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PRICE, FIVE CENTS.

EXERCISE.

Its Influence upon the Body—Remarkable Illustrations of Trained Strength.

The old Romans, who conquered eighty-six foreign nations, had recognized the secret of success when they called their armies "exercitus," bodies of drilled or exercised men. Exercise overcomes all difficulties, and if the power of its influence has limits, they have never been ascertained. It insures every victory; practice, i. e., exercise and experience, would enable a hundred veterans to beat a thousand recruits, even if the recruits were better armed. A brigade of ordinary riflemen would have no chance against a regiment of picked archers, such as were employed in war in the middle ages.

In the London tower and in the armories of Strasburg, Nuremberg and Vienna, there are several goals of mail that have been pierced through and through, and evidently by the same shot. That is, the arrow has broken the breast-plate, passed through the body of the cuirassier, and then through the back-plate.

A common rifle ball rarely penetrates the body of a full-grown man, even nowadays, when mail-coats are gone out of fashion.

During the middle ages it was the custom of princes, and even of wealthy bargainers, to keep runners who followed their carriages on foot while the horses were going at full gallop. Fast runners were in great request, and if parents wanted to qualify their children for a position of that sort, they began to train them from the earliest childhood and made them undergo a singular operation, namely, the removal of the spleen, which was supposed to have an influence on the vigor of the lungs.

From the city of Puebla in Mexico, a sandy country-road leads across the hills to the valley of Amozoc. Early in the morning that road is crowded with Indian hucksters, who carry heavy baskets on their backs. They often come from a distance of ten or twelve miles, but make the whole trip at a sharp trot, and without a single stop. Their children trot at their sides, carrying small bundles of beans, and thus their trade so gradually that they hardly feel the hardships of it.

It is certainly queer that nowadays a small short-legged dog can easily outrun the tallest man. It has not been always so. An ostrich proves that two legs can go as fast as four. Want of exercise probably accounts for the whole difference.

Lifting weights is another excellent lung exercise. There is a story of a Grecian Samson, the athlete Milo of Crotona, who day after day carried a calf around the arena, and gained in strength as the calf gained in weight, till he could finally carry a steer.

We may doubt if the steer was quite full grown; but there is no doubt that Dr. Winslow of Boston, Mass., practiced with dumb-bells and bags of pig-iron till he was able to lift (though only for a moment) the weight of the heaviest steer in the Texas prairie. It is equally certain that before he began to exercise he was the puniest student of the medical college. And if a weakly man of modern times could uphold such a weight, why should not a champion of the Grecian arena have been able to carry it for a distance of half a mile? For it cannot be denied that people have become weaker since they began to trust to gunpowder and steam instead of to exercise.

In countries where they still rely on the strength of their limbs, as in Turkey, Hungary, and Afghanistan, there are plenty of men earning their bread by common labor who would astonish the so-called athletes of a French circus. A Turkish porter will shoulder a box which the driver of a New York express wagon would hesitate to unload without assistance.

During the last Afghan war, the native warriors carried cannon to a battery on the top of a hill from where the English soldiers were unable to carry theirs. A Turkish porter will shoulder a box which the driver of a New York express wagon would hesitate to unload without assistance.

The foot soldiers of the Turkish Janizaries had to drill in full armor, run, wrestle, and even swim, without removing their iron equipments. Such a value did their drill-masters set upon the influence of early training that they would never accept a recruit of more than twelve years of age. These cadets were exercised for years, like the sons of the old Spartans, before they were assigned to actual duty, and the result was the Janizaries repeatedly beat the armies of all western Europe combined.

The ancient Greeks managed to train not only their troops but the whole nation, by offering liberal prizes for proficiency in all kinds of bodily exercise, such as running, leaping, lifting, spear-throwing and wrestling. At a distance of sixty yards their spearmen could hit a target with unflinching certainty. Their runners competed with horses and greyhounds. It is on record that the champion leaper of the Spartan Helotes once cleared fifty-two feet, and a native of Crotona, in southern Italy, even fifty-five feet.

But the most wonderful results of life-long training are seen in the achievements of the Oriental acrobats, who come from countries where over-population obliges such people to work miracles in order to excel their numerous competitors. During the last Vienna exhibition a troop of Japanese jugglers attracted far more attention than the display of their native art-works and manufactures. They had amazingly clever rope dancers and tumblers, some boys some men.

But their best performers were all gray-headed old men. It had taken them a lifetime of practice to master the difficulties of their special tricks. One of them began his performance by putting the palm of his left hand upon a box, and after stretching out his legs horizontally in one direction, and his head and right arm in the other, he raised himself in such a way that his whole weight was supported on the edge of his left hand.

Without ever touching the ground with any other part of his body, he then began to turn on his wrist, slowly at first, then more and more quickly, till his outstretched feet whirled around like the spokes of a horizontal fly-wheel. The rapidity of his motions was wonderful enough, but how he contrived to keep his balance would have puzzled the best acrobats of our gymnastic associations. The next performer had an attendance who held a tin box by a leather strap, and swung it slowly to and fro like the pendulum of a large clock. In the center of the box was a hole about an inch and a half, but certainly not more than two inches in diameter. The juggler stepped back to a distance of about twenty yards, and began to throw little copper balls at the tin box. The first ball was caught by the attendant, who thereupon raised the box a couple of inches; but continued to swing it to and fro. The second, third and all following balls went straight through the narrow aperture without ever touching the rim of the hole. He threw about forty of them, and then retired, amidst the prolonged applause of the audience, for this time everybody could appreciate the marvellous dexterity of the trick.

But the champion of the band came last. His whole outfit consisted of a straight wooden pole, about ten feet long, and hardly two inches in diameter. It was cut off square at each end, and did not seem to be very heavy. This pole the juggler placed upright on the level surface of a wooden board, tried the board with his feet to see that it did not shake, and then proceeded to climb the pole.

He clambered up and down some ten or twelve times in quick succession. He then ascended to the very top, seized it with his hands, let go his feet, and went spinning around in a circle, till it made one giddy to look at him.

By a sudden contraction of his body, he then joined his feet at the top of the pole, let go his hands, and slowly raised himself till he stood bolt-upright like a statue on a pillar. All this while the pillar had no other support but a flat wooden board, and was balanced entirely by the management of the statue.

One of the spectators, an expert American gymnast, got permission to go on the stage and examine that pole. He looked at the lower end, took up the board, looked at the floor below, and then examined the board itself. It was nothing but a flat piece of pine wood.

"Well, how do you explain it?" I asked when he came back.

"I can't believe it withcraft," he uttered, "I don't know at all what is going about it."

The great change for the better in the comforts, enjoyments and material wealth of the nation which has taken place in the past twenty-five years is acknowledged as a reason for universal congratulation among all who have eyes to appreciate the improved condition of the people. The enterprise of the American merchant has reached out to every commercial port in the known world in disposition of the ever increasing out-turn of agricultural and manufactured products of the country. The people are better housed, better clothed and better fed than ever before. The distribution of wealth is wider and greater. There are more homes, more farms and more families, and there is no present prospect of an influence to interfere with the general prosperity. Occasional sectional disaster may come, but the march of the nation is forward. The future holds no uncertain seasons, but everywhere are manifest indications of great prosperity. Agriculture, manufactures and commerce have steadily increased with the progress of years, and the development of an intercourse with the people of newly discovered commercial countries will consume a few years of the immediate future, when the energies of the nation's producers will be put to the test, and the croakings of the drones will be drowned in the hum of industry which shall signalize our advance with the progress of the world.

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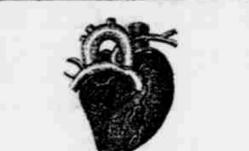
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