GREEK vs. MODERN PHYSICAL CULTURE.

Greek education was comprised in two words, gymnastics and music. In the words of Plato,—"That having reference to the body is gymnastics, but that having reference to the mind is music." Grammar, which was sometimes distinguished from other branches of music, comprehended knowledge of the Greek language, poetry, eloquence, and history. Music embraced all arts and sciences over which the muses presided. Gymnastics, grammar, and music constituted the whole curriculum of study prescribed for the Athenian boy, and formed a system peculiarly adapted for the harmonious development of body and mind.

The gymnasium was not, as with us, "appended" to the school, but was the school itself. No Greek town was without one of these schools, and Athens had three,—the Cynosarges, Lyceum, and Academy. The Spartans, Doriens, and, later, the Romans, used gymnastics chiefly as a drill, to fit their soldiers for toil and hardship. The utilitarian Romans judged unfavorably of Athenian gymnastics, charging that they induced idleness, and that, instead of the use of weapons, mere ornamental arts were taught. The more cultivated Athenians, however, viewed the lighter physical exercises in a more correct physiological light. They were in higher repute at Athena than elsewhere, and had a more powerful influence in developing Greek character and life than any other institution. They awakened generous emulation, incited to the noblest deeds, enhanced the personal grace and beauty and the vigor of the bodily powers, made men all alive to the beauty and nobility of the human form, and opened a broad field for the grandest creations of art. Artists had daily before their eyes the flower of Greek youth and middle life,—the slender, agile stripling, and the powerful, well-knit man, naked, as the word gymnast means in itself, perfectly developed and trained, in every conceivable attitude of running, leaping, throwing, and wrestling. Can we wonder at the perfect manly grace of the Apollo Belvedere; the airy figure of the wing-footed Mercury; the massive strength of Hercules; the strained, distorted muscles of the mighty Laocoön? Such sights were of the most familiar to the sculptors of those days. The gymnasiums were the daily resort of old and young. There the schoolboy found his task; the young man of leisure, an agreeable lounging-place; there the
scholar listened to the great masters in philosophy; there the sedentary took their mild "constitutional" on the foot-course; and the invalid and aged there courted a return of health, or sought to retain the vigor of earlier years. The vast area of the gymnasium was not devoted exclusively to physical exercises. Logic, rhetoric, psychology, and morals claimed their place in this focus of the city life, and were the delight of the subtle Greeks. Socrates, who looked upon all Athens as his school, to be instructed in moral wisdom, met them with his questions in these places. Within the enclosure of the Academy Plato possessed a small garden, where he opened a school for all who were inclined to hear his reasoning, and to which he admitted no ungeometrical mind. In the groves of the Lyceum Aristotle walked with his disciples, who derived their name of Peripatetics from this practice, and there taught them his "ambulatory philosophy." And though some clog of a cynic might despise the union of the ornamental with the useful, and claim austerity as the rule of life, yet to the majority of the lively, social Greeks the gymnasium offered all the attractions that the Parisian of to-day finds in his boulevards, cafés, jardins-chantants. Nay, even the cynics held their school of philosophy in the Cynosarges, where was their gymnasium dedicated to Hercules, who, having a mortal mother, was not properly one of the immortals. Here, accordingly, all strangers having but one parent an Athenian were obliged to perform their daily exercises.

Athenian legends paid great reverence to these institutions. Their earliest rules were referred to Theseus, the emulator of Hercules, who slew the Minotaur and conquered the Amazons. Their presiding deity was Mercury, to whom was ascribed the invention of the lyre, of letters, and of gymnastic exercises.

The sports of the gymnasium were physical exercises, either simple games or exercises in preparation for the public contests. Among the games were ball and spinning the top, both popular amusements among the Athenian boys. They had, also, a sport familiar in our gymnasiums, which consists in two boys drawing each other up and down by the ends of a rope passed over a pulley. They played a game of dexterity with five stones tossed from the upper part of the hand and caught in the palm, called Jackstones nowadays, and had many other gentle exercises.

The training for the public games was included in what was called the pentathlon, a word meaning five athletic exercises; these were running, leaping, throwing the discus, wrestling, and boxing. The first four were practised by amateurs and by most persons who frequented the gymnasiums for health. Boxing was not looked on favorably by the more refined, and many restrained their sons from engaging in it.

The foot-races were made between fixed boundaries a stadium,—one-eighth of a mile—apart. The distance run varied from one to twenty stadia; that is, from one-eighth to two and a half miles. This was much followed by adults for the sake of health, as well as by youths under training. Horse-racing was sometimes brought into the public exhibitions. The horses were trained to run without riders, or else harnessed to a chariot. The Greek youths were extremely fond of fine horses, and were often ruined by the extravagant prices they paid for them; but horse-racing was far more common later in the Roman circuses than ever among the Greeks.

To make a momentary digression from the exercises of the gymnasium, we will mention here that when a young man reached the age of nineteen, and could engage in a free course of action, he added to the occupations of the training-school the amusements of hunting and charioteering. They took great pains in breeding horses, and marked the different breeds with brands. Fashion ruled, to a great extent, in preference of color; but they were fond of driving a four-in-hand of different colors. Dogs also brought high prices, and great care was bestowed upon them. The youths even kept lapdogs,—a custom now relegated to ladies.

But to return to our gymnasium. Leaping, like running, was performed within fixed limits. The leaper generally grasped metallic weights in his hands, or sometimes wore them attached to his head or shoulders.

The quoit, or discus, was made of stone or metal, was circular in form, and was thrown by means of a thong passed through the centre. It was three inches thick and ten or twelve inches in diameter. The one who threw farthest won.

In wrestling, the one who threw his adversary three times conquered. The wrestlers were entirely naked, anointed with oil, and covered with sand, that they might give firm hold to the adversary.
Striking was not allowed. Elegance of motion and position, as well as force, was studied in the attack. They practised upright and prostrate wrestling. In the former the one thrown was allowed to rise; in the latter the struggle was continued on the ground. The vanquished held up his finger to acknowledge himself beaten.

Boxing was a severer sport, not much practised except by the gentlemen of the "profession,"—for there was a profession even then. Free-born youths of better feeling did not demean themselves by this brutal pastime. It was practised with clenched fists, either bare or armed with the deadly *cestus*. The *cestus* was much like our "brass-knuckle," being a thong of hide, loaded with lead, bound over the hand. It was at first used merely to add weight to the blow, but was afterward continued up the forearm, and made to serve as a piece of defensive armor. The science of the game consisted in parrying the blows of the antagonist, as it does to-day in the manly art of self-defence. The exercise was violent and dangerous, and the combatants often lost their lives. The *pancratium* was a mode of battle which for brutality would put any modern prize-ring to the blush. The word is composed of two Greek words, one meaning all and the other strength. The custom was so named because it called all the powers of the fighter into action. It was a union of boxing and wrestling, and was opened by an attempt to force one's adversary into an unfavorable position with the sun shining into his eyes. Then began either wrestling or sparring. As soon as one party was either thrown or knocked down, the other kept him so, and pommelled him into submission; and when he arose at last, to receive the plaudits of the assembly, it was often from the corpse of his antagonist.

The torch-race, which was five times performed at Athens, must have been a singular spectacle. Commentators have been puzzled to interpret the passages describing this game; but the most rational explanation seems to be that it was a contest between opposite parties, and not between individuals. A lighted lamp, protected from the air by a shield, was passed from one runner to another down each of the lines of players to a certain goal. The party who succeeded in carrying their lamps most swiftly to the boundary, unextinguished, were declared the victors.

Dancing to the sound of the cithara, flute, and pipe was a favorite amusement with all classes. Gray-haired veterans and young soldiers joined in martial dances. Dancing by youths and maidens formed part of the entertainment of guests. The distinguishing characteristic of Greek dancing, and the one that elevated it into a fine art, was that it was not a mere series of meaningless motions, but that it was the outward bodily expression, in which all the limbs took their share, of some inward emotion or idea. What poetry elected by words, dancing performed by movement! There was a strong connection felt by the Greeks between these two arts, dancing being conceived as merely a natural development of the gesture accompanying recitation of poetry. They even had mimic dances, which represented in the most graceful pantomime, without an uttered word, popular fables and legends. Music was also associated with both dancing and poetry. The study of music began at the age of twelve. It was not pursued merely for pleasure, but was a noble occupation for hours of leisure and social recreation. The lyre and cithara were the only instruments judged suitable for a noble-born youth. The flute was once popular, but was discarded as not allowing the accompaniment of the voice. It was customary at a banquet to pass the lyre from one to another guest, each accompanying it by an improvised ode. It was a reproach to a young man, and an evidence of ill-education not to be possessed of this elegant accomplishment. Dancers were also invariably accompanied by either the lyre or flute. Professional dancers, both men and women, threw somersaults and leaped among sharp knives, somewhat in the manner of Chinese jugglers. The Romaic dance, which is peculiar to the modern Greeks, is an inheritance from these ancestors.

Physical education is commonly postponed with us—if, indeed, we are so exceptionally fortunate as to receive it at any time—until early manhood, when the growth is nearly or quite completed, and the frame confirmed in weakness and lack of development. The Greeks did otherwise with their children. They are said by some of their writers to have restricted the boy to physical exercises till his tenth year, when he was allowed to begin the study of grammar and the works of the poets. At all events gymnastics preceded mental instruction. This was not owing to any indifference to the higher branches of education. We read that when at the
time of an invasion the women and children of Athens took refuge at Troezen, the inhabitants, so necessary did daily instruction seem to them, besides supporting them, paid persons to teach the children. The Mitylenæans, wishing to inflict the severest possible penalty on their revolting allies, forbade their children to be taught. They had no lack of esteem, then, for intellectual instruction, but considered a sensible course of gymnastics quite as important as the other occupations of the school. The Athenians, who spared no pains in making well-bred men of their sons, considered gymnastics, chariot-driving, and hunting, together with the intercourse of learned men, the only occupations befitting a free-born youth. They believed that a man's mind took its color from the nature of his pursuits, and that no occupations were better suited than those of the gymnasion, and of the public festivals, to which the former paved the way, to stimulate patriotism and religious devotion, and arouse the physical and mental energies to their most exalted action.

At the age of sixteen the youth left off the studies of school, and frequented the gymnasion alone, applying himself there chiefly to physical training, although enjoying opportunities of listening to teachers of a higher order, the Rhetoricians and Sophists, as well as the masters in philosophy. At the age of nineteen he reached his majority, and was in possession of a frame well-knit and expanded during his growth by invigorating exercise. He then either continued to follow athletic sports, or entered upon a military or other career.

The young gymnast was not simply provided with an arena for practice and the necessary apparatus, and then left to his own devices in making use of them. This is not an uncommon and very unwise course with us. The result is inevitable. In overzeal and ignorance, and without the preparation of previous exercise, the boy attempts some of the most difficult feats he has chanced to witness, uses appliances without any regard for his own lack of muscle, exerts himself too long and violently, and, perhaps, suffers during the rest of his life from some injury that might have been easily avoided. Then his parents unreservedly condemn gymnasia and all systematic physical training. The Greeks were wiser in this. The exercises of their gymnasia were ordained by law, and were always performed subject to the regulations of masters, and animated by their commendation. Instruction was given by the gymnastæ and pedatriæ. The former gave practical lessons, and knew the physiological effect of the different exercises, and how to adapt them to the constitution and needs of each youth. The latter knew and taught the games in all their varieties. The morals of the young were cared for by the sophronistæ—officers appointed for that purpose. The discipline of the gymnasion was so rigid, and it was felt to be so important that confidence should be so undoubtedly there, that theft committed within its precincts was punished with death.

The ancients valued gymnastics highly, not only as procuring soundness of mind and elegance of culture, by means of a sound and well-trained body, but even as remedial agents in disease. The officers of the gymnasia were called doctors, because of the skill won by long experience among those under their charge. The gymnastæ examined the physical condition of each youth, regulated his exercises carefully, and prescribed for his diseases, while inferior officers dressed his wounds, or fractures. They had not only general ideas of the benefits of exercise, but selected different kinds of exertion, as adapted to alleviate particular maladies. Hippocrates had faith in the "movement cure," and prescribed special exercises for each particular disease. They probably esteemed gymnastics more highly for sanative purposes than comported with their knowledge of physiology and disease. They were probably more apt to treat symptoms than to ascertain causes, and, no doubt, often prescribed exercises that were injudicious, if not positively injurious. We, on the other hand, with far more accurate knowledge to direct us in the application of the means of development and cure that Nature has given us so bountifully, either undervalue and reject them altogether, or else use them as in the blindness of those who refuse to see. In some few instances, however, we are developing and applying principles that carry us back in mind to all that was most soundly conceived, and most serviceable in the gymnastics of the Greeks. Dr. Sargent, of Harvard, whose methods are becoming so widely adopted among our best colleges, supervises the physical culture of the students in his gymnasia with a wisdom and science that need not be compared with those of the Greek doctors of old times. He was bred a physician, and for nearly twenty
years has had under his charge students at Bowdoin, Yale, Harvard, and in New York City. He subjects each of his pupils to a private examination, taking into account the relative proportions of the different parts of the body; the undue development of certain muscles, and the enfeebled condition of others; the comparative size of body and limbs; with a variety of facts concerning personal history, bone and muscle measurements, and acquired or inherited tendencies to chronic or functional disease. He can thus judge at once of the needs of the person under advice, and prescribe the general regimen and the kinds of apparatus necessary in his case. He does this with great minuteness, and with great resulting success in securing harmony in function and symmetry in development.

It is hard, however, to find adequate incitement to physical training for our young men. They seldom think carefully enough about true culture to realize how intimately connected with a perfect spiritual condition are bodily health and vigor. They rightly make all physical things subservient to the formation of character and intellect. The Greeks, too, made this their principle; but they never forgot or failed to realize the important condition we so often leave out of sight. We are so absorbed in the effort to enrich and strengthen our minds by knowledge and training, that we forget to cultivate our physical nature. We forget that health is "the power to work long, to work well, to work successfully"; that health is our first wealth, the capital to be used as a basis in all our mental and spiritual processes. Fathers and mothers, too, forget in training their children to lay a foundation for the lovely, ethereal structure of sensitive, keen intelligence they seek to rear, and find it at last but a useless and tottering castle of cards, if not a ruin before its completion. The results are painfully apparent on every hand. Recent writers have spoken earnestly and wisely in warning. The children in the cities are "under-sized, listless, thin-faced," with no muscles, with neither time nor inclination for active, invigorating sports; and yet nobody seems to notice or compassionate their feebleness, or to do anything for their physical salvation. Fathers and mothers who spent a vigorous childhood in the country, working and playing long hours out-of-doors, with but short hours of schooling for a few months in the year, neglect to care for the slender bodies of their studious little ones. They do not realize sufferings of which they have no experience, and their hearts are set on other aims. They are giving all their care to forcing the minds of their children into premature bloom. They are even so eager in this matter as to do much to thwart their own purposes. A New York School Commissioner is quoted in Harper's Monthly for November as saying: "The present course of study is so elaborated that nothing more than a superficial knowledge can be gained by the pupils."

How different is our American school course from the old, simple, well-balanced system of the Greeks, with its few studies carefully and slowly pursued; its attention to the graces of culture, music, and poetry, and its wise and unremitting physical training! How shall we make it seem worth our while to leave our studies for so much time as shall be necessary to make us men physically, broad-chested, strong-limbed, enduring; as like the Greeks in our bodily health, strength, and beauty, as we are in clearness and depth, quickness and geniality, of mind? They found their incitements to physical culture in public emulation, for which abundant opportunity was offered in the national games or festivals. These formed a part of the religious observances of the Greeks. They brought into contact people from the several parts of Greece, and thus cemented patriotism. They stimulated and publicly rewarded talent, as well as bodily vigor and skill. They afforded orators, poets, and historians their best opportunities of rehearsing their productions. Music, in the classical sense, with the pentathlon, formed the programme. They were influenced in physical training by religion, patriotism, and love of high art and poetry, as well as by the natural delights of emulation, strength, courage, and skill. We are clearly at a great disadvantage. Religion and patriotism afford us no motive. We have completely separated mental pursuits from bodily exercises, and have chosen the former as our only love. We would find it a very mechanical and distasteful task to cultivate our bodies with a set purpose, and with no other more stimulating motive. We need some exercise that, with an opportunity for social companionship and generous emulation, shall afford us in itself an interest and excitement sufficient to draw us from our beloved books. All the better if it shall be capable of being allied with and drawn into
the service of thought and imagination, capable of assisting in investigation, and of inspiring love of nature and her manifold blessings and delights. We need an exercise that shall bring into use and develop all the muscles, that shall call us into the fresh air and sunshine, that shall exhilarate and refresh the nervous system and fit us for more energetic and fruitful mental work. We need one that shall give us an opportunity for winning laurels before the eyes of our friends in public contest, and that yet cannot be debased to brutal uses. We need something that will be not only delightful, and useful to our health, but that will be of service also, if possible, in our every-day avocations. We can make a very large demand, it is to be observed, and can picture to ourselves the satisfaction of all our wants; but can so bright a picture be realized in actual experience? Oh, yes; it can. The cunning contriver, Mercury, the god with wings on his feet, has not ceased to be the patron deity of gymnastic sports, nor the god of inventions. He has crowned his work for our bodies by winging our feet like his own. We may go about our daily tasks as swiftly as the messenger of Jove himself.

All we ask is done by the bicycle. It brings into play every muscle, expands the chest, and enables a man to exert a force two or three times as great as his severest efforts can put forth in any other manner, and that, too, with refreshment instead of fatigue. (See The Wheelman for July, 1883, vol. II., page 269.) It exerts a fascination over all who learn its use that is not to be resisted. Everybody who once rides it will always continue to do so. For rapid and continu-ous travel it excels a horse, and gives, at the same time, more beneficial exercise than horseback-riding. It favors companionship, gives opportunity and a fit frame of mind for observation and appreciation of nature, and lends itself in the most admirable manner to the aid of out-door excursions for scientific purposes. What more can we desire?

We have something further to ask that the Greeks did not possess or wish for. We value the health, happiness, and usefulness of our maidens as well as of our youths. We would ask as much for the one as for the other. We are as careful in sending the girls to school as the boys, and train them perhaps even more care-fully in the ornamental arts and in refine-ment of manner than we train the boys. It was contrary to the Greek ideas of decorum and of the female character and capacity to educate girls. They were forbidden, on pain of death, to appear at the gymnastic exercises or the public festivals. It is related that the mother of a Greek victor, who accompanied her son to the Olympic games, and discovered herself by her joy in the moment of his victory, escaped the penalty only because many of her family had been Olympic victors. Our youths, on the contrary, have the greatest satisfaction in the presence and admiration of women on all occasions honorable to themselves. They enjoy the feeling of half-curious admiration they excite from their bicycles in the breasts of feminine beholders. But we are sure they are genuinely glad that their pleasure can not only be witnessed, but shared, by their sisters and daughters. They still have a little ground to themselves where the girls cannot trespass. Girls cannot ride the bicycle. That is undeniable. But they have three wheels, instead of two, and progress almost as rapidly by means of them, and quite as skilfully and gracefully, as the boys with two.

We cannot do better than quote, in regard to the tricycle, from a physician who stands high in his profession in England: “Hitherto I have written as if the advantage of tricycle-riding was confined to the male sex. I would not like this to be the impression gleaned from my papers; on the contrary, I am of the opinion that no exercise for women has ever been discovered that is to them so really useful. I shall rejoice to see the time when this exercise shall be as popular amongst girls and women as tennis and the dance.”

The wheel might be called the modern pankration, and would be far more properly so named than the Greek boxing and wrestling match. It not only employs all the muscular forces in their finest and most effective activity, but it stimulates and calls into fullest play all the more delicate powers of nervous energy and the higher qualities of courage and of mental activity, instead of debasing, blunting, and brutalizing them.

We have a pankration that no father need fear for his son, that will be for the highest good of all by whom it is employed.

H. H. M.