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Physical Education.

A SKETCH OF A PHYSICAL COURSE FOR COMMON SCHOOLS.*

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The educational system pursued in our Common Schools has been greatly wanting in scientific breadth, and not less so in scientific method. It has been almost solely the growth of tradition, and not the result of investigation into the nature of the being that is to be educated. Large sections of our nature have been neglected in our school economy. The æsthetic faculties have been altogether untrained; the moral have received only very slight attention, as far as they are touched by so-called Religious Knowledge; intellectual training has been very partial and one sided, being almost exclusively confined to the acquisitive powers, and too little applied to the perceptive and reflective; and systematic physical education has been altogether ignored, until quite recently, in our Common Schools. But there are good signs that we are beginning to entertain more correct notions of what education is. We begin to have a feeling that the training of children should be broader than it has been, and that it should embrace all the faculties of a child, which should be trained systematically and symmetrically.

It is to one of the parts of our nature ignored in our Common School education that I would seek to direct

the attention of the Association—the training of the physical powers. The neglect of Physical Education and of the physical principles that ought to regulate our school premises, furniture, organisation and studies, medical men tell us, with strong and concurrent testimony, has resulted in many and grave evils to our children and our people. It has given rise, they show us, to the bent forms, the slovenly gait, the unequal shoulders, the contracted chest, and the general want of full physical development so observable in the mass of our people; and it is the source, they conclusively demonstrate, of graver evils and serious diseases, as bent and curved spines, short and unequal sight, various chest complaints, pains and permanent disorders in after-life, as well physical exhaustion and want of physical and mental vigour during the period of youth.

But it is pleasing to note the growing attention that is being paid to this important subject, and we have to thank our medical men more than our educationists and teachers, for the interest they have roused in it through their advocacy of its necessity in a thorough system of education, if our children are to be rightly developed and these evils to be prevented. Many works have lately appeared on the subject, textbooks have been written on it, our schoolmasters have passed resolutions in its favour, and attempts have been made in some places towards its systematic teaching.

The subject of Physical Education as applied to our schools is much more extensive than might at first sight appear. I can only very briefly indicate the field it includes, and make rapid suggestions in regard to its teaching. These I shall endeavour to make as practical as possible. I shall chiefly confine my remarks to what can and should be done in our Common Schools towards giving the children of the mass of the people Physical Education; and one aim in bringing the subject before the Social Science Association at this time is to lead, if possible, to early practical effort, to have thorough physical training carried on in all our Common Schools, especially now that, in Scotland, we are beginning a new national system of education, and erecting new and superior premises for the education of our children. Our projected educational scheme in Scotland, as sanctioned

* Abridged from a paper read before the Social Science Association.