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The Influence on National Life of Military Training in Schools

BY

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OF
MILITARY TRAINING IN SCHOOLS.*

OBVIOUSLY it is necessary for the welfare of every State, and especially for the welfare of a State in which so much is left to the initiative of the individual citizen as is the case in Great Britain, that a sense of duty towards the community shall, as far as possible, be created and developed in all citizens. Everyone who, either in town or country, examines our life with any degree of care finds that many persons, of both sexes and of almost all ages, recognise that it is their duty to do, or try to do, kinds of work for the good of the community as a whole, or of parts of it, which no authority but that of their own conscience could compel them to do; and that their work, on the whole, does very much good, although some of it is directed to badly chosen ends, and the means employed are not always well selected. But though even a superficial observer soon discovers that very much voluntary work is done, from the unpaid work of legislators and magistrates to that of children who in Sunday Schools teach other children a few shades more ignorant than themselves, it is only an experienced observer who gets any adequate idea of the high degree in which the welfare of every class in the community, and especially that of the poorer class, depends on good work done only because the doers believe they ought to do it. I know, from experience gained by thirty years of membership of the Manchester and Salford Sanitary Association, that medical men take a very large part in this vast amount of unpaid good work, and that nearly all medical men see much of it, and therefore I feel sure that you will all agree with me when I say that, bad as are the conditions under which a large part of our people live,

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unsatisfactory as are those under which the great majority live, those conditions would be far worse, and that for hundreds of thousands of persons who now have some health and comfort, physical, mental, and moral ruin would be inevitable, but for the work done to help them by persons whose sole motive is a sense of duty. But though very much work of this kind is done by many persons, we all of us know that there are a vast number of persons, including many who, if they chose, could do most to help the community, who do nothing to help it. The commonness of the non-existence of even the beginning of public spirit is shown by the large number of persons who on getting out of a railway carriage in cold weather will not take the trouble to shut the door after them, and, in the country, by the large number of carters who leave the big stones which they have used to scotch the wheels of their wagons lying in the middle of the road, where they will very likely trip up the next horse which comes that way. Moreover there is a remarkable perversity on the part of many of those who do some work, in their choice of work. A man who could raise the level of life of a large town, if he would serve on its town council, often satisfies his conscience by accepting the position of a churchwarden. One who could fight for his country in a South African war is contented to play cricket for it in Australia.

As it is certain that the future of our people cannot be saved unless far more work is done for both our urban and rural populations, it is very desirable that, if this be in any way possible, every boy and girl shall be made to feel the desire to do the best possible service for the country and shall possess the power to do good service for it. We ought, therefore, to find out why it is that the desire or the power is so often non-existent, and so often badly directed.

I am sure that the chief cause is that far too little effort is made to create and guide desire to serve the community in children. I have met a considerable number of persons who, so far as I could learn, have never done any good work for the community nor had the least desire to do any; but I have met hardly any whose lives did not seem to show that they could have been easily trained in childhood into willingness and power to be useful. Probably we have all of us met with cases of lives which have long been useless in which a change has taken place that apparently might have been easily brought about much earlier. I will mention only one typical case. I knew a rich man who, when I met him, was doing much good work in East London by which his

own life was as much helped as were the lives of the people for whom he worked. He told me that, until he was grown up and came by accident under the influence of the Head of a University Settlement, he had never been asked to do any work for the good of anyone. Often the useless people we see are too old to be reformed. Here is a typical case. Many years ago a man holding high office was assassinated. A military officer who might have at least attempted to prevent the deed made no effort to do so. I was told by a man who knew his training that the unfortunate creature had never been compelled, or even asked, in childhood, to think of the welfare of anyone but himself.

English boys of the well-to-do classes—that is boys just of the classes who can do most for the good of the community, and whose influence is most potent for evil as well as for good—are worse placed in respect of the chance of gaining desire and power to serve the community than the boys of most other nations, and than many of the boys of the English lower-middle classes. The "natural" way for a child to acquire the desire is to live with his parents and to acquire it from them. A child of good disposition who shares its parents' life, if it receives from them a little instruction respecting the mutual dependence of the various social classes and of individuals, is soon influenced by their example, and gradually comes to share the interest which they take in the life and needs of the people of the village, town, or city near, or in, which it lives; and as the village, town, or city contains the same mixture of classes which make up a nation, the child, as it gets older, grows easily into increased knowledge of, and willingness to try to do its part in satisfying, the needs of the nation. Not to receive in childhood this early training in the initial stages of patriotism is by itself a great misfortune, and it is an additional misfortune if, lacking it, a child is trained to care strongly for such a community as that formed by a preparatory school or a public school, consisting only of lads of his own social class and his own sex, which has inherited from many other generations of little boys modes of thought and feeling some of them very perverse and unwholesome, and which gives its members no idea of the constitution and needs of any normal human community of village, town, or nation. This, in spite of the influence of holidays, which, however, are not always spent at home, is the lot of the majority of English boys of the upper-middle and the higher classes. It seems clear that if those social classes are to produce as many patriotic citizens

as possible, the boys born of them must have some special treatment to make good the loss of the civic training of home and to counteract that of membership of a society whose needs differ much from those of a normal community. We know, too, that in a large proportion of the homes of the children who go to our public elementary schools, the struggle for daily bread, and too often, also, the influence of the daily beer, prevent the parents from forming any strong and intelligent conception of duty to the community in which their children can participate. If, then, most of the children attending elementary schools are to feel a desire to live the lives of useful citizens, they too must receive some special training at school.

The training needed must be comprehensive; it must include some instruction respecting duty towards our neighbour and duty towards the mass of our neighbours—our country; but it must include much more than instruction given in words, which cannot influence the average child very strongly. Such instruction must be accompanied by action which the child knows to be intended to fit him for the doing of things, the usefulness of which he can understand at least partly.

So far as instruction respecting duty to neighbours is concerned, something is already done in many schools, and a good deal is done in some schools; but I do not think that duty towards the country as a whole is taught with sufficient clearness in many schools of any grade. Our English shyness, our reluctance to speak to anyone about the subjects which we believe to be most important, and the great difficulty which we most of us find in speaking to children about such subjects, owing to our belief that we may do harm and not good—this feeling, which is so common in English people, too often prevents children from receiving the instruction, the advice, which to many of them would make all the difference between noble and ignoble life. We know that the reluctance of parents and teachers to give young people necessary information respecting the relations of the sexes often has the worst results. I believe that failure to tell children of the duty of each of them towards his country is also very harmful. Of course, the giving of such instruction must be guided by good sense and tact. Mr. Kipling, in "Stalkey & Co.," gives us an example of how not to do it in the address of his offensive M.P., who, if I remember rightly, waves the country's banner in the face of reticent English lads. Exaggeration and all other forms of insincerity must be carefully avoided, or boys will be made to regard as

ridiculous that for which we wish them to feel reverence. It is, perhaps, not desirable to tell all boys that it is our duty to die for our country if it needs our death; though, as dying for the country is an act which closed the careers of many of the people whose lives boys admire most, I believe that there is no risk in telling most boys of that duty, if they are helped to take to heart the much more difficult and unattractive lesson that it is our duty to *live* for our country. With this lesson may be, and ought to be, combined not only instruction in the laws of health, but also direct teaching that it is a very important part of our duty to our neighbour and to our country, as well as to ourself, to find out and to obey those laws. It seems very desirable that teaching respecting the need for fresh air, for light, for a sufficiency of varied physical and mental exercise, for abstinence from alcohol and tobacco and licentiousness, shall give as the motive for seeking all these right things not merely the child's own good, but also the good of his family and of his country. Many children are quite capable in brain and heart of understanding and feeling that, if they make the best of all their powers, the influence of their health will be far-reaching, and the thought and feeling are distinctly helps towards rightness of life.

The training to action which must accompany instruction given in words, if the instruction is to have lasting and large effect, must be in the main comprehensive physical training. Owing to the fact that in this country the great majority of the people have had no physical training except that which has come to them in games and different kinds of sport and in their bread-winning work, the immense potential value of physical training as a means for giving the highest moral training to a nation is not as generally recognised as it ought to be. It is true that in no other country in the world, except, perhaps, in the United States, is the value of games as means for keeping boys out of vicious habits so fully recognised as it is in the system of our preparatory and public schools; and that system has trained here a larger proportion of well-to-do men than are probably to be found in any other country who look to physical exercises as a necessary auxiliary to good intentions in their struggle against temptations to sensual indulgence. But, even by most of these exceptional people, the highest value of physical training is believed to lie in its power to give and defend physical, mental, and moral health and strength. And most English people who value physical exercise do so on account of the pleasure which

they get from it, and of its good influence on their appetite and health. But Germany and Switzerland, through their great good fortune in having had to bear almost intolerable misfortunes at the beginning of the nineteenth century, learnt the lesson, which is still living in the minds of many of their best people, that the highest value of physical training lies in its being one of the means which are absolutely necessary to enable a country to gain some of the noblest objects for which a nation can strive. When, in the days of Prussia's humiliation, GutsMuths, and, after him, Jahn, with the aid of Stein and his great colleagues, sought to bring all the youth of the country under the influence of their new methods of physical training, though the immediate objects which each lad was taught to work for were physical health, strength, strong nerve, and high courage, all young Germans were taught to regard these things as only means to an end. The end which each lad had to work for was, not his own good physical and moral condition, but the driving out of the hated tyrant, the gain of liberty, of self-control, for the fatherland. And so it has been in Switzerland also. Each Swiss lad who has been helped to gain strength and health by the system of physical training applied to all Swiss schools, has been taught that the gain to himself must be used by him as a means to an end—the secure independence and liberty of his country. The lesson that good health and strength are not the highest results which good physical training can give is still taught in Germany. Dr. Koch, speaking at a conference held last year in Frankfurt-am-Main, said: "Increased bodily strength and health are not the most important gain which our youth can owe to their physical exercises, but training for independence of will and action, for freedom of judgment, and for the power of decision"; and these qualities are to be used for the service of one's country.

Surely we English, of all social classes, need the introduction in that spirit into all our schools of a comprehensive system of physical training. Every English boy ought to be so trained as to be able, should occasion arise, to help to repel a foreign invader; but while it is quite right to let a foreign invader be kept before children's minds as one of the enemies whom they may have to meet, he should be treated partly as a type of the foes whom they will certainly have to face. They should often be reminded that the training which will enable them to repel a possible invasion, is intended also to enable them to serve their country by being strong, healthy, industrious, honest, happy citizens, able and willing to drive out from their country

the drunkenness, gambling, licentiousness, lying, dishonesty, and physical deterioration which now hold her in bondage. Of the necessary system games, of course, are a part. They have good effects on health which can be gained in no other way; and they give self-reliance, quickness of decision, and, when played under proper guidance, desire and power to be fair towards others, which no other kind of training can give in the same degree. Even if the matter be only looked at from a money point of view, it is worth the while of the community to provide a large playground within reach of every child in town and country. At present very few children in our large towns get exercise in games as often as they need it, and many town children, and not a few in the country, do not know how to play any health-giving game.

Games do not suffice as means of physical training. They often do not give the all-round training which everyone should receive; and though they give some kinds of self-reliance, in the case of many children they fail to give training in courage, in resolution to do, or try to do, difficult things which one knows it is one's duty to do. The boy who has been taught to try to vault a bar so high that he does not know whether he will get over, not in the excitement of a game but in cold blood, has received training which will help him to face many of the difficulties of life. Moreover, because games are so pleasant to most children, the habit of playing them does not keep alive the sense of the duty of keeping one's self in good condition for work, as the moderate use of gymnastics does. And it should be borne in mind that while we do not gain from games so easily as from gymnastics the feeling that it is a duty to take enough exercise, they subject many children to a strong inducement, and often to absolute compulsion, to over-tire themselves to a degree which not only prevents the acquisition of love of work and of knowledge, but is also most injurious to physical growth.

There can be little doubt that this country owes its possession of a large number of men, members of the well-fed not over-worked classes, who are small in body and boyish in mind, to the effect, repeated day by day in their school years, of over-excitement and over-fatigue in school games and school runs. Gymnastics carefully taught, compensate admirably for the defects of games. They give all-round training and they need not over-tire. Gymnastics taught in all schools seem to give better physical training to a nation which makes comparatively little use of games, than does our system of games. We know that the physique of Englishmen is not improving.

At the last Congress of the German Society for the Promotion of Games, an army surgeon of great experience, Dr. Meisner, gave statistics which showed that, notwithstanding the great increase in the proportion of the German population which lives in towns, there has been a distinct increase in the proportion of the young men who are physically fit for military service, although in Berlin there is a serious diminution in the proportion of the physically fit. Some of the German school authorities are now taking measures to ensure that all boys, likely to be benefited by it, shall spend a considerable amount of time regularly in the playing of games. For instance, the Secondary School Authority in Wuerttemberg has just issued an edict to the effect that, in addition to the time now given to gymnastics, all boys who do not need exemption, shall play active games for two hours a week. In this connection I may mention that in Germany far more attention is given than here to preventing weakly boys from being injured by over-fatigue in games.

Military drill, the subject which we have to consider today, should certainly form part of the system of physical training for every boys' school, and some kinds of drill should be used in every girls' school also. If there was no war in the world, and it was not necessary to think of the chance of invasion, military drill would still be a desirable kind of training. The boy possessed of a little intelligence who learns how to form fours, how to wheel in line and in fours, feels that he and his comrades are no longer a mob of which all the parts are in each other's way. They have become an orderly body able to bring their united force to bear where it is needed. And simple military drill and some kinds of military training may be of very great use for many purposes of school life. German school doctors have now had for a considerable time under observation in large towns a great number of scholars, many of whom have had their eyesight, many their hearing, many their general health, injured by the conditions under which they have worked in schools, and by those affecting their home and other out-of-school life. The German school doctors confirm the experience of English observers in saying that life in the country, even if it can only be had for a few hours, or for even shorter periods, at a time, has great power to restore eyesight to normal condition, to train the ear, imperfectly used in the city, to new power of perceiving and discriminating between sounds, and not only to strengthen physical health by light, pure air and exercise, but also to improve mental and moral health by the store of new whole-

some knowledge which it gives and the new wholesome feelings and thoughts which the new knowledge supplies. Walks to the suburbs, and when possible into the country, in military order, practice in judging distances, changes of formation when space allows of it—these things should form an important part of the training given in every school. There are some interesting German statistics which raise the question whether for many children this kind of physical occupation which keeps them in the open air, with their minds and bodies pleasantly engaged, and does not tire them, is not, with the addition of a moderate amount of games and gymnastics, much more conducive to the gain of health and strength than the giving of more time to games and gymnastics would be. Dr. Meisner showed that in those parts of Germany where the population is mainly occupied in the varied work of agriculture, this kind of daily training, with the addition of school gymnastics, causes a much larger proportion of the young men to be fit for military service at the age of twenty than a much larger amount of strenuous physical training given in other districts to boys and youths who spend less time in fresh air. Sweden gives more gymnastic training to its boys than any other country, and 75 per cent. of its young men are fit for military service. But in some of the country districts of the German province of Brandenburg, where boys have gymnastic training, but less than is given in Sweden, the proportion of young men fit for military service reaches 80 per cent. Dr. Meisner, who demands between eight and nine hours of sleep daily for boys, says that for many boys an hour's extra sleep would be more useful than an hour's extra physical training.

That too much mental work in schools, and an insufficient amount of rest and physical exercise, are among the most potent causes of physical deterioration seems to be proved by the remarkable fact, reported in the year 1877, by Dr. Finkelnburg, that of 17,246 young men who were entitled by the examinations which they had passed to serve for only one year in the Prussian army, only 20 per cent. were physically fit for service, while of the ordinary recruits whose brains had not been so much over-worked, and whose bodies had been more exercised, from 50 to 55 per cent. were physically fit for service. Last year it was again stated that boys from the higher German schools show an ever-increasing amount of physical unfitness for military service. Though military drill would be a very desirable addition to the physical training given in all boys' schools, even if there were no such a thing as the possibility of war, some of the strongest reasons for making it part

of the training of every boy are, of course, supplied by the need for ensuring the safety of the country from foreign attack. It cannot fail to have a good influence on the life of a boy that he shall grow up with the knowledge that, if his country is attacked, it will be his duty to take part in defending her, and that he is receiving the training needed to enable him to fulfil the duty. Every boy should, therefore, not only take part in the military drill, of which I have spoken already, but should also be taught to use a rifle. The belief, which one sometimes hears expressed, that such training is likely to make boys jingos and lovers of war, and that to teach them to shoot familiarises them with the thought of killing their fellow-creatures and makes them bloodthirsty, seems to me to be based on complete ignorance of the nature of boys. Nearly all boys are pugnacious internally, and gain from books, and from intercourse with comrades, great familiarity with thoughts of the slaughter which takes place in war and with violent death as the result of crime and accident. To drill boys and to teach them to shoot, and at the same time to make them understand that the use of their skill in shooting would only be justified by an attack on their country, is not to make them think more lightly of war, and the infliction of wounds and death, than they would otherwise think, but is, on the contrary, to make them think much more seriously of them. It is quite certain that in this country, where boys and men have not hitherto been made to feel, by receiving military training, that it is the duty of each to take part in the defence of the country, there has been far more shouting for war, far more of the worst kind of jingoism, than has been found in any nation which has compulsory service. And the South African war, which, by the claims which it made on so many families which had not before sent any of their members into the army, resembled more than any other war of the last ninety years a war carried on by a conscript army, has certainly done more to banish jingo feeling from the nation than has any other war carried on in our time.

A few weeks ago I consulted a Swiss instructor who gives military drill and other physical training to a large number of boys in the Canton of Vaud. He is a member of the Peace Society and detests war. He takes all the opportunities which he can get of keeping before his pupils the duty of preparing themselves for the defence of their country, a task in which, peace-lover as he is, he is prepared to share. The training does not create any chauvinistic feeling in the boys.

Objection has been taken to the introduction of military training into schools on the ground that it is valueless as a preparation for military service, and this objection is supported by the statement that the French, who had at one time many school battalions, have got rid of them, and that German military authorities disapprove of giving military drill to scholars and of teaching them to shoot. Both these statements are true, but the facts that they record give no reason whatever for doubt as to the usefulness of military drill and the teaching of shooting in English schools. Both Germany and France compel every young man, who is physically fit to do so, to receive military training when he reaches the age of twenty, and it is believed, therefore, in both those countries that, as every boy will then receive military training, it is well to give other kinds of physical training in the years of school life. In this country it is only in these years that it is possible to give the majority of our boys military training. Moreover, in both France and Germany military discipline in the army is very strict, and it was found that, if scholars received military drill at school one of two evils had to be borne: if the drill at school was less strict than that of the army, it gave the boys habits of which they had great difficulty in breaking themselves, and which were regarded as detestably slovenly by the army drill-instructors. If, on the other hand, drill as strict as that of the army was taught to scholars, it crushed out their independence, made them stiff instead of supple, and in some cases injured their spines. The kind of drill given in English schools is not well fitted to prepare boys to be the military machines formerly needed in a German regiment, but it may be well fitted to prepare them to be the kind of self-reliant, active, patriotic soldiers whose great value was shown in the South African and Russo-Japanese wars. Moreover, it would be a great mistake to suppose that Germans do not now see the need for the giving in schools of a kind of military training closely resembling that which it is proposed to give in English schools. At the congress held in Frankfurt last year, to which I have already referred, the members who had taken to heart the lessons of the last two great wars unanimously accepted a series of principles for the guidance of physical training in schools, of which one is: "The school must arrange for practising marches of considerable length and for war-games."

Switzerland compels all its young men who are physically strong enough to go through two courses of training in shooting in their eighteenth and nineteenth years, and through a course

of military training in their twenty-first year, and also compels them in subsequent years to practise firing yearly, and to receive a short course of military training every second year. It is, therefore, much less dependent than is this country on the use which it causes to be made of the time spent in the elementary school for its chance of training its people in love of country and in power to defend it. Yet Switzerland gives all its boys elementary military drill, and in many of the cantons the older boys in the elementary schools are trained in shooting, and receive a little training also in skirmishing. In conjunction with all this military training they receive much instruction respecting their duty towards their country. No chauvinism is produced, and the Swiss are a most peace-loving people.

It is sometimes said that military drill is poor exercise and that children soon tire of it. In Macclesfield the Patriotic Association in the year 1900 began to give instruction in drill and other kinds of physical training to the boys of some twenty elementary schools in and near the town. The exercise and the orderly movements seemed so delightful to the girls that in some of the schools they begged that they too might be drilled, and their request was complied with. Some of the older boys were taught to shoot out of school-time, and a Cadet Corps was formed for the boys who left school. This system of work was continued till last year, when, owing to the change in the management of elementary schools, the giving of drill by our instructor had to be discontinued. Recently, the local authority which controls the schools outside the town has announced that it is willing to allow drill to be renewed, at its cost. So convinced were the head-teachers of the goodness of the physical and moral results of the training, so fresh had they found the interest of the children to be in it, that everyone of them is delighted to hear that the training can be continued.

I am convinced that very great good would come to English children and to the whole community from the introduction of military drill and instruction in shooting into all our schools, and that there would be no drawbacks to the advantages which it would give in improvement of health, increase of public spirit and patriotism, and of increase also of the safety of the nation.