



### Our Foreign Letters.

THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN BERLIN. (Second letter.) GENERAL EXHIBITION OF SPORTS, GAMES AND ATHLETICS.

*Mens sana in corpore sano*, that is the spirit that inspired the National Society in the ordering of this exhibition, a display neither large nor astonishing in itself. Cycles, tennis bats, cricket balls and snow-shoes, gymnastic appliances for the weak and for the strong, the sick and the healthy, medals and mugs of prize-winners at the competitions, sails and oars and photos of yachts—we have seen all these elsewhere! Here they are simply gathered together in a big hall of the old House of Parliament, with here and there an innovation, an original invention, a striking picture, to give a touch of interest to an otherwise somewhat tame display.

And yet this little exhibition is of national importance. On its committee stand the names of some of the cleverest men of science. Men of thought and fame have written essays for its catalogue. Artists have made it an attractive picture-book, in itself worth far more than the trifling entrance fee for which it is given. A number of athletic competitions take place in connection with this exhibition, at which prizes are given, and large sums are offered for the best *German* names to foreign games.

The meaning of all this is that Germany is waking up to recognition of the importance of a *national* interest in games of skill, not only for men and boys, but for women and girls of all classes.

One must know Germany to understand the astonishment, the launching of such sentiments as the following will call forth in many circles:—"Athletics, games and sports," to quote Mr. von Egidy, "are quite naturally of equal importance in the development of man and woman; we do not train ourselves for soldiers, but for human beings. The body of a woman must be trained just as carefully as that of a man. The woman's strength of mind requires training just like the man's. The woman has a right to demand happiness, and *is to enjoy danger* as much as the man. By no longer separating girls and boys, young men and maidens in their bodily and mental training, we raise the morality and self-respect of the people."

There are few English people who have not heard, or witnessed, or read about the "carefully cultivated littleness" of German women, and their objection to physical exercises. Educated people will suspect a good deal of word-smoke and superficial observation, knowing that every nation consists of *individuals*, whom it is impossible to characterise by any general terms. It is absurd to imagine that theories such as the above are fungous growths of a night, or isolated

and unshared by many thoughtful German women, as it is impossible to deny that the "cultivated littleness" exists here as elsewhere.

It is just as absurd to suppose that an intelligent nation should exempt physical training from the curriculum of its government schools, in which the elementary training has for many years been acknowledged far in advance of our own. The writer, for example, who spent many of her early years in Germany, clearly recollects being taught to swim with ease and climb and leap before she could read, and the institutions in which she learned at the time were *not* innovations.

But athletics were not then, and are not now, generally looked upon as anything more than a secondary consideration. I well remember the patronising manner in which we girls of the High School would scamp "athletics"—"only athletics, you know"—on the most shadowy excuses, and escape unscathed, though in every other branch of study justice would have certainly chained us to our work.

And this is exactly the kind of feeling the National Society wishes to undermine. Athletics are not to be "an extra" or a desirable accomplishment, but the one-important branch of training. People are to learn from early childhood to use hand and foot and eye, to appreciate habits of self-restraint, and to realise that strength and agility are necessary to health, and health to happiness and success.

Professor Jaeger writes:—"Does the *mens sana* make the *corpus sanum*? Certainly not. The case stands reversed. The healthy body is the first condition for the healthy mind, and the education of the *corpus sanum* stands about on the same footing as business to pleasure." A truism says: "Business first, then pleasure." By which Professor Jaeger would seem to imply that study was natural and pleasing to the Teutonic mind.

For results of disregard of this rule Professor Jaeger bids us consider the abnormal length of lists of pensioned invalids, would have us observe the poor, the sick, the criminal in hospital, almshouse and prison. He looks to the people to save the people, when they have learnt to love and honour health.

Whether this Utopia will ever blossom from the little seed, whether the bulk of nation will ever *want* to be all that is hoped by an intelligent and energetic select—this is veiled in the mists of unexplored future.

At all events it seems more than likely that a revolution is preparing for the school children, a revolution that is bound to carry joy into their hearts.

These are the theories that it is hoped will be put into practice. "More of physical drill, and less of mental—more athletics—less book-learning; more training of eye, hand, foot, *will*—and no *home tasks* for tired little brains."

Professor Jaeger has been drawing up a petition bearing on this last item. It will be brought before the House.

In the excellent guide-book I mentioned before the importance of gymnastic exercises in the education of the deaf and dumb is insisted upon, riding, swimming, skating are discussed by various able writers, and last, not least, Mr. Otto Lilienthal writes a quiet, unaffected paper on the advantages of *flying* as an athletic exercise.

As Mr. Lilienthal has invented the flying-machine that has hitherto been the most successful, and as he is energetically at work perfecting the same, his views are especially interesting. More even than a water-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)