

**The Turkish bath in health and disease : being the substance of a lecture delivered at Sheffield on the 10th of December, 1858 / by John le Gay Brereton.**

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A LECTURE

ON THE

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TURKISH BATH.

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For the Use of Beginners.

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The Turkish Bath, in Health and Disease ; being the substance of a Lecture delivered at Sheffield on the 10th of December, 1858, by John Le Gay Brereton, M.D., M.R.C.S.E., late of Bradford, and now of Sydney, New South Wales.

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies, and Gentlemen,—Our worthy chairman has told you that since I last had the pleasure of lecturing to you, he has tested the merits of the Turkish Bath by an experiment upon himself. That, of course, is the only method by which the truth of any statement can be tested. I wish you all to try the Bath, not that it will benefit me in any way, nor have I any interest in lecturing to you further than that I am actuated by a desire to see you happier men and women than you are ;—and I assure you that I am fully convinced, from practical knowledge and experience of the Bath, that it is the *only* means by which perfect health can be maintained, and disease in many forms be eradicated ; nor is it necessary for me to inform you that health is essential to happiness. Cleanliness is unattainable except by the Bath, and health without cleanliness is impossible ; none of you who have not taken the Bath can know what absolute cleanliness is. As many of you are ignorant of what constitutes the Turkish Bath, I will briefly describe the process. You, perhaps, all associate the term Bath with ablution—washing in some form or other. I do not wish you to infer that I consider washing with water unnecessary ; on the contrary, it is very important in its place, and constitutes an essential portion of the Bath. The medium into which man is born, that which is most agreeable to him, and which imparts health and vigour to his frame, which is the life of his blood, and the stimulus of all power, is the Air we breathe. Water is not the element for man to live in, and it alone cannot effectually cleanse the system of its impurities. Water can do no more than remove filth which is deposited on the surface.

Now, the Turkish Bath is a *hot-air* Bath, into which water is only incidentally introduced. It consists of five processes. First, having divested yourself of your clothing, save some slight covering, you enter a tepid room through which air is passed at the temperature of about 100 degrees. You can sit, lie down, or walk about at pleasure. In this room



you begin gently to perspire, and then you are taken into another, the temperature of which ranges from 140 to 230 degrees, according to the requirements of the case. In this room you perspire very freely, and drink plentifully of cold water until it passes out of the pores of the skin as clear as when taken in at the mouth, and not till then are you cleansed. Here, or in the tepid room, you undergo the next operation, that of shampooing. Now, this shampooing is a very essential part of the Bath. The filth of the body has, by the heat and perspiration, been brought to the surface, and then by shampooing you not only remove it, but you also equalize the circulation over the whole body. Shampooing is not perfectly performed unless these two ends are accomplished. Next comes the washing. Now, in England and Western Europe generally, washing consists in ablution of a portion of the body in water and then wiping with a towel. We think that we know how to wash ourselves, and we are offended if any one tell us that we do not, but, in fact, we know nothing of the sort. Washing in England is often the contrary of a cleansing operation, because such dirt as would have fallen from the skin as dust is re-dissolved, and literally washed back into the pores of the skin. You may often be conscious of this by a certain clammy stickiness of the skin directly after the so-called washing; but just take a sponge and wash your face over, and see if the water be not dirty. To proceed to wash yourself, therefore, in that water is simply absurd. Now, in the Turkish Bath there is no such operation as this; there is no bason nor vessel of any kind whatever, but there is a continual stream of fresh water passed over the body which removes all the filth which has been deposited upon the skin. Let the fairest skinned person take a Bath, (or rather four or five, for the first is not effectual,) and he will be astonished at the black rolls clinging to his person after the shampooing, which removes from the pores what the previous process had carried to them. Ablution is now evidently necessary, and it accordingly constitutes the next act in the drama. The water may either be hot or cold, or both in alternation, according to the requirements of the patient or inclination of the healthy bather; always remembering that it must be passed in a stream from a fresh source, over the person, and not be allowed to accumulate in a vessel in which the body, or any part of it, is immersed. Having thoroughly dried yourself, you are now conducted into a cool room, where you recline upon a couch as long as you feel it agreeable, the desire for exertion being the proof that the bath is completed. In this the final process, it is necessary to bear in mind that you are still bathing, and that therefore the body must be as much as possible exposed to the Air. Do not be afraid of catching cold by this sudden change of temperature. Change of temperature is then agreeable to the skin.

There is but one laudable and permanent method of maintaining animal heat. This is not by stimulants, nor by fires, nor by clothing, but



simply by the combustion of carbon, from its union with the oxygen of the atmosphere, which takes place at the lungs and on the general surface of the body. Do not then cloak yourselves up on leaving the Bath, for when the whole surface *breathes*, the more you are exposed to the air the warmer you become. The Russian rolls in the snow after the bath. After leaving the hot room in our Bradford bath, bathers were in the habit, last winter, of jumping into a bed of snow which had been collected for the purpose. I have myself spent the whole night in the woods at Blarney, without any clothing save the bath sheet, after coming out of Dr. Barter's bath at that place. This was after a ball, when with several other gentlemen, I retreated to the bath for the sake of refreshment from fatigue. So delightful was the cool air, that when far away from any dwelling, we threw aside even our sheets, to enjoy the morning breeze at day-break. You need not then fear exposure to the air, after the bath; it is not so much for the sake of *cooling* that this process is necessary, as to keep up the action of the Bath by exposing the skin to air; it is to compel the skin to breathe, after having put it in a state of ability to do so, by cleansing the pores. Having now taken the bath, you will continue warm, without clothing if you like, until the skin becomes again blocked up.

The circulation, too, is necessarily active throughout the whole system, preventing any local congestion, coldness, or inflammation. For what is the *primary* cause of the circulation of the blood? Is it the contraction of the chambers of the heart? Certainly not; but the attraction of pure blood to the centres of nutrition all over the body; and again the attraction of the impure blood, after having supplied those centres with nutriment, to the lungs, to the skin, and to the excrementitious glands, there to give off the effete matter with which it has, in exchange for nutriment that it imparted, become loaded. The heart is merely a mechanical auxiliary, requisite in large and complex animals, but not necessary, and therefore not found in simpler organizations. But can you preserve the circulation without *Air*? No. Cut off the atmosphere from the lungs, and not all the power of the heart can drive a drop of blood through that organ. The blood, by contact with the oxygen of the air, not only gets rid of its effete matter, but is re-charged with the vitalising principle—oxygen, which it carries to all parts of the body. Away then with your flannels and stimulants! Every one whom I meet to-day, cloaked up to his nose, tells me that it is a cold day. I am not sensible of it, though I was formerly as sensitive to cold as most people, and was once even considered consumptive. I assure you, that so long as I take my bath once or twice a week, no degree of cold affects me, let me clothe as thinly as I may.

I wish to correct one other objection, which after my last lecture was raised against the bath, viz. that it is *weakening*. Never was a greater mistake made. The perspiration has drained away no living tissue, but merely effete and poisonous matter, which was oppressing, and not main-



taining life. In exchange for this you have oxygen, the quickener of every function, and the very life of the body. If you perspire well you come out of your bath stronger than when you went in. Your appetite is quickened, and what you eat is sure to be assimilated, for a demand has been created at every point by the greater activity of function which has been excited, and the consequent more rapid wear of tissue. If you go into the bath weary and jaded, even though you have been up and working all night, you come out refreshed. If from grief and care you are desponding when you enter, your heart is lightened before you leave, for it is impossible to resist the exhilarating effects of oxygen. If on the other hand, from the reaction of over excitement you are restless and unable to sleep, the bath becomes a narcotic. Only the experienced physician knows how many forms of disease originate in these, so common, but now so easily obviated causes.

You now know what constitutes a Turkish Bath. Let us next glance at the ends which it accomplishes. First of these, and the basis of all the rest, is cleanliness. I am informed that some of the audience, at my last lecture, were not pleased at being told that they were far from clean. I am sorry for this, but I must speak the truth. When your house is on fire, that is the most friendly voice which gives you the alarm. But what if I do more than cry *fire! fire!* What if I tell you, not only how to extinguish the flames, but how to prevent a recurrence of the catastrophe? If I can satisfy you that I do this, I think that you will overlook the unpleasantness of the first announcement. Now what constitutes dirt? What is it that an Eastern will not touch? The effete matter of the body. Not that which is deposited on the body from without, but that which is secreted by the body from within, "that which cometh out of the body, that defileth a man." Now the skin is the main organ for getting rid of this matter. It is perforated with seven millions of drains for this purpose. Put those drains together, end to end, and you have a tube nearly thirty miles in length;—thirty miles of sewerage! with seven millions of outlets! I ask you is it not of importance to attend to the flushing and cleansing of this animal sewerage? Effete matter is a most deadly poison when reabsorbed. All effete matter makes its way to the skin. Put poison into the blood, and the body tries to throw it off by the skin. Hence in fevers, doctors give sudorifics, poisonous drugs, which provoke this effort in the body, and excite perspiration. The colour and odour of the skin is speedily affected by the food and drink in which you indulge. At hydropathic establishments, it is no uncommon thing to find deposited on the wet sheets in which patients have been packed, medicines, poisonous drugs, which had been administered years before. When any internal organ is diseased and ceases to produce its proper secretion, it is the skin which, more or less, takes up the suspended function, and gives the diseased organ time to recover itself.



I am told that those who are employed in smelting copper ore at Swansea never suffer from the noxious fumes to which they are exposed. They are six hours per day in a sort of Bath, perspiring most profusely, and drinking on an average one gallon of cold water per hour. You will remember the story of Cæsar Borgia, when he is said to have taken poison himself in order to induce his victim to do so. He escaped death by enveloping himself in the body of an ox which he had killed\*and ripped open for the purpose. Now you may some of you say, "We of the upper and middle classes do not need the bath, we wash ourselves and are clean. Moreover, we have to do no dirty work." Excuse me, but you of all people most need the bath; you are *par excellence* the dirty classes. If a working man wears a shirt a week, its odour is intolerable. Not so with you. How is this? The working man sweats at his work, is partially exposed to the air, and to some extent gets rid of his uncleanness, while you, clean without, are full of filth within. The working man's skin is an open drain, while yours is a covered cesspool. We shall see, by-and-bye, which suffers the most from disease arising from suspension of the functions of the skin.

You may say, "But is not this bath a violent and unnatural means of attaining your end?" As to its violence, all I can say is, that I have seen children a few days old go through the process with evident manifestations of delight; and I have seen old men, ready, as they seemed, to drop into the grave, recover, from its use, faculties and vigour which they had lost for years. So far from being unnatural, it is the only compromise we can make to a violated nature. Man is by nature a naked animal, and compelled to take violent exercise, either to till the soil, or to hunt for his food. The upper and middle classes eat to excess, and seldom or never take violent exercise. The skin becomes blocked up, oxygen is not inhaled by it, circulation flags, and animal heat is imperfectly and with difficulty maintained. Then, as a remedy, you fly to clothing and to stimulating drinks; by the latter adding to the already over-stock of carbon, and by the former still more effectually clogging the skin by encasing it in a second integument, and that too generally of the worst material—flannel, and air and water-proof coats, hats, and over-shoes. Perhaps, as a crowning folly, you wear a respirator, so as to shut off the air from the lungs also, and put a plaster on the chest. Copious perspiration and exposure of the body to the air, are the only compromise we can pay for our artificial mode of life; and this and much else is accomplished by the bath, and by the bath alone. Priessnitz, the founder of hydropathy, knew well the importance of air-baths, and made his patients, at stated times, range the fields in a state of nudity. Dr. Franklin spent some hours daily, divested of his clothes, and the poet Shelley bears testimony to the benefits he derived from a similar habit.

Let us now glance at some of the diseases which arise from suspended



functions of the skin—diseases of civilization all, and most of them to a considerable extent peculiar to the non-working classes. We eat animal food in this country to excess, loading the blood with fibrine and albumen. At the same time, we do not take measures to get rid of this excess. What is to become of it? Why, it either remains in the blood, and becomes the fermenting soil for typhus and other putrid diseases, or it is deposited in the tissues in the form of tubercle, gout stones, &c. Violent inflammations too are fed by this same fibrine. To get rid of a portion of it, the surgeon bleeds his patient. But alas! while he lets out the fibrine, he lets out also the blood-globules, which carry the oxygen from the lungs and skin to the tissues. This oxygen is the very thing that is wanted. The carriers of the patient's very life are cut off. He will soon make up the fibrine, the enemy; the beef steaks and porter prescribed will soon do that work; but the blood globules, his deliverers, he does *not* make up, let him eat and drink what he will. He is more liable than before to be re-attacked by the disease, and less able to combat it.

I have already drawn your attention to the skin as a respiratory organ, that is as a *breather*. You all know that we breathe with the lungs; that carbon and other matter is consumed, and the blood renewed with oxygen as it passes through that organ. That is what constitutes *breathing* and maintains animal heat. Well, the skin is also a respiratory organ. Some animals have no lungs, and breathe entirely with the skin; others with a portion of the skin modified into gills or rudimentary lungs. In higher animals, though the lungs become especially devoted to this function, the skin still retains it to such an extent, that to interfere with it there, is dangerous; to arrest it, fatal. The skin, like the lungs, exhales carbonic-acid, and inhales oxygen, as may easily be proved by holding the hand in a vessel of oxygen, when that gas will by-and-by be replaced by carbonic-acid. You all know from daily experience the intimate sympathy between the skin and the lungs. When you are walking fast, how much more easily you get along after you have broken out into a slight perspiration. If you are riding, your horse freshens up under the same condition. In a vapour bath, although your head is in the air, you soon begin to feel suffocated, because the skin cannot breathe. If you remain too long in a wet-pack, or in a hot-water bath, the same sensation will be felt. In the lamp bath too, when your head is still out, you soon feel faint, and as if short of breath. Why? Because the lamp is consuming the oxygen in the bath, and the skin can no longer breathe. Now, you all know that if any of you were to hold your head long enough in a vessel or pool of water, thereby excluding oxygen from the lungs, that you would be drowned. Are you aware that if you as effectually exclude air from the skin you will die, not quite so soon, but quite as certainly? When Leo X. was raised to the Pontificate, a child was gilded over, at Florence, to represent the golden age. The child died in a few hours. Extensive



burns are more dangerous than deep burns, because they exclude a greater surface of skin from the oxygen of the air. Smallpox is at its most dangerous stage when the pustules burst, varnishing the body over, and excluding the air. The remedy obviously at that time is ablution. Fourcault, a distinguished French physiologist, varnished and gilt over guinea pigs, rabbits, and other animals, and he found that they invariably died like the boy at Florence, and for the same reason,—the skin could not breathe. Such is the result of complete closure of the skin. What follows partial closure of the same organ to any considerable extent? Disease in a thousand forms, but most commonly and most certainly, nay inevitably, that which gives annually in this country more victims to the grave than all other diseases put together, *Scrofula*, including amongst its subtle and deadly forms, that generally considered incurable malady,—*Consumption*. Not one of you in this room probably but has lost a near relative, or a dear friend, by this disease. Can the bath cure consumption, you are eager to know. I tell you plainly, that when not very far advanced, it can. On this very platform I could point out an instance. Effete matter seeks for oxygen. If it cannot find it at the skin it flies to the lungs, and ultimately destroys the organ by which it seeks an exit from the body. Scrofulous deposits, either in the lungs or elsewhere, are drained off by the skin when stimulated to activity; and the carbonaceous portions of them are burnt at the lungs and at the skin, where the blood comes in close proximity with air.

Another protean and fatal disease, assuming endless forms, and afflicting especially the upper classes is Gout; well what does the bath do here? It drains off the soluble refuse matter, and renders the insoluble salts soluble by supplying them with oxygen. Gout then is curable and preventible by the Bath. There are many diseases which arise from the nervous system being oppressed with effete accumulations; I have seen general paralysis arising from this cause very much relieved, and in a fair way of being cured. Blindness and deafness, the former almost total, and the latter total in one ear, I have seen cured in an incredibly short time, by the Bath, and by the Bath alone; and I beg you to remember that whatever the bath cures, it will also prevent. I have seen a large tumour disappear under the bath treatment. But in no disease are the effects more magical than in Rheumatism, often when it has defied every other treatment. Why, since my last lecture, several cases of rheumatism, of years standing, have been cured in this town. I have just now recalled to my memory a terrible case of acute rheumatism, or rheumatic fever. All treatment had failed to give any permanent relief; the patient with great difficulty could be carried to the Bath. He roared with pain if even a finger were moved; you will hardly believe the result. He *walked* home after the first bath. All forms of Neuralgia which arise from irritation of nerves by superfluous or effete matter in the blood, such as Rheu-



matic Sciatica, many cases of Tic Doloureux, &c., the bath will certainly cure. The high temperature alone, of the bath, will often cure chronic rheumatism, and various forms of neuralgia. High temperature, too, is curative in Inflammations, Burns, and Scalds. High temperature arrests all diseases of fermentation. The Plague is arrested in climates above a certain temperature. The hot winds of Australia are said to arrest fevers of various kinds. In short, it has become a question with me, not what the bath *will* cure, but what it will not cure?

I am aware that such diseases as have their origin in the nervous centres, and in the forces or fluids which those centres secrete,—Dynamic diseases we may call them,—demand equally subtle, dynamic remedies; these the bath does not supply, but in *blood diseases* I see no necessary limit to its curative power. Under this class come Diseases of the Skin which I ought to have particularized: for the most part they are mere efforts, more or less ineffectual, to throw off impurities, and are of course superseded by the Bath. This we know, that scrofula and gout are almost unknown in countries where the bath is in vogue. With all these facts, is it not strange that we should so long have neglected it? We well know that if we do not exercise our horses, aye, and shampoo them, too, they break into grease or some other disease. We know, too, how grooming refreshes a jaded horse. While we daily court the very accelerators of death, we habitually shun the means of averting their mischievous effects. We eat and drink to excess, and are too often indolent in proportion as we are gluttonous. The old Romans exceeded us in gluttony, but then they had the Bath, and did so with comparative impunity.

What the destined duration of life may be we do not know. The Psalmist tells us that in his day the limit was from 70 to 80 years. But there is no declaration in Scripture that it ought to be or need be so for ever. We are told, on the contrary, that man shall live 120 years, and that the child shall die an hundred years old. This is not more than we should expect, compared with the lower animals, of a being who takes at least twenty years to arrive at maturity. Be this as it may, how few live out even their 70 years, and how few again are perfectly healthy even in middle or somewhat advanced life? You will some of you be startled to hear that half the children born in London die before they are three years old. It is needless for me to tell you, that if the statements I have already made be true, the Turkish Bath will make a vast difference in these statistics. I lately read a book recording 1,712 authentic cases of people who had lived to the age of 100. Some had been great eaters, many had been vegetarians, some few had been great drinkers, some had been teetotallers, some had been bachelors, some were married, and had large families; but *all* had lived much in the open-air, and with one exception of an infirm clergyman, had been in the habit of taking active exercise; if in the upper ranks of life, as sportsmen, and when poor, in their daily avocations.



Sailors, soldiers, shepherds, and beggars, preponderated. One old woman, residing in Wakefield, after attaining her 90th year, took it into her head that she would like to see London, and she walked there and back. Those much exposed to the air, even without exercise, often attain an unusual age; witness old apple women at the corners of streets, who sit in the draughts of alleys. No doubt that an easy life and tranquil mind often play no small part in these cases.

You have all of you heard of the Water Treatment of disease, and of the relief that it has afforded in many cases. What it partially accomplishes, the Turkish Bath completely effects. By exercise, by copious water drinking, and consequent perspiration, the skin, no doubt, is partially cleansed; and by the external use of water also, it is stimulated to a more active performance of its functions. Then there is the rapid change of matter in the body, replacing old diseased tissue by new and healthier formations. All this Hydropathy, as it is inappropriately called, to a certain extent, accomplishes. But how imperfect, how slow, how clumsy and unpleasant is the process, when compared with that of the Bath! All that hydropathy does, and a great deal more, is achieved by the Bath, which in addition to being the greatest curative agent, is also the greatest physical luxury in the world. The introduction of the lamp and vapour baths into hydropathic treatment, is a proof that the want of a more certain, speedy, easy, and agreeable method of arousing the vital functions of the skin has been felt. We have already seen why these baths are so objectionable; perspiration is impeded, and respiration on the surface arrested by vapour. The lamp bath soon becomes a carbonic acid gas bath—a *poison* bath, in fact. Then why stop short? Why not come at once to the hot fresh-air bath? Moreover with water, with vapour, or with the lamp bath, you lose the curative action of high temperature. You all know that the presence of vapour in the atmosphere aggravates the benumbing influence of cold, and the oppression of heat. You know how much further and more easily man or horse can travel on a frosty, than on a foggy day, on a dry hot, than on a humid sultry day.

One word on the moral and social advantages of the Turkish Bath. Unless you desire to be private, you have the pleasure of varied society, one of the main attractions, to the poor man, of the public-house. You imbibe also the legitimate stimulant of the body, oxygen, which supplants the appetite for drink with a taste for a finer and ten times more enjoyable exhilaration. You excite also warmth which will last for days. Mr. Ure has most eloquently and forcibly dwelt on these advantages in so many of his writings,\* nor has he exaggerated them; and of this I am certain, that, for his enlightened and philanthropic exertions alone to estab-

\* See his invaluable chapter on the Bath in his work, *The Pillars of Hercules*, vol. 2, page 25.



lish the Bath in Western Europe, he will take his stand among the greatest benefactors of the age. I have said enough I hope to satisfy you that the Bath demands your serious investigation, and if after a trial you find that I have spoken *within* the bounds of facts, then it is your duty to do all in your power to help forward the good cause, and to place the Bath within the reach of all classes. If you want to live long and healthily, I again say take the Bath. If you want to save doctors' bills, take the Bath.\* I do not mean to say that it altogether supersedes medicine; every poison has its use, and I am well aware that for local effects, hydropathic appliances are often necessary; but I do say, that in a vast majority of, if not in all, blood diseases, the Bath is more speedy, more certain, and far more agreeable, than any other treatment of disease. Above all this, it is the preserver of health; it heightens every personal charm; the complexion especially becomes clearer under its use, the eyes brighter, and the person positively fragrant. Homer does not exaggerate when he describes Achilles, on issuing from the Bath, as looking "taller, and fairer, and nearer the gods."

\* When the population of Ancient Rome was said to be five millions (?) there were Baths in abundance, but no Hospitals; and it is recorded that during a period of 500 years, there was no physician in that vast city!

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49, KING STREET, WESTMINSTER.

*Price Twopence, or Twelve Shillings per hundred.*

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By George Witt, F.R.S.





