

PHYSICAL EDUCATION IS FUN

Women and the Home

H EAT rose from the burning asphalt of the Kelburn School tennis courts. Ranged around were rows of benches and chairs on which crowds of spectators sat, at ease, fanning themselves with hats and programmes while twenty girls pranced and leaped for their entertainment.

I had come to watch the demonstration by third-year Training College students of modern methods of physical education. Wellington Training College is the Dominion centre for this work, and the twenty girls I saw had been selected from the four training colleges for the special course. It was natural, therefore, to expect a fairly high standard of physical prowess, but I was unprepared for the excellence of the afternoon's programme. Throughout, stress was laid on the fact that the girls had been chosen primarily for their teaching ability, and only secondarily for proficiency in the exercises themselves, and that the work demonstrated was merely that suitable for teaching to primary and high school pupils.

I thought back to my own school days, and to our quarter hour of "drill" each morning after interval, and decided that if I had been educated under the new system I might have found it easy now to do my ten minutes night and morning for the sake of my figure, or rather that my figure would not have needed the ten minutes night and morning, and I should probably be doing it just for fun.

Enjoying Themselves

For our twenty girls certainly seemed to be enjoying themselves. Clad in brief navy bloomers and white blouses (their usual uniform for sports) they were racing round the court giving a demonstration of team passing for basketball. Next came a hoop relay, then a few minutes of "corner ball" and skittle aiming.

The next item was a bracket of infant singing games, which cunningly combine musical instruction with physical work. Wide grins were noticeable on the faces of the demonstrators as they skipped to "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep" round a young woman with a plentiful crop of black curls.

Perhaps the section which aroused most enthusiasm in the audience was the dealing with various kinds of agility work. Forms were placed across the path of the runners, and they "bounded" (technical term) over them with bird-like ease and grace. The perfect timing and the beauty of the movements themselves brought a wave of applause. Then there were demonstrations of leap-frog and forward and back rolls, but the grace of the movements made them curiously unlike the common varieties of leap-frog and somersaulting.

After almost an hour, the demonstrators had ten minutes or so off. They left the arena with heads high and smiles for the spectators.

"How do they do it?" I asked a student beside me. "After an hour of

that they should need to be carried out on stretchers."

"I suppose they get used to it," replied my blasé companion. "They're very fit, you know."

Music And Movement

I believed her, the more so when the stalwart twenty reappeared clad in gay tunics of various colours and looking as though they had just started their programme. This time they showed advanced exercises illustrating the use of music as a background for rhythmic movement. The swaying bodies formed coloured patterns against the grey asphalt, and the perfectly synchronised movements seemed to give added meaning to the music. Music interpreted by movement. I decided.

But I was wrong. The voice of authority at the microphone, that of P. A. Smithells, Superintendent of Physical Education for the Education Department, was explaining that movement came first, and that it was a matter of finding music that would fit in with the rhythm of the movement, not of movement to fit the rhythm of the music.

Five minutes interval, according to the programme. The girls bounded from the court and into the dressing-room. I pictured them flopping limply on benches, able to breathe uninterrupted for five blessed minutes. But soon they appeared again, this time in Russian peasant costume, for the Russian Wedding Scene, a suite of four Russian dances (with by-play) begun and ended with a mazurka. The mazurka is a rather vigorous dance, intended to be performed in the Russian winter rather than in the New Zealand summer.

More Folk Dances

Another short interval while the performers extricated themselves from knee boots and high buttoned tunics and reappeared in their tunics and dancing pumps for a demonstration of four more folk-dances, English, Scottish, Irish and Moravian. Last of all came the "Running Set," an old English dance, preserved in the Appalachian Mountains in America and discovered there by Cecil Sharp. The whole dance, Mr. Smithells informed us, takes nine and a-half hours if all the figures are done and has nothing namby-pamby about it. "An excellent stamina builder," was his comment. Fortunately there was time for only one movement from the complete dance, and so after ten minutes of the "running set" they formed up for the final item, the relaxation exercise without which no programme of physical education is complete.

The twenty glowing forms in their bright tunics were swallowed up in the darkness of the dressing room, but from it, instead of groans of exhaustion, came sounds of laughter and merriment. The spectators rose limply from their seats for "God Save the King," and, fanning themselves wearily, drifted towards the Training College Hall, lured by the promise of much needed refreshment.

They're tough at the Training Colleges.

—M.I.



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