

Concerning Girls

A PHYSICAL STANDARD FOR GIRLS.

(By Amy B. Edwards, Industrial Secretary, Y.W.C.A., Vancouver, B. C.)

The Canadian Girl's in Training programme as outlined by the National Advisory Committee on girl's work embraces four standards for their all round development.

It may be presumed that those who planned this four-fold programme for girls have placed the physical standard first, not because physical perfection is most important as an end to be sought after itself, but because they recognized good health as an essential condition for the attainment of completeness of mind and character.

The word health is used in its broadest sense—not merely freedom from pain or disease, but a positive condition in which every organ is performing its functions to the fullest degree.

Recently in one of our large Eastern cities some questions on this matter were given to the younger students in the public schools. The answers proved very interesting. One question was "What does it mean to feel well?" and the different responses were "glad," "feel I like doing things," "laughing all the time," "running and jumping." "How can you help others grow big and strong" brought forth the following: "Make your small children wear rubbers when it rains." "Don't let your father smoke in the kitchen." "Do for others, like helping milk stations for babies." "Be careful about spitting on the floors." "Tell people to sleep with windows open." "Don't put snow down their backs." "Don't breathe other people's breath." "Don't let somebody eat from your plate or drink from your cup."

One first grade child with a strong instinct for self-preservation said "I wouldn't help other people, I might catch it myself." To the question "What does health mean to you?" a little fifth grader replied "Makes you feel like going some and not to feel lazy." Perhaps readers will agree that this is better than most dictionary definitions.

But the definition of health which we should like to adopt is simply "Abundance of Life." This is what we crave for our girls—Abundance of life. Life that will mean increased intellectual power and increased usefulness to humanity. This is the idea that must underlie all physical endeavour.

Certain modern conditions have arisen which make it difficult to obtain even a fair degree of physical development without very special effort on the part of leaders of all young people. Many are working day after day under unhealthful conditions performing tasks which require the use of very few highly specialized muscles and with no opportunity of or incentive to further exercise. Indeed, our boasted civilization is so hard on the body that some have called it a disease.

The girl who sits all day in a school room with forty other children, frequently in a seat not adjusted to her growth, using almost exclusively the accessory muscles, and who afterwards goes out to find her recreation in the "Movie," has little opportunity for developing a strong body which will prove adequate in the expression of whatever intellectual attainment may in time come to be hers.

Under the most favorable conditions possible, school is sure to be, in some respects, unfavorable to growth in its fullest sense.

The ancient Greek belief was, of course, that with physical perfection, Moral and mental excellence would follow. Whether we are prepared to accept this or not we must admit that hand and brain evolved together and that an education

which liberates the mind and does not develop along with it self-control, is absolutely dangerous.

The modern city seems to be made entirely for the adult, but it is within the power of their leaders to provide girls with some opportunities for those things which are of such vital importance to them in their development and no less so to us as a nation.

Our particular problem is with 'teen age girls. Some little opposition is still to be overcome concerning women's participation in physical activities. Sportive activity does not prevent boys from becoming men; nor will it prevent girls from becoming women. Womanly instincts will assert themselves.

What are the characteristics of these young people that make it particularly necessary and worth while that we provide to as full an extent as possible for their physical wellbeing?

Vital Value of Sports During Adolescence.

The adolescent girl has reached a stage when she is emerging from childhood into womanhood. She is not yet a woman and the longer she can hold on to some of the accompaniments of childhood the better for her physical nature. They tell us that the animals that have the longest childhood have survived longest owing to greater development. So man has survived longest of all and when we shorten his childhood we thereby hinder his natural and full development. So we must not sweep aside the play accompaniments of childhood while we endeavour to guide the individual who is fast becoming a woman. Inevitably at this period many of the former interests and ideas will be discarded. It is the important period of formation of new habits of thought and action that challenges us. Not only are new habits being formed, but there is a rebuilding of all the organs and great waste is possible involving poisoning of blood and lowered vitality. The great need is for more oxygen which can only be supplied through exercise and increased lung capacity. The gymnasium performs its greatest service at this period—not by producing a few good athletes but by raising the general level of vitality. Lowered vitality in conjunction with other changes taking place may result in a 'teen girl who forgets how to play and becomes a book worm or even shows a strong tendency to over sensitiveness and introspection. Girls always tend to be subjective and particularly so at this time. Sports are primarily objective—they afford no opportunity for analysis of feeling. The thought is upon the thing done—never on the doer. To quote from a woman of large experience among her sex,—"Every institution which provides opportunity for Women's games is erecting a barrier against nervousness, morbidity and too much introspection."

Friendships are in the making which will have more influence than any previous. Physical activities bring congenial girls together and reveal them unmistakably to one another.

The desire for more grown-up amusements is bound to go hand-in-hand with the awakened sense of womanhood. Through the life offered in the "Gym" we may still be able to hold the girl's interest in simple pleasures.

How Best Provide for the Need?

Granted the need of physical development for the full rounding out of the individual; granted the special demand—for it is nothing short of a demand—from the adolescent girl; how shall we best provide for the need?

First of all we must bear in mind that what we are most anxious to obtain is a satisfaction of the various demands of girl life—not a training in feats, not a specialization in any one form of recreation or exercise. Our sports have, unfortun-