Concentration and Dispersion

IN SPORTING activities those who want to be successful choose a certain line or subject which appeals more to them and suits their nature; they concentrate on their choice and take great care not to disperse their energies in different directions. As in life a man chooses his career and concentrates all his attention upon it, so the sportsman chooses a special activity and concentrates all his efforts to achieve as much perfection as he can in this line. This perfection comes usually by a building up of spontaneous reflex which is the result of constant repetition of the same movements. But this spontaneous reflex can be, with advantage, replaced by the faculty of concentrated attention. This faculty of concentration belongs not only to the intellectual but to all activities and is obtained by the conscious control of the energies.

It is well known that the value of a man is in proportion to his capacity of concentrated attention, the greater the concentration the more exceptional is the result, to the extent that a perfect and unfailing concentrated attention sets the stamp of genius on what is produced. There can be genius in sports as in any other human activity.

Shall we then advise a limit to one action in order to achieve perfection in concentration?

The advantages of limitation are well known, but it has also its inconvenience, bringing narrowness and incapacity for any other line than the one chosen. This is contrary to the ideal of a perfectly developed and harmonised human being. How to conciliate these two contrary tendencies?

There seems to be only one solution to the problem. In the same way as an athlete develops methodically his muscles by a scientific and gradual training, the faculty of concentrated attention can be developed scientifically by a methodical training —
developed in such a way that concentration is obtained at will and on whatever subject or activity is chosen. Thus the work of preparation instead of being done in the subconscious by a slow and steady repetition of the same movements, is done consciously by a concentration of will and a gathered attention centred on one point or another according to plan and decision. The chief difficulty seems to be to obtain this power of concentration independent from all inner and outer circumstances — difficult perhaps but not impossible for him who is determined and persevering. Moreover, whatever method of development is chosen, determination and perseverance are indispensable to obtain success.

The aim in the training is to develop this power of concentrating the attention at will on whatever subject or activity one chooses from the most spiritual to the most material, without losing anything of the fullness of the power, — for instance, in the physical field, transferring the use of the power from one game to another or one activity to another so as to succeed equally in all.

This extreme attention concentrated on a game or a physical activity like lifting, vaulting, punching, running, etc., focusing all energies on any of these movements which bring about in the body the thrill of an exhilarating joy is the thing which carries with it perfection in execution and success. Generally this happens when the sportsman is especially interested in a game or an activity and its happening escapes all control, decision or will.

Yet by a proper training of concentrated attention one can obtain the phenomenon at will, on command, so to say, and the resulting perfection in the execution of any activity follows inevitably.

This is exactly what we want to try in our Department of Physical Education. By this process the result may come more slowly than by the usual method, but the lack of rapidity will surely be compensated by a fullness and richness in the expression.