

"BREATHING AND CANCER."

To the EDITOR of the PALL MALL GAZETTE.

SIR.—I note in your issue of October 15 an extract from a paper read to the British Medical Association by Dr. Scanes Spicer, in which he advances a theory concerning a possible cause of cancer. There is little doubt that the suggestion is worthy of serious consideration, despite the adverse criticism to which it was subjected by the scientists who took part in the debate which followed the reading of the paper.

Briefly, while emphasising the theory that abdominal breathing is incorrect breathing (Dr. Harry Campbell gave scientific reasons for this in his work on the subject published some years ago), and that it brings about, among other evils, "increased compression and irritation of the throat." Dr. Scanes Spicer goes further, and suggests that it is a possible cause of cancer of the throat. Time and practical observation can alone prove whether he is right or wrong.

His pronouncements serve one good purpose at the present moment, however—that of giving his support to the experts who have for years insisted, both in print and practice, that abdominal breathing, with its undue hollowing and narrowing of the back, causes a crowding down of the structures of the throat ("compression and irritation") and a similar crowding down and displacement of the abdominal viscera and almost every vital organ in the body, and hence the "compression and irritation" of all the parts concerned.

Therefore, if Dr. Scanes Spicer is correct in his theory with regard to cancer of the throat, it is quite certain that as abdominal breathing also causes compression and irritation of parts of the internal organism, these parts will be even more disposed to cancer than the throat, seeing that the activity of the throat structures, by reason of their constant use in speech, is naturally much greater than those of the abdominal viscera, and it is well understood that the resisting power of any vital organ is absolutely in accordance with its habitual activity, since in time such activity governs the standard of functioning.

The real object of my letter is not, however, to consider the points under discussion in their connection with cancer—which would stand in the position of only a single effect among many—but to draw attention to the fact that while tangible proof is forthcoming of the nature of an existing cause of harmful effects, and its prevention or eradication, the physical culture and "deep breathing" exercises, as practised in our schools, actually promote or intensify that cause by occasioning, as I pointed out in publications of my own in 1907 and 1908, that unnatural and harmful depression of the larynx and its accessories, which is undoubtedly the greatest factor in the causation of throat troubles, undue hollowing of the spine, and displacement not only of the abdominal viscera, but of the vital organs within the thorax. I am not advancing pet theories, but stating facts which my fourteen years' practical professional experience has confirmed, and I am prepared to give the necessary proof by a series of practical demonstrations.

In this connection I may say that I recently convinced Dr. Alexander Leeper (Melbourne University) of the truth of the above pronouncement and in a report to the Teachers and Schools Registration Board on the various methods of physical culture in vogue in Europe, he strongly recommends the adoption of that exemplifying my principles. This report is particularly interesting, as it contains a most favourable opinion from Dr. Scanes Spicer of the principles in question—an opinion which he is specially competent to express, since on examining the points which I brought to his notice in 1904 he at once became a pupil, and has sent several of his patients to me for treatment. The fact that he is convinced of the nature of the cause of certain serious effects, and that I offer to prove that the aforesaid cause is itself a result, in the great majority of cases, of the training given in our schools, should induce those responsible for such training to examine the points at issue. In the event of this, I am prepared to offer my services as a gift to the nation, where the children are concerned, in proving the existence of the evils referred to above, and to give particulars of the means by which they may be eradicated and prevented in future.—Yours, etc.,

F. MATTHIAS ALEXANDER.

22, Army and Navy Mansions, S.W., Oct. 18.

Extract from The "Pall Mall Gazette," October 21st, 1909.

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SIR.—I see in your issue of last night that Mr. Matthias Alexander has generously offered to give to the nation his services in the matter of the physical training of children. As one who has derived great benefit from Mr. Alexander's work, and, as supporting the testimony of Dr. Scanes Spicer, whose scientific explanation of some of the principles of Mr. Alexander's method has just appeared, I would venture to suggest that such an offer is one that calls for most serious consideration at the hands of those public authorities who are entrusted with the care and education of our children.—Yours faithfully,

H. B. IRVING.

Queen's Theatre, W., Oct. 20.