

Contributions.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

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*(Read before the Ontario Teachers' Association at Toronto.)**(Concluded from last month.)*

Subdivisions 3 and 4 of my text treat of out-door exercise, trained exercise, and first as to gymnastics. — Running, jumping, skipping, snow-balling, lacrosse, boating, &c., &c., are all good aids to physical culture. Were all boys and girls constituted alike, and did like athletic tastes prevail the year round these means might prove sufficient wherewith to develop at least a moderately robust physique, and maintain a normal state of healthy being. Unfortunately all boys and girls are not constituted alike. We have the mercurial, all activity and vim; the ordinary, all method and mediocrity in school and out; the studious, all black letter and white paper; the shy, the retiring, the melancholy, the delicate, all nervousness, diffidence, mope and biliousness. Again, sports, even healthy, boy-like and girl-like sports are mutable; the skipping-rope has to be changed for tag, tag is eventually discarded for puss in the corner, which in turn has to succumb to the prowess of something less romping and consequently more sedentary. There comes a time when even the vivacious bright-eyed darling of the cheery ground or the steeple-chase course, is seen suspiciously lurking in shady corners, and stooping with dubious moral intent in dark and uncanny spots, over secret and occult delvings in mother earth. The cabalistic sounds of 'knuckle down', and 'taw', and 'fudge' greet the ear of the tutorial detective on his casual beat through the haunts of the idly-busy young tenants of the play-ground. The open is deserted, every fence has its row of juvenile human wall-flowers, who blossom in groups, in lines, in couples, even in units, all intent on the same fell purpose. No longer do we see twinkling feet speeding across the green sward, leap-frog it dead, base-ball buried, and the whole family of cognate recreative pastime in deepest mourning. Hour in and hour out, the devotee of law stands, sits, kneels, stoops, squats, now shivering, now glowing, now despondent, now jubilant, according as cold or warmth, loss or success acts upon his external frame or inner emotions. It is the marble season, it comes as regularly as the March winds or the measles, the spring bonnets or the summer roses, and while it lasts, good-bye to healthy racing, open shouldered exercise. It is at seasons like this, and more particularly with certain classes of scholars that the need of some compulsory means of hygienic exertion is best appreciated. How many schools are there in the Province of Ontario with even the faintest elements of a gymnasium attached thereto? Even in those which happen to be supplied with bars and poles and similar apparatus, how many scholars avail themselves of the opportunity afforded of using them in a systematic manner? How many among their preceptors are competent to give instructions in the simplest athletic movement, or to supervise an elementary gymnastic course? It may be answered the preceptors are not engaged to instruct in physical athletics, the athletics of the brain are all they are required to supervise and direct. So much the worse for instructor and instructed. But with regard to the apparatus, could not a few bars and poles be erected and ropes suspended without entailing ruinous expense on the ratepayers in every school-yard in the Province? Could not a few simple yet healthy movements be taught to the scholars without necessitating a very deep insight into the laws of athletics? No matter how humble the apparatus, no matter how elementary the instructions, could not every pupil, boy and girl, be compelled, as a matter of

duty, where such apparatus is provided, to perform occasional exercise during certain days of the week?

Upon one most vital topic in connection with gymnastics, I would like here briefly to touch. I allude to the art of swimming, or at least, to the method of preserving life while in a state of immersion, voluntary or involuntary. The blindness of humanity in some respects has become proverbial, it is amazing and utterly incomprehensible. Our nationality is threatened by exterior and inimical influences—the voice of warning goes forth, and tens of thousands of bristling bayonets line our defiant shores to resist the aggressor. A disastrous explosion occurs in a coal mine through the destructive agency of fire damp, and a Humphrey Davy at once sets his scientific genius to work to construct an instrument whose use shall tend to avert such calamities for the future. A stately man-of-war with her noble crew founders some murky night in the tempestuous waters which lash a rock-bound coast, and the inventive wits of ship-builders, engineers and philanthropists are at once enlisted on the side of humanity—with what results? Water-tight compartments, magnificent lighthouses, life-boats, floating beacons—Life-saving apparatus of every kind and degree is multiplied. News of a terrific railway accident is telegraphed through the length and breadth of a startled continent, and measures are at once adopted to moderate undue speed, check negligence of officials, repair roadways, perfect signal codes, compenss to sufferers. A pleasure boat, out under a sunny sky, floating on an unruffled plane of azure, freighted with thoughtless, happy, riceless human souls, capsizes through inadvertency, neglect or over-crowding, and those souls are hustled into eternity. A sigh of horror is wafted to the ears of the shuddering public, which lingers for a brief instant and then dies away ere the ripples have well closed above the spot from which the poor human forms, bereft of life, have been lifted for the last time to the light of heaven; and what measures are taken to prevent a repetition of this most awful catastrophe? None—none that are truly effectual. Laws may become for a season stricter, vessels examined a little more closely, avaricious owners of unworthy craft forbidden under the minacious terrors of a possible penalty, thus to admit humanity by the gross into the most awful arena of the invisible world at such a ridiculously small figure as 25 or 50 cents, or perhaps a dollar a head. Think of it—the beginning, a cheap holiday excursion; the ending—200 open graves and alas! for cheapness—the funeral expenses, and then the waste of tears and life energy and heart action;

"Sudden partings such as press
The life from out young hearts and choking sighs,
Which ne'er might be repeated."

Repeated!—What decisive and effectual step is ever taken to baffle the destroyers' death and greed, and rob them of their victims. Another bright day; another tempting way bill; another holiday crowd. Hoary age and russet prime, golden youth and rosy childhood step on board all flutter and excitement and high hope. How many as individuals able, if occasion requires, to strike out a limb to save themselves if suddenly immersed in the treacherous element which now woos them with its placid smile? How many, so inured to the contact of the water that mere presence of mind will suffice, not only to prompt exertions for self-preservation, but will prove efficacious to withhold the deadly clutch which drags down a fellow being to his death, who, unencumbered, had been able to save himself and perhaps others? It is time and high time that something were done in this matter. Why, a dog if thrown into a pond will paddle to the shore, and is a rational being less able to preserve his invaluable life than a dog? London disasters with their manifold editions are becoming too notoriously frequent, and I repeat something should be done to compel humanity, especially young humanity, so to train itself that under exceptional circumstances, and in a foreign element, it may not hopelessly founder like a water-logged hulk within sight of the glancing sun-