

## *The Education of Hercules Johnson.*

BY R. E. VERNEDE

**S**OMEONE had mentioned the subject of national physical education and Johnson looked up. He was a middle-aged unhappy looking man, who breathed loudly and moped a good deal. Hardly anyone at the club knew him except by sight, and we were all a little surprised to hear him remark in a resolute voice:

"I believe a physical education to be a mistake for anyone."

"Why?" asked Grinley, curiously. He was an athlete himself, but tolerant of weaker men. I have heard him say that with all the exercise he took he doubted if he would ever be as big a man as Mr. Chamberlain, who took none.

"Because," said Johnson, coloring slightly, "I am an example of the physically educated."

For politeness sake we tried not to look at him, and he went on in a slow voice.

"I have been physically educated, I may say, from the cradle. My father was a fanatic on the subject, and to prevent me from becoming flabby, he insisted on my walking at the age of nine months. Three months later I had a punching ball set up in my nursery, and at this I used to hit for two hours every day regularly. My diet was strictly supervised, with the result that—at eighteen months—I could pull my young brother in his go-cart a couple of miles without turning a hair. It is true that I was, and have been ever since, a trifle bandy-legged, but this, according to my father—was only on the lines of the

finest Greek models, and, as he said, I had a straight left. He delighted to see me use it on the nurses, and for every one that gave notice in less than a month, he would present me with a toy. 'You'll be a Hercules yet,' he would say, alluding to the name by which—much against the wish of my God-parents—I had been baptised; and would blow out his chest for me to hit. Had my education proceeded on these comparatively simple lines, I might have grown up an ordinarily healthy and contented man. Unfortunately it did not. My father was for ever improving on his previous schemes. I can still recall with loathing the breathing exercises I used to have to go through from the age of five to nine in his study, he with a stop watch in his hand to see that any given breath took the exact time proper to do it. He insisted much on the necessity of breathing through the nose, sending me running to the top of the house and down again ten times, and putting me in the corner if he found my tongue out of my mouth. Those times in the corner indeed were among the few peaceful hours of my childhood, which was otherwise spent in perpetual motion and the consumption of foodstuffs that varied between underdone beefsteak and charcoal biscuits. An attack of measles—necessitating a change of diet—gave me perhaps my happiest month, and I used to pray that I might have whooping cough like my eldest sister.

"When the time came for me to go to