy of average ability can attain if he takes trouble. It is often compulsory for all members of a school to remain there for the afternoon so as to be available for extramural activity.

The range of interests offered depends in the last resort on the abilities and interests of staff members. There should be the chance for every pupil to find some interest which he wishes to make his own. Religion, academic work and games have been mentioned. In addition there is a proliferation of hobbies such as printing, pottery, motor maintenance, natural history and exploration, photography and so on. Drama involves carpentry, set-building, and electrical work as well as the acting. Music regularly finds its devotees in the choir, the orchestra, and perhaps light opera. Art is more individual, but a good art teacher is an essential member of a full staff. Social work has been attempted in night schools for Africans, and boys' clubs for the less privileged. A regular feature of school life is the chance of going on tour, whether for games or with a play or a folk group or on an expedition.

The private school has to be on its toes to remain in business. Being in the teaching business, it strives for a vigorous and imaginative interpretation of its task, and finds fulfilment in service. The teacher who looks for immediate recognition is bound to be disappointed; when a past pupil returns with recognition and thanks after leaving a school this is reward enough. Probably none of the ideas set out above is the sole possession of any particular school. The objectives are general, but the private schools aim at their wide range of excellence in human relationships and interests.

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ties of sensitivity, compassion, and social concern in preference to those of manliness and leadership. Conformity is no longer the obvious quality bred in the English public schoolboy of today, where as in South African schools there are heavy sanctions against non-conformity, and this is true even in that sphere in which Arnold himself asserted the importance of independence of action — the role of headmaster. Caught up in a career structure which puts a high premium of "safeness" and stolidity, South African headmasters as a group show a conservatism, a resistance to innovation and a craven sensitivity to reasonable criticism which would have made Arnold despair.

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4. For details see J. R. de S. Honey, "The nature and limits of the Victorian public school community", chapter II of Brian Simon and Ian Bradley (eds.), **The Victorian Public School.** (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1975.)
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