

Hot-air baths.

Contributors

Haughton, E.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

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183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
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Royal Dublin Society.

*A Sectional Meeting of the Society was held last Evening in
the Board-Room of the Society House.*

DR. WALLER *in the Chair.*

HOT-AIR BATHS.

MR. EDWARD HAUGHTON, M.D., read an interesting paper on the above subject, of which the following is an abstract:—

The baths specially alluded to were the Spartan, Roman, Turkish, and native Irish; each of which is distinct from the other; but all agree in placing the *summum-bonum* of bathing in the production of free perspiration as the real cleansing agent; whilst ablution (whether in hot or cold water), is merely accessory, and incapable of removing any but superficial impurities. A marked distinction was drawn between vapour baths, properly so called, and the Oriental Hammam, in which latter the presence of vapour is rather tolerated than purposely induced. The objections to which warm water bathing is liable were applied to steam baths, although in a less degree; they consist chiefly in the fact of these mediums parting with their heat suddenly, and being thus liable to raise injuriously the temperature of the body, whilst cooling by evaporation is totally prevented, and cutaneous action seriously interfered with. Objections against hot-air baths, on the score of climate, were combatted by showing that such baths are not only now in operation in this island, but are of great antiquity, having

been introduced into France and England by the Romans; and remains of the buildings erected by these conquerors still existing in various parts of the country. The climates where this bath is used are of every possible variety—that of Constantinople itself being very ill adapted for a bath which would predispose to taking cold. The time occupied in taking a Turkish bath was shown to be owing to taste rather than necessity, as the essential processes may be gone through in as short a time as any other warm bath. Diagrams were exhibited showing the outer and part of the hot chamber of a “Hammam,” as also a section of a Roman bath, taken from a fresco of the Baths of Titus. A drawing of the native Irish sweating house (so much used in the Rathlin Island) was also of much interest, as its principle was shown to be analagous to that used by the Spartans, whose great physical prowess and power of enduring hardships is so much dwelt upon by all writers of Grecian history. The drawings of the Turkish bath were taken from two different buildings, one of which was altogether for females; and in both we observed that every individual was clothed. This very proper regulation appears to us to confer a dignity upon this institution, which is altogether wanting in our own public baths, nor does it at all impair the efficiency of the sudorific process, or interfere with subsequent ablution. Interesting facts recorded in the works of Drs. Watson and Erasmus Wilson were alluded to by the speaker in proof of the innocuous nature of a heated atmosphere, when compared with any other medium whatever. The reason why we take cold seems to be but imperfectly understood, people confounding the heat gained by violent exercise, and attended with expenditure of nervous power, with that which is communicated to us from without, and which is a disposable *surplus*, over and above what we could have parted with *previous* to being heated. That this is the case, Dr. Haughton maintained both on the ground of *a priori* reasoning, and as

the direct result of experiment, which tended to show that persons in the habit of warm bathing are far less liable to take cold than those who are not accustomed to it. The vicarious power of the skin with respect to other organs having been alluded to, it was next shown that it is capable of absorbing gases, and that it is probable a good deal of oxygen is obtained from the atmosphere in this way, in persons whose skin is perfectly free from accumulations of cuticle or other impervious matter. This fact is of especial importance where the lungs are incapable of making those deep inspirations which are so essential to the health. The want of oxygen in the system was proved to give rise to the production of unorganizable deposits; and the superiority of cod-liver oil over most other oleaginous articles of diet was ascribed *in part* to its being rich in oxygen, as well as having little tendency to occasion intestinal irritation. Without advocating the hot-air bath as a panacea, Dr. Haughton maintained that it was capable of a wide range of application to the cure of disease, especially some disorders in which the blood was overloaded with noxious or superabundant substances. He stated that persons whose skin was in a proper condition, could swallow with impunity a greater quantity of any poisonous substance than could be taken by those unaccustomed to perspire freely, and that not only are Turks more abstinent than we are in their consumption of intoxicating liquors, but when they *do* transgress the law of Mahomet, they can dispose of a quantity of ardent spirits surprising in persons not habituated to their use. The objection which is thoughtlessly urged against warm bathing, of the insalubrity of certain trades which necessitate long-continued exposure to high temperatures, is evidently absurd,—for it is in the very nature of a remedy to act injuriously when its application is excessive; and, although this may be a reason for requiring a competent person to superintend its administration, yet it cannot have any force as an objection,

which does not apply equally to every other remedy with which we are acquainted. Having referred to the coincidence of certain forms of disease with habitual neglect of bathing, and shown the immunity from them which prevails in countries where the bath is frequented, Dr. Haughton concluded by expressing his belief that there is no class of society which would not be benefitted by the introduction of an institution which is venerable from its antiquity, and calculated to diminish many social evils if judiciously adapted to the habits of the people.

At the conclusion of this paper, which was loudly applauded, a conversation ensued, in which Dr. Bagot, Dr. Kinahan, Mr. James Haughton, Professor Galbraith, and the Chairman took part. The Meeting then adjourned.—*Reprinted from the Freeman's Journal of Saturday, 27th March, 1858.*