THE PRINCIPAL TYPES OF PHYSICAL TRAINING COMPARED

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Principal Types of Physical Training Compared.

BY

EDWARD MUSSEY HARTWELL, M.D., PH.D.,

DIRECTOR OF PHYSICAL TRAINING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF BOSTON;
LATE ASSOCIATE IN PHYSICAL TRAINING IN JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, BALTIMORE.

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With the Writer's Compliments.

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At our first meeting, I stated that the aim of these lectures was a practical and pedagogical one, namely, to set forth the teachings of experience and science, touching the nature and effects of physical training in support of my main contention that it is not only wise and desirable, but necessary and practicable as well, to make bodily exercise an integral and co-ordinate part of the elementary and higher education of American youth of both sexes. Attention was called to the pronounced interest evinced by this community in matters pertaining to bodily exercise and education, and to the forms in which that interest was most striking and manifest: (1) In the field of athletic sports; (2) in the field of discussion and controversy; and (3) in the field of gymnastics and drill. Emphasis was laid upon the fact that, although the interest in question had marked local characteristics, this apparently circumscribed and distinctively "Boston Movement," was, in truth, only a part of a wider, general movement embracing other parts of this country and many parts of Europe — the fact being that educational authorities have been put upon the defensive, all over the civilized world, by reason of the alarming results of their inability, or unwillingness, to modify their

[1] The substance of this article was delivered on May 9, 1891, as the last of Six Hemenway Lectures on Physical Training, by the writer, at the Old South Meeting House, Boston.

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methods in accordance with the plain teachings of experience and of modern science as to the interdependence of body and mind.

At our later meetings we have considered the more salient features of what may be denominated the most representative and typical forms of physical exercise or training. These are five in number and may be styled: the Grecian; the Mediæval; the British; the German; and the Ling or Swedish. We have also discussed the nature and effects of muscular exercise, from the standpoint of modern physiology, in order to secure a standard or criterion, by which to estimate the hygienic and educational value of any particular system of exercise.

In comparison with the five main types or national systems of exercise, mentioned above, all other schemes and so-called systems of physical education, seem to me, to be fragmentary, anomalous, and insufficient. Provided we apprehend the lessons of experience and the teachings of science with regard to the essential character and comparative worth of the results attained by each of these national systems of bodily education, we shall be able to classify and criticise, with approximate justness, the numerous varied, and often fantastic, new and local schemes of exercise, whose inventors and partisans are on every hand clamoring loudly and insistently for recognition and patronage. I shall not consider them further, as it is not my purpose in these lectures to attempt to bolster up or pull down any local idol that has gained a hierarchy or worshippers for itself, either in this city or in the country at large.

A twofold comparison of the systems whose origin and more obvious external features have thus far occupied our attention, seems to me to be desirable. I propose, therefore, to compare them, in the time which remains to me, first from the historical point of view, in order to discover the place and influence attained by the five typical systems in the life and history of

those nations which have originated or adopted them; and in the second place, to compare them as regards their fitness to realize the true ends of bodily education, taking as my criterion so much of the modern doctrine of the nature and effects of exercise as seems necessary for my purpose.

It will be convenient to use the terms *agonistic*, *gymnastic* and *athletic*, in speaking of the most general features of the five types of physical training under review, these terms being derived from Grecian usage. An ἀγών, you remember, meant originally an assembly, then an assembly to witness a contest of some sort. For instance, the Olympic games were gymnic *agones*, being so-called because the contestants in them were naked; then there were musical and hippic *agones* also. The prizes given to victors in an ἀγών were termed ἆθλα, and an *athlete* was a winner or contestant simply; later, in its worse sense, an *athlete* was a *prize-fighter*, governed by professional and mercenary ends. A gymnast was a trainer primarily, especially after the agonistic games had become systematized and regulated, and were practised as a necessary part of the education of every free-born youth.

Greek physical training was, then, *agonistic*, during the period of its growth, when its main purpose was to afford sport or pastime; it was *gymnastic* during the period of its best estate, about the time of Pericles, when its aims were distinctly educational and ethical; and it became *athletic*, in the worse sense of the word, during the decadence of the institutions and independent life of the Greeks when a spirit of mercenary self-seeking and professionalism dominated both gymnasts and athletes.

Using these terms, in the sense above indicated, we should call the martial exercises of the ancient Gauls and Teutons, agonistic. Out of these sports and exercises were developed the physical training of the young page and squire, and the chivalric tournaments

and jousts to which the knights of Italy, France, Germany, England and Scandinavia were so devoted in feudal times. That training and these contests were partly agonistic and partly athletic in their nature. The same terms may be applied to British sports. They were agonistic and have become chiefly athletic, within the last seventy-five or one hundred years. Athleticism is the dominant note in all British physical training, which has but little of pedagogical aim or method in it, and is less deserving of being called gymnastic than was the mediæval kind of physical training. German turning is somewhat agonistic in its nature, though its aims and methods are in the main gymnastic. No system of physical training, ancient or modern, so well deserves the name of gymnastic as the Swedish system, which has, perhaps, too little of the athletic element in it. In the Swedish gymnastics, moreover, we find medical gymnastics more highly developed and accorded a higher place than in any other system of physical training. Indeed, excepting the Grecian, there is, properly speaking, no system of medical gymnastics, worthy the name, to be found outside of the Swedish gymnastics.

Taine has well said, in his "English Notes," "In every age, under every civilization, a people is always itself. Whatever be its dress, goat-skin, blouse, gold-laced doublet, black dress-coat, the five or six great instincts which it possesses in its forests follow it in its palaces and offices." Of these great instincts, the play instinct is one of the most ineradicable. To this instinct of the barbarian and the child, as to a primitive germ, we may trace more or less directly every national or tribal system of bodily training. Ball-games, contests in running, jumping, lifting and casting of weights, hurling a tree-trunk or a beam and wrestling, are sports which have never ceased to be practised in one form or another, as popular pastimes and means of exercise, from Homer's time to our own.