

CORRESPONDENCE

THE SCHOOLS, SHREWSBURY.

14th November 1931.

Sir,

Having read the excellent article on 'The Games of the Greek Boy' in your first number, may I ask why so much difficulty is experienced in attempts to reconstruct the game Harpastum? Even the late Dr. Norman Gardiner in his recent *Athletics of the Ancient World* falters on this point. The only resolute attempt at a reconstruction is that of Mr. G. E. Marindin (in *Class. Rev.*, 1890, p. 145), who tries to see in Harpastum a game played by teams on a marked-out ground between two goals, but unfortunately there is no evidence for this view.

Our principal authority is Athenaeus (*Deipnosoph.* i. 14), who tells us that Harpastum is a violent and exhausting game involving particular strain on the neck because of the tackling; that its early name was Phaininda ('feinting'); that the word Harpastum means 'intercepting'. Further he quotes in illustration a passage from the comic poet Antiphanes which describes the game Phaininda in practice: 'When he got the ball he loved to dodge one player and pass it to another; he knocked it away from one man and cheered on another with noisy shouts— "Outside—a long pass, past him—over his head, a short one!"' There is one more passage: Sidonius Apollinaris in a letter (v. 17) describes a ball-game in which a veteran at the game, Filimatus, cannot resist joining. He is said to go among the other players who are standing waiting their turn, but is continually compelled to leave this position and join in the thick of the game because he is so forced by the 'medius currens', i.e. the man running in the middle. When he gets into the middle he finds that he cannot easily judge the flight of the ball or intercept 'as it flies past him or over his head', and he loses his balance so much and gets so hot and winded that he has to retire. If the game so described is Harpastum, then its working is obvious and I have times innumerable seen it played before my own eyes.

All should now be perfectly clear if I quote a passage from *Brain-stimulating Exercises and Competitive Games* (revised ed. May 1924), an official manual issued by the Army School of Physical Training, Aldershot:

No. 70. *Object*: rapid passing and catching.

Organization: a football. Players stand in a circle one or two paces apart, facing inward, with one player inside the circle.

Method of Playing: the football is passed, low, by hand from one player to another, and the player inside the circle endeavours to intercept it. If successful, he changes places with the last thrower. (If the ball falls to the ground, the player responsible either for the bad pass or for the missed catch—at the discretion of the instructor—changes place with the player inside the circle.)

So much for theory; in practice (at a well-known English public school) I have noticed that normally the formation becomes relaxed and the circle becomes fluid, that passes are by no means always low (see *Common Faults* under No. 70 in the above manual) and that tackling is inevitable and not undesirable. With these practical modifications this modern exercise is in all essentials Harpastum: the inside player is the 'medius currens' and it is easy to see how the inside man would constantly be taking advantage of the elderly Filimatus's slowness to make him change places: the players 'waiting their turn' are those who have not had an innings as 'medius currens'. The only differences between the ancient game and the modern, and these are negligible, are that Harpastum was played with a smaller, harder ball and that it would probably have no referee.

Yours truly,
R. W. MOORE.

COMPETITION

Report on No. 1

A FAIR number of competitors sent us translations of the Elegiacs, but a mere handful of schools were represented. Possibly composition in this restricted metre is a pursuit more congenial to middle age. We hope for a much larger entry for our second competition. Most of the competitors kept the rules, but the few difficulties of the English were too often evaded. On the whole the best version was sent in by R. O. Hibbert of Shrewsbury, in spite of the weakness of his fourth couplet and the omission of the necessary personal pronoun in the last line. A good vigorous copy was entered by R. N. Rayne of Bradfield. It contained some swinging Propertian pentameters, but there were just too many ugly elisions. R. W. F. Wootton and M. L. Booker were also worthy of mention.

THE PRIZE VERSION

Me, licet Aethiopes quaeram Seresve remotos,
non nova mens, tantum Iuppiter alter habet;
et vagus ut liber pontum, vagus aera lustrem,
heu mens perpetuo spe viduata premit.
aequore nam medio cum me quatit unda, carinis
mens mihi sollicitis aequiperata labat: