

A UNIQUE SCHOOL.

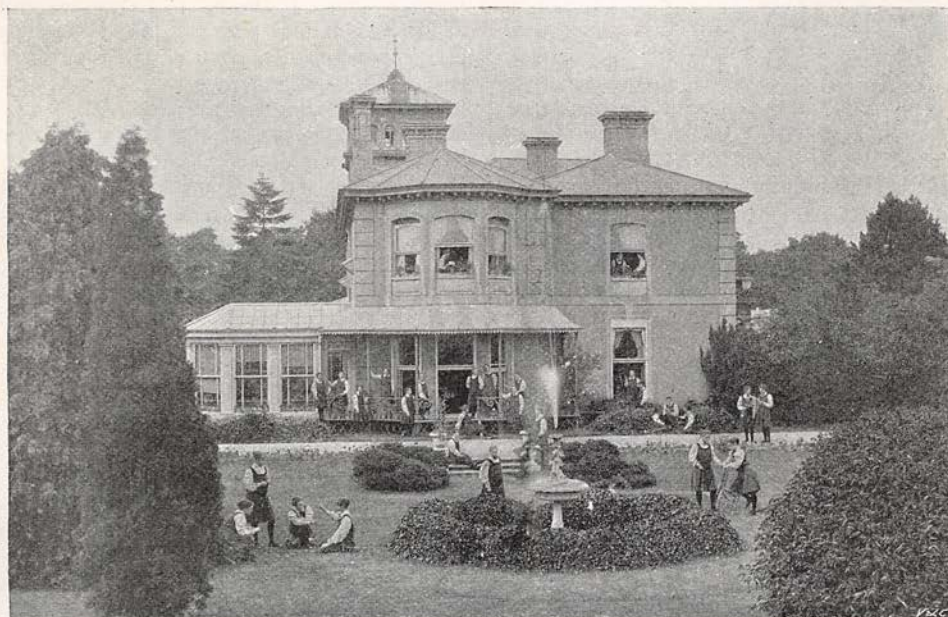
By C. L. McCLUER STEVENS.

Illustrated from Photographs.



WITHIN easy walking distance of the ancient township of Dartford, sheltering itself half petulantly amid a wealth of woodland, stands Madame Bergman Österberg's Physical Training College, an institution generally regarded, by those best qualified to judge, as the most remarkable educational establishment in the world. It is a type, and at present a unique type. It resembles Newn-

the country that gave us Ling. Ling is rightly regarded as the father of physical culture, and it was Ling's system that Madame Österberg adopted when, way back in the seventies, she first became imbued with the idea of devoting her life to the physical education of her sex. But she was not content to follow slavishly in the footsteps of any master, however distinguished. She studied and re-studied his famous system, testing every theory, verifying every fact.



MADAME ÖSTERBERG'S PHYSICAL TRAINING COLLEGE AT DARTFORD.

ham and Girton in that its doors are open to women, and to women only. But there the analogy ends, for Madame Österberg's is intended to be a training-school for the body rather than a forcing-house for the mind. Its *raison d'être*, to produce, as nearly as may be, women who shall be physically perfect; its *modus operandi*, a graduated course of carefully thought-out exercises, alternating with outdoor games.

The originator and present head of this singular seminary is a native of Sweden,

Then at last, when she felt that she had the whole subject at her finger ends, she came to England, and, under the auspices of the London School Board, introduced Ling into some three hundred schools and trained over a thousand Board-school teachers to carry on the work.

So far so good. But something more was needed if she wished to realise, even partially, the ideal she had set before her eyes. To quote her own words: "I fully appreciated the excellent work done by the

Board-school teachers. Their zeal and their capacity were alike worthy of all praise. But—and this is the *crux* of the whole question—I was driven irresistibly to the conclusion that, in order to arrive at satisfactory



From a photo by]

[T. Fall.

MADAME ÖSTERBERG.

results, we must have good material to work with. To erect a substantial house, good bricks, well-tempered mortar and seasoned wood are needed. A very considerable proportion of the young girls attending our elementary

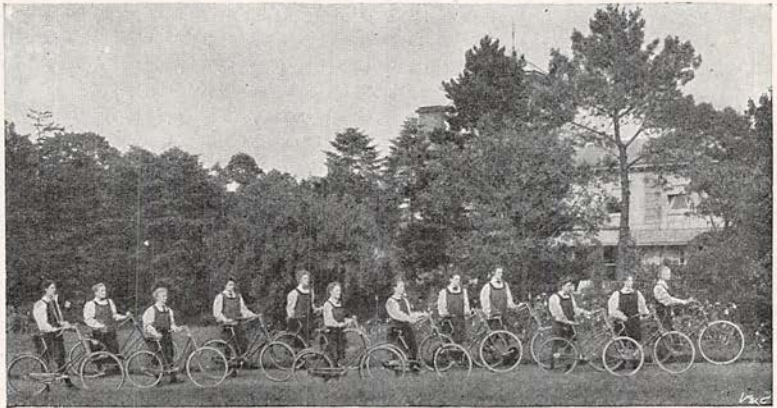
schools are absolutely unfit to be trained. Their muscles have been starved from babyhood, they breathe bad air, eat that which fails to nourish, dress in what impedes and hampers. To attempt to physically educate such a child is but to try to fit a cube into a round hole. It is the labour of Sisyphus accentuated."

Eventually Madame Österberg came to the conclusion that one really sound, healthy, capable and properly trained woman was worth a hundred makeshifts; and so she established, first at Hampstead and later on at Dartford Heath, the first, and up till now the only woman's physical training college in England. And

within its walls it has been her aim and object to gather together a band of women, sound in mind and body, and each one fit therefore to be developed into the ideal apostle for the propagation of this new

religion—the religion, that is, of physical culture.

The present college buildings are perfectly adapted to the purpose for which they are being used, and are charmingly situated. All around the demesne in the midst of which they stand are thousands upon thousands of acres of strawberry beds—beds that in early spring are white with countless millions of blossoms, and later on are splashed and speckled with crimson. Far and away beyond, even to the horizon, stretches the Kentish woodland, alternating with hop-fields and dotted with picturesque villages: Here and there in the foreground nestles a tiny cottage, fronted by a garden and bowered in flowers that glow with freshness. Right round the fourteen acres of ground that Madame Österberg has dedicated to the carrying out of her work there runs a high wooden fence. Inside this magic circle reside, year in and year out, some thirty or forty "sweet girl graduates," each of whom is destined in the near future to carry forward a work the ultimate effect of which no one now living can attempt to gauge. For, it must be remembered, Madame Österberg's pupils are, almost without exception, teachers in embryo. They are studying in order to be able eventually to instruct others. They are, in fact—and of this they are fully aware—the destined high priestesses of a new cult. Year by year, as their course of training is completed, they sally forth to spread the



A CORPS OF CYCLISTS.

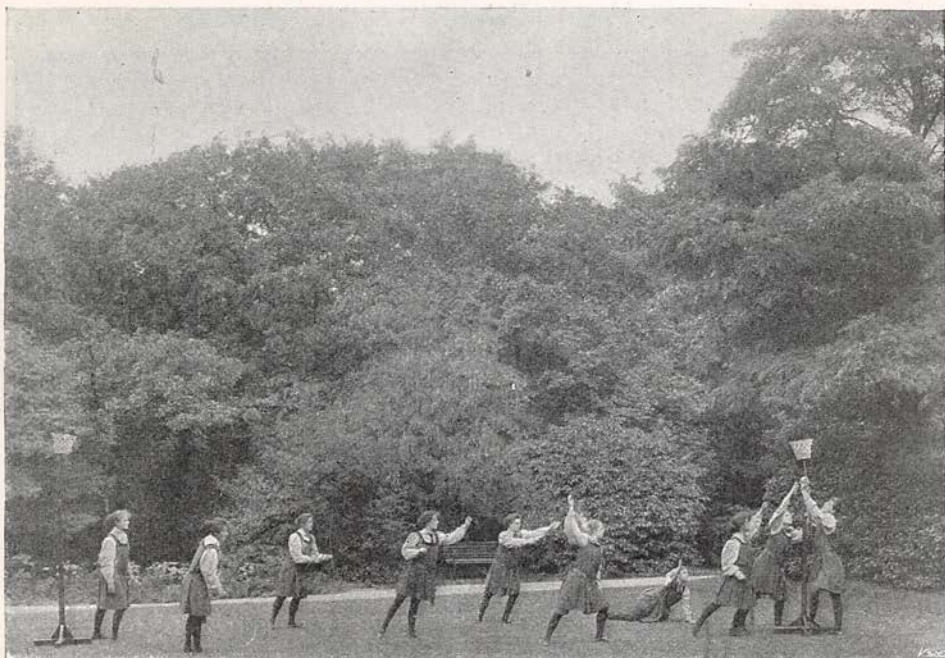
light to the uttermost ends of the earth. They go literally everywhere. Some are snapped up by the great American colleges, where Ling is already known, and they simply have to carry forward and amplify a

work that others have begun. Others find work ready to hand among their own kith and kin. Wheresoever, in fact, the physical status of womankind is capable of being raised, there are to be found one or more of the teachers whom Madame Österberg has trained. They constitute collectively the "little leaven" that in time, so many people think, is destined to leaven the whole lump.

The college course extends over two years, and during the whole of this period the students lead perform an almost ideally healthy life. The good old rule of "early to bed and early to rise" is rigidly enforced. A diet, in which the place of meat is largely

cumstances. Anatomy, physiology, hygiene, chemistry and medical gymnastics are not neglected, and the playing of all sorts of games forms part of the regular curriculum. These latter include, besides cricket, hockey, tennis, cycling, dancing, etc., a new and exceedingly fascinating sport called "basket-ball."

This really splendid game, about which a good deal will probably be heard in England in the near future, is an importation from America, where it has taken its place beside lawn-tennis, and threatens to become, to the typical up-to-date Yankee girl, what football is to her brother. The great beauty of



PLAYING BASKET-BALL.

usurped by green vegetables, fruit, cereals, milk and eggs, is partaken of by all; and, so far as possible, all studies and exercises are performed in the open air. Madame Österberg holds strongly to the opinion that, in order to get the very best possible results from a scientific system of physical training, the lessons ought to take place out of doors. To this end she has had fitted up, in a sort of natural leafy amphitheatre in one corner of the college grounds, a perfectly appointed open-air gymnasium. Here each day pupils and professors climb ropes, vault, leap, run, and in fact do everything their brothers have been wont to do under similar cir-

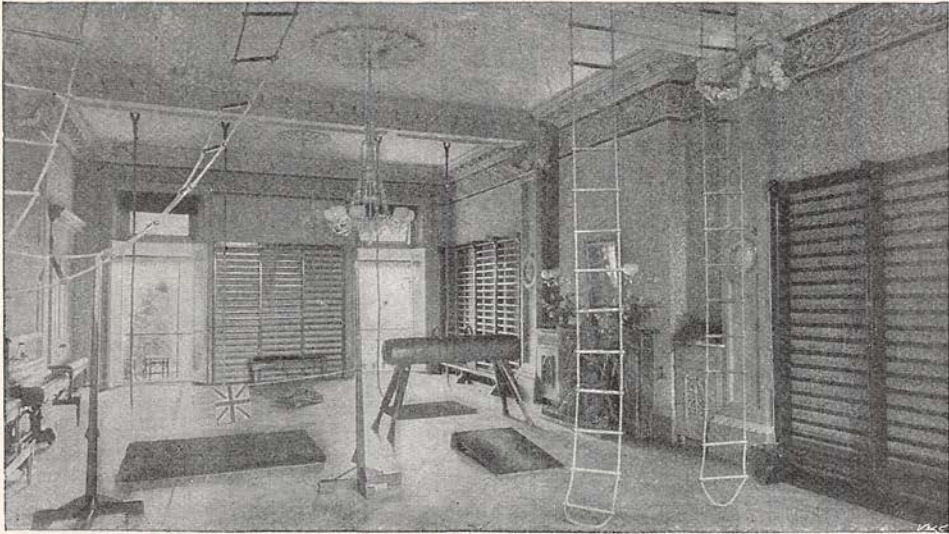
basket-ball consists in its extreme simplicity. No expensive apparatus is required, nor is a smooth-shaven lawn a necessity. Wherever in fact a ball, two baskets and a couple of clothes-pros are, there can the game be played. The baskets are placed on the tops of poles about sixty yards apart, the players are divided into two numerically equal teams, and the object of the game is to pass the ball from one to the other, landing it eventually into their rivals' basket. Basket-ball is in fact a sort of football played with the hands, and the teams are disposed in much the same manner—goal-keepers, backs, half-backs, etc.

Like the Blue-coat boys, the Dartford Heath College girls go bare-headed in all weathers, and wear a special costume consisting of a loose-fitting blue cloth tunic above knickers and jersey of the same colour. Clad in this dress their movements are absolutely free and untrammelled, and they are able to leap and run with a swiftness and agility that would have caused the typical bread-and-butter miss of a decade or two back to hold her breath in horrified amazement. It almost seems unnecessary to add that at Dartford the corset, or any substitute thereof, is strictly tabooed.

Old prejudices die hard, and Madame Österberg found it at first a somewhat difficult task to persuade the average British

carry out this great work effectively they must possess not less but more than the average of intelligence. I need women with brains and character. None others will do."

In conclusion it may not be without interest to inquire who and what was this Ling, whose system is being taught at this present moment to tens of thousands of English girls and boys—at Girton College, as well as in the Board-schools of the East-End slums. Ling was a graduate of Upsala University, of delicate constitution and feeble health. He held the theory that disease is largely attributable to physical inertia and sedentary occupation, and took up fencing and gymnastics to cure himself of chronic rheumatism. At Lund in 1805 we find him



THE GYMNASIUM.

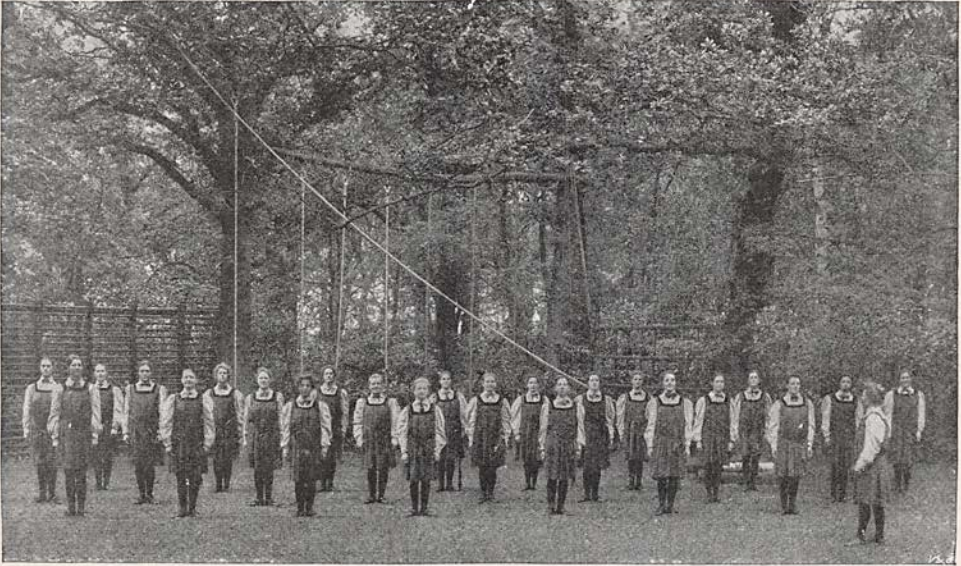
matron that some such costume as that indicated above is an essential adjunct to the proper physical training of growing girls. Madame smiles sadly as she recalls some of the many wordy wars she has been obliged to wage upon this point. "Another trouble is," she remarks gravely, "that I am absolutely obliged to pick and choose my raw material. To do otherwise would be to risk, even at this late date, the failure of my life's work. Parents, I find, need to be dispossessed of the idea that girls with feeble intellects—those in fact who are unfit for other callings—can take up this work of physical training. Of course the very reverse holds good. My girls are destined to become the pioneers in all that relates to hygiene and a more rational method of life for the sex. To

nominally employed in teaching mythology and modern languages. In reality he was devoting the bulk of his time and the best of his energy to the propagation of "Ling." At first he was laughed at and derided, but he lived to see his views adopted by all the leading educationalists of Sweden, from whence they gradually spread to England and the Continent.

The essential laws of the system may be summarised as follows: (1.) Man has, in his own organs of movement, an efficient means for the preservation and even the restoration of health. (2.) Every gymnastic movement must have a distinct physiological object—it must have a well-defined beginning, and an equally well-defined end, and a time and rhythm must be set for its performance.

(3.) The movements must be so graduated and combined as to increase both the bodily strength and the functional powers. (4.) In bodily development, beginning with the simplest, we may gradually advance to the

healthy, happy womanhood—going through the exercises with a grace, an accuracy, and an agility such as suffices to lend to that much abused phrase, “the poetry of motion,” a new and hitherto undreamt of significance.



DRILLING IN THE GROUNDS.

most complicated movements, and this without danger, inasmuch as the pupil will have instinctively acquired the knowledge of what he is capable and incapable of doing.

Such briefly is the system. It is a beautiful theory, looked at simply *as* a theory. Anyone wishing to see some of its possibilities when carried out carefully, systematically and intelligently, should pay a visit to the Dartford Heath College. There can be seen the girls—perfect physical specimens of

Where will it all end? He would be rash who should attempt to prophesy. It may be that, in the near future, the science of gymnastics is destined to be as closely interwoven with the national life of our English women as it was with that of the Greeks twenty centuries ago; in which case it is safe to predict that the artist and the sculptor of the next generation will no longer be compelled to seek his ideal of female beauty amid the cold dead marbles of a bygone civilisation.

