THE ADVANTAGE OF
SYSTEMATIC EXERCISE,
AS A
MEANS OF RESTORING HEALTH.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—Although I am aware your Journal is designed chiefly, if not solely, for the contributions of members of the medical profession, yet I think it possible that the following statement of simple facts may not prove unworthy of attention, especially to such persons as take an interest in prophylactic discipline.

On the 2nd of August, 1839, a pupil, aged nine years, was placed under my care, whose general health had been delicate and precarious from infancy; and had been further impaired, at various times, by scarlatina, measles, and whooping-cough. For half a year, or more, previously to joining me, he had suffered a good deal from cough; and being very slight, and rapidly outgrowing his strength, fears were entertained as to his ultimate recovery. I at once noticed, on first seeing him, that he laboured under a general debility, which caused him to present a *crouching attitude*; and that, without care, there was some danger of flexure of the spine; and of malformation of the right knee, with contraction of the limb; and I was given to understand that he often manifested much morbid excitability. At the same time, however, I observed that his complexion did not indicate any septic condition of the blood; and that the state of the tongue, skin, and eye, were favourable. It therefore struck me that attention to *symmetrical development* was the chief object to be kept in view.

Having stated my opinion to a medical gentleman of the place, and finding that he concurred, I commenced myself, in military phrase, *to set him up*. I also placed him under an experienced teacher of the Calisthenic exercises, that he might learn to throw himself into a variety of easy natural attitudes, and thus be able to maintain an upright position without fatigue, and without requiring artificial supports; requesting that he might be well exercised in springing motions, to give tone and elasticity to the lower extremities. In addition, he was ordered a tepid sea-water shower-bath twice a-week, with friction on the back and thorax; and cold sea-water affusion, with friction, of the knees and ankles. The result has been that, from the above to the present period, he has had no cough, or serious indisposition of any kind; and is now perfectly straight and very active. Indeed, three months after I had commenced his training (although, at the outset, scarcely able to run on level ground without falling,

and soon exhausted,) he was able to run and walk, in one day, at intervals, about five miles, without any sense of fatigue, and without experiencing any ill effects from a sharp north-east wind. With accession of physical strength, all nervous tendencies are fast disappearing; and his memory, formerly weak, rapidly improves. I need hardly observe that, under such circumstances, all lessons must be short and easy; and rather calculated to counteract mental inanition, which is decidedly unfavourable to health, than to serve the ordinary purposes of education.

In this case, if I judge aright, general proclivity to disease proceeded from general atony of the muscular system; which, as it had already led to the compression, would have eventually led to the displacement of the thoracic and abdominal viscera. The boy had been very judiciously treated at home, and allowed as much air and exercise as possible; but still the idea of first imparting strength to the lower extremities, to enable him to exercise without nervous exhaustion, and the value of training generally, were not likely to occur to any one who had not previously seen,—as I had often among tall weakly recruits,—the advantage of systematic exercise. I am far from commending training as an empirical “universal remedy.” It must be carefully modified, in every individual case, by existing peculiarities; and, in careless hands, it would be a dangerous experiment. But still where a very steady, intelligent, drill serjeant, or professional teacher of exercises, is at hand, such means may often be resorted to with good effect, if duly persevered in, and never carried to the extent of nervous exhaustion; the approach of which a good trainer will soon perceive by any slight change of the complexion, and expression of the eye. In course of time, cricket, football, leaping, vaulting, &c., may, in many instances, be cautiously superadded, with marked benefit. I have the honour to be, Sir, your very obedient servant,

JOHN A. WALKER,
Lieut. H. P. 34th Regt.

Cliff House, Torquay, Sept. 28, 1840.

STRANGULATED HERNIA.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—The press, together with further information, assure me that this so often fatal ailment is treated at the present day as it had been a century back, and that improvements, correct in theory and sanctioned by successful practice, are misunderstood. For the sake of brevity, suppose a case. A portion of intestine is *ex situ*, distended by its gaseous contents, highly sensitive, painful, &c. Apply cold water, by cloths often