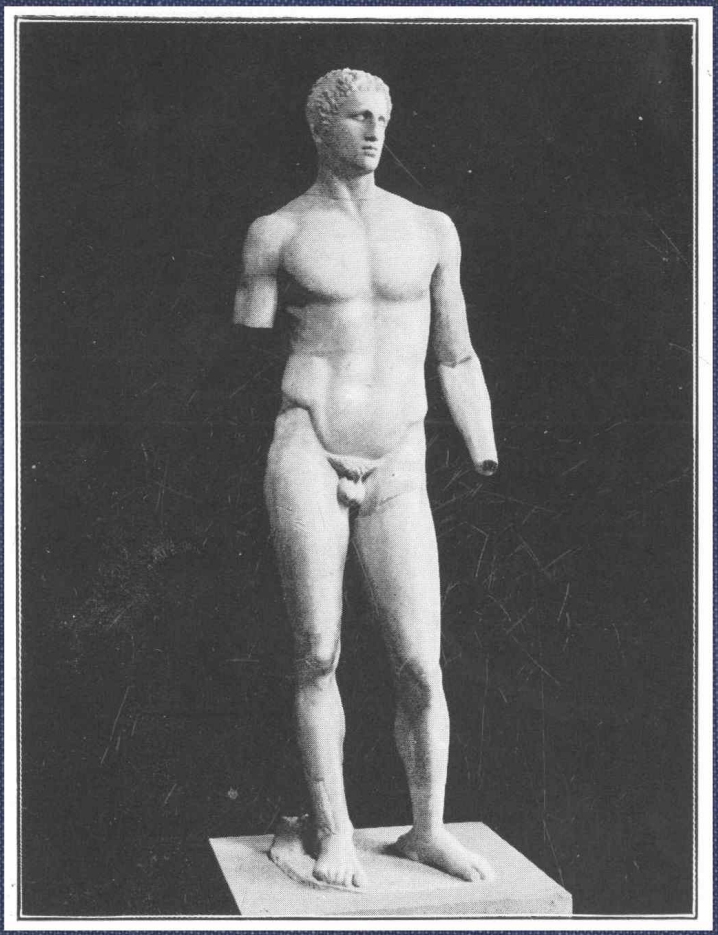
# Greek Athletics

*by* **F. A. Wright**



*Title:* Greek Athletics

*Date of first publication:* 1925

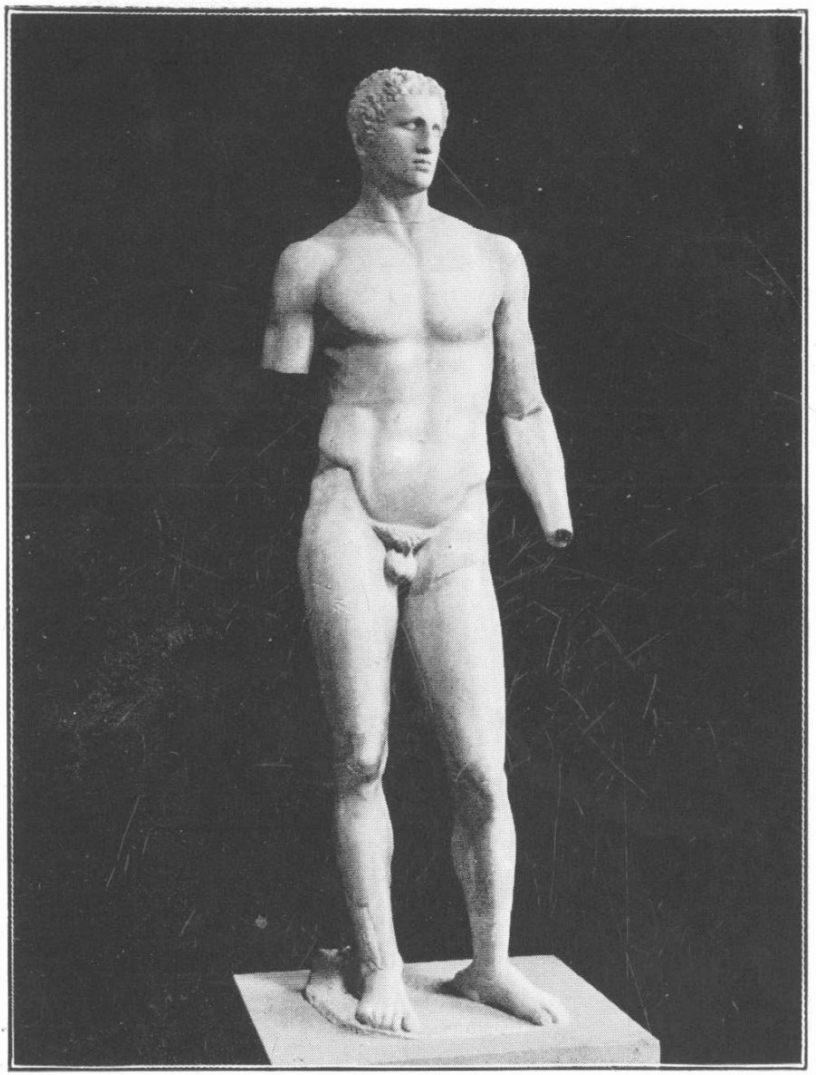
*Author:* Frederick Adam Wright (1869-1946)

*Date first posted:* Oct. 22, 2020

*Date last updated:* Oct. 22, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20201050

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Chuck Greif & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net



THE AGIAS OF LYSIPPUS (Delphi)

# Greek Athletics

***by* F. A. Wright**

**London**
**Jonathan Cape Ltd**

FIRST PUBLISHED IN MCMXXV
MADE & PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY BUTLER & TANNER LTD
FROME AND
LONDON

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

# PREFACE

IN a previous volume[A] an attempt was made to set out the principles followed by the Greeks in the three sister arts of acting, music, and painting; and to show how in some respects we have failed to improve upon their practice. It is perhaps doubtful whether the mass of our countrymen will ever take a very deep interest in the laws that govern the right use of colour, sound, and gesture; and even if our inferiority in art were proved, it is probable that the position would be regarded with equanimity.

But as regards athletics the case is different; and it is with some hesitation that in this book, after giving a brief account of Greek gymnastics and physical training, I have ventured to raise the question whether Greek systems of bodily culture were not in some ways superior to ours, and whether on the whole the Athenians of the fifth century B.C. were not a finer and a healthier people than are the Englishmen of to-day.

Before the year 1914 such doubts might never have presented themselves. But one of the many unpleasant truths that the War revealed was that the physical condition of our average middle-aged citizen was very far from being what it should be. Indeed, anyone whose business it was then to examine recruits, if he was at all familiar with the work of Greek sculptors, must often have noticed with positive pain the difference that was apparent between the figure of the typical Greek athlete and the figure of the typical English town-dweller.

The reasons for this poverty of physique were manifold—city life, alcohol, nicotine, sedentary occupations, unsuitable food among the most frequent—but there was one that

overshadowed all the rest, a complete ignorance of the structure and functions of the human body. Accompanying this ignorance nearly always came an utter lack of acquaintance with the elementary principles of gymnastics. There were very few men who did not take a passionate interest in the progress of some football team, and there were equally few who had ever given any intelligent thought to their own physical condition.

Games have certainly been of immense value to modern England, and we have succeeded in making of them a real instrument of moral education. On the cricket and the football field our national qualities of individual initiative and cheerful obedience have been developed, the virtues of courage, endurance, and self-control fostered. But the average man to-day is inclined to take games too seriously, and to the competitive element in them he attaches an altogether absurd importance. In cricket, football, or tennis it really makes little difference which side wins, as long as all the participants get their due share of exercise. The true object of a game is not to secure runs or points or goals, but rather to develop and increase the strength of every part of our body.

On the other hand, gymnastics, in their widest sense, are not taken seriously enough. It is the duty, and it should be the pleasure, of every man and woman amongst us to make themselves as healthy and as beautiful as Nature meant them to be. For this purpose the playing—not of course the mere watching—of games has a definite value, but it does not take the place of a properly devised system of gymnastic exercises. Knowledge of the right methods is here of the first importance, and I therefore dedicate this book to our real experts in physical science, the gymnastic instructors of His Majesty's Army.

# 1

## Athletics and Athletic Festivals

ATHLETICS, whether ancient or modern, is a wide term covering a large field of bodily activities, while the boundaries between sport and athletics are often hard to fix. But we may safely distinguish four main branches of physical energy.

1. Athletics proper, where the essential feature is the competition with its almost invariable concomitant the prize, —athlon; the two things going so closely together that, as in the ‘Grand Prix,’ the same word is used for race and reward.

2. Gymnastics, the training of the body by a system of exercises in which the naked limbs are allowed free play. Competition is here often replaced by united action, and there is a close connexion with the sister arts of music and medicine.

3. Drill, the particular form of bodily training which is necessary to fit a man for the duties of a soldier. It includes all the varieties of military exercise and practice with arms, and differs from athletics and gymnastics in that its formal purpose is purely utilitarian.

4. Games of various kinds, played either singly or in company, and usually requiring some sort of implement, a ball, a stick, or a hoop. The elements of competition and united effort are usually present, but a prize is not essential.

The history of organized athletics in Greece is a very long one, and extends for some twelve hundred years. The Olympic register of winners in the foot-race begins 776 B.C., this year being taken as the first Olympiad when, in the third

century B.C., the Olympic register came into use as the recognized method of reckoning dates. From 776 B.C. to A.D. 217 the list, as drawn up by Julius Africanus, has been preserved intact for us by Eusebius. In the third century of our era the Roman Empire, attacked by Goths, was forced to call in the Greeks to fight once more for their native land, and even when the invading hordes were repulsed the effects of their ravages were still felt. The Olympic games, as a permanent institution, apparently ceased after the Gothic invasion, and the policy of Constantine hastened the process of decay. Christianity, now the official religion, looked with little favour on the ancient festivals, and finally Theodosius I, probably on the advice of St. Ambrose, in A.D. 393 abolished the games by imperial edict, the last Olympic victor known to history being a certain Armenian knight, a man of gigantic strength, named Varaztad.

There is hardly any other Greek institution which had so long a career. Through the centuries, from the age of the tyrants to the great era of the free States; from the rise of Macedonia to supremacy, through the troubled years of the Achæan and Ætolian Leagues; while Greece lay crushed under the rule of the Roman Senate and while it had its brief revival of prosperity under the Roman Empire; in spite of every vicissitude of fortune, year by year the Olympic games took place. There is something impressive in this continuity which links together periods otherwise so different, and historians have laid full stress on the services that Olympia rendered in emphasizing the sense of national unity and goodwill. But exaggeration is very possible here, and no one can say that these athletic festivals created or maintained an atmosphere of peace among the constantly warring Greek States, any more than that their recent revival as an

international event has succeeded in bringing harmony to our modern empires. The chief benefit of all these gatherings is the stimulus they afford to local and national patriotism; but whether the dangers of such competitions are not greater than the advantages is a question still undecided, and it may be useful to remember that in Greece, despite the general popularity of athletics, the two leading States, Athens and Sparta, during the greatest period of their history held somewhat aloof. The reasons that actuated them were different: for Athens, athletics were too specialized; for Sparta, they were not specialized enough. But the fact remains that the two cities which give to us most of what is valuable in Greek culture took but little interest in this particular organization.

The Athenian, in his indifference, was influenced probably by various currents of thought. There was the old Ionian vein of softness, which made the arduous straining of the athlete distasteful and led to the formation of the adjective *athlios*, 'distressful,' from the noun *athlon*; the spirit that regarded work as a 'plaguy nuisance,' the carrying of burdens as 'vulgar,' and any form of manual labour as beneath the dignity of a gentleman. There was also the finer feeling that the excessive pursuit of athletics tended to coarsen rather than to refine the human body by developing particular muscles at the expense of general grace, and thus destroying that *eutrapelia*, the ready nimbleness of mind and limb, which the Athenian valued most. Lastly, there was the just belief that athletics in themselves are but a means to an end, the health of the body, and that although that end is a desirable one, a healthy mind is even more important. This is the point of view that Xenophanes of Colophon (576-480 B.C.) represents when he says:

‘It is not right to prefer strength to the blessings of wisdom: our wisdom is better than the strength of men and horses. It is not speed of foot that gives a city good government; nor does it bring fatness into the dark places of a land.’

In the next century Euripides repeats the complaint, and in more bitter language:

‘Of all the countless evils in Greece, none is worse than the athlete tribe. Slaves of their belly, they know neither how to make money nor to bear poverty. In early manhood they seem fine fellows and strut about, the darlings of the town; but when old age comes, like worn-out cloaks they are flung aside.’

And for all this mischief the athletic gatherings, with their crowds of useless spectators, are chiefly responsible. The principle of valuation is wrong, for

‘Who by skill in wrestling, or by lifting the diskos, or by a shrewd blow on the jaw ever helped his native land, even though he won the prize? Will men fight the foe holding a diskos in both hands, or will they get home with one fist through the foemen’s shield? No one thinks of such folly when he is standing near cold steel.’

These last lines, though written by an Athenian poet, represent the Spartan reasons for withdrawal from Olympia. In the early days of the festival—from 720 to 576 B.C.—the number of Spartan victors in the list is very large, and shows, indeed, an undisputed Spartan supremacy. After 576 they cease almost entirely, and the disappearance of Sparta coincides with the specialization of athletics which then began. At Delphi, Corinth, and Nemea small local games were changed into national festivals which hoped to rival Olympia. Besides the four great festivals, there were

countless smaller competitions established—at Athens, for example, at Argos and at Pellene, and the first result was a distinct rise in the standard of athletic performances, so that definite training became necessary to win success. Secondly, people began to attend the meetings purely as spectators, and additional competitions—in music, poetry, even in beauty—were introduced to please an idle audience, with the result that at last these gatherings presented almost as many attractions as a mediæval fair. It was against this combination of international merrymaking and individual prize-winning that the Spartan system was a protest. 'Sparta for the Spartans' was the ruling principle of the Spartan State, and aliens who tried to establish themselves at Lacedæmon were removed by somewhat drastic methods. In a State where all personal initiative was discouraged, the international athlete, honoured by poets and sculptors for his mere personal prowess, could have no place. Moreover, athletics, which the Spartans were prepared to support as a useful recreation tending to produce that which alone in their judgment was of importance to a State, good soldiers, had in the sixth century before Christ become an end in themselves, and the gulf between the specialized athlete and the soldier very quickly began to widen. The athlete soon became a professional in fact if not in name, with little time for anything else but training. A class of professional instructors came into existence, and Sparta, after first excluding the trainers, finally forbade her citizens to take part in such competitions. She saw that the spirit of the professional athlete was at enmity with the military ardour which she made it her business to create, and so after about the middle of the sixth century she practically withdrew from active participation in the Olympic festival.

The withdrawal of Sparta, however, had also its political reasons, and was only part of her general disapproval of the Tyrants. While she, the Dorian ox, represented the principle of individual isolation, the tyrannis, the Ionian horse, was the champion of expansion and national unity. Athletic festivals were to the tyrants one of several means whereby the commercial and social intercourse of all the Greek States, on the mainland or across the seas, might be encouraged, and the period of the tyrants' prosperity was also the period when most of the Panhellenic Games were instituted. Periander, tyrant of Corinth, founded the Isthmia about 586 B.C.: Cleisthenes, tyrant of Sicyon, about the same time helped the Amphictyons to establish the Pythia: the Nemea, which began in 573, almost certainly owed their importance to one of the tyrants of Argos who succeeded Phidon. As for Phidon himself, it is probable that he should be regarded as the second founder of the Olympic Games, and that his was the influence which changed a local festival into a national gathering where East and West could meet. We know that the chief object of his policy was to promote free intercourse with South Italy and Sicily, and the geographical position of Elis, looking across the western sea, was probably an important factor in his plans.

But however this may be, and we know too little of Phidon to be dogmatic, it is a certain fact that the Olympic games were reorganized by the managers at Elis some time in the early part of the sixth century B.C. The festival, which had been for one day only, was now enlarged and the chief competitions became races for chariots and single horses, these taking the place of importance given formerly to the simple running and wrestling matches of which alone the Spartans approved. Chariot races, except in so far as they

improve the breed of horses, have no military value, and they also require a considerable expenditure of money, time and trouble, things of which Sparta thought better use might be made; but they exactly suited the merchant princes of the West, and after 550 B.C. we find the Greeks of Italy and Sicily playing always a very prominent part at Olympia. Of the ten treasure-houses there that have been identified five belonged to them, and possessing those material resources which the home-staying Greeks so painfully lacked they were able both very frequently to win the chariot race and also to commission Pindar to celebrate their victories. Among other places that were especially successful in the athletic contests we find the great African colony of Cyrene, the island of Rhodes, whence came the famous athlete Dorieus, and, curiously enough, the little State of Ægina for whose citizens Pindar wrote no fewer than eleven of the forty-four epinikian odes we now possess. Athens was occasionally represented, Sparta never.

At the beginning of the fifth century the four great games were all firmly established. The Olympic took place in the first year of each Olympiad; the Nemean and the Isthmian came in the second year, the Pythian in the third, and the Nemean and the Isthmian again in the fourth. Every year therefore the Greek athlete had one competition open to him and in alternate years two. Of the four, the Nemean games were the most purely athletic, as befitted a festival where the old Peloponnesian traditions still maintained some of their vitality. The Pythians gave rather more importance to literary and musical competitions than did the others; one of the chief events was a recital of the ‘Hymn to Apollo’ and there were also contests in flute playing. The Isthmians, which were the most frequented by the Athenians, catered especially for

sightseers and there was a large number of side shows of every kind. But the Olympic festival, the first of the four to be established, always maintained its premier place, having furthermore the distinct advantage of a site especially designed and reserved for this one great occasion. The games were to the ruling families of Elis what the oracle was to the ruling families of Delphi, a source of honour, profit and wealth, and every effort was made to glorify and embellish the precinct of Olympian Zeus.

Of that precinct, the Altis, we have a very full description by the old Greek traveller Pausanias, who visited it in the second century of our era. Following his indications German archæologists, assisted by their Government, excavated the greater part of the site with the most careful thoroughness between the years 1875-1881, and discovered there, *inter alia*, nearly all the exterior temple sculptures, the Hermes of Praxiteles, and the Victory of Pæonius, although they failed to find any trace of the greatest treasure of all, the sitting figure of Zeus by Pheidias.

The Altis is a quadrilateral space, where goats now feed, about 750 feet long by 570 feet broad, lying between the river Alpheus on the south and a low but steep hill, thickly wooded with pine trees, the ancient Mount of Cronos, which rises to the north. Immediately to the west, the river Cladeus flows between high sandy banks into the Alpheus, which now in the summer is only a trickle of muddy water running over a broad gravelly bed, but in old times was a navigable stream.

In the precinct itself stood the Temple of Zeus, built by the architect Libon, about 460 B.C., to house the statue of the god; the Temple of Hera, one of the oldest of Greek shrines, dating back perhaps to the tenth century B.C.; the Treasuries of the various states; and the Council House. The stadion, some 230

by 32 yards, where the athletic contests took place, was just outside the precinct at the north-east corner, the spectators being accommodated on raised embankments of earth which may have contained as many as forty-five thousand people standing.

The festival took place at the time of one of the summer full moons, and as soon as the sacred truce was proclaimed, sightseers began to flock in by sea and land from all parts of the Greek world. The first day of the five, to which the games in 472 B.C. were extended, was spent in sacrifices and general festivity, while the competitors and the judges, the Hellanodicæ, took the oath of fair dealing. On the second morning at daybreak the judges, in purple robes, were conducted to the special seats reserved for them, the herald proclaimed the names of competitors, and the day was spent in chariot and horse races and in the pentathlon competition for men; the crown of wild olive, which was the only prize, being presented by the judges to the victors at the conclusion of each event. The boys' contests came on the third day; the men's foot-races, wrestling, boxing and pankration on the fourth; and the last event of all was the race for men in armour. On the fifth day there were sacrifices again, and in the evening a ceremonial banquet at which the victors were entertained. This was the beginning of that athletic glorification to which Sparta so strongly objected, and their homecoming was usually made the occasion of the most elaborate celebrations. Exainetos of Agrigentum, for example, who won the foot-race in 416 B.C., was brought into the city in a chariot to which his fellow townsmen harnessed themselves and was escorted by three hundred cars drawn by white horses. In the western states especially they sometimes received almost divine worship: their exploits were recorded

on stone monuments, and songs composed in their honour were sung by bands of youths and maidens, while for the rest of their lives they had the privilege of a front seat at all public festivals, and often also the right of taking their meals free in the town hall.

All this was part of the exaggerated pomp with which the festival itself in all its details was conducted; its processions, feastings, proclamations, and sacrifices, where each state vied with the others in making a show of gold and silver plate and displaying all the wealth they possessed. Ostentation was not a common fault in Greece, but it had full scope at Olympia. The two worst defects of the Greek character were also prominent there—a contempt for women which forbade any female even to be present, and an exaggerated idea of racial purity which shut out all competitors except those of undisputed Greek descent. But the spectacle must have been a splendid one, and it undoubtedly inspired some of the finest works of Greek art. The erection of a statue in the Altis was one of the honours given to victorious athletes to glorify their triumph, and if the victor was unable himself to meet the expense of setting up such a monument, the cost was often borne for him by his native city. 'In the courts of Olympia,' as Walter Pater says, 'a whole population in marble and bronze gathered quickly,—a world of portraits out of which, as the purged and perfected essence, the ideal soul, of them, emerged the *Diadumenus* and the *Discobolus*.' Pausanias gives us a list of some of the great sculptors whose works were still standing there in his time—Hagelaidas, Pythagoras, Kalamis, Myron, Polycleitus, Lysippus, and possibly Pheidias—and these nude figures established a canon of bodily perfection which had no little influence in actual life.

Poets also vied with sculptors in glorifying the Olympic victor. Simonides of Keos and Bacchylides sang his praise, and in the Epinikian Odes of Pindar we have the greatest of all memorials to the athletic spirit—'Verse that is all of gold and wine and flowers, and is itself avowedly a flower, or "liquid nectar," or "the sweet fruit of his soul, to men that are winners in the games." "As when from a wealthy hand one lifting a cup, made glad within with the dew of the vine, maketh gift to a youth": the keynote of Pindar's verse is there.' With a choral music unsurpassed in any language, with wealth of legend and myth, with accumulation of epithet and metaphor, Pindar bears his witness to the pride of physical perfection. And with all the grandeur of his odes it is significant that he lacks conspicuously both the Spartan virtue of simplicity and the Athenian desire for economy of effort.

'His soul rejoiced in splendour—splendour of stately palace halls where the columns were of marble and the entablature of wrought gold; splendour of temples of the gods, where the sculptor's waxing art had brought the very deities to dwell with man; splendour of the white-pillared cities that glittered across the Ægean and Sicilian seas; splendour of the holy Panhellenic games, of whirlwind chariots and the fiery grace of thoroughbreds, of the naked shapely limbs of the athlete, man and boy.'[B]

Splendour was the ideal alike of the Achæan chieftain, the Corinthian tyrant, and the Olympic judge. But the stern lesson of the Persian Wars led the Greek people in the fifth century to higher things, and the true spirit of athletics passed from the magnificent precinct of Olympian Zeus to the simple exercising grounds which every town possessed. Olympia and its prizes fell into the hands of professionals; but gymnastics remained an essential part of national education.

# 2

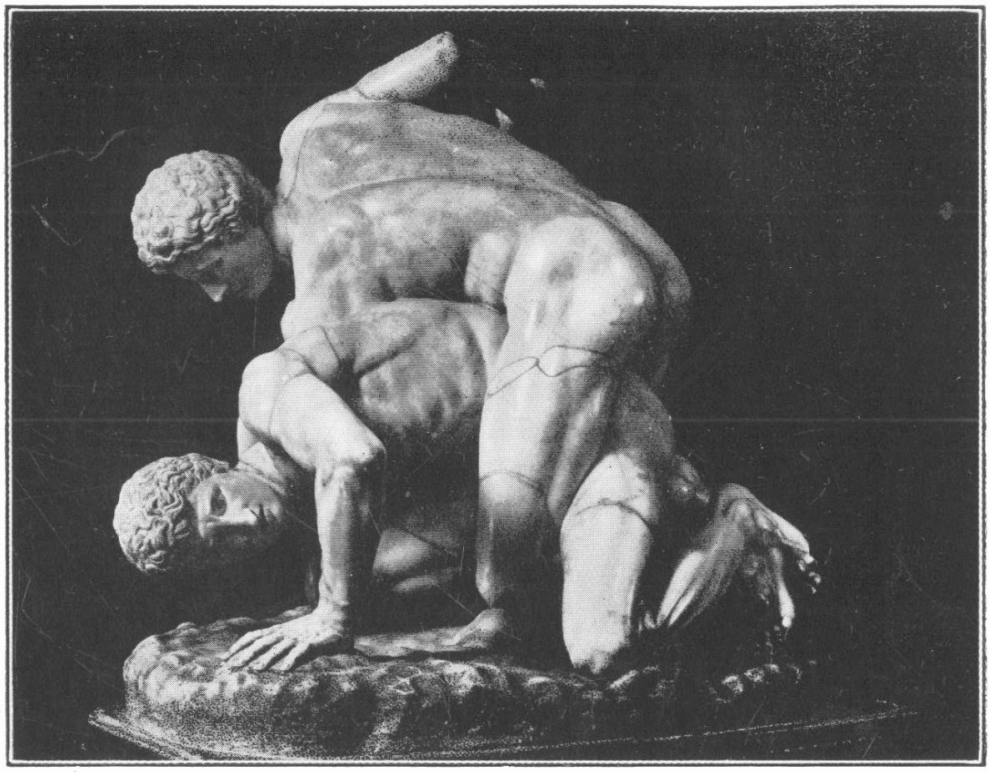
## Gymnastics and Military Training

THE various athletic exercises, which are here for convenience classed together under the word 'gymnastics,' fall into three main classes, depending respectively on strength of body, of leg, and of arm. To the first class belong boxing and wrestling, to the second running and jumping, to the third throwing the diskos and the javelin. The last five of these six sports—boxing being excluded—formed the Pentathlon, a combined competition of five events arranged to suit the all-round military athlete, for whom Greek athletic training at its best was especially designed. In such a competition the foot-race probably came first and the wrestling last; the three middle events—the field events, as we should call them, jumping, throwing the javelin, and hurling the diskos—being those that were particularly identified with the five-sport system which aimed at producing, not a specialized athlete, but a man who combined strength with agility and skill. Victory in the Pentathlon depended, not on success in all events, but on a system of marks; victory in three of the competitions was sufficient in itself, but if no competitor won three times, and two competitors tied with two victories each, it is highly probable that account was taken of second and third places.

Of the separate exercises, wrestling perhaps was the favourite. It was the oldest of all sports, and to the Greeks one of the most important. To them it was both a science and an art. Theseus, its inventor, was, according to the myth, taught the rules by Athena herself. Victory alone was not sufficient; the winner must win gracefully and according to the precepts

of the schools. It was from wrestling that the palæstra took its name, and the Greek language is full of metaphors and expressions borrowed from the technical phraseology of the ring. The contests between Heracles and Antæus, and between Atalanta and Peleus, are two of the best known and most frequently depicted episodes of the heroic saga, and wrestling was one of the sports in which women were allowed by some States—by Sparta and Chios, for example—to take part, competing even against men. Instruction was given in the school; there were separate rules for men and boys, and the different movements, grips, and throws were taught on a system of progressive difficulty; textbooks were used, and fragments of such a manual have recently been found on an Egyptian papyrus. There were two principal styles, the upright wrestling, in which the object was to throw one's opponent to the ground, three falls being necessary for victory, and the ground wrestling, in which the struggle was continued even after a fall until one of the combatants yielded. The first style, however, was the only one regarded as strictly legitimate, the second being merely part of the pankration. The attitude of a Greek before coming to grips was very similar to that of modern wrestlers, and is beautifully illustrated in the pair of boy statues from Naples which may be seen in the Embankment gardens. Standing square to one another, they endeavoured to get a hold from the front or the side. The defence was often a grip on the opponent's wrist, which might lead to the offensive if his elbow could also be seized and the throw we call 'the flying mare' be then executed. Of front body-holds, the most effective was gained by catching the waist with both hands and then lifting the opponent off his feet, such a hold as Heracles used against Antæus. Of side-throws the best known

was ‘the heave,’ usually ascribed to Theseus, where one hand was passed round the opponent’s back and the other hand slipped underneath him. Another favourite hold was by the neck—a strong neck was essential for a wrestler—and when this was secured a sudden turn of the body would lead to the throw that we call a ‘cross-buttock.’ In all wrestling tripping played an important part, and there are a very large number of technical terms in Greek for the different trips that are



THE WRESTLERS (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)

employed. Every district in Greece had a style of its own, and these diversities of method helped to keep active an interest in wrestling and to preserve it from the disease of professionalism, so that even when other sports had been

ruined the wrestling ring still remained a useful and a popular institution.

It is this popularity in actual life that accounts for the frequency of descriptions of wrestling matches in Greek literature. Two of them at least are worth quoting; the first from the *Iliad*, Book XXIII, the contest between Ajax and Odysseus at the funeral games of Patroclus:

He said; and straight uprose the giant form
Of Ajax Telamon: with him uprose
Ulysses, skilled in every crafty wile.
Girt with the belt, within the ring they stood,
And each, with stalwart grasp, laid hold on each;
As stand two rafters of a lofty house,
Each propping each, by skilful architect
Designed the tempest's fury to withstand.
Creaked their backbones beneath the tug and strain
Of those strong arms; their sweat poured down like rain;
And bloody weals of livid purple hue
Their sides and shoulders streaked, as sternly they
For victory and the well-wrought tripod strove.
Nor could Ulysses Ajax overthrow,
Nor Ajax bring Ulysses to the ground,
So stubbornly he stood; but when the Greeks
Were weary of the long protracted strife,
Thus to Ulysses mighty Ajax spoke:
'Ulysses sage, Laertes' godlike son,
Or lift thou me, or I will thee uplift:
The issue of our struggle rests with Jove.'
He said, and raised Ulysses from the ground;
Nor he his ancient craft remembered not,
But locked his leg around, and striking sharp
Upon the hollow of the knee, the joint
Gave way; the giant Ajax backwards fell,
Ulysses on his breast; the people saw,
And marvelled. Then in turn Ulysses strove
Ajax to lift; a little way he moved,
But failed to lift him fairly from the ground;
Yet crooked his knee, that both together fell,
And side by side, defiled with dust, they lay.

(Homer: *Iliad*, XXIII, 820-851,
Derby's translation.)

The second description is separated from Homer by some twelve centuries, but it is equally vigorous. In the tenth book of *The Æthiopian History* of Heliodorus, the hero Theagenes, as his last trial before winning his beloved Chariclea, is

matched against a stalwart Æthiopian, and in Underdowne's quaint Elizabethan version the passage thus appears:

'Then hee tooke dust, and cast it upon his armes and shoulders, and stretched foorth his hands, and tooke some footing, and bent his legges a little, and stouped lowe, at a word all partes of his body were ready, so that he stoode, and with great desire awayted for the advantage at the close. The Æthiopian seeing this laughed irefully, and triumphed scornefully upon him: and ranne suddenly upon him, and with his elbowe hit Theagenes in the necke, as sore as if he had stricken him with a leaver, and then drewe backe, and laughed againe at his owne foolish conceite. But Theagenes like a man alway from his cradle brought up in wrastling, and throughly instructed in Mercuries arte, thought it good to geve place at first, and take some triall of his adversaries strength, and not to withstand so rude a violence, but with arte to delude the same. Therefore he stouped lower, and made semblance as though he had beene very sorrowfull, and layde his other side to receive his other blowe. And when the Æthiopian came upon him againe, he made as though hee would have fallen flat upon his face; but as soon as the Æthiopian began to despise him, and was incouraged well, and came unadvisedly the third time, and lyfted up his arme againe to take holde of him, putting his right arme under his left side, by lifting up his hande he overthrew him in a heape, and casting himselfe under his arme pittes gryped his gorbelly with much a doo, and forced him with his heeles to fall on his knees, and then leapt on his backe, and clasping his feete about his privie parts made him stretch out his legges, wherewith he did stay up himselfe, and pulled his armes over his head behinde him, and laide his bellie flatte upon the earth.'

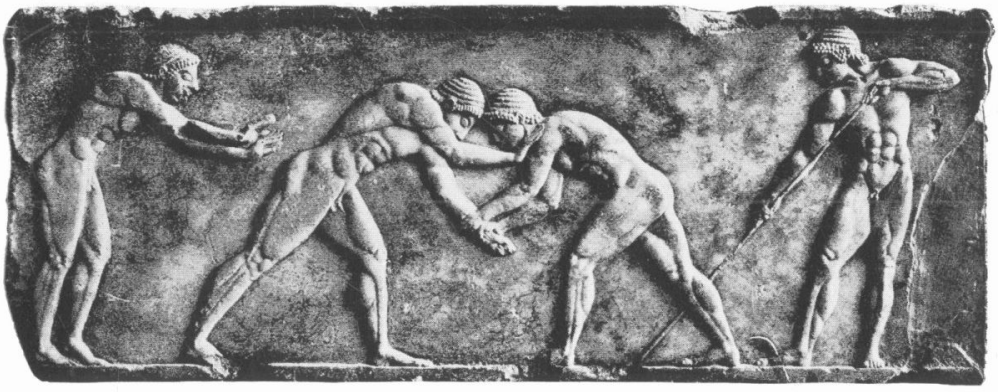
Boxing also, like wrestling, always retained its attractiveness, and in its ancient form offers some varieties from the modern mode. There were three stages in its history, depending largely upon the instruments of fighting used. Down to the beginning of the fourth century B.C. it was customary to wind soft strips of leather—*meilichai*—round the hands and arms, which served, like our light gloves, to protect the knuckles and so increased the power of attack, but did not in themselves add to the severity of the blow. Early in the fourth century the *meilichai* were superseded by gloves—*sphairai*—made of hard pieces of leather with projecting and cutting edges, real weapons of offence, like our knuckle-dusters. From these the Roman *cæstus* was developed, where the glove was weighted with pieces of iron and metal spikes placed in position over the knuckles.

In Greek boxing there was no ring and therefore little close fighting, there were no rounds and therefore the pace was slow, for rushing tactics marked the untrained man; lastly, there was no classification by weight; the heavier the man the greater his chance of success, so that a meat diet for boxers was almost compulsory, and boxing became practically the monopoly of the heavy-weights. As thongs or gloves were always used on the hands, wrestling was impossible, and in later times at least the defence was all-important. It seems fairly well established that body-hitting was not practised, and in the Hellenistic age a fight was usually decided by a knock-out blow on the jaw. But in the best period the Greek boxer used both his hands freely, was active on his feet, and had a considerable variety of attack. The introduction of heavy gloves vitiated the art, and boxers began to rely merely on their weight and defensive powers.

Of all these stages we have plentiful evidence both in art and literature, for boxing and its preliminaries are among the favourite subjects of vase painters, while in poetry, beside the account of the fight between Odysseus and the beggar Irus in the *Odyssey* and between Entellus and Dares in the *Æneid*, we have a really enthusiastic and expert description by Theocritus of the great struggle between Amycus and Polydeuces. The battle is as vividly described as the epic contest in the Dell between Lavengro and the Flaming Tinman, and the poet, by making it a fight between the old school of scientific activity and the new method of stolid strength, ingeniously enlists our sympathies from the first upon the side of skill against brute force.

'Then Amycus came on furiously, making play with both hands; but Pollux smote him on the point of the chin as he charged, maddening him the more, and the giant confused the fighting, laying on with all his might, and going in with head down.... But the son of Zeus stepped now this side, now that, and hit him with both fists in turn, and checked his onslaught, for all his monstrous strength. Like a drunken man he reeled beneath the hero's blows, and spat out the red blood, while all the princes shouted together, as they marked the ugly bruises about his mouth and jaws, and saw his eyes half closed by puffy flesh. Next Pollux began to tease him, feinting on every side, and at last, seeing that he was now quite bewildered, he got in a smashing blow just above the middle of the nose beneath the eyebrows, and laid the bone of his forehead bare. Stretched on his back the giant fell amid the flowers; but he rose again, and the fighting went on fiercely. They mauled each other hard, laying on with the weighted thongs; but the giant was always busy with his fists on the other's chest and outside his neck, while Pollux, the invincible, kept on

smashing his opponent's face with cruel blows.' (Theocritus: *Idyll*, XXII, 87-111.)



A WRESTLING CONTEST (Athens)

Boxing and wrestling were combined in the pankration and allied with many other devices, such as kicking, strangling, twisting, etc.; it was a versatile performance, the joint invention of Heracles and Theseus, and considered both by Pindar and Philostratus as 'the fairest of all contests.' There was an element of danger, but it was no more brutal than is the almost similar method of jujitsu; moreover, strict rules were enforced by umpires who closely watched the combatants. Biting and gouging were strictly forbidden, although frequently attempted, as for example by Alcibiades. 'You bite like a woman,' cried his opponent. 'No,' said the young Athenian, 'like a lion.' Of gouging we have a picture on a cup in the British Museum, where one figure has inserted his finger into his opponent's eye, while the umpire hurries forward with uplifted rod. But nearly every manœuvre of hands, feet, and body was permissible. You might catch your opponent by his foot and throw him backwards; you might seize his heel or ankle, and then, if you could, twist his foot out of its socket; you might kick him violently in the stomach;

you might plant your foot against the other man's waist and throw him over your shoulder; you might even stand on your own head, if that position seemed expedient. All these tricks were used in the standing position, but the issue of the combat was usually decided on the ground. There you might twist arm or hand, break fingers, and strangle. All neck holds were allowed, but the favourite method of strangling was known as the 'ladder grip,' in which you mounted your opponent's back and wound your legs round his stomach and your arms round his neck. Ground wrestling was indeed the distinctive feature of the pankration, and the well-known group in the Uffizi Palace at Florence represents one of the last stages in such a contest.

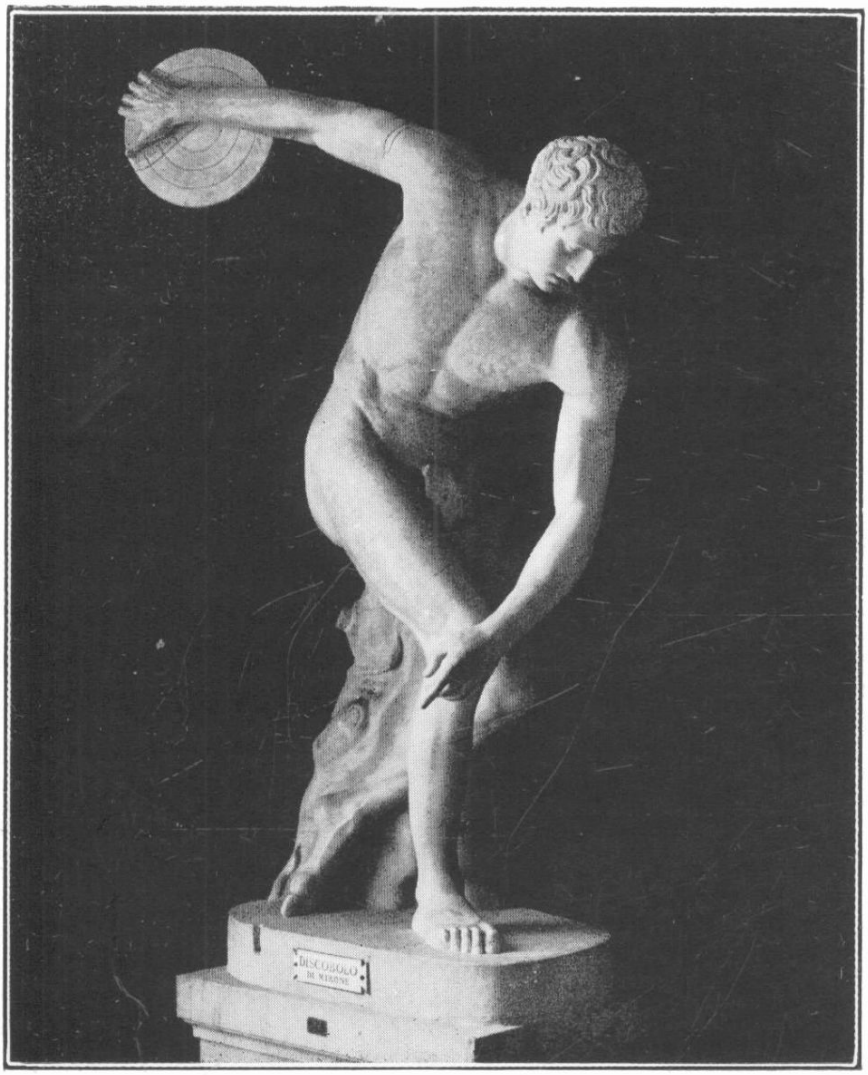
Of running and jumping little need be said, for it is very possible that in neither sport had the Greeks much to teach modern athletes. They were a short-legged people, and although they may have had some advantages in long-distance races they probably would be much inferior to our specialized sprint runners: length of leg must tell, and as in horse-racing 'a good big 'un' is better than 'a good little 'un,' so in a short-distance race length of stride ensures victory. But running was very popular in Greece, and of the eight events in the early Olympic games no less than four were foot-races, three for men—at 200 yards, 400 yards, and three miles—and one for boys. The running course—the stade—was a straight 200 yards; for the diaulos of 400 yards the runners turned at a post and came back to the starting-point. The start was marked by two parallel lines, for a Greek runner began in a somewhat cramped position, with the feet close together. The runners ran naked, their bodies carefully oiled, and for each man there was a post at the starting and at the finishing point to which he ran; there were no dividing strings, nor was there

any tape. Vase paintings of runners are very frequent and plainly show the difference of style between the sprinter and the long-distance man; in the early vases a short, thickset type is common, in the later the thin sprinter is preferred. The most famous names are those of long-distance runners—e.g. Pheidippides and Ladas, whose statue by Myron was even more admired than the same master's Diskobolos,—and in these races the Cretans and Arcadians especially excelled, while the Athenians were better at short distances. Beside races proper there were various running contests; for example, the race in armour, which was introduced at Olympia towards the close of the sixth century and was the final event of the games, the competitors running in full panoply of shield, helmet, and greaves. Other similar events were the Oschophoria, where youths ran in women's clothes, and the Lampadophoria, in which a lighted torch was carried by single runners or by teams. These latter were very popular at Athens, and they illustrate the difference between the ancient and modern view of running. They were not serious and specialized enough for a modern athletic meeting, where everything is a matter of record and a fifth of a second is of vital importance.

Jumping, also, was comparatively simple and restricted in its scope. Of high jumping and pole jumping the Greeks had none, for athletics were always practical, and as there were no hedges in Greece for soldiers to jump over it was unnecessary to practise high jumping in the school. Their long jump differed from ours in that it was always performed with the help of jumping weights—*halteres*—things much like our dumb-bells and used in a very similar fashion. With these implements a class of pupils would practise together to the music of the flute. Both standing and running jumps were

performed from a take-off into a pit—*skamma*—and jumps of over twenty feet were common; the fifty-five feet ascribed to Phayllus is an impossible exaggeration.

But if in running and jumping we have little to learn, it is very different in regard to the ‘field events,’ the throwing of the javelin and the diskos. Here the Greek system of body poise and muscular development gave their athletes an enormous advantage and enabled them easily to perform movements which to our modern bodies seem almost impossible. Both exercises were especially popular at Athens, and were there regarded as part of gymnastics rather than athletics: i.e. they were designed, not as



THE DISKOBOLOS OF MYRON

competitive sports, but as means to improve bodily efficiency.

The javelin was a light stick of wood, usually pointless. Distance throwing was far more usual than throwing at a mark, and for this purpose a thong—*amentum*—was used, fastened near the centre of the javelin shaft. Such a thong practically quadruples the range of throw, but the process

needs long practice and is of course highly artificial in comparison with the natural use of the spear in hunting or in war. Greek athletics had a definite purpose, and we may be sure that it was not the actual throw but the movements necessary for the throw that gave its value to the exercise. These movements, the short, quick steps before the cast and the sharp turn of the body to the right, are illustrated frequently on the vases; the throw itself is seldom represented, and then with very poor results. The diskos was a flat and fairly heavy circle of bronze. It was thrown from behind a line and in a restricted space, a throw of 100 feet being exceptionally good.

II

Such is a brief account of the gymnastic sports and exercises which formed so important a part of a Greek's everyday round. Each one of them had its own special value in developing the strength of some particular part of the body, and taken together they formed a complete and adequate training for what was to an ancient citizen the chief business of life—war.

To us, whose civilization is based on the habits of peace and to whom war means the negation of all the humanities, it may seem illogical to think of fighting as a business. But it was not so in Greece. Warfare was *the* art of life, so far surpassing all the other arts that it was regarded not so much as an accidental state but rather as a vital function, as necessary to existence as breathing, sleeping, eating, and drinking. It would accept what help the other arts could give: athletics made a soldier nimble and supple; medicine kept him in health; the music of the flute was useful in marching; the lyric poet and the dramatist could foster and elevate the

martial spirit; but all these were subservient to the one engrossing purpose. Men fought to live and lived to fight.

For the Greeks it was war, not peace, that seemed the natural state of an organized community. War was part of their civilization: they liked fighting and they fought like gentlemen. The Romans, on the other hand, had no love for fighting in itself and fought without much regard to the rules of the game. And yet the Romans were more successful in the conduct of war, for, as our English general says, Courage, Common Sense and Cunning are the essentials of victory, and if by courage we mean endurance all three were Roman rather than Greek qualities. The Romans were always anxious to win and get finished with it, and for this purpose they were willing to fight on year after year in order that at last they might inflict a crushing defeat on the enemy and then return home to their flesh-pots. The Greeks were satisfied with one indecisive success and never tried to annihilate their opponents; for then the sport would have come to an end. To the Romans, in spite of their many campaigns, war was an unpleasant interruption of their usual way of life; to the Greeks, it was simply an exciting but somewhat dangerous diversion, which was, however, an integral part of the citizen's service to the state.

The Greek attitude may be easily understood if we consider their history. They were never, like the Romans, a pastoral or agricultural community. Their culture was cradled on the battle-field and the more intense the fighting the more intense the literary and artistic effort of the nation. The constant stress of battle wore the race out eventually, but it never hurt their civilization. From the earliest days peace was unknown in the land. The raids of sea pirates, the forced migrations of peoples, tribal wars, trade wars, dynastic wars: such is the

history of Greece in its first, middle, and concluding stages. If war is a curse that can only bring evil, then the Greeks were the most unhappy of nations, for the noise of battle was seldom hushed, and instead of declaring war they thought themselves fortunate if occasionally they could declare peace.

This constant presence of the martial spirit is visible in all that remains to us of their art and literature. Upon the silver ware of Mycenæ we see the Minoans fighting naked, crouching with bow and arrow behind their shields. The statues from Ægina are all of men arrayed for battle with lance, shield, and sword. Even Pallas Athene, the goddess of wisdom and the household arts, is usually represented wearing the panoply of war, and the decorations of her temple are mostly pictures of battle or of preparation for the fray, the combats between Centaurs and Lapithæ and the marshalling of the mounted soldiers for her solemn procession. Painters, like sculptors, found their chief subjects in war, either in the ancient combats of the epic lays or in the actual life of the parade-ground and the guard-room. The Attic vases of the sixth and fifth centuries, the best example we possess of truly popular art, repeat the warrior motif almost to satiety, and they did so because the potter knew that of this subject at least his clients would never be weary.

It is the same in Greek literature, from first to last. In the Homeric poems fighting is the normal business of man. There are fairy-lands, the poet can imagine, where fighting is not the common rule of life, the land of the lotus-eaters, the orchards of the Phæacians, the island realms of Circe and Calypso: but these are all uncanny magic places where decent everyday rules do not hold good. In Homer it is a man’s function to fight, by sea and land, in a chariot or on foot, to use spear and sword, to attack and plunder, or to defend himself from the

enemy's raids. So also with the lyric poets of the next era, from Archilochus downwards; they are men of battle first and men of letters afterwards, squires of the War god, as Archilochus cries:

'My spear is bread, white kneaded bread,
My spear's Ismarian wine,
My spear is food and drink and bed,
With it the world is mine.'

We get the same refrain in Hybrias the Cretan, the verses known to English musicians by Campbell's translation:

'My wealth's a burly spear and brand
And a right good shield of hides untanned
Which on my arm I buckle.
With these I plough, I reap, I sow,
With these I make the sweet vintage flow
And all around me truckle.

But your wights that take no pride to wield
A massy spear and well made shield,
Nor joy to draw the sword,
Oh I bring those heartless hapless drones
Down in a trice on their marrow bones
To call me king and lord.'

'King and lord'—they are the only words that the lyrists have for the soldier, and the elegiac poets repeat the idea in the more serious fashion appropriate to their poetical form. Tyrtæus, for example, the lame schoolmaster lent by Athens to Sparta, in those poems which the Spartans regarded as one of the chief causes of their military success, emphasizes the supreme importance of martial valour:

'I would never remember a man nor hold him of any account because of his speed of foot, or skill in wrestling, his bigness, or his strength, his beauty, or his wealth. He might be more

kingly than Pelops, more eloquent than Adrastus; but all his fame would avail him naught unless he were a man of mettle in fight. This is the supreme virtue, the best sport, the highest prize that a young man can win.'

Tyrtæus, as we see in his verses, regarded the art of poetry as ancillary to the art of war, and the greatest of the Athenian dramatists shared his views. The real gravamen of Æschylus' attack upon Euripides in the *Frogs* is that the latter did not sufficiently exalt the martial spirit among a nation, of whom the old poet says:

> 'Their life was in shafts of ash and of elm, in bright plumes fluttering wide,
> In lance and greaves and corslet and helm and heart of seven bulls hide.'

Prose literature gives us the same evidence as poetry. Thucydides and Xenophon look upon history chiefly as a succession of battles and campaigns. Of the social history of their time they tell us scarcely anything, but they will dilate with the most intense interest on the smallest details of a skirmish. To them, as to most of their contemporaries, war was the one thing that mattered, the great business and the great sport of life, and our historians have only in comparatively recent times escaped from their point of view.

It is probable indeed that many of those Athenians, whom we think of only as men of letters, were viewed by their contemporaries in rather a different light. Æschylus was perhaps better known as one of the heroes of Salamis than as a dramatist. Sophocles was an admiral in charge of the Athenian fleet the year after the performance of the *Antigone*, and the anecdote that his military position was due to his literary skill is probably a literary invention. Thucydides had been appointed to the command of the Athenian troops in Thrace long before he set to work on his history. The stubborn

courage of Socrates was proved upon the field of Delium, and Euripides, that keenest critic of the war spirit, served his forty years in the Athenian army when fighting was at its fiercest. We generally imagine Pericles and Nicias as being civilian ministers, men holding the same sort of position as Pitt and Walpole: in reality through most of their lives they were soldiers on active service, and Cleon, who was almost a professional politician, was ready and willing at a moment's notice to take command of a difficult and dangerous military expedition and, what is more, had enough technical knowledge to bring it to a successful termination.

As every Athenian citizen was a soldier serving under equal conditions, there was no military caste and no military discipline as we know it. The cavalry, once the preserve of the richer classes, was in the fifth century B.C. confined to decorative peace functions. The higher officers of the army were elected by their fellows, walked in the ranks, and had no distinguishing badges.

The Athenian, who supplied his own elaborate equipment and was trained to a particular kind of fighting, refused to become part of a military machine. A general was forced to adapt his tactics to the temper of his men, and the personal element entered very largely into all questions of army organization. The accoutrement of the hoplite was the deciding factor in strategy and tactics, and the character of fifth-century fighting can only be realized by considering first the weapons with which the citizen soldier was armed and the fashion in which he was accustomed to use them.

If a citizen were to play his part properly in the great war game, long and constant bodily training was necessary. At Sparta, the complete type of a militarist state, everything was made subservient to physical fitness, and even at Athens the

claims of the body came before the claims of the mind, so that when Socrates wanted patients for his dialectic he had to go to the gymnasia to find them. And this was reasonable, for only a man in perfect condition could fight under the conditions imposed upon a Greek heavy-armed soldier. The mere weight of a hoplite's accoutrement would astonish a modern infantryman. His defensive armour consisted of four pieces: helmet, cuirass, greaves, and shield; and even the first of these, especially if it were of the Corinthian type, was a considerable burden and involved a severe strain on the neck muscles. It was very heavy, twice as heavy as any of the mediæval helmets that we possess, was made usually of thick iron and completely covered the head and neck. Holes were left for eyes and mouth, the nose was protected by a vertical strip of metal, and a lining of felt or leather was sewn inside to save the skin from abrasion. After the fifth century, it is true, the Corinthian type began to go out of use, and the Attic shape became more common. This was considerably lighter and in appearance resembled a metal cap with extra pieces protecting neck, cheeks and nose, which could be detached at will. It was graceful both in its proportions and its adornment: a crest, and often a triple crest, was usually worn with it, the three plumes being carried in elaborately modelled supports.

The cuirass in its first form consisted of two bronze plates, roughly carved to fit the body and fastened on the sides and shoulders. The bottom edge was turned up to leave the hips free and the lower parts of the body were thus dangerously exposed. Moreover, the rigid metal seriously hampered all movement, and this type was generally superseded by the cuirass proper, a garment worn much in the fashion of a modern corset, but made of leather plated with bronze and buckled down upon the breast by means of shoulder straps.

The bronze plating was mostly in the form of round scales sewn on to the leather with wire and overlapping so as to present three thicknesses of metal.

The greaves were thin sheets of bronze shaped to fit the leg, which they clasped and held by their own elasticity. They were often adorned with embossed work and the fittings were sometimes of tin or ivory. Their length varied; some went only to the knee, others covered part of the thigh and an ankle pad was worn to keep the bottom edge from chafing the foot. They were a protection against minor hurts, scratches, bruises, etc., rather than a defence against spear thrusts, but their general adoption is synchronous with the disappearance of the oblong covering shield in favour of the smaller oval, carried on the left arm.

The Homeric shield, 'great as a tower,' and large enough to cover a man from head to foot, had in the fifth century gone completely out of use. In art we have no representation that corresponds to the descriptions in the *Iliad*, and the heroes whose combats are pictured on the Attic vases are armed either with a round shield which protects their body only, or else with the oval shield about three feet long which after 500 B.C. had become the normal type in Greece. These shields bore usually the blazon of their owner and often served to identify his body: man and shield were inseparable and the fighter who threw his shield away revealed himself as destitute of knightly honour. The character of the blazonry varied as much as our heraldic designs. Sometimes it was decorative and depended on individual caprice; Capaneus, in Æschylus' play, carries as his device a naked man with a torch; beneath, the words 'I will burn your city'; Alcibiades had merely a little Cupid with a toy thunderbolt. In other cases it was the city or a god who supplied the design: for

example, the Mantinean hoplites had on their shields a trident, the symbol of their state god, Poseidon; the Thebans, a sphinx in memory of Œdipus; while others were merely marked with an initial letter, the Argives with an A., the Sikyonians with the Doric San. These devices were on the outer surface: the inside of the shield was supplied with a leather or metal strap across its middle through which the left arm was passed, and one or two grips of cord or leather at the side and end to give a firm hold; for this shield was a heavy implement, very different from the light buckler, with which the cavalry and the skirmishers were armed, and it required strong and well-trained muscles to wield it effectively in the stress of battle.

The race in armour, therefore, often called simply ‘The Shield,’ was not only one of the most popular of gymnastic contests, but also had a very practical value; although as a concession to human weakness the runners were usually allowed to divest themselves of cuirass and greaves. The picturesqueness of the race appealed especially to the vase-painters, and we have many pictures of it, the best perhaps being those on a red figured cup in the Museum at Berlin. On one side is a group of three runners, the right-hand one bending ready to start, the left-hand one turning the half-way post, and the central one hastening back on the home stretch. On the other side are three runners one behind the other, while in the interior of the vase is a single figure looking back, in rather unsportsmanlike fashion, as he runs.

So far for a hoplite’s body armour; but he had also to carry his weapons of offence, his sword and his spear. The first was of many different shapes and has many different names in Greek, but all its varieties belong to three main types.

In the first, dating from the earliest age, the blades are short and heavy, made in one piece with the hilt. The guard is

usually straight, the pommel a round knob, the space between being filled with bone or ivory to form a grip. This pattern, really a survival from the Bronze Age, was transferred to the iron sword and is occasionally found even in the classical period.

But the ordinary Greek sword of the fifth century is of quite a different shape. The hilt is round and the long thin blade swells from the hilt towards the point, showing that it was meant for cutting rather than thrusting. Flat scabbards, often highly ornamented with the precious metals, were used and occasionally the spear would be discarded for single combat and two swords employed, one in the hand, the other hanging ready in its sheath, as we see it in the well-known vase painting of the combat between Achilles and Memnon. This was the usual infantry sword, but there was another cutlass shape, the 'machaira,' which was especially suited to the cavalry soldier. Here the blade curved and the whole weapon was heavier, with knife-like cutting edges. The hilt was usually bent—often in the shape of a bird's head—and gave a secure grip, so that it was possible to deal heavy blows from above.

The spear, however, rather than the sword, remained always the chief item in a Greek soldier's equipment, for the Mediterranean peoples, unlike the northerners, have always preferred the thrust to the cut. In Greek poetry the word for spear is used indifferently for any weapon and includes sword, while on the drill-ground the commands—'To the spear,' 'To the shield'—corresponded to our 'Right' and 'Left Turn.' In shape there seems to have been but little variation. The iron head was sometimes formed like a spike, with three or four blades tapering to a point, but more commonly it was of the flat dagger type, with a raised central rib and two

cutting edges. The shaft, usually of stout ashen wood, was about six feet long and the weapon was chiefly used for thrusting at close quarters. Occasionally it was thrown from a distance, but for this purpose the light cavalry lance of cornel wood was more suitable. The spear, used like a pike, was too heavy for any but close fighting, and there was a constant tendency to increase its length and weight until the Macedonian sarissa reached an average of twelve feet and required both hands for its effective use.

Such was the accoutrement of the Greek citizen soldier, and the character of his arms fixed the character of his fighting. It was not stupidity and lack of judgment that led the Greeks to fight in the way that Mardonius the Persian thought so foolish, but rather the fact that a Greek fighting man was almost useless on rough ground. 'These Greeks,' the old general told his young master, 'when they have declared war upon one another choose out the best and most level piece of ground they can find, and there go down and fight so that the winners get off with the maximum of loss: as to the beaten side I need not say anything; they are completely wiped out. Speaking all the same language they ought to settle their differences by any method rather than battle. But if in spite of everything war becomes inevitable, then each side ought to discover its strongest points and try to take advantage of them.' The passage is interesting, for it shows that total inability to comprehend the psychology of any nation but one's own, which is one of the most pathetic things in history. Mardonius was among the wisest of the Persians, but he could not understand that to the Greeks war was not merely a business, but also the highest form of sport, and that it may be carried on under rules of honourable conduct which rob it of most of its worst features. In the great age, from causes partly

physical, partly moral, a Greek battle was fought on a system as formal and well defined as the precepts of mediæval chivalry. The herald was an important figure; due proclamation had to be made to the enemy; there was a definite acknowledgment of defeat; and an elaborate ceremonial of triumph and trophy. The battle once over, no bad blood was left: it was a fair fight with equal weapons on the plain, and no attempt was made to annihilate the enemy or to annex his territory. The losses in killed and wounded were by no means as heavy as Mardonius believed, for these were not big battalions directed by invisible generals, but citizen soldiers who were sensible enough to know when they were beaten. The procedure was fixed. The army marched out from the city at dawn until it found itself face to face with the enemy on the traditional battle ground, one of those alluvial plains, comparatively rare in Greece, upon which the city depended for its supply of corn, the prize of victory being indeed the ground on which the fighting took place. Then the generals on either side would address their men with some final words of exhortation (there was a special style of rhetoric held appropriate for such occasions) and the two armies would advance to the attack.

With waving plumes and glittering spears, the sun striking upon the gold ornaments of breastplate and sword-belt, the hoplites pushed forward, slowly at first but quickening their step as they approached the enemy, and at last the two lines, moving now at the double, would meet with a crash in the shock of battle. Then came the moment for which the Greek's whole life was one long preparation: swaying, struggling, heaving, with every muscle tense and every limb engaged, the opposing masses strove to hurl one another back. All the tricks of the wrestling school and the boxing match were

designed for use in this hour, and even courage was of little avail unless it was supported by that perfection of physical fitness which the ancient Greeks alone of all nations attained. Success in an ancient battle depended upon the quality of the men engaged, and the men derived little aid from external sources: cavalry, engineers and artillery played no part. The issue was decided by the final shock of two bodies of heavy armed infantry relying on solidity and weight, and momentum in the attack was all important, for the ranks once broken could seldom be reformed. Long training in the drill ground must have been necessary for the orderly advance of formations so dense as these (the average depth of men in the fifth century seems to have been about eight, but at Delium in 421 the Bœtians massed their men in files of twenty-five), and however good the marching there was a constant tendency for the front line to slant as each man edged under his right hand neighbour's shield. A Greek hoplite like a modern Rugby forward depended upon his formation, and without a comrade on either side of him, and ranks of men behind or in front, he felt himself lost. His formation broken, the natural impulse was to retire, and a withdrawal to the city walls was the usual result of defeat. Once behind his ramparts the citizen soldier was safe, for in the fifth century sieges were costly, tedious, and usually indecisive. Open fighting was the cardinal rule: cunning surprises and unforeseen attacks were as difficult for an Athenian hoplite as they were for an English knight. Both, when encased in their armour, were conspicuous figures incapable of any very nimble movements, and needing an attendant squire to take charge of their war panoply. With both physical conditions led to a moral code of 'noblesse oblige,' and for a time war became almost a gentlemanly diversion. In neither case it is true did these conditions last

long: the moral degeneration caused by the Peloponnesian War destroyed the one, and the physical changes brought about by the invention of gunpowder put an end to the other.

Ancient as distinguished from modern warfare really ends with the fifth century B.C., for the next age brought a revolution to Greece. War ceased to be an art and became a science. The end of the Peloponnesian War coincided with the spread of the Sophistic spirit; warfare was subjected to the same sort of investigation and criticism as the other departments of life; and specialization, with all its advantages and disadvantages, began.

The later years of the Peloponnesian War had shown the importance of cavalry and its proper functions in the attack and support of infantry; but the first great change came when Iphicrates the Athenian discovered that a hoplite force was not invincible by light armed troops, if these latter were properly handled. His defeat of a detachment of Spartan heavy armed infantry was in itself an insignificant event, but it created a revolution in military tactics comparable to that brought about by the success of the English archers over the French knights at Creçy. Up till that time the hoplite in popular estimation held much the same position as a battleship does in modern sea warfare; it was considered as hopeless for peltasts to engage hoplites as it would be for a light cruiser to attack a Dreadnought.

With the fall of the citizen soldier came the rise of the mercenary and the professional fighting man. A Greek force ceased to be a homogeneous unit and split up into the component elements of a modern army. ‘The light armed men are the hands, the horse the feet, the infantry the breast, and the general the head’; such was the saying of Iphicrates; and the Theban tacticians, notably Epaminondas, followed him in

combining cavalry and light infantry with the heavy armed phalanx. Philip of Macedon improved upon his Theban teacher's example and soon a standing army was established which disregarded all the old traditions of chivalry. The Greeks had their first warning in the ruthless destruction of Olynthus and the two systems met in final conflict at Chæronea. The professional soldier won, and by the end of the fourth century the ancient ideals had disappeared.

But it is well still to remember them. The system of orderly combat in the open remains the best for developing the manly virtues; and any nation that relies over-much on the mechanical and the unseen in war will inevitably fall away from those standards of conduct which we in our half humorous, half depreciatory way call sportsmanlike, and to which the Greeks gave the truer name of 'Aidôs,' the quality alike of the sportsman and the gentleman. Aidôs is 'ruth,' and the man who has no aidôs in him will be ready to employ all means to achieve his aims, and in the end perhaps will even delight in ruthlessness for its own sake.

# 3

## Physical Education

EDUCATION, mental and physical, falls into three sections, according as it deals with the training of the child, the boy, and the man; the word boy including girl, and the word man woman. Of these three stages the second seems to us so much the most definite that it has almost appropriated the word to itself. Education in common judgment does not begin until the boy goes to his school, while it ceases when he leaves his university.

The Greeks, or rather the Athenians, looked at things differently. They paid much less attention than we do to the training of young children, and in this respect were distinctly inferior to most modern nations. Even the second stage, that of boyhood, was not taken very seriously, and the word for youthful education, Paideia, by the slightest of changes gets the meaning of ‘a joke.’

Education at Athens began when the youth reached years of discretion, and the true Greek word for education is neither Paideia nor Didaskalia but rather Philosophia, love of knowledge. The real teacher was not the Grammatistes but the Sophistes, the ‘sophist’ whose business it was to train men in practical wisdom. Adult education in fact was the most, not the least, important of the three stages.

Furthermore, in the early stages of life the training of the body was regarded as more essential than the training of the mind. When his education was finished, the Athenian boy knew his elements, he could wrestle and box, he could recite Homer and play the lyre, he could swim and dance: but of

‘useful’ knowledge, so called, and especially of that horrid travesty that we call ‘technical education,’ he possessed nothing. In most of the qualities of discipline, as Plato complains, the Athenian system was lacking; but it had one great practical virtue: it kept the mean, and neither over-stimulated nor yet over-repressed a boy’s natural attitude towards imparted knowledge. An Athenian, when he emerged from boyhood and became a man, was neither a pedant nor a barbarian. In the fifth century B.C. it was realized that with growing animals the demands of the body must come before the demands of the spirit. Physical perfection, if it is to be won at all, must be secured in youth: the final training of the mind can be left to a later stage of life. The method had its obvious defects, but at least it did not create that distaste for all study which more perfect theories of education have often produced. An Athenian till the end of his life was always eager and ready to learn.

There were two systems of education known to the Greek world, that of Athens and that of Sparta; but in an Athenian, as in a Spartan, household, the first six or seven years of a child’s life were spent at home in the women’s quarter of the house. A Spartan mother, however, only received her child to rear after it had been carefully examined by the elders of the tribe to which the parents belonged: if its physical condition was unsatisfactory it was exposed on Mount Taygetus, there to die or be brought up by Helots. Consequently the Spartan women, who were famed all over Greece for their skill as nurses, had only the best material to work upon.

In both states such education as the children received at this period of life was almost entirely physical. They were taught how to stand, how to sit, and how to walk correctly: on a vase painting in the British Museum, for example, we see a small

child moving unsteadily towards its mother, who waits with open arms to receive it, while an instructor with long wand stands in the background. Athenian mothers usually were inclined to delegate the care of their children to a hired nurse, and there is an implied reproof to their indifference in the elaborate precepts that Plato gives in the *Republic* for the proper management of infants. For example, he combats the idea that a good child should be quiet, and insists upon the importance of constant motion for the young baby, who in an Athenian nursery was often closely bandaged in swaddling clothes and then left to its own resources.

'The first principle,' he says, 'in relation both to the body and the soul of very young creatures is that nursing and moving about by day and night is good for them all, and that the younger they are the more they will need it. Infants should live, if it were possible, as if they were always rocking at sea. Exercise and motion in the earliest years greatly contribute to create a part of virtue in the soul: the child's virtue is cheerfulness, and good nursing makes a gentle and a cheerful child.'

Greek ears were very sensitive to sounds, and the noise of the uncheerful infant protesting against life was doubtless very trying to the father in the few hours that he spent at home. We have no information of Plato's practical experience of children, for, as far as we know, he never married, but both he and Aristotle love to criticize the customs of their native city. In the *Politics*, for example, as in the *Republic*, the importance of the child is emphasized.

'Young children,' says Aristotle, 'should be kept healthy by exposure: to accustom children to the cold is an excellent practice which greatly conduces to health and hardens them for military service. Children should be amused till they are

five years old, but the amusement should not be vulgar or tiring or riotous. Their sports should be imitations of the occupations which they will hereafter pursue in earnest. Crying and screaming should not be checked, for they contribute to growth, and in a manner, exercise the body. The Directors of Education must keep a careful eye even upon young children, who will stay at home until they are seven; and they must see that they are left as little as possible with slaves. Formal education will begin after seven years; it will be the same for all, given in public, and directed to promote the good of all. Nature requires that we should be able not only to work well but to use leisure well. Work and leisure are both necessary, but the latter is the more important; and it is the chief function of education to teach us how to use our leisure rightly. Gymnastics and music are the chief branches of education; but for children gymnastic exercises should be of a light kind. Children should not be brutalized, as they are at Sparta, by laborious toil. Music should be studied both for its intellectual and its ethical virtue. Children should be encouraged to sing and play, for it will keep them out of mischief; but the flute should be forbidden as over-exciting, and musical studies should cease at manhood.'

It will be seen that Aristotle recognizes the necessity of amusement, and Greek children seem to have had most of the toys familiar to our nurseries. Little girls played with their terra-cotta dolls, boys with their hoops and balls, and with the knuckle bones that took the place of our marbles. An Alexandrian epigram (*Anth. Pal.* VI, 309) records the dedication to Hermes of one such playbox.

‘This noiseless ball and top so round,
This rattle with its lively sound,
These bones with which he loved to play,
Companions of his childhood’s day;
To Hermes, if the god they please,
An offering from Philocles.’

Of dance games too, which give exercise both to mind and body, they had an abundant variety; some simple like ‘The Wine-skin and Hatchet,’ which could be played upon the stomach of a complaisant guest, others more elaborate in their dramatic ritual, such as ‘The Swallow’ procession, of which our ‘Jack in the Green’ is a reminiscence.

At the beginning of their lives then children were treated in much the same way at Sparta and at Athens; but in the next stage of education, after the period of early childhood was past, there was a sharp divergence between Spartan and Athenian practice. At Sparta boys and girls alike, over the age of seven years, were taken in hand by the state, and given the most thorough of physical trainings. The girls were allowed their meals at home, but otherwise were subjected to the same discipline as the boys. They had to harden their bodies, so that they might bear strong children, and among their sports were wrestling, running, and swimming. They learned to throw the diskos and the javelin; and wearing only the short Doric chiton engaged in contests of speed with youths. The result we may see in the statue of the girl runner, a copy of a fifth-century original, which is now in the Vatican at Rome, and in the description of the Spartan woman envoy in Aristophanes’ play *Lysistrata*, who looked ‘as though she could throttle a bull.’ The boys, for their part, were organized in the strictest fashion into ‘packs’ of sixty-four and into divisions. Each pack fed together, slept together on bundles of reeds for

bedding, and played together. They had to go barefoot always, wore only a single garment summer and winter, and provided for their own wants.

One boy in the pack was appointed as ‘Bouagor,’ or ‘Herd-leader,’ and could give orders and inflict punishment. Over him was a young man, above twenty years of age, of tried character and courage, the ‘Eiren’ who was in charge of the pack’s organization and lived always with the boys. In control of the whole system was the ‘Paidonomos,’ the minister of education, an elderly citizen of rank and repute who had the ultimate powers of discipline over boys and eirens alike. In the three ranks we see something resembling the prefects, assistant masters, and Heads of our schools: in manner of life there was a close approximation to the boy-scout movement.

This Spartan type of education in some respects was not unlike the English public school system, as we owe it to Dr. Arnold, before it was affected by the spread of competitive examinations and the demand for utilitarian knowledge. The qualities that the Spartans wished to cultivate were not intellectual acuteness or literary taste, but the moral virtues of obedience, discipline, and endurance. To obtain these the lads were kept under constant supervision by grown men, and the weakness of the system was that individual initiative was not sufficiently encouraged, and that the claims of the mind were too persistently disregarded. Of book study there was practically none. Hunting, scouting, and foraging for food took up most of the boys’ time. Fighting, both in play and in earnest, was encouraged, together with gymnastics of an unspecialized sort, especially the musical drill which the Spartans called gymnopædia. Competitions between individuals and divisions were very frequent, and in many of them girls met boys on equal terms. Above all things, the idea

of military efficiency was kept before the children's eyes, and a strict military discipline was enforced. In fact, the Spartan system had all the strength and weakness of an exclusively military regime. The young Spartans were brave, healthy, modest, hardy and obedient: on the other hand, they were stupid, quarrelsome, brutal, lacking in self-restraint, and inclined to a gross immorality when once they were free from the close restraint of Spartan law. As long as a Spartan lived in his own country he behaved well, but the vices that the system produced showed themselves unpleasantly in any dealings with others. To the rest of Greece the vices seemed more than to counterbalance the virtues, and the Athenian ideal of education became the model for most of the other Greek States.

At Athens, everything was left to the individual parent and to the private schoolmaster. The State recognized its responsibility for the maintenance of children, and if a man died in battle his orphans were reared at the public expense; but it did not recognize its responsibility for their education. Some ancient laws, attributed to Solon, did indeed enact that all free-born children should be sent to school and there taught 'letters and how to swim.' Other regulations fixed the school hours, and in the interests of morality forbade boys to come home from school in the dark. But as regards the methods and the subjects of education given to boys, the Athenian Government was indifferent. The keeping of a school was a private speculation, and the State required no evidence of moral or intellectual qualifications from the schoolmaster. Accordingly, schools and the fees charged varied very greatly. Poor folk sent their children to establishments where only the elements of reading and writing were taught χαχὰ χαχῶς as the sausage-seller in

Aristophanes says. Richer parents not only gave their children a better training in the early stages, but kept them at school for a longer period.

The schoolmaster himself was regarded with extreme contempt. The father of Æschines belonged to the despised class, and Demosthenes draws a scornful picture of his youthful rival helping to mix the ink, scrub the forms, and sweep the schoolroom. The fees were due on the last day of the month; but they were grudgingly paid and mean parents would keep their children away from school in those months of the year when the State festivals gave the schoolmaster an opportunity of granting his pupils a holiday. Of long intervals from work, such as our summer and winter vacations, we have no trace in Athens, and the precept of the Roman poet 'æstate pueri si valent satis discunt' apparently went unregarded.

The school hours were arranged to suit the time of meals in the boys' homes. After the early breakfast, taken at sunrise, the boy sets off to his teacher, with whom he remained till noon. Then came the midday meal, followed by a siesta, and then afternoon school. Discipline was lax. The schoolmaster certainly had a rod to assist him in maintaining order, but his social inferiority deprived him of any real authority. Children would bring their pet dogs to school and play with them under the master's chair. The master usually was sitting, a position which an Athenian despised as unworthy of a free-born man, and we have the typical schoolmaster pictured for us on a vase by Euphronios. He is a small, ill-developed man, with a bald head and a prominent nose. His body twisted, he leans forward with a threatening gesture, his forefinger raised in warning. In his left hand there is a stylus, for a writing-lesson is in progress; his stick with crooked handle and formidable

knobs lies convenient to his right. He is drawn by a malicious hand with something of the caricaturist's touch, but he is thoroughly alive and evidently closely resembles a real original. We may imagine that not unlike him even in bodily form was the schoolmaster in the third mime of Herondas who beats his idle pupil with his bull's tail strap until he is 'black and blue like a spotted snake.'

The ordinary system of elementary education at Athens, as followed by boys from seven to fourteen, consisted of three parts: letters, music and gymnastics, presided over by the grammatiste, kithariste, and pædotribe respectively. The grammatiste taught reading, writing and simple arithmetic, and his methods, on the evidence of the papyri and ostraka which have recently been discovered in Egypt, were not very much unlike those of a modern school. We have long lists of alphabets, and of simple and difficult combinations of letters; passages for dictation and recitation, the conjugation of verbs, and elementary grammatical rules. The kithariste taught 'music'; i.e. the words of the lyric poets and the simple lyre accompaniment which went with the words. In general estimation he ranked a little higher than the grammatiste, but they both taught under the same conditions, and usually in the same building. The pædotribe was a much more important person than the other two, and his teaching, which directed the boy's physical development upon scientific lines, lasted usually till manhood. He taught the rules of health, 'dancing' in the Greek sense of the word, and especially the five exercises of the pentathlon, which aimed at producing a perfect, all-round athlete. The palæstra was his school-room, and he was always sure of eager pupils and interested spectators.

But upon the smaller boys no very arduous tasks were imposed. Deportment, how to sit, stand, and walk gracefully, the correct manner of salutation, a decorous and becoming carriage of the body; these with some easy gymnastic exercises, together with a multitude of games and an occasional cockfight, occupied most of a boy's day. He spent much more time at the palæstra than he did anywhere else, but the border-line there between instruction and amusement was not very rigidly drawn. This was the sort of education that seemed to Aristophanes ideal, and nowhere is a better picture given of it than in the *Clouds*:

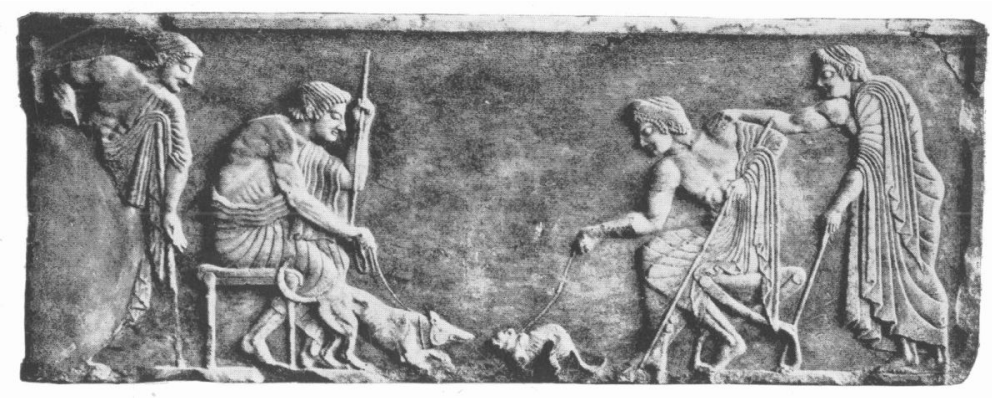
‘To hear then prepare of the Discipline rare which flourished in Athens of yore,
When Honour and Truth were in fashion with youth and Sobriety bloomed on our shore;
First of all, the old rule was preserved in our school that “boys should be seen and not heard”:
And then to the home of the harpist would come, decorous in action and word,
All the lads of one town, though the snow peppered down, in spite of all wind and all weather;
And they sung an old song as they paced it along, not shambling with thighs glued together ...
But now must the lad from his boyhood be clad in a man’s all enveloping cloke;
So that, oft as the Panathenæa returns, I feel myself ready to choke,
When the dancers go by with their shields to their thigh, not caring for Pallas a jot.
You therefore, young man, choose me while you can; cast in with my method your lot;
And then you shall learn the forum to spurn and from dissolute baths to abstain,
And fashions impure and shameful abjure, and scorners repel with disdain,
And rise from your chair if an elder be there, and respectfully give him your place.
And with love and with fear your parents revere, and shrink from the brand of disgrace ...
Not learning to prate, as your idlers debate, with marvellous prickly dispute,
Nor dragged into court day by day to make sport in some small disagreeable suit:
But you will below to the Academe go, and under the olives contend
With your chaplet of reed, in a contest of speed, with some excellent rival and friend;
All fragrant with woodbine and peaceful content and the leaf which the lime blossoms fling,
When the plane whispers love to the elm in the grove in the beautiful season of spring.’
(*Clouds*, 961-1008, Rogers’ translation.)

Boyhood at Athens was a time of preparation; the real education of an Athenian, in physical and in mental studies, began when ours too often ceases, in the year when he reached manhood. Then, and not till then, did the State step in and accept responsibility for his training. The ephebe of eighteen enrolled, in his deme register, had first to take the oath:

‘I will not disgrace my sacred weapons nor desert the comrade who is placed by my side. I will fight for things holy and things profane, whether I am alone or with others. I will hand on my fatherland greater and better than I found it. I will hearken to the magistrates, and obey the existing laws and those hereafter established by the people. I will not consent unto any that destroys or disobeys the constitution, but will prevent him, whether I am alone or with others. I will honour the temples and the religion which my forefathers established. So help me Aglauros, Enyalios, Ares, Zeus, Thallo, Auxo, Hegemone.’

Then under the direction of specially appointed magistrates, the ‘Sophronistai’ or ‘Moderators,’ a definite and thorough course of gymnastics and military training began. The young recruits were first taken round the temples and afterwards put into garrison at Munychia and Piræus. They had masters and undermasters to teach them the use of the hoplite’s accoutrement, and pædotribes for their gymnastic exercises. Discipline was fairly strict, but there were plenty of amusements, and many festivals in which the ephebes played a special part. When they were not engaged in military drill they were usually to be found in the gymnasia and palæstræ, and at the end of their first year of training they were reviewed in the theatre during the celebration of the greater Dionysia. After the ceremony they received a spear and shield as a gift from the State and marched out of Athens, spending most of their final year patrolling the country and garrisoning the outlying forts. Then, this first initiation into the science of physical fitness achieved, they returned to the city, and during the rest of their lives devoted a large proportion of their time to perfecting their knowledge of the laws of health and developing the strength of their body.

The academies, where these studies in a Greek city were pursued by young and old together, were of two kinds, and were called either ‘gymnasia’ or ‘palæstræ.’ A gymnasium was an open space, with trees for shelter from the sun and, if possible, near a stream of running water; and there went on those sports that required plenty of room. The two chief gymnasia at Athens were both outside the town walls, the Academy in the sacred grove of the hero Academus and the Lyceum in the precinct of the hero Lycus. They corresponded fairly closely to the playing fields about our public schools, except that they belonged to the whole community and were used by all classes and ages alike. If we could imagine Hyde Park thronged every day and all day with men and boys running, jumping, hurling quoits, and throwing javelins,



INDOOR SPORTS (Athens)

we should get some idea, although of course on a very much larger scale, of the appearance of the Lyceum in the time of Socrates.

The palæstra, on the other hand, bore more resemblance to our school gymnasium. It was a covered building used especially for the indoor sports of boxing and wrestling. Built round a central court which in fine weather was normally the

scene of these competitions, it had also a large hall opening on to the court and a number of smaller rooms used for bathing, rubbing down and undressing. In the large hall the spectators gathered, and a vivid picture of the impression made upon a foreigner by the sight is given in Lucian's dialogue *Anacharsis*. The young Scythian speaks:

'Why do your young men behave like this, Solon? Some of them grappling and tripping each other, some throttling, struggling, intertwining in the clay like so many pigs wallowing. And yet their first proceeding, after they have stripped—I noticed that—is to oil and scrape each other quite amicably; but then I do not know what comes over them—they put down their heads and begin to push, and crash their foreheads together like a pair of rival rams. There, look! that one has lifted the other right off his legs, and dropped him on the ground; now he has fallen on top, and will not let him get his head up, but presses it down into the clay; and to finish him off he twines his legs tight round his belly, thrusts his elbow hard against his throat, and throttles the wretched victim, who meanwhile is patting his shoulder; that will be a form of supplication; he is asking not to be quite choked to death.'

(Lucian, *Anacharsis*, I, Fowler's translation.)

There were only three gymnasia in all Athens, but there was a very large number of palæstræ, some public, some private, some frequented by men, some by boys, the majority used indifferently by men and boys together. In the public establishments the instructors were provided and paid by the State, and were probably at the head of their profession, for as the oligarch who wrote the treatise on the Athenian Republic bitterly says:

‘As for gymnasia and baths, some rich people have their own, but the people also have built palæstræ for their own use, and the mob now has far more advantages in this respect than the fortunate few.’

The popularity of a private palæstra, especially if it were intended chiefly for the instruction of boys, depended largely on the personality of the pædotribe who there gave instruction, and Athenian fathers were as fond of expounding the merits of their own favourite teacher as Englishmen are of singing the praises of their old school. The pædotribe was usually assisted by subordinates—*gymnastæ*, who coached pupils in special exercises and prepared them for competitions, and *aleiptæ* who undertook for boys the actual rubbing down and massaging which men and youths performed for themselves; but he alone was the directing spirit of the place. He required to have considerable medical knowledge, and held a rank in popular estimation of equal importance with a physician. His business was to prevent, the doctor’s only to cure, disease. He had to know what exercises would suit what constitutions; he was called on frequently to prescribe in matters of diet and sometimes must advise a strengthening and sometimes a lowering regime. Besides giving his pupils health, he was expected also to increase their beauty and their strength. Finally, according to Plato, a good pædotribe was able to produce by his teaching firmness of character and strength of will: therefore he must know exactly how much training to administer to each boy, for too much of these qualities is as bad as too little. It will be seen that a successful pædotribe combined in his person most of the capacities and duties which in our educational institutions are shared among the headmaster, the games master, the school doctor, the drill sergeant and the cricket professional; with the

additional responsibility of having frequently to teach both parents and children.

But the larger palæstræ, as we have said, were usually public and free, and it may be useful to give here a brief account of their arrangements. On entering from the street the visitor passed down a short passage into the *'Apodyterion*,' the undressing room, a large hall with one side opening directly on to the cloisters which surrounded the central court. His first business was to strip; for all the exercises of the palæstra were performed naked; and then to anoint himself all over, and carefully rub the oil into his skin. As Lucian says again in the *Anacharsis*, speaking now through the mouth of the great law-giver, Solon:

'When their first pithless tenderness is past, we strip our youths and aim at hardening them to the temperature of the various seasons till heat does not incommode them nor frost paralyse them. Then we anoint them with oil by way of softening them into suppleness. It would be absurd that leather, dead stuff as it is, should be made tougher and more lasting by being softened with oil, and the living body get no advantage from the same process.'

Another room, the '*Konisterion*,' was set apart for athletes to powder themselves with dust before exercise. The effects on the body of powder were regarded as no less beneficial than those of oil. It closed the pores of the skin, checked excessive perspiration, and kept the body cool, thus protecting it from chills and rendering it less susceptible to fatigue. Special sorts of powders were supposed to have special virtues; those of a clayey nature were particularly cleansing, those that were gritty stimulated perspiration if the skin was inclined to be over-dry, the yellow earthy kind made the body

supple and sleek, and gave that glossy appearance which was the sign of good condition and training.

Yet another apartment was the '*Korykeion*,' where the punch-balls hung; some of them large skins filled with sand hanging about waist-level and used by wrestlers who would try and check their rebound, others smaller and lighter filled with fig seeds or meal, hanging as high as the athlete's head and used by boxers as a mark for their blows.

And, lastly, there was the bathroom, a severely simple place with a large stone basin on a stand as its chief feature. Bathing establishments with hot and vapour baths existed in Athens, but they were discouraged by manly folk as corrupting athletic vigour and considered only truly suitable for the old and feeble. In the palæstra cold water was used alone, and the bath was either taken direct from the basin or else the athlete stood while a friend swilled him down from a bucket. Before the actual washing a flesh scraper was used to remove the dust and dirt from the skin, and a sort of lye obtained from wood ashes took the place of soap.

All this at Athens, as befits a true democracy, was open without restriction and without payment to every citizen. In the palæstra rich and poor met on equal terms without regard for rank or position. A strigil and an oil flask were the only implements that were needed, and on occasions the State even supplied the oil. We have scarcely anything like it in modern days; perhaps a racecourse, in its mingling together of all classes for sport, is the nearest equivalent. But our racecourses have some peculiar features that need not now be specified, from which the Greek palæstra was free.

# 4

## Health and Bodily Exercise

FOR the attainment of the perfect health which is one of the highest goals of human endeavour, the Greeks of the fifth century B.C. in comparison with ourselves were placed under some disadvantages. Firstly, their racial stock, a difficult blend of the old Mediterranean people with central European immigrants, was not so good, for purposes of active strength, as our mixture of Saxon, Norman and Dane: the inhabitants of Attica claimed with some reason to be autochthonous, but in historical times they were already showing plain signs of race decay. Secondly, their climate on the whole was inferior to ours, the summer too hot and enervating, the winter dank and depressing rather than sharp and bracing: Attica in this respect also was more favoured than many states, and Athenian authors are very fond of contrasting the clear brilliance of their native air with the heavy dullness of the Bœotian plain. Thirdly, they lacked most of those sanitary appliances without which life in our cities now would seem almost impossible, and their doctors and surgeons had not that wealth of drugs and instruments which we possess.

On the other hand the Greeks, or at least the Athenians, had some points in their favour. Of all the people that we know the citizens of Attica did the highest thinking on the lowest feeding. They were naturally temperate both in food and drink, and a very great contrast both to the Romans and such other Greeks as the Bœotians and Thessalians. In this, at any rate, they were feminists; like most women they did not pay much regard to their stomachs, and made their meals not the

most important but the least important thing in their lives, so that a Greek banquet was a very simple affair, compared with an English or a Roman repast, and its chief attraction was the music and conversation which followed the mere eating and drinking. The ordinary diet of the Athenians consisted almost entirely of cereals; porridge and bread were the staples, and although sometimes a little salt fish, cheese, honey or olives might serve as a relish, yet porridge in various forms was the staff of life. Their drink was usually water; a good supply was brought in to the city by pipes dating apparently from the time of Pisistratus, and the big fountain of the nine springs is mentioned by Thucydides. They realized all the benefits that come from a copious use of nature's chief medicine: 'best of all things is water'—such is the motto on the entrance portal to the great temple of Pindar's poems, and the Athenians, knowing the truth, acted on their knowledge. Wine, of course, they drank and enjoyed—there were teetotalers amongst them, Demosthenes, for example, and they were regarded as crabbed, unpleasant fellows—but they enjoyed in moderation, and always diluted their wine copiously with water. To drink wine neat was to be a barbarian, and the story of the Spartan king who was driven mad by his unmixed potations was often repeated at Athens. The typical citizen was a thin wiry person, active and restless, and the highest praise you could give to an Athenian was to call him εὐτράπελος, ready to turn his hand to anything. As Aristophanes says, the Athenians were wasplike, thin-waisted and ready to sting—while one of commonest terms of political approbrium was παχύς—'fat'—the word applied by the democrats to the idle rich.

Again, as we have said, the Athenians were autochthonous—such was their favourite boast—sprung from the land, born from the actual womb of mother Attica. Without examining

too closely the exact truth of their claim, or accepting the origin of their grasshopper king, we may regard it as an historical fact that the Athenian stock remained undisturbed and without admixture for a very long period in Attica. They had therefore all the advantages which are derived from a pure and an old race; they were thoroughly suited to their environment, and had developed strong special characteristics. They were fully conscious of this themselves, never admitted aliens to Athenian citizenship, and took the most careful precautions to see that all citizens on the roll should be of pure Athenian parentage. In its relation to general health this steady continuity of race and domicile is more important than is often recognized. Only long centuries of undisturbed habitation can bring man into real harmony with nature, and this is one reason why the English peasant is so much finer a man, physically and intellectually, than the mixed breed of a great town. Half the diseases of our time are of nervous origin, caused ultimately by a feverish attempt to adapt oneself too rapidly to a new environment.

Moreover, the chief means whereby we stave off for the moment the results of this strain, drugs and stimulants of every kind, were unknown to the Greeks, and they were all the better for their ignorance. Tea, coffee, tobacco, opium; all these poisons are among the blessings of modern civilization, and in the fifth century B.C. were as unfamiliar to the Greeks as the countries from which they come. Here again the Greeks were closer to nature than we are. When they needed a stimulant—and stimulants are on occasion a real necessity—they took wine, the natural product of their own country, not something only to be found among totally different conditions. They knew nothing of the poisons of tropical countries, and nothing of the diseases which we have

imported from the tropics. Asiatic fever, smallpox, cholera, syphilis, typhus were diseases of which the Greeks had neither knowledge nor experience, and even from our milder infectious complaints, such as measles and scarlatina, they were immune. Until the advent of malaria during the Peloponnesian War their most common malady seems to have been ophthalmia in its various forms, and consumption was their only serious scourge.

This would seem to be a fair statement of our respective advantages and disadvantages; and on the whole perhaps the balance of the account is in our favour. But all these considerations are counterbalanced and more than counterbalanced by one fact: an ancient Greek took a lively and intelligent interest in his own physical condition, and devoted most of his time, not to making money, or reading books or playing cards, but to what is a more remunerative investment than any of these, to the care of his health.

The most precious thing that a Greek possessed was not his soul, the existence of which he doubted, but his body. He took an interest in his body; he was not afraid of it in any of its parts, and he was not always trying to cover it up as something of which he was ashamed. He had none of those curious and morbid feelings that still linger on amongst us as an inheritance from Syrian conventicles and Egyptian monasteries. He stripped himself freely and often, in public as in private, and he allowed the sunlight, the fresh air, and the running water to reach every limb. Dirt was not to a Greek a proof of holiness, nor neglect of one's person the sure sign of a love of learning. Cleanliness was not merely next to godliness; it was godliness itself. To be χαθαρός—clean, pure, free from defilement—was the ideal, and an ideal generally attained.

A Greek concentrated his attention on the care of his skin by means of baths, massage, and external applications. Bathing with the Greeks of the classical period was not the elaborate function that it became with the Romans, who used it indeed, as we use drugs, to correct the results of their own follies and self-indulgence; but it was thorough and it was constant. Moreover they knew the value of sun and air baths, a thing almost unattainable in England, and their dress allowed the free-play of air round the body. Hats, stockings, and gloves were practically unknown, and the feet were usually bare.

Of massage, both by the hand and by the instrument, which they called a 'strigil,' great use was made. The 'rubber' was as important for purposes of health as the 'doctor,' and an Athenian put aside a certain proportion of his time every day for his duties in this respect. In connection with rubbing comes the universal use of olive oil as an external application; the oil flask—*lecythus*—was as indispensable to a Greek as an umbrella is to an Englishman; and as a consequence the Athenians seem to have been seldom troubled with those coughs and colds which so harass modern men. Under the stimulus of the bath and frequent massage the skin performed its natural cleansing functions, and the oil served as an invisible protection against sudden chills, while from one of our greatest dangers, the hot polluted air of a crowded room followed by the cold dampness of a raw February evening, the Greeks were free, for artificial heating and lighting were little used and all gatherings of people took place in the open. By constant exposure to sun and air, by massage, by regulated exercises, and by rubbing with oil the Greek gained an elasticity of skin which meant health, vigour and beauty. A large proportion of our community take an interest in their

complexions and spend a considerable amount of effort in trying to produce an artificial softness of face tissue, but to the far more important task of stimulating and strengthening the skin of the body and larger limbs they give scarcely any time at all. A delicate skin is not the essential, either from the point of view of health or real beauty; for though it may render details visible in an elegant fashion, only a skin that is well knit to the subjacent tissues shows the true configuration to advantage. This firm elasticity cannot be obtained except by attention, and in this respect we are inferior, not only to the Greeks, but to such different and widely separated modern peoples as the Red Indians of North America, the Malays of the Eastern Archipelago, and the Kanakas of the South Seas. A very large number of our minor maladies and disabilities come to us from our closed pores and our flabby epidermis, and from all these the Greeks escaped, owing to the care they gave to the outer surface of the body.

In the day-time a Greek was usually to be found upon his feet. Of the value of walking as the best of all the more gentle forms of exercise he was well aware, and he normally took a brisk walk in the early morning, another before the mid-day meal, another in the late afternoon, and another before he went to bed. Fortunately for him cycles and motor-cars were not yet invented. When he was not walking he usually stood, for the sitting position was regarded as more appropriate to slaves than to free men, and in any case he knew that sitting tends rather to cramp than to invigorate the body. If he wanted to relieve his leg muscles for a moment, which he seldom did, he dropped down easily into the squatting position, which those other scientific gymnasts, the Japanese, now use, a mode of resting especially valuable for women, as it strengthens all the muscles about the pelvis and gives vigour

to the most vital portions of the female anatomy. When the time for a complete rest came he lay down, either propped upon one elbow or at full length, and allowed all his muscles to relax. If ever it was necessary to sit—in the theatre of Dionysus, for example, where an audience sat attentive in the open air for hours together—he sat on a plain flat seat without a back, his legs straight down in front of him, his feet resting on the floor. He did not loll or lounge, and when he was sitting he did not have that round-shouldered appearance, which is now so noticeable in a room full of people: he kept his diaphragm firm with the upper part of his body correctly balanced, the centre of gravity being exactly over the base of the spine; and in this position he was able to remain for long periods without effort or fatigue.

But as we have said sitting to a Greek was not a matter of choice, and was for him the exception rather than the rule; he preferred an erect position. The chief reason for this very considerable difference between his custom and ours is to be found in a simple fact: he was taught in childhood how to stand and how to walk *properly*, so that both actions were to him a pleasure and not a labour.

It may seem strange at first sight, but as an actual fact the operations of standing erect and walking straight are not in the strict sense of the word ‘natural’ to creatures like ourselves who have painfully evolved from a lower form of life. The awkward hesitations of the baby learning to walk are natural; the supple activity of the athlete is the result of art. To stand gracefully and easily is an accomplishment that must be acquired; it does not come to us of itself.

If a man stand erect, firmly planted on both feet at the same time, exerting as little muscular effort as possible, the hip joint is always a little overextended; the body would fall

backward were it not for the ilio-femoral ligament which suspends the body to the hip joint. On the length and strength of this ligament depends both the position of the pelvis in relation to the thigh and also eventually the graceful carriage of the whole body. A lack of strength in this ligament and in the muscles of the abdomen means that the pelvis is too much inclined, the abdomen projects forward, and in the back there is a deep hollow: results unsightly and unhealthy enough, but unfortunately with us far too common, for we do not take means, as did the Greeks by a scientific system of gymnastics, to strengthen all these body muscles in early youth. Jumping with dumb-bells (performed in squads to music), throwing the diskos, and casting the javelin were exercises expressly designed for this purpose, and combined with daily practice in the wrestling school they gave the ancient Greek a different and a superior body to ours, a body which in outward contour and muscular development was much further removed from the ancestral ape than is that of the ordinary middle-aged citizen of to-day. A Greek could ‘stand at ease’ without any difficulty: the attempts that may be seen on any drill ground now when recruits attempt to carry out the order would be ludicrous if they were not so painful.

In order to stand correctly the legs and feet must be of a proper shape; a man must not be knock-kneed or splay-footed. When the legs and feet are close together, the two legs should be in contact at four points: at the upper part of the thigh, between the knees, at the point where the calves come furthest inwards, and at the inner ankle bones. The body muscles also must be well developed and under control, and the stander should know exactly where the centre of his body’s gravity is and how to obtain correct poise. Our drill-book advises that the weight of the body be balanced on both

feet and evenly distributed between the fore part of the feet and the heels. With our present type of boot this represents probably the best position possible, but it should be remembered that it is not the best that can be devised. The perfect position for standing is this: the heels should just touch the ground, but there must be no weight on them; the feet should be close together so that the heels and the whole of the inside line of the feet are touching; the whole weight of the body should be got well forward *over the ball of the foot*.

Right standing is as essential to beauty as is the care of the skin, but most women now, like most men, stand wrongly. The head is not held in its right position by the neck muscles but hangs negligently forward, so that eventually the beauty of the nape of the neck is destroyed. The back muscles of the neck, thus overstretched, cause the large chest muscle, on which the breast is supported, to sink, and then the abdomen is forced upward and forward. Body poise is thus completely lost, the weight of the upper trunk is left to be supported by the legs alone, and all the conditions of unnecessary fatigue, weariness, and lack of vigour come into existence. The whole art of standing consists in the knowledge of body poise, and this has to be learned.

Even when we have acquired that knowledge we are still at a disadvantage. We stand upon our feet, and under modern conditions our feet do not have a fair chance. Sculptors know that it is possible to get living models for other parts of the body, even though those models rarely approximate to perfection; but for the foot the only safe method is to copy direct from the antique. The Greek sandal was in every way superior to our boot: it protected from injury and yet did not hinder movement: it was easily taken off and when in use left all the top part of the foot exposed to the light and air. Our

feet, imprisoned from early childhood in closely fitting socks and in boots that impede the play of the toe muscles, can hardly be said to be alive. The great toe is usually twisted towards the median line, and the joint consequently has an ugly knotted appearance: all five toes are crushed together, and lose their natural shape, while the last, and often the last but one, is altogether distorted and deformed. Nor is the mischief confined to the toes: the whole foot, so seldom exposed to the open air, has a dry, lean, ill-nourished look. It shows itself the starved captive that it really is, and, as our modern schools of dancing and eurhythmic have discovered, the first condition of beauty and of graceful movement is that the foot should be free.

The Greeks were too sensible and too well aware of the importance of securing true body poise to deprive of its vitality that part of the body which is the chief factor in balance, as being the main point of contact between ourselves and the solid ground. As a result the Greek foot was in some important respects differently shaped from ours. The first three toes were longer and were thin and nervous like fingers; the second toe was often the longest of the three; the fourth and fifth toes were little used and were usually off the ground, being thus raised by a pad of firm fleshy tissue, spreading under the foot, on which all movement centred. The instep was not quite so high as with us, but the tendon Achilles was finer, the heel considerably smaller and much less used, for a Greek child was trained to dispense with it as a security for balance and to keep the centre of gravity over the forward part of the foot.

All these points of difference are perfectly well known to modern artists and can be observed in most ancient statues. It rests with ourselves, if we wish it, to recover the combination

of beauty and strength which the Greek foot possessed; and if the attempt be made it will be found that it is not impossible even for us soon to approach with some closeness to that desirable ideal.

Let us suppose then for a moment that our feet are sensibly shod and that their muscles are properly exercised: let us suppose also that we have learned enough of the principles of body poise and balance to be able to 'stand at ease.' With the next order 'Quick march!' a new series of difficulties will begin. Correct walking requires that the centre of gravity of a moving weight should be kept constant over its base, and to do this the muscles must be in a state of elastic tension. If the diaphragm is not doing its work, the act of passing the weight of the body from one foot to another results in an effort to feel forward for a new base, and movement proceeds in jerks. The way to avoid this jerky movement is to carry the whole weight forward at the same time as the advancing foot, and this can only be done if mind and muscle work together. The essential difference between a soldier's march, if it be properly performed, and the civilian's walk, degenerating into a slouch, is that the first calls for a definite mental effort; the second is mere mechanical habit. As soon as men march mechanically they cease to march, and that is the value of a regimental band: it stimulates the connection between mind and muscle that centres round our diaphragm.

Unfortunately, very few men know where their diaphragm is, or what purpose it serves. They think they know the position of their heart and their liver (although experience on the drill ground shows that they are generally wrong), but as regards their diaphragm, their ignorance is even as the night. As they plaintively remark, 'How should they know? They have never been taught.' And that is really the mischief. As

children they were laboriously instructed in the anatomy of the world: they knew what a promontory and a peninsula were, and could tell you the names of the principal rivers from China to Peru. But as for the anatomy of their body they were left in almost complete darkness. Many people cannot even spell the word diaphragm correctly; the ancient Greeks were so convinced of the influence of the diaphragm on mental and physical conditions that in their language the same word ‘phrenes’ stood for diaphragm and mind. It is a fact that if the diaphragm muscles are flabby and loose (as with undrilled men they almost invariably are), the whole mental system becomes infected with the resultant slackness. An alert mind is only secured by an alert body, and the call, ‘Attention!’ is, in fact, a stimulus to the abdomen muscles, which spring up vigorously and raise the weight of the body from the centre. A heightening of vitality and a sense of spiritual power follow as surely as it did on the ancient hymn —‘Sursum corda’—‘We lift up our hearts unto the Lord.’

Walking is of all forms of exercise the best for women; but it loses its value if a woman’s gait is radically wrong. Instead of walking from the hips, most women walk from the knees: the result is a strut, a shuffle, a stamp, a shamble, a waddle, or a hobble, never a true walk. To walk correctly, feet, legs and body must be under control. The feet must be allowed to keep their proper shape and position, and while the inside of the foot is used the toes should be planted in a straight line with the heel, never turned outwards. Uncertain balance produces bent knees, and one of the first results of a true walk is an increase of beauty in all the leg muscles, an increase of strength in the knees and in the deep-set muscles of the lower back. A woman’s knees, which nature meant to be strong and elastic, are now, with the abdomen, the weakest part of the

female frame. There is nothing that women fear so much as a jump, and this timidity is purely the result of knee weakness, and the consequent inability to distribute body weight correctly. In the interests of health, beauty and comfort, correct walking is essential for women, and yet not one woman in a thousand would satisfy an expert.

To walk properly, then, the diaphragm must be on the alert, and a lifted diaphragm in a state of muscular tension cannot exist side by side with a large flabby abdomen. If a man's body is to be beautiful, and if the man himself is to be in perfect physical condition, the abdomen must be reduced to the smallest possible dimensions and not overloaded with fat. The size of the abdomen is increased by the absorption of large masses of food, especially if they are of a gaseous and indigestible nature; it is decreased if the amount of food taken is reduced and if the food itself is rich in nutriment so that less bulk is required. Above all, if the muscles of the abdomen and back are strengthened by a carefully-designed system of exercises, they will take their share in bearing the weight of the upper part of the body and will prevent it from settling down, an inert mass, in the socket of the pelvis. As things are now, our hip muscles have usually too much work to do and are exaggeratedly developed, and an examination of any Greek athlete statue—the Diadumenos will serve as one example of many—will show that the Greek hip was much finer and slimmer than ours: it was more behind the body than under it and a far greater freedom of movement was thereby made possible.

An even more striking change will be seen in the muscles of the abdomen. With us a young, well-proportioned man has usually a depression just above the iliac ridge, and the iliac line descending from the hips to the top of the legs makes

only a slight inward curve. In the Greek body we see a firm roll of flesh lying just above the iliac crest, the iliac line running beneath it for a short distance inwards in a horizontal direction, and then bending downwards at an obtuse or sometimes almost a right-angle.

Of this plain fact two explanations are possible. Either the ancient sculptors wilfully falsified their models' contours in the interests of ideal beauty, or else this difference between the ancient and modern abdomen really did exist. The first explanation is highly improbable considering the Greeks' artistic conscience, and furthermore in their statues of women no trace of this horizontal iliac line is ever apparent. The only reasonable inference is that these muscles, which with us are so undeveloped as to be invisible, were the result of the constant physical training to which the Greek man, but not the Greek woman, was habituated.

In an artistic sense there can be no doubt as to the excellent effect which the ancient line produces. It gives proportion and an air of solidity and greatly diminishes the superficial area of the abdomen. And that it represented a real condition rather than an artistic ideal is a very probable fact, for the statues of Greek athletes often represent positions which for us with our weak abdomens are almost impossible of attainment. One of the most perfect of all, Myron's Diskobolos—the young athlete throwing the diskos—seemed to Herbert Spencer 'an impossible contortion'; and after a close examination of its poise he declared that at the next moment—if the action were continued—it would fall upon its nose. It is quite possible that such a regrettable accident would have been the result if our revered philosopher had attempted to perform the movement, but the muscles of the Greek body, properly trained and hardened, found in it no insuperable difficulty.

The movement that Myron represents is the swing back of the diskos. The athlete has already taken his stance, and with left foot forward has extended the diskos horizontally to the front in his right hand. Then comes the decisive action: the whole weight of the body is transferred to the right foot, whose toes grip the ground at full tension; the left foot trails back, offering no resistance either to the pause or the coming momentum; the body swings round upon the fixed pivot of the right foot. The diskos held in the right hand comes downwards and backwards; head and body turn with it; the next moment the body will swing round again with a forward lift and the diskos will fly from the extended hand. Whether the force of the throw relies entirely upon the lift of the thighs and the swing of the body, or upon the arm alone, swinging rapidly in a free shoulder socket, will depend upon the weight of the diskos used. In either case it is the pause at the end of the backward swing that the sculptor has fixed in the bronze.

Only in imagination can we see the actions by which the body has got into this position and by which it will again recover its equilibrium. It illustrates one of Lessing's sayings in the *Laocoön*: 'Of ever changing nature the artist can use only a single moment and this from a single point of view. And as his work is meant to be looked at not for an instant but with long consideration, he must choose the most fruitful moment, and the most fruitful point of view, that, to wit, which leaves the power of imagination free.'

One of the greatest benefits that the ancient Greeks have bestowed upon the modern world, if only we like to make use of it, is the standard of bodily perfection they have bequeathed to us in the remains of their sculpture. Just as Greek literature is eternally precious, not only for itself but as a criterion of beauty, so Greek statuary supplies us with

visible proof of the power and grace to which the human body with proper care and training can attain. Besides the Diskobolos we have an admirable example of slender vigour in the Hermes of Praxiteles, of athletic strength in the Hagias of Lysippus, of grave dignity in the Charioteer of Delphi, of poise and balance in the Archers of the Ægina pediment, and of what the Greeks considered perfect proportion in the various copies—all unfortunately rather late and lifeless—of the Doryphoros of Polycleitus, from which the sculptor himself worked out his ideal canon.

Of examples of female beauty we have an equal wealth, and almost every movement of the body may be illustrated from some extant statue. For walking, we have the Victory of Pæonius, stepping freely forward with her light linen robe blowing back against her girlish limbs, and the more mature figure of the Victory of Samothrace. To some modern critics both statues seem to be flying through the air, but the appearance of winged motion is in reality simply due to the fact that they are walking *correctly*, using about half the effort, and covering at each pace nearly double the ground that a modern woman would traverse.

As types of the standing position there are the three great statues of Venus in Paris, Rome, and Florence. The Venus de Milo, more beautiful than any modern body with her mingled charm of grace and vigour, the tapering waist line and fine hips giving grace, the strength and development of the abdominal muscles promising the perfect fulfilment of woman's noblest task; the Venus of Cnidus, where again the line of beauty is the line of the hips, as the goddess stands with left knee bent resting the weight of her body on the right flank; the Venus de Medici, less vigorous at first sight than the other two, but revealing on a closer view a subtle

complexity of sinew and muscle about the waist line, where the modern corset leaves unsightly rolls of fat and muscles atrophied.

For sitting, there is the group known usually as ‘The Three Fates,’ from the east pediment of the Parthenon; the figures resting, but resting with knowledge, the shoulders square and thorax high

arched, the body not allowed to collapse in an inert mass, but ready at need to spring again at once into active life. Another example is the crouching Venus of the Vatican, set in a position of modest grace which a modern woman would find almost impossible of attainment. With us the cartilages of the breast bone are practically useless and the thorax is left unsupported; Greek women were able to move the entire thorax sideways, a capacity we have lost, and when lowering their bodies they kept them, as does the goddess here, with the longitudinal axis of the torso remaining as far as possible in the vertical plane.

If we need types of more active motion, there is the Amazon from the pediment at Epidaurus, her body perfectly poised as her thigh muscles press the horse's side; or the Athena of the Æginetan pediment showing us how with proper control of the muscles it is possible to turn the body through three-quarters of a circle without moving the feet; and the exquisite bronze Fortune at Naples, a perfect example of muscular balance—'drawn up on the extreme points of her toes, she looks as though hovering over the world, light as thistledown, and yet in her tense immobility the very essence of Force.'

It has often been said that the marvellous achievements of Greek sculptors were a result of their daily opportunities of seeing the nude form; but nudity alone does not suffice. The greatest sculptor of our time tried the experiment of studying his nude models as they walked to and fro at their ease in his great room at the Hotel Biron. We saw the result: critics accused him of a love for the grotesque and the uncouth, while Rodin himself was reduced to the theory that for the

artist nothing is ugly. The truth is that the naked body of a modern grown man is not beautiful, and therefore a faithful transcription such as Rodin gives cannot be beautiful. But the Greek models were beautiful, because beauty of body had been developed by a system of gymnastics universally applied.

With their statues to guide us, it will be our own fault if we do not again reach the standard of physical perfection which the Greeks attained; for it is a curious and inspiriting fact that the human form almost immediately responds to any opportunity that is given it, and that with each child the race begins anew. What we need is a national training, carefully planned by experts and adapted alike for children, youths and grown men. And with it we need a fuller realization of the duty that every one owes to himself, and a deeper determination to make each part of our body as beautiful as nature allows. Listen to the words of the wisest of philosophers:

‘It is a shameful thing to grow old in neglect, without having realized to the utmost such strength and beauty as your body is capable of. Strength and beauty will not come of themselves: the man who takes no care for them will never possess them.’

# 5

## Galen's Treatise on the Small Ball

BALL games, as we know from Homer, were from the earliest times popular among the Greeks, being especially esteemed for the grace of body which the act of throwing and catching gives. The central incident of the *Odyssey* is connected with such a game, for it was a lost ball that roused Odysseus from his sleep in the bush and led to his discovery by Nausicaa. At Athens in the fifth century they were, for men, rather overshadowed by the gymnastic exercises already described, but youths found in them a favourite diversion, and the poet Sophocles in his tragedy of the *Nausicaa* won particular praise in the title-rôle—a non-speaking part—because of his dexterous skill. Those who played, as Athenæus tells us, always paid great attention to elegance of attitude, and he quotes from the comic poet Demoxenus:

'A youth I saw was playing ball,
Seventeen years of age and tall;
From Cos he came, and well I wot
The gods look kindly on that spot.
For when he took the ball or threw it,
So pleased were all of us to view it,
We all cried out; so great his grace
Such frank good humour in his face,
That every time he spoke or moved,
All felt as if that youth they loved.
Sure ne'er before had these eyes seen,
Nor ever since, so fair a mien:
Had I stayed long, most sad my plight
Had been, to lose my wits outright,
And even now the recollection
Disturbs my senses' calm reflection.'

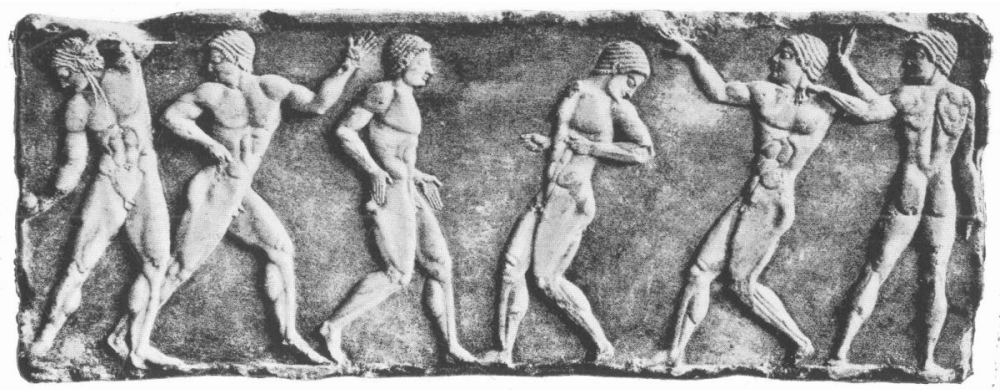
Of the actual details of these ball games we have very few accounts in literature or representations in art. One of the most recent archæological discoveries has, however, thrown light on one point. Up till lately we had no instance of implements being used; but in February, 1922, while the foundations of a shop were being constructed at Athens, sections of the Themistoclean circuit wall were brought to light. Built into them were three quadrangular bases of Pentelic marble with sculptured reliefs on their sides and one of these reliefs shows clearly the details of a hockey match. The ball is on the ground in the exact middle: two youths with sticks are engaged in a 'bully' for it precisely in the modern fashion: on either side of them stand two other pairs of youths, with sticks, representing, it may be presumed, the rest of the two competing teams.

Another of the six reliefs, equally interesting, shows probably the beginning of the most popular and the most energetic of all forms of ball games, the Phæninda, played with a small hard ball stuffed with hair, the Harpastum. The game bore some resemblance to our Rugby, except that the ball was always thrown and never kicked. The scene on the relief represents a throw-in from the touchline; one youth is preparing to throw, the rest are waiting either to seize the ball in the air or to tackle the next possessor. A passage from the comedian Antiphanes, quoted by Athenæus (Bk. I, ch. 26), gives a lively picture:

‘The player takes the ball elate,
And gives it safely to his mate,
Avoids the blows of the other side
And shouts to see them hitting wide.
List to the cries, “Hit here,” “hit here,”
“Too far,” “too high,” “that is not fair”—
See every man with ardour burns
To make good strokes and quick returns.’

Another sort of game, less rough in character and more akin to our lacrosse, was possibly played with a lighter feather stuffed ball, in Greek, *sphaira*, the Latin *follis*. Here, tackling was not allowed, and the ball was thrown from hand to hand while the players were running at full speed.

In playing with the *harpastum* or the *follis* the main object was to drive your opponents to retreat behind their base line, and in both styles there



THE THROW-IN AT THE SMALL BALL GAME (Athens)

was a good deal of running. The third type of game, played with the *trigon*, required less exertion. The players here were only three in number, and stood at the three-corners of a triangle, throwing balls quickly one at the other: both hands were used and caddies supplied the players with missiles.

All three games were Greek inventions; but they reached the height of their popularity under the Roman Empire. Seneca, writing on the brevity of mortal life, complains that there are many people who have no other occupation but to play ball from morning till night. Martial frequently mentions the dusty *harpastum*, the warming *trigon*, and the feathered *follis*, and in one of his epigrams praises a young student for taking his exercise in the form of a long run rather than waste his time on the 'busy idleness' of a ball game. To this period also belongs the one serious account that we have in Greek of any game, Galen's treatise on exercise with the small ball.

Claudius Galenus, born at Pergamum in the reign of Hadrian, 131 A.D., is one of the most notable figures of a notable age. Courtier-physician, scholar-diplomat, the friend of princes and the trainer of gladiators, he recalls the versatility of the great sophists of the fifth century B.C., and he equals them in the breadth and profundity of his knowledge. His writings embrace four distinct fields: medicine in all its aspects, philosophy, rhetoric, and grammatical logic; and although he is best known as a physician his commentaries on Hippocrates may claim to be the beginning of truly scientific scholarship.

His long life was spent in acquiring and imparting knowledge. A thorough education, conducted under his father's eye, rendered him apt for every art. His wealth enabled him to travel and study at his leisure, and in early manhood he made the 'grand tour' of the ancient world, living for a time at Smyrna, Alexandria, and Rome before he returned to his native town. We have now 118 genuine extant works from his pen, which translated from the Greek into Arabic and thence again into Latin, were the chief text-books in all the mediæval universities. Editions were innumerable,

and even to-day the name of Galen occupies more than fifty pages in the British Museum Catalogue. In a production so immense we must not expect consummate grace of language, but his own maxim, ‘the first merit of style is clearness’ is well exemplified in the ‘Small ball,’ which is short enough to be translated here in its entirety.

‘How great an advantage for health gymnastic exercises are and what an important part they play in questions of diet has been sufficiently explained by the best of our ancient philosophers and physicians. But how superior to all other exercise is the use of the small ball has never been adequately set forth by any of my predecessors. It is only right then for me to put forward my ideas for your criticism, Epigenes, since you have the very best practical experience of the athletic art, in the further hope that they may be useful also to all those to whom you communicate your knowledge.

‘The best forms of gymnastic, I think, are those which are able not only to work the body but also to delight the mind. Those men were true philosophers who invented coursing and the other varieties of the chase, tempering the labour they involve with pleasure, exultation and rivalry, and they had an accurate knowledge of human nature. So powerful an effect has mental emotion upon the stuff of which we are made that many people have been cured of ailments merely by the effect of joy, while many others have fallen ill from sorrow. Indeed, of all the affections that are rooted in the body none is strong enough to master those others that have the mind for their sphere. So it is wrong to neglect the character of our mental emotions; we ought for every reason to give more attention to them than to the condition of our body, especially as the mind is more important than the body can be. This care is the common function of all gymnastic exercises that have an

element of pleasure in them, but there are other special points in small ball play which I will now describe.

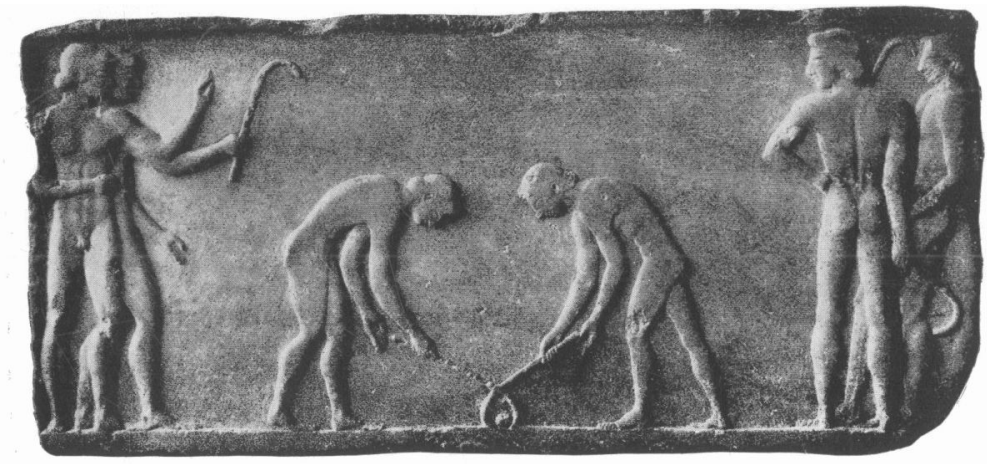
‘Firstly, it is easy. If you consider what time and trouble all the business of hunting involves, especially coursing, you will clearly see that no one who is engaged in public service or who follows an art or trade can take part in these forms of exercise; they require abundant wealth and a person who enjoys considerable leisure. But ball play is different. It is so democratic that even the poorest can spare the necessary trouble. It needs no nets, nor weapons, nor horses, nor hounds: all it requires is one small ball. Moreover, it suits itself so well to a man’s other pursuits, that it does not compel him to neglect any of them for its sake. What could be easier than a sport which allows any form of human occupation or condition? As regards the exercise that hunting gives, it is out of our power to enjoy it easily: it requires money to provide an elaborate equipment and freedom from occupation to wait for a suitable opportunity. But with ball play even the poorest have no difficulty in getting the implements; it will wait for us, and quite busy people find opportunity to enjoy it. Its accessibility is a very great advantage.

‘If you consider the effect and nature of each of the other kinds of exercise, you will see clearly that ball play is the most satisfactory of them all. You will find that the others are either over violent or not violent enough; that they give disproportionate exercise to the lower or to the upper part of the body or to one part at the expense of the others; the loins, the head, the arms, the chest. Something which keeps all parts of the body moving alike and admits either of the most violent strain or the gentlest relaxation, this can be found in no exercise except the small ball. The game can be sharp or slow, soft or violent just according to your own inclination, as your

body seems to need it. You can exercise all parts of the body at the same time, if that appears best, or if it should seem preferable, some parts rather than others. When the players form sides and try to stop their opponents midway and rob them of the ball, the exercise is very severe and violent. You often have to grip your man in wrestling fashion or else collar him; the latter method giving plenty of work for head and neck, the former exercising ribs, chest and stomach, as you fasten your own grip or escape from your opponent's. Sometimes you make your mark, sometimes you use one of the holds that are taught in the wrestling schools; and this means a very considerable strain on the loins and the legs. And so for this sport a man must be a strong runner: he will have to swerve and leap sideways as well as run straight forward and this is hard exercise for the legs. Indeed, to speak the truth, it is the only sport that properly exercises the legs in all their parts. When you run forward one set of sinews and muscles comes into play; when you jump backwards others have more work to do, and others again when you change direction sideways. In track-running on the contrary, only one sort of movement is necessary and the exercise is unequal, not affecting all parts of the legs alike.

'And as with the legs so also with the arms, the exercise is very fairly apportioned, for the players are accustomed to catch the ball in every kind of attitude. This variety of attitude inevitably exercises different muscles at different times in different degrees of intensity. Every muscle has its turn of work and an equal share of rest: they are now active, now quiescent; none remains altogether idle, none is overcome with weariness by working alone. As for the training that the eye receives you may realize this by remembering that unless a man anticipates exactly the flight of the ball and its

direction, he must inevitably fail to make his catch. Moreover, the wits are sharpened by the game: you have to think carefully how best to stop your opponent, and not drop the ball yourself. Thought by itself makes a man thin; but when it is combined with exercise and the pleasant rivalry of a sport it is of the very greatest benefit. The body improves in health, the mind is turned to practical knowledge. When exercise can render service both to body and mind, each in its own special form of excellence, it is a blessing indeed.



A HOCKEY MATCH (Statue base discovered at Athens, 1922)

‘It is easy too to see that ball games can give men practice in two most important forms of training, those two which the royal ordinance of law bids our generals most sedulously to pursue. The functions of a good general are these: to attack at the proper time and to seize quickly each opportunity for action: to secure the property of the enemy either by force or by an unexpected assault, and to keep safe any possessions already acquired. In short, a general should be an expert guardian and an expert thief: that is the sum of his trade.

‘Now, can any exercise but ball games train a man so well how to keep what he has got, to recover what he has lost, and

to anticipate his opponent's plans? I should be surprised, if you could tell me of one. Most forms of exercise have the opposite effect: they make men lazy, slow-witted and fond of sleep. The competitions of the wrestling school tend to make people corpulent rather than to train them in virtue. Many wrestlers become so fat that they have difficulty in breathing, and such folk could never be good generals in time of war or good administrators either in a royal or a republican state: you might sooner trust pigs than them.

'Perhaps you may think that I approve of running and any other form of exercise that reduces fat. I do not. I disapprove of excess in all matters, and I think that every art should aim at symmetry. If a thing lacks measure, it is in so far bad. So I cannot approve of track athletics, for they reduce a man's physical condition and give him no training in manliness. Victory does not come to those who run quickly but to those who are able to hold their own in a close fight, and the Spartans owed their greatness not to their speed of foot but to their stubborn courage. Even if you considered it purely on grounds of health, a sport is not healthy in so far as it exercises the parts of the body unequally. Inevitably, some parts are overstrained, some left quite idle. Neither of these conditions are good: both foster the seeds of illness and produce a weak state of health.

'The exercise I approve of most is one that can give health of body, symmetry of limbs and excellence of mind: and all these virtues are found in the small ball. It can benefit the mind in all kinds of ways; it exercises every part of the body alike—and this is of the greatest importance for health—for it produces a regular state of constitution; and it does not lead either to undue corpulence or excessive thinness: it is

competent to perform such acts as require strength, it is suitable also for those that need quickness.

‘Now if we consider ball games in their most violent form they are inferior in no respect to any sort of athletics. But we must also look at them in their milder aspect, for sometimes we need gentle exercise. We may be either too old or not old enough to stand a severe strain; we may wish to relax our efforts or be recovering from illness. I think that in this respect also the small ball has a great advantage, for no game is quite so gentle, if you wish to take it gently. Should you need moderate exercise and desire to avoid excess, you will sometimes step softly forward, sometimes stand quite still: you need not make any violent effort and you can add to the effect by a warm bath or a gentle rub down with oil. Of all exercise this is the most gentle: it is most suitable for one who needs useful recreation, it can revive failing strength, it is most suitable for old and young alike. There are, however, some stronger sorts of exercise which can be obtained by the use of the small ball, although they are milder than the most intense form of the game, and these must now be considered if we really wish to treat the subject completely. If ever some unavoidable task, such as often falls to many a man’s lot, has caused an excessive strain to all the upper or all the lower parts of the body, or to the arms alone or to the feet, by the help of the small ball you can rest those parts that have been overstrained and give the same amount of exercise to those other parts that were then left quite idle. To stand a fair distance apart and throw the ball vigorously, without using the legs hardly at all, rests the lower limbs and gives a somewhat violent exercise to the upper parts of the body. On the other hand, if you run most of the way at a good speed keeping a wide distance and seldom throw the ball, the lower limbs have

more work to do. The quickness of action and the speed required, involve no great muscular strain but they exercise the lungs, while the vigorous effort, as you grasp the ball and catch and throw it, although it needs no speed of foot, yet braces and strengthens the body. If the ball is thrown both vigorously and at full speed there will be a considerable strain on the body and on the lungs: it will be indeed the most violent form of exercise possible. But how far this strain should be relaxed or intensified, as circumstances require, it is impossible to set down in writing—exact quantities should never be stated; in actual practice it is easy enough to discover the proper limit and to instruct others. On actual experience all depends. The quality of a thing is useless if it is spoilt by a wrong quantity, and this will be the business of your trainer, who will act as guide in all matters of exercise.

‘But I must bring my subject to an end. In addition to all the other advantages, which, as I have said, the small ball possesses, there is one more which I should not like to omit. It is free from all the risks to which most other athletic exercises are liable. Before to-day many a man has died of a broken blood-vessel after a violent race: and so also the practice of loud and furious shouting, if pursued without intermission for some time, has often proved the cause of very serious mischief. Continuous horse-riding ruptures the parts about the kidneys and often injures the chest, besides in some cases doing harm to the generative organs. I say nothing of the mistakes that horses make, whereby frequently their riders have been unseated and killed on the spot. Many men have also been hurt while jumping, or throwing the discus, or turning somersaults. As for the frequenters of the wrestling school, what need I say of them? They are all scarred more shamefully than the Curse-hags of whom Homer tells us. The

great poet describes them: “Lame and wrinkled and with eyes askance.” And so with the wrestling master’s pupils, you will find them lame, distorted, battered, and maimed in some part at least of their body. Since then, in addition to the other advantages, this freedom from danger is the particular attribute of small ball games, they must be regarded as the best of all inventions, so far as actual utility is concerned.’

There are many striking points in the little essay; the importance that Galen assigns to athletics as part of military training; his insistence on the moral and intellectual virtue of games and their value in producing a cheerful frame of mind; his depreciation, on social and physical grounds, of track-running. It is written obviously from the standpoint of a physician and not of an athlete or a sportsman. The athlete might well wish for fuller details of the three different games of ‘harpastum,’ ‘trigon,’ and ‘follis,’ which are here mentioned rather than described. The sportsman would probably object to the strictures on hunting and riding, and reply that a spice of danger gives an additional zest to exercise. It is noticeable also that in discussing the moral virtue of games Galen makes no mention of that which we consider their most important feature, the ‘team-spirit,’ the working not for yourself but for your side.

Criticisms such as these, however, are ungracious. The ‘small ball’ is a delightful example of the work of a great practical genius who devoted his whole life to the service of his fellow-men. In spirit, moreover, and in method it follows the true Greek tradition, and regards athletics not as a mere diversion but as the best practical preparation for the strenuous business of life.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

*E. N. Gardiner*: Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals. Macmillan, 1910.

*K. J. Freeman*: Schools of Hellas. Macmillan, 1907.

*W. W. Hyde*: Olympic Victor Monuments. Washington, U.S.A., 1921.

*Walter Pater*: Greek Studies. Macmillan, 1895.

*J. B. Bury*: The Nemean Odes of Pindar. Macmillan, 1891.

*E. Bruecke*: The Human Figure. Grevel, 1900.

*D. Watts*: The Renaissance of the Greek Ideal. Heinemann, 1914.

*E. Jaques-Dalcroze*: Rhythm, Music and Education. Chatto and Windus, 1921.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[A] *The Arts in Greece.* By F. A. Wright. Longmans, 1923.

[B] E. Myers: *Odes of Pindar*.

---

[The end of *Greek Athletics* by Frederick Adam Wright]