
Books and Magazines

Terry Todd

Each issue, this space will contain information about books, magazines or both. The aim is to acquaint or, in some cases, to reacquaint readers with earlier publications and to alert readers to current books and magazines which deal with the history of physical culture.

Apollo [William Bankier] *Ideal Physical Culture*. London: Greening & Co., Ltd. 1900. 141 pages.

William Bankier, who performed under the stage name of "Apollo", was a capable, professional strongman and the owner, for a time, of what we would call today a health club. In the first chapter of *Ideal Physical Culture*, he discusses noted strongmen of the past. His descriptions are interesting, and he makes the enlightened and unusual statement that many of the feats he ascribes to the various strongmen may not have really been performed. He explains that he is merely relating to the reader information that he has gathered from reading about these men and talking to people who knew them.

Bankier, who was also known as the "Scottish Hercules", is commendably forthright throughout the course of the book, even going so far as to say that a man must be "born strong" in order to develop record-breaking bodily strength. This statement is in contradistinction to the claims of the average purveyor of systems of physical culture, who would usually maintain that he had been a pitiful weakling and in a state of physical collapse until taking up a course of physical training (one he happened to sell), after which he acquired great strength and muscular development and the company of attractive young women.

The later sections of the book provide exercises for the overall development of the muscles of the body—the chest, waist, legs, arms, shoulders and so on. Other aspects of physical culture are also covered, such as diet, breathing techniques and clothing appropriate for vigorous exercise.

Along with a degree of honesty which was uncharacteristic for the period in which the book was written, Bankier, like most of his contemporaries, had something to sell. In his case, it was a device—in the form of a dumbbell—which contained electrical batteries that could be activated so that the person using the dumbbell would receive a mild electric shock. But critics of Bankier should remember that the turn of the century was a time in which many people were producing and marketing devices for "electrical stimulation" which supposedly aided the health of those who used them. (For those interested in knowing more about this period and some of the devices which were sold, a good source is Harvey Green's *Fit for America* [NY:Pantheon Books, 1986], although Green's knowledge base about exercise seems a bit unsolid.)
