

WEST POINT'S NEW GYMNASIUM

THE FINE BUILDING IN WHICH
THE CADETS ARE TRAINED.

Perfect Appliances for Physical Culture—
Manner in Which Defects in Muscular
Development Are Remedied—Advance
in Gymnastic Work Under Herman J.
Koehler's Direction—Every Apparatus
Which Science Has Devised—Duties in
Which the Students Take Pleasure.

WEST POINT, Oct. 7.—The new gymnasium, which has just been finished, attracts more attention than any other building on the post. Its style of architecture does not belong to any particular class, it being made up of the most artistic parts of ancient and modern designs. Granite, with brick lining, has been used throughout, and it is absolutely fire-proof. It took three years to build, and cost \$100,000.

In the basement are two shooting tunnels, 50 feet long and 3 feet in diameter. They are used for the gallery practice prescribed by army regulations. On the first floor is

unenlightened brain the means and ways to expand the chest and throw back the shoulders. These are hard days for the plebes. At every corner he is met with the command, "Hold up your head, Sir!" "Throw back your shoulders, Mr. Dumb-john!" "Compress your toes!" and many other mild injunctions which serve to remind him that he is a thing of earth and of no account whatever. He is finally turned over to the gymnasium director, who proceeds, probably less forcibly, but surely more scientifically, to train the new arrivals according to the most improved methods of physical development.

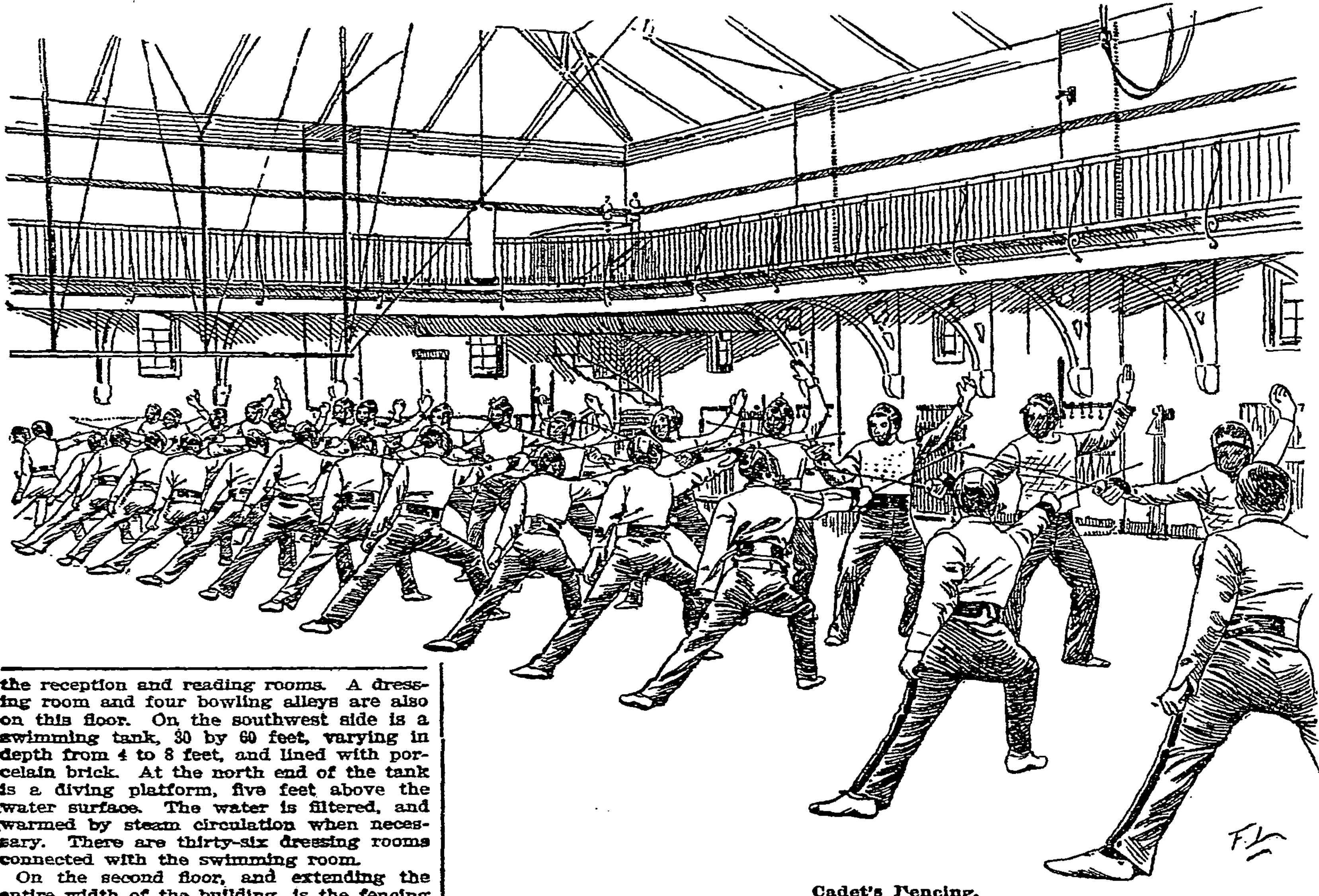
He at first receives a thorough training in an elaborate and detailed system of so-called free exercises, in which no implements whatever are used. These instruct the cadet how to use his muscular force to the best possible advantage, which is looked upon as a sort of physical economy.

After becoming acquainted with the various uses of the different muscular groups, and after having learned properly to control them under all conditions and circumstances, the cadet is put to work on the various gymnastic machines. On all of these, beginning with the familiar chest machine and ending with the horizontal bars, a series of exercises, progressively arranged, without the omission of the slightest detail, is taught. The progress made is truly remarkable and reflects the greatest credit upon the system pursued. The instruction in gymnastics is not considered work by the majority of cadets, but is hailed as an hour of pleasant and beneficial recreation. This is undoubtedly the secret of the exercise, and a visit paid to the gymnasium during

last Board of Visitors. This said: "The foundation of much of the endurance and soldierly power of the cadets is laid in their gymnastic training. The board witnessed the exhibition of work done with the members of the fourth class in the gymnasium and was strongly impressed with its scientific character and with the remarkable results achieved."

In the old academic building, which is being now replaced with one of the finest buildings for classroom purposes in the world, the first gymnasium at West Point was established. It took up about half of the ground floor of that building. It was lighted with windows on the southwest side, but there was no pretense made at ventilation. The height of the room was not much over 6 feet, and the fittings of the place were in keeping with the other accommodations. A few rings, dumbbells, and bars constituted the working apparatus. There was hardly an attempt made to instruct the cadets in a systematic manner in athletic science, so that they were compelled to get along as best they could without the aid of properly-trained teachers. Bright minds, however, saw the necessity, and, after the death of the old fencing master, one was secured who thoroughly understood athletics. Now the cadets bid fair to outdo the older colleges that have taught athletics almost from their very beginning.

Ten years ago a few of the younger officers began whispering among themselves that some games ought to be practiced, in order to loosen the stiff joints of the lads who, after being cooped up in a classroom from 8 o'clock in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, were then marched out for drill or dress parade, where those joints were



Cadet's Fencing.

the reception and reading rooms. A dressing room and four bowling alleys are also on this floor. On the southwest side is a swimming tank, 30 by 60 feet, varying in depth from 4 to 8 feet, and lined with porcelain brick. At the north end of the tank is a diving platform, five feet above the water surface. The water is filtered, and warmed by steam circulation when necessary. There are thirty-six dressing rooms connected with the swimming room.

On the second floor, and extending the entire width of the building, is the fencing room, which is used only for voluntary practice, the regular instruction being given in the main room. The gymnasium proper is on the same floor. It is 70 by 90 feet, and varies in height from 25 to 44 feet. It is ventilated with small windows, which are situated high enough above the floor to avoid all draughts on the cadets while exercising. Light is obtained through a large skylight, which takes in almost the entire roof surface. This skylight is furnished with a number of large ventilators. This system gives the greatest volume of light and perfect ventilation.

About twelve feet from the floor and extending around the entire gymnasium is a

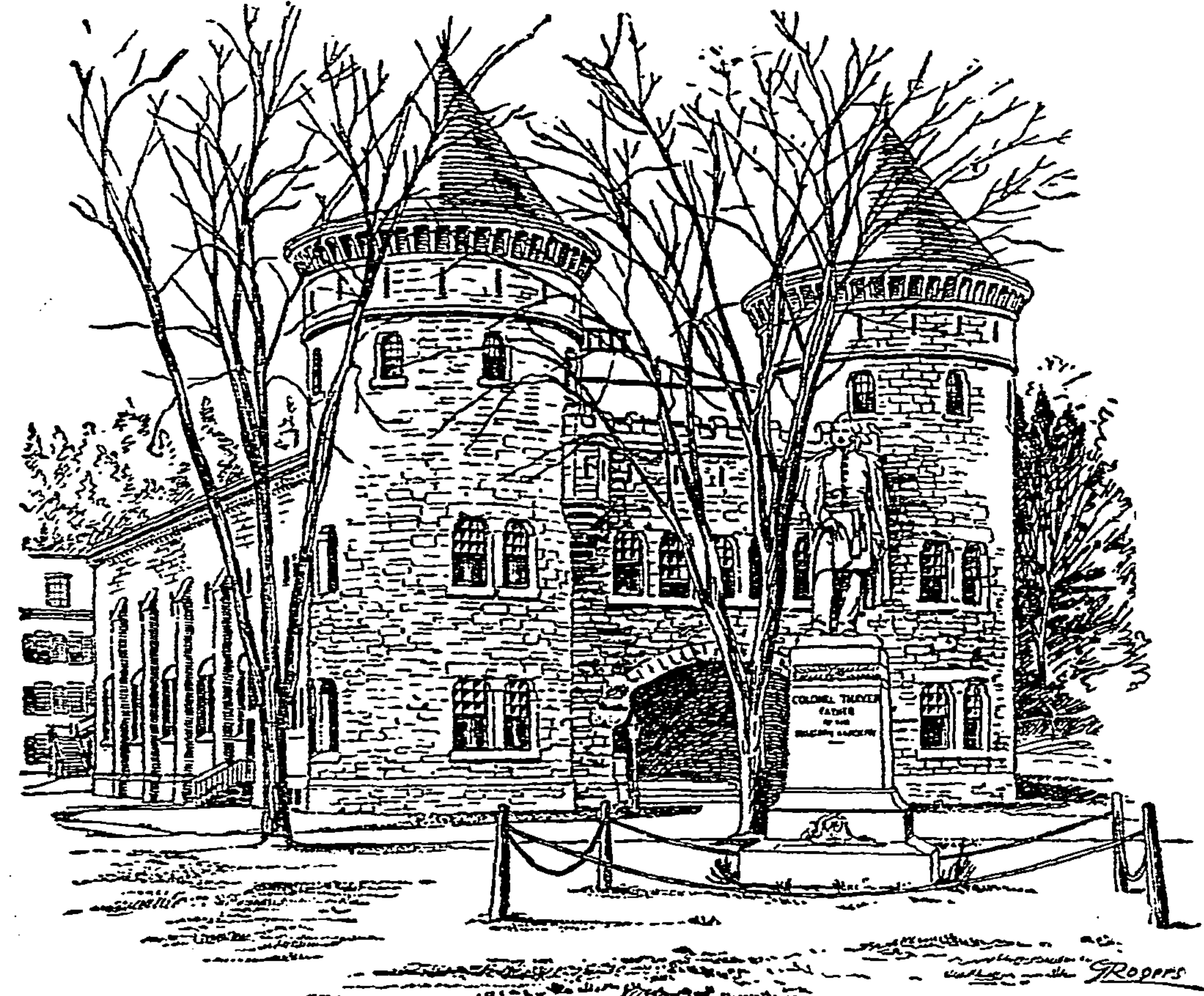
grill hours is the most convincing proof of the boys' enjoyment of this part of their duties.

To study the movements and evolutions of these fifty or sixty young men, earnestly at work preparing for the hardships which their future life is apt to have in store for them, is a picture that is at once pleasing and astonishing. Always on the alert to carry out with alacrity the slightest instructions of their teacher, they prove that they are not only aware of the importance of this portion of their training, but also that they look upon it as a labor of pleasure.

While the fourth class only is under the direct charge of the instructor and attends by order daily, the members of other classes are

made even stiffer than before. They were afraid lest some of the old fogies might hear them and they should be reprimanded for daring to introduce new-fangled ideas which would do away with the time-honored customs of the past. But the storm of progress was gathering, and its bursting on the football fields of West Point and Annapolis was the first warning that some of the most bitter opponents of athletics had found that their ideas were antiquated and unsuited to this day and generation.

Privileges are now extended to the cadets for the practice of athletic sports which a few years ago would be looked upon as utterly foreign to the purposes of the academy. The tennis, baseball, football, and other athletic field sports which are now receiving so much encouragement at West Point cannot fail to raise the academy to the highest standard of perfection. They do not conflict, but actually harmonize, with the thorough military and scholastic instruction given at the academy.



The New Gymnasium.

running gallery, six feet wide, padded with hair felting, which is covered with an elaborately-painted canvas, giving it the appearance of a cinder path; nineteen laps of this track cover a mile. There is also a spectators' gallery extending along the north end of the room. These galleries rest on brackets, thus doing away with pillars, which are so objectionable on a gymnasium floor. In the towers on the gallery floor are two rooms, one of which is used by the Directors. The other is used for sparring.

The gymnasium is fully equipped with all the scientific appliances for physical development. Those who are acquainted with the equipment of modern gymnasiums would be surprised at the large number of duplicate machines in this room. Some are duplicated five or six times. All the machines are so suspended that the gymnasium can be cleared in fifteen minutes.

Only members of the fourth class receive training. At the beginning of the training the men are measured according to the present system. This measurement aids in detecting any undeveloped parts or physical defects. A note of them is made, and the necessary corrective exercises are prescribed. This individual training does not, however, conflict with the general training. This general training is entirely on military lines. The exercises and combinations of exercises are of the simplest kind, which, while they tend to develop in a thorough and systematic manner those qualities which a soldier must possess, reduce the danger from injury of overexertion to the smallest fraction.

Herman J. Koehler has had charge of the exercises for the past nine years. He is the best swordsman and all-around athlete in the country. Mr. Koehler was graduated from the National Normal Training School for Physical Culture at Milwaukee. He is also a member of the Army Officers' Athletic Association and is a member of the Committee on Athletics in that organization. During the past ten years gymnasium work has steadily advanced at West Point, until it has now reached the highest standard of perfection. It is looked upon as one of the most pleasant duties connected with the Military Academy.

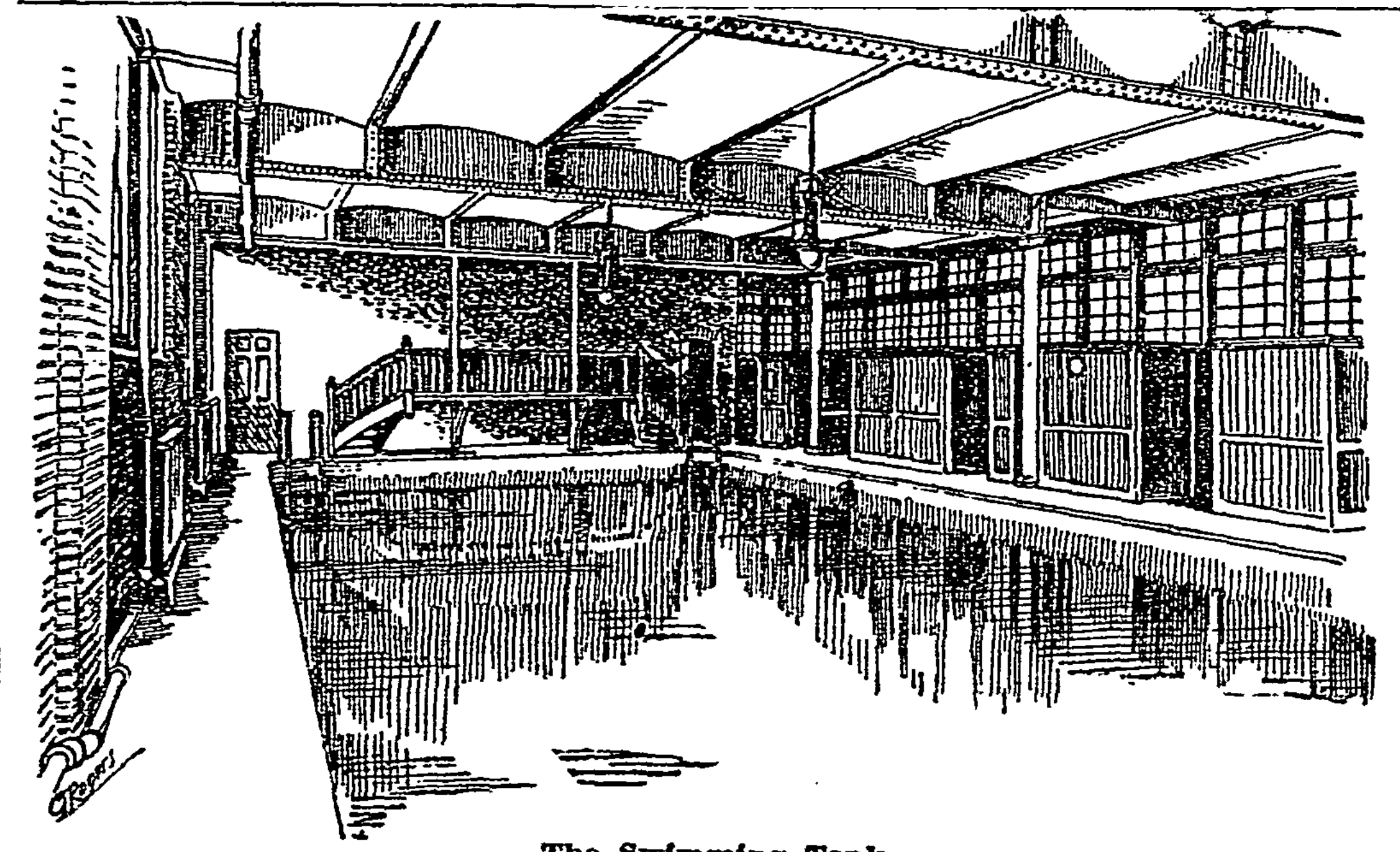
All exercises are executed by a large number of cadets simultaneously at the word of command of the instructor. The precision with which they are executed illustrates in the most forcible manner the benefits which the young cadet receives from such a training. It is absolutely necessary for him to have entire control of the muscles in order that the exercise may be executed in the strictest and most approved military style.

When the unsophisticated plebe first enters the Military Academy he is turned over to the tender mercies of the new third class, who have only shed their own plebe skins a few days before and who have waited and longed for the moment when they could command the trembling and much-frightened new-comer to take his place in line, and, by means of the regulation "setting-up exercise," instill into his

not only permitted but encouraged to visit and practice in the gymnasium. During the winter, from Nov. 1 to March 15, the gymnasium is open from 4 to 6 P. M. daily.

Cadets make much use of this privilege and continue the good work begun in their plebe year. The work of these cadets is along conservative lines, there being an absence of all acrobatic feats and other work which smacks of the circus ring. It is owing to this that the records at the hospital show no serious accidents traceable to the gymnasium.

As was to be expected, the systematic



The Swimming Tank.

gymnasium training soon made the want of field athletics felt. Where an occasional baseball game, sometimes played in full fatigue uniform, constituted the entire athletics, sports are now found established on a solid basis. The regular army officers stationed at the post, appreciating the importance and benefits derived from the practice of athletics, organized a society which has for its object the aiding and encouraging of athletics.

In the gymnasium the cadet takes his first lessons in horseback riding. Here the wooden steers, covered with leather, and stuffed with hair, await the arrival of each new fourth class. These horses are of various sizes, several being taller than the tallest horse in the cavalry stables. From September until May the plebes practice riding on these wooden horses and many are the falls experienced by the amateur horseman. When he is able to vault with sufficient alacrity, and turn somersaults over these improvised chargers, he is sent to the riding hall, where the full course is given him.

That the importance of gymnastics is recognized by the highest authorities, even in civil life, is shown from the report of the