

The Importance of Physical Culture.

The importance of physical culture has been much before the public of late, owing to the lamentable fact that so many recruits during the late war failed to come up to the standard of physical fitness required by the Army. The question is as important to women as it is to men, for the future health of the child depends largely on that of the mother, and women have, therefore, a responsibility in this matter. Again in the case of nurses physical culture is of importance, for a nurse with an ill-developed physique and an unhealthy appearance will scarcely commend herself as a desirable factor in remedial agencies, and it is an undoubted fact that health and vitality on the parts of those surrounding the sick are a potent influence for good. Therefore let nurses see to it that their physical health is sound and their deportment and muscular development as perfect as may be. A trained nurse who has realised the importance of the foregoing principles is Mrs. Byers, who holds the certificate of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and who at present gives lessons in physical exercise and deportment to women and children in her pretty rooms at 10, Princes Street, Hanover Square. Calling upon her there, I found Mrs. Byers eloquent on the neglect of physical training in this country and the evils arising from it. In England, she asserts, physical training has been more neglected than in any other European country, and where it is taught the principle of training is frequently very unscientific. Sufficient attention is not paid to balance, or to the system of localised work which is the pith of the whole thing. "We have lost," said Mrs. Byers, "the Grecian love of the beautiful, and have neglected to an extraordinary degree the art of physical culture."

"I was always very interested in the subject," she said, "and when I went to Gibraltar and Malta, and still more in Africa, I was greatly struck by the carriage of the women, and its superiority to that of the majority of women in this country. We are suffering from over-civilisation. For instance, there is the compression of clothing, affecting the circulation, and, though I do not condemn all kinds of corsets entirely, or think that a woman should have no waist—for Nature has bestowed one upon her—still undoubtedly it is impossible for a figure to be properly balanced in the average corset."

Mrs. Byers receives nurses as pupils, and teaches American, German, and Swedish movements, as well as some of her own. She prefers individual teaching, but gives class teaching also to those who are unable to receive private lessons.

Listening later to an address from Mrs. Byers on the subject of the

IMPORTANCE OF FIGURE TRAINING, one realised how much there is to be said on the subject. It has been suggested, said the speaker, that "Every normal woman is beautiful," but it must have occurred to all how comparatively few women are normal; shelving pelvis, contracted chests, weak spines are all too common. The remedy to a large extent is physical exercise.

What is physical exercise? It is the education and training of the muscles of the body, not a recreation or faddism. The ancient Greeks believed that the training of the body and of the mind should go hand in hand, and the result was beauty of both. Nowadays we hear much of lack of development of the body and of over-developed brains.

In Germany much attention is paid to physical culture, and their recruits are able to show a physique much superior to ours. The significance of the statement of Lord Meath, that during the recent war out of 11,000 men who volunteered from Manchester and the surrounding districts only 3,000 were accepted as physically fit, cannot be too much taken to heart. It is accentuated when we are told of these 3,000 only 1,000 were held good enough for the Regulars.

The loss of physique means hideous deportment, loss of figure, increase of ugly lines, frequently obesity, and finally the wreckage of a figure. Remarking once to an American that the women of that nation seldom lost their figures, the reply I received was, "We have more self-respect." Again, amongst the Swedes spinal curvature is almost unknown. When the body is correctly balanced, a perpendicular rod from the root of the toes should rest against the middle of the head. The balance is preserved by antagonistic muscles.

In training the body, exercises should begin with the ankles, as in building a house from its foundations. Then attention should be paid to the knees, and to the essential lissomness of the hip-joint. The correct balance of the pelvis, which contains some of the principal organs, is also of importance.

After describing by means of diagrams the spine in an infant and an adult, and the causes leading to spinal curvature, Mrs. Byers described some chest expansion movements and breathing movements.

There is an Eastern saying, "Let all beings be happy, let all beings be peaceful, let all beings be blissful." This might, said the speaker, be paraphrased in the less romantic speech of the West by the words "Don't fuss."

It will be a relief to women to know that if normally developed they have a naturally small waist-line, and "that flat, square, and depressing waist which so often figures on platforms in public causes" is not a hygienic necessity.

Certainly Mrs. Byers herself and her pupil, Miss Kingsford, commend the doctrine which she preaches, "Every normal woman is beautiful."

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