

## Varsity Athletics.

I gladly accede to the request of the Editor that I should write a few words for the Christmas number of VARSITY on our college sports. The occasion is appropriate since, after a remarkably open season, every thing in the way of out-door play is over for the year except hockey, which, with a good send-off at Christmas, has the winter all to itself. If in this hasty review of our athletics I should seem to be a little critical here and there no alarm need be taken. Nobody will be put off the field, though as a matter of warning some may be sent to the fence for a brief meditation. Anyone who would deny that this has been a good year for athletics in Toronto must be sadly out of condition—at least in a moral sense. There has been good feeling on the part of those who engaged in the various lines of play, as well as on the part of those interested guardians and friends of truth who share in the moral responsibility for the success of college sports. The mention of the latter class suggests a remark, in passing, as to the practical cessation of criticism of college athletics all over the American continent. We had been used for years to the scoldings and waggings and writings of censorious editors and timid educationists who had either lost the spirit of truth, or perchance never had any, and who apprehended the decay of learning and the physical as well as mental break-down of most of the present generation of students. Now even the humorous paragrapher has dropped the theme and accepted the situation, yet foot-ball, once reputed to be more dangerous than a military campaign, is played more than ever in school and college. The explanation is that vigorous college sport has proved itself to be a necessity, not only for the expression of youthful energy, but also for its due control, direction and development. Its exponents have also shown that they can be trusted to keep it from becoming scandalous and unruly. The fact is that it is such a natural, wholesome and human occupation, that all excessive abuse works out its own case in the great body academic. Add to this that in nearly all colleges a hearty and systematic co-operation between the students and the faculties has resulted in an increased sense of responsibility on the one side and enlarged sympathy and confidence on the other.

As to our own experience during the year some of the clubs seem deserving of special congratulations. The Tennis Club is not only paying its way but has made a specially brilliant record both in the City League and in its two successful tournaments. A conspicuous triumph of the year has been made in Association Foot-ball. The Inter-College League played a succession of interesting and well-contested games, of which the closing match between the School of Science and the Dentals was among the best seen on the Trinity grounds in many years; and the victory of the selected College eleven over the Western Association only emphasizes the assurance that there is among us a distinct revival of interest in this grand old game; only one thing seems needed to make it a real rival of Rugby in the public favor. I mean a reform in the system of scoring. That only goals should count for points is, on the face of it, a misinterpretation of the object of foot ball generally and an injustice to the players, besides its results are indecisive. A very large proportion of the games end in ties, and of the rest another large proportion are every season decided in favor of inferior teams on very small total scores. Association leaders everywhere, however, seem to think that the game has long ago reached perfection, and even the prospect of enlarged gate receipts fails to move them in the direction of a merely incidental yet most desirable amendment.

About the Rugby game, a long chapter might be written, but a few sentences must suffice. It is no formal congratulation that we extend to the first Fifteen, for its winning of the championship for the second time in the second year of the College Union is no mere accident, but the reward of merit. At the final game, when the championship was already decided, Queen's had as good a team in the field, but it was too late in the season in getting into shape. Not only Queen's but McGill also will apparently be a formidable competitor next year. The Mulock Cup competition has shown that the regrettable vacancies to be made in the several Fifteens may be worthily filled in next season's playing. To a lover of College games the appearance in this series of contests of such a magnificent set of young athletes is the most inspiring sight that our new grounds have as yet presented. That the School of Science has won the double championship of Association and Rugby is due both to its College spirit and its physical skill and prowess.

In the Rugby contests some of the other teams are deserving of nearly equal praise. Indeed the remark has often been heard that "the School has been travelling in luck." It would be ungracious to allude to such an observation were it not that even an unwarranted statement of the kind usually finds several conscientious backers. The main reason for this is that as the game is now played the umpire finds it often difficult or impossible to detect an interference or offside play during the scrimmage. Hence, with the very best intentions he runs the risk of failing to penalize where the rules require a penalty.

This evil is of itself grave enough to discredit the present rules of the game. But it is only one of the many symptoms of the deplorable conditions of Canadian Rugby, due to the encouragement it affords to the indiscriminate mixing up, in all kinds of positions, from the vertical to the horizontal, of more than half of the whole number of players on the field. The tendency of the game as thus played is to promote slugging, wrestling and general trickiness instead of open and manly football. The whole spirit and atmosphere of the game are inevitably lowered by what is the chief and central feature of the play itself. No better proof of this assertion is needed than the fact that at the recent meeting of the O.R.F.U. an attempt to minimize irregular and uncontrollable play was, according to the newspaper reports, voted down, the plea being made by one of the past-presidents that such a measure would not be enforced, and that there were already enough rules in the book that were wholly disregarded. If this is so, and Mr. Bayley, as an experienced and very strict referee, should know whereof he affirms, then the sooner the rules of Canadian Rugby are essentially changed the better.

College men are naturally anxious for an open and irreproachable game, and this, I presume, is a chief motive for the drawing up of the Burnside Rules, which have been proposed for adoption by the Intercollegiate Union. Unfortunately there was little chance this season for an exemplification of the features of the new game. But what was shown us seemed to prove its superiority to both the present Canadian and English types of Rugby. The future of both Canadian and College Rugby is very uncertain. All that is certain is that a radical change in the game is necessary to its prosperity. There is much that might be said and much probably that should not be said, but it may not be improper in criticizing the present rules to point to the extraordinary and universal popularity of the American game, in spite of its feature of running interference. What we want in our sports is well deserved popularity. Our depleted treasuries speak eloquently on this point at least.