

The Growth of Gymnastics in Montreal.

BY R. TAIT MCKENZIE, B.A.

The position held by Canada in the world of sport is a high one, especially when we consider her comparative youth and scattered population which has not been consolidated into towns and cities until quite recently. As the country grows in population and wealth, the importance of a gymnastic training for her young men and women, based on the best medical principles, becomes more and more evident, because with this increase and crowding together into cities there comes also the inevitable specialization of labour and the consequent imperfectly developed individual.

In the early days of our history, when the settler went out axe in hand to hew out for himself a road to independence and prosperity, the life was spent in the open air, in Nature's hospital among the pines, where vigorous work, a good appetite and pure air supplied more than enough vitality for the comparatively small amount of nervous strain to which he was subjected, and there was no need of any kind of education or training designed to strengthen the body and make it symmetrical. These days have now gone by, and instead of the hardy backwoodsman we have to deal with the student or the business man, whose work keeps him bending over a desk for the greater part of each day, cramping his lung space by contracting his chest; with his brain at a white heat often far into the night, breathing the stifling air of the study, office or counting-house deprived of its health-giving oxygen by the burning gas jets. Instead of the mid-day meal is a lunch bolted at the nearest restaurant and given no time to digest before the necessary blood is drawn off to the brain again. The only exercise taken is the rush down to business in the morning and back again at night, if, indeed, this is not supplanted by his taking a car.

With conditions so different in every particular, it will be readily seen that the half starved muscles and the sluggish circulation must soon become inadequate to properly perform their functions, and most of the ailments which are so common among us—dyspepsia, nervous prostration, and even insanity—are the direct consequences of this manner of life, and cannot be cured except by a more rational and hygienic life.

Gymnastic exercises are ARTIFICIAL WORK, designed to increase combustion in the muscles, and thus get rid of *effete* and poisonous matters in the system, which are replaced by new and good materials, and they supply the best method of preserving that equilibrium between mind and body which is essential for perfect health.

It was in 1860 that the earliest movement in the direction of systematic physical education was made in Montreal, and the mainspring of it was the late Major Barnjum, whose name will ever rank high among the pioneers of this branch of education, and who was the first to conduct this work in Montreal, beginning as honorary instructor to the Montreal Gymnastic Club and afterwards as principal of his Academy of Physical Education. He was a native of England and by profession an artist, and was the first to see the necessity of this work. Becoming impressed with its importance, he in 1867 resolved to give his whole time and energy to it.

At first it was uphill plodding, because people had first to be educated to see the great benefits to be derived from systematic exercise, and his fight was against that most discouraging of all things—indifference. This he fought by giving exhibitions, and writing. He took a great interest in military matters, and organized the High School Cadets. During the Trent difficulty he organized a company, and served as adjutant during the Fenian affairs of '66 and '70. His name will always be gratefully remembered by the thousands who have at his hands been made the better men physically and more fit to successfully carry on their work in life. It was altogether through his work in gymnastics that they have gained the high stand in Montreal which this branch of sport now holds.

His work among the young ladies and growing boys and girls of the city was also an important branch from a medical standpoint, and can hardly be over-estimated, and the size of the classes now conducted by Miss Barnjum, his sister, shows that the early work done by him, discouraging at first as it was, is now meeting with the recognition which it so richly merited but at first lacked.

In 1862 the present McGill University gymnasium on University street was built and opened, and it was then the best equipped gymnasium in Canada, and was amply sufficient for all the needs of the University and the city as well.



GOING TO CHURCH IN NEW ENGLAND IN THE OLDEN DAYS.

In 1867 the necessity for increased accommodation took practical shape in the erection of a new building on Mansfield street, now the club house of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, and this was the beginning of what is now the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, and the progress it has made and the hold it has on the young men of the city accounts to a great degree for the fact that Montreal has more good gymnasts and athletes for its population than any other city in America; which explains the well-known saying: "Montreal for handsome men."

The system which is in use at the gymnasium on University street, and which was introduced by Mr. Barnjum, is founded upon the English methods, rendered so popular by Archibald MacLaren, of Oxford, and depends largely on class work made to suit the requirements and capabilities of the different classes.

The work for children consists of marching, a set of free movements, bar-bell exercises, designed to exercise the torso more than the limbs, and a class exercise with wooden dumb-bells. The dumb-bell drill gone through by a class of girls at the closing exhibition in the spring of each year is a sight worth seeing, as the exercises are the embodiment of grace as well as being beneficial as exercises.

The girls and young ladies' classes have, in addition, Indian club swinging in which the "charge" or lunge is introduced, thus exercising powerfully the lower limbs and increasing the value of the exercise.

Probably the best exercise taken up by these classes is with wooden rings. It was an original one of Mr. Barnjum's, and is especially designed to strengthen the trunk muscles and cultivate elasticity.

The exercises are all accompanied by music, which, besides keeping the movements in perfect time, has the additional benefit of relieving the mind of the mental strain of counting for the exercises.

For the men's classes the work is more varied, and they are divided into squads, with a leader for each. A class evening's work begins with half a dozen exercises by the whole class on the bridge ladders, which act powerfully on the arms and upper part of the trunk. After this the class divides, and one squad goes to the vaulting bar, where particular attention is paid to cultivating a good style; after about ten minutes of vaulting the parallel bars are tried and several easy exercises are done, after which more difficult ones are gone through, their difficulty varying with the advancement of the class. This is followed by the bar-bell exercise, and when thoroughly done this brings into play almost every muscle in the body, and yet by making antagonistic muscles work against one another the danger of a strain is entirely overcome.

Next in order is the Indian club drill, which is in itself a refutation of the assertion that an exercise cannot be at once graceful and at the same time have a powerful action on the muscles.

The results of these exercises can be most clearly shewn, perhaps, by taking an individual example and tabulating some of his measurements. The young man whose measurements are seen in the table had in all a little less than nine months of systematic exercise from Dec. 10th, 1889 to April 16th, 1891, and last October had a severe illness, confining him to bed for over a month. The small

increase in height would indicate that his growth is almost complete, and the most marked improvement is seen in his chest girth, which shows a clear gain of nearly *four inches* of lung room. The leg work of the bar-bell and club exercises has also told favourably on his thighs, causing an increase of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches. See table:

Table of measurements of L—P—, age 21, taken before and after nine months work in gymnastics:

	Dec. 10, 1889.	April 16, 1891.
Age.....	20 yrs 3 mos.	21 yrs 6 mos.
Height.....	68 in.	68½ in.
Weight.....	113 lbs.	123 lbs.
Girth of neck.....	13½ in.	14 in.
" shoulders.....	38 "	39½ "
" chest.....	31¾ "	35½ "
" " full.....	33½ "	37¼ "
Upper arm, R.....	9 "	9½ "
" " flexed R.....	10¼ "	11½ "
" " L.....	8¾ "	9½ "
" " flexed L.....	10 "	10¾ "
Fore arm, R.....	9½ "	10 "
" " L.....	9½ "	9¾ "
Thigh, R.....	17 "	18½ "
" " L.....	17 "	18½ "
Calf, R.....	12½ "	13¼ "
" " L.....	12½ "	13½ "
Width of shoulders.....	15½ "	16½ "

To a young man, however, there must be more inducement held out than the mere idea of bettering his physical condition, and after a certain amount of strength and skill has been acquired he hungers for fresh fields and greater difficulties to conquer. The result of this want has been the feats shown in the illustrations. The perfection to which this work can be brought by amateurs is shown by the ladder pyramids which were performed in 1887-88, and also by the Roman pyramids which were performed here this spring at the closing exhibition. These feats, as will be seen by the illustrations, are both difficult and beautiful, the neat costume of the gymnasium adding materially to the statuesque effect. These pyramids have not been given anywhere by amateurs except in Montreal at the old gymnasium.

The present building was inaugurated by an exhibition and supper, at which, among others, Hon. Jas. Ferrier, Hon. Alexander Morris and J. R. Dougall were present, and it has seen more men go in weak, sickly and under-developed and come out strong, healthy and vigorous than perhaps any other building of its size in America; but while its inhabitants started weak and finished strong, the building started strong and has gradually been getting more frail and more in need of support, and of late years the enthusiasm of many a young man has been dampened for the moment by a stream of icy water on a rainy night coming from its venerable roof and trickling down his back.

That 240 men should last year brave the disadvantages in the way of ventilation and accommodation with which they have had to struggle, speaks volumes for the popularity of the work done in the old institution. Let us hope that there will arise in Montreal as in Cambridge another Hemenway, whose name will be immortalized by handing down to future generations of McGill students the priceless boon of a well-equipped gymnasium, managed on a scientific medical basis—an institution worthy the great university to which it would form one of the chief attractions.