

HOW TO GET STRONG, AND HOW TO STAY SO.

CHAPTER I.

DO WE INHERIT SHAPELY BODIES ?

Probably more men walk past the corner of Broadway and Fulton-street, in New York city, in the course of one year, than any other point in America—men of all nations and ages, heights and weights. Look at them carefully as they pass, and you will see that scarcely one in ten is either erect or thoroughly well-built. Some slouch their shoulders and double in at the waist; some overstep; others cant to one side; this one has one shoulder higher than the other, and that one both too high; some have heavy bodies and light legs, others the reverse; and so on, each with his own peculiarities. A thoroughly erect, well-proportioned man, easy and graceful in his movements, is far from a frequent sight. Any one accustomed to athletic work, and knowing what it can do for the body, must at times have wondered why most men allowed themselves to go along for years, perhaps through life, so carrying themselves as not only to lack the outward grace and ease they might possess, and which they occasionally see in others, but so as to directly cramp and impede one or more of the vital organs.

Nor is it always the man's fault that he is ill-proportioned. In most cases it comes down from his progenitors. The father's walk and physical peculiarities appear in the son, often so plainly that the former's calling might also be told from a look at the latter.

A very great majority of Americans are the sons either of farmers or merchants, mechanics or labourers. The work of each class soon develops peculiar characteristics. No one of the four classes has ordinarily had any training at all aimed to make him equally strong all over. Broad as is the variety of the farmer's work, far the greater, and certainly the heavier, part of it tends to make him stoop forward and become inerect. No man stands up straight and mows. When he shovels, he bends more yet; and every ounce of spade or load pulls him over, till, after much of this sort of work, it requires an effort to stand upright. Ploughing is bet-

ter for the upper body, but it does not last long. While it keeps one walking over uneven ground, it soon brings on an awkward, clumsy step, raising, as it does, the foot unnaturally high. Chopping is excellent for the upper man, but does little for his legs. In hand-raking and hoeing the man may remain erect; but in pitching and building the load, in nearly every sort of lifting, and especially the heavier sorts, as in handling heavy stone or timber, his back is always bent over. It is so much easier to slouch over when sitting on horse-rake, mower, or harvester, that most persons do it.

Scarcely any work on a farm makes one quick of foot. All the long day, while some of the muscles do the work, which tends to develop them, the rest are untaxed, and remain actually weak. A farmer is seldom a good walker, usually hitching up if he has an errand to go, though it be scarce a mile away; and he is rarely a good runner. He is a hearty, well-fed man, not only because wholesome food is plenty, but because his appetite is sharp, and he eats with relish and zest. Naturally a man thinks that, when he eats and sleeps well, he is pretty healthy, and so he usually is; but when he is contented with this condition of things, he overlooks the fact that he is developing some parts of his body, and leaving others weak; that the work he is encouraging in that body, by twice as much work for the muscles of his back as for those of the front of his chest, while it enlarges the former, often so as to even render it muscle bound, actually contracts the latter, and hence gives less room for heart, lungs, stomach, and all the vital organs, than a well-built man would have. If a man should tie up one arm, and with the other steadily swing a smith's hammer all day, there is little doubt that he would soon have an excellent appetite and the sweet sleep of the labouring man. But in what shape would it leave him in a few years, or even in a few months? The work of the farmer, ill-distributed as to the whole man, leaves him as really one-sided as the former. It is in a lesser degree, of course, but still so evident that he who looks even casually may see it.

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