

## **The cold water cure / by Edwin Lee.**

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THE

# COLD WATER CURE.

REPRINTED, WITH ADDITIONS, FROM THE LAST EDITION  
OF THE "BATHS OF GERMANY."

BY

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ING AND HONORARY MEMBER OF THE IMPERIAL MEDICAL ACADEMY  
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THE MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL SOCIETIES OF PARIS,  
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## P R E F A C E.

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THE account of this method of treating diseases which formed the Appendix to the First Edition of the "Baths of Germany," was the first which appeared in England. Within the last two years, however, the subject has attracted a large share of public attention; numerous establishments have arisen, and works have been published, for the most part by individuals whom sickness, speculative or other motives, had led to Graefenberg, which convey a too partial and one-sided view of the question; while, on the other hand, the advantages which may result from the practice in certain cases have been too much depreciated by some of the medical profession. I therefore considered it would be doing a service to republish my remarks upon the subject in a separate form, with such alterations and additions as were rendered necessary, for the advantage of those who are interested in having an impartial opinion upon the degree of estimation to which the practice is entitled.

68, Grand Parade, Brighton,  
Nov. 1843.



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THE  
COLD WATER CURE.

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THIS method of treating diseases, which of late years has been so greatly in vogue in Germany, had been scarcely heard of in England, until the publication of the brief account which I gave of it in an appendix to my work on the baths of that country.

Its originator, Vincent Priessnitz, a small farmer of Graefenberg, near the little town of Freywaldau in Silesia, having, it is said, accidentally had his finger crushed when young, immediately put his hand in the water of a neighbouring fountain, and not only found that the pain was instantly relieved, but also that the part healed with very little difficulty. On the occasion of two or three other accidents which he subse-



quently met with, he employed cold water with a like success, and having a sick cow he applied cold affusions while the animal was in a state of copious perspiration, from which time it got rapidly better and recovered. He was likewise induced to recommend the same remedy to persons residing in the vicinity, and in a short time the report of the benefits said to have been derived from the method so extended its fame, as to cause invalids from distant parts to resort to Graefenberg for the purpose of undergoing the treatment. Considerable opposition, however, was made on the part of the local authorities, before whom Priessnitz was cited to appear, and his practice was prohibited; but he appealed from the decision to a higher tribunal, and on proving that he did not employ any secret remedies, but simply pure spring water, he was authorized to receive patients to be treated according to his method; Graefenberg was ranked among the number of Austrian baths, an inspector was sent from Vienna to superintend and report upon the proceedings of the establishment and the advantages of the treatment. The government of Bavaria and other German countries, likewise authorized and protected the practice.

The house at Graefenberg was built in 1824, on the acclivity of a wooded mountain, on which nu-



merous walks were cut ; but as it was soon insufficient to receive the numerous invalids, two other houses were added, and the houses of the villagers were put into requisition for lodging-houses, into which the water from the stream flowing through the meadow was diverted to serve for the supply of baths. The rapid increase of the repute of the treatment may be estimated, by the increased number of patients, which in the season of 1830 amounted to only fifty-five, but in 1838 to upwards of eight hundred—among whom were several medical men—and last year, to one thousand five hundred. Other establishments likewise arose in various parts, many of them being under the superintendence of physicians.

One of the largest and best conducted of these establishments, which I have twice visited, is Marienberg, (formerly a convent of *dames nobles* ;) it stands on an eminence overlooking the town of Boppard, in one of the most picturesque parts of the Rhine, and forms a conspicuous object from the river. In the courtyard is a fountain of clear spring water with iron cups attached, for drinking, and an ascending douche, by which a fine continued stream of water may be directed against the eyes or other parts of the head. A statue to the virgin, to



whom the building was formerly dedicated, stands as a memento of by-gone times in a niche over the door. The apartments (on either side of spacious corridors) are neatly and conveniently fitted up, the price varying according to the accommodation. A neat bed-room with board, and the use of the baths, being about two Frederics d'or a week, the fee to the director depending upon the patient's circumstances, the nature of the case, and the duration of the course. There is a large and cheerful reading-room, commanding a view of the Rhine, and supplied with newspapers and periodicals; adjoining is the refectory, where all the patients assemble at dinner. The baths are on the lower story, sunk in the ground. They contain clear water, about four feet deep, of the natural temperature, and are sufficiently spacious to admit of the bathers moving freely about. Patients are let down through a trap door, in a few seconds, from the corridors near their rooms on the first and second floors, by means of a chair and windlass, as it would otherwise take them some time to reach the baths. About 150 persons can be accommodated at the same time. The dinner consists of soup, roast or boiled meat, potatoes and other vegetables, cutlets, and plain puddings; the only beverage allowed being pure



water, of which there is a plentiful supply of bottles upon the table. Bread and butter, and cold milk and water, are allowed for breakfast; and the same for supper, with the addition of stewed prunes, pears, or other fruit.

Besides the douches in the house, there are, in an adjoining building, the Wellenbad, (wave-bath,) which is used in certain cases of local debility, and two or three douches in the environs; one being at the Hermitage, in a picturesque situation at the foot of the Hunds-Drucken hills, about a mile and half distant, to which the patients must walk, and, having been douched, must also return on foot. The water of the douches falls from a height of from ten to twenty feet, through tin tubes, the diameter of which varies from two to three inches, so that a powerful column of water falls upon the part of the body exposed to its action. On the back, abdomen, and chest, the stream is generally made to fall obliquely. Dr. Schmitz, the director of this establishment, is also the editor of a journal which gives an account of the progress of the water cure in Germany.\*

\* Mr. Mayo, lately surgeon to the Middlesex Hospital, who had been long in a bad state of health, resided some time at Marienberg, to superintend the treatment of English patients; but in consequence of disagreements, in which it was the general opinion



The mode of life, and method of treatment, do not materially vary at any of these places; but the coarse nature of the diet at Graefenberg is a just subject of complaint, the dinners being generally composed of beef done to rags, cucumbers in salt and water, acid sauces, and heavy dough puddings. "Hares, coarse, dry, and tough, being first boiled, then baked, baked pork, baked goose, baked duck, and baked sausages, help to vary the repast. Add to this, old mutton, foetal calf, and cow beef *stewed in vinegar*, succeeded by rancid ham served with mashed *gray geas*." "Add, moreover, that the veal, hare, &c. is constantly either mouldy or putrescent, and that the bread is invariably perfectly sour, and the reader will readily acknowledge that here is an assemblage of savours, flavours, and odours, exceedingly well calculated to give him an indigestion who never had one before. The food is so insufferably bad, that a party of gentlemen, after having stood it as long as they possibly could, were literally compelled to spit it out of their mouths, and retire in order

that Dr. Schmitz behaved in an improper manner, and refused to adhere to his engagements with Mr. Mayo, availing himself of the circumstance of the paper not having been signed, that gentleman, and all the English inmates, left the establishment in a body for another in the town, the Mühlbad.



to buy and cook, as well as they could, themselves sufficient food for their dinner."

"It cannot be doubted," observes the author\* from whom I have extracted the above list of delicacies, "that this wretched diet keeps the patients much longer under treatment than would otherwise be required, and that in many instances it obstructs the cure altogether." Priessnitz, however, is said to be willing to prove that his patients are able to digest, without inconvenience, substances which at other times would disagree with them, though doubtless the true reason is assigned by Dr. Johnson, that *bad food is cheaper than good*. Everything of a stimulating nature, as spirits, wine, coffee, tea, &c. is prohibited.

Although bathing is the most essential part of the treatment, the drinking copiously of cold spring water is equally enjoined. Some persons drink as many as twenty goblets a day, though it is seldom that more than twelve are prescribed. In some instances it is deemed advisable to recommend the preliminary use of a few cool or tepid baths, previous to bathing in the water at its natural temperature; but the usual mode of proceeding is as follows: Each patient is awakened at about five in the morning by an attend-

\* Hydropathy, by Edward Johnson, M.D.



ant, by whom the process of *emaillottage*, or wrapping up, is performed. A blanket or woollen covering is first bound round, so as to envelope the whole body, the face only being left free; over this is placed an eyderdown covering; over this, again, a second blanket is bound round the body, which, thus enveloped, appears to about twice its natural size. In a short time copious perspiration is induced; the window of the room is then thrown open to admit fresh air, and cold water is given to the patient at intervals, to supply the waste produced by the perspiration, and to prevent him from being weakened by its quantity. When the perspiration has continued for the period that is deemed sufficient, the coverings are taken off, except the original blanket, a cloak being thrown over the patient and slippers placed on his feet; he descends quickly from his room to the bath, and first dipping his hands and face for a second or two, throws off the blanket and plunges into the water at a temperature from 9° to 12° R., while the perspiration is still streaming from the pores of his skin.

The duration of the bath is only a few seconds in most instances; some persons, however, remain in for a longer period, in brisk motion, and rubbing the surface of the body. On quitting



the bath the skin presents the same appearance as a boiled lobster. After having been dried by friction with a sheet, the patient dresses, walks about for an hour, drinking two or three glasses of cold water, and then goes "to breakfast with what appetite he may." The time between breakfast and dinner (at twelve or one o'clock) is occupied in walking, reading, drinking cold water, &c. At Graefenberg many of the patients were formerly subjected to a repetition of the sweating and bathing process in the course of the day; this is, however, now, seldom the case; neither are patients sweated so profusely as two or three years ago.

In some cases, instead of being first wrapped in the blanket, a sheet dipped in cold water and wrung out is used, and over this a blanket and other coverings are bound round the body. The application occasions shivering for the first minute or two, but the body soon becomes warm; and, from evaporation being prevented, the wet cloth acts as a fomentation, and the perspiration is not so profuse. The sheet is preferred to the blanket, in cases of irritability of the surface, where the skin does not act freely, and in weakly individuals. In some of the more recent establishments, the wet sheet is even made almost entirely to supersede the blanket. Local baths



to various parts are likewise very commonly employed, either alone or as an adjuvant to the general treatment. Hip or sitz baths, in which the patient is seated in the water with his legs over the edge of the *baignoire*, are of very frequent use, especially in cases of relaxation of the pelvic viscera, discharges, piles, constipation, &c., water injections being also used. When employed for a short time, the action of the sitz bath is tonic and bracing; when for a longer period, by the reaction which is induced on quitting the bath, it is a powerful derivative, and is used to relieve congestive states of the brain or other viscera. In some states of nervous excitement, head baths are employed, the patient lying upon his back with his occiput in a vessel of cold water. Compresses of wet linen are likewise frequently recommended to be worn on the epigastrium or other parts, for the removal of abdominal obstructions, fixed rheumatic pains, &c. When the wet cloth is frequently renewed, and evaporation freely allowed to take place, it is one of the most efficient means in the reduction of inflammatory action, especially in the skin or external parts, and has from time immemorial been employed for this purpose, in private practice and in public institutions. The simply dressing ulcers and wounds with a bit of linen



steeped in cold water, as formerly recommended by Dr. Macartney, has been long employed in some of the London hospitals. Where, however, the wetted compress is allowed to remain on beneath the clothing, its action is analogous to that of a poultice, or fomentation, and is consequently derivative.

It is well known that the impression of cold water or cold air to the surface of the body, throws the blood upon internal organs, which relieve themselves of the undue quantity, under the consequent reaction, when the application of the cold is discontinued, and a glow, frequently with perspiration, is produced. The sudden passage of the body, while its surface is heated or in a state of perspiration, to a very cold medium, is generally considered, and very justly so, as highly dangerous; but in the cold water treatment, it is seldom found to be productive of prejudicial consequences, when under proper superintendence. On the contrary, a direct increase of bodily vigour and of the appetite is commonly experienced on leaving the bath.\* It must,

\* "The cooling of the body," says Liebig, "by whatever cause produced, increases the amount of food necessary. The mere exposure to the open air in a carriage, or on the deck of a ship, by increasing radiation and vaporization, increases the loss of heat, and compels us to eat more than usual. The same is true of those who



however, be borne in mind, that in these cases the heat of surface and perspiration are of a passive nature, and not produced by exercise, by which the whole body is heated and the circulation accelerated, in which state a person could not go into a cold bath without great danger. In fact, the practice is very analogous to that which was adopted by the Romans, who plunged into the *baptisterium* or cold bath, after leaving the vapour or hot one: and also by the Russians and other nations at the present day. "The heat of the vapour," says an author who has treated of the subject, "to which the bather is exposed, is from 122° to 132° Fahrenheit. After the expiration of a quarter of an hour, or even double that time, when the body is in a profuse sweat, it is washed with soap and water, and gently switched with small birch brooms; affusions of tepid and finally of cold water are practised, by pouring buckets full of it on the head. Sometimes, when there are no conveniences for a supply of cold water, a Russian will rush out from the bath, and plunge into the nearest

are accustomed to drink large quantities of cold water, which is given off at the temperature of the body of 99·5. It increases the appetite, and persons of weak constitutions find it necessary, by continued exercise, to supply to the system the oxygen required to restore the heat abstracted by the cold water.



stream, or even roll in the snow." Acerbi states, "that almost all the Finnish peasants have a small house built on purpose for a bath: the apartment is usually dark, with only a hole at the top. They remain for half an hour or an hour in the same room, heated to 167° Fah. The Finlanders will sometimes come out naked and converse together or with any one near them in the open air. If travellers happen to pass by while the peasants of a hamlet or little village are in the bath, and their assistance is needed, they will leave the bath, and assist in yoking and unyoking, and fetching provender for the horses, or in anything else, without any sort of covering, while the travellers sit shivering with cold, though wrapped in good wolf-skin. The Finnish peasants pass thus instantaneously from an atmosphere of 167° Fah., to one in which the thermometer is as low as 24° below zero, which is the same thing as going out of boiling into freezing water; and, what is more astonishing, without the least inconvenience, while other people are very sensibly affected by a variation of but five degrees, and in danger of being affected by rheumatism by the most trifling wind that blows."

"The Indians of North America," continues the same author, "have also their fashion of



bathing, which is not very dissimilar from that of the Russians. They construct a kind of stove, by fixing several small poles into the ground, the tops of which they twist together, so as to form a rotunda, and then cover it with skins and blankets, so accurately, that the external air is completely excluded. The space left for the introduction of the body of the person about to take the bath is closed as soon as he gets in. In the middle of this small apartment they place red-hot stoves, on which water is poured until a steam arises that produces a high degree of heat. The effect on the person enclosed is a speedy and profuse perspiration, which may be prolonged at will. Immediately after coming out, he hastens to the nearest stream, into which he plunges and bathes for about half a minute; he then puts on his clothes, sits down, and smokes with great composure, and, what is of no little importance, with a thorough persuasion that the process will prove efficacious. The sudatory is often resorted to for the purpose of refreshment, or to prepare for the transaction of any business which requires unusual deliberation and sagacity.”\*

In these instances, the time the person remains in the cold is not sufficiently long for the pro-

\* Bell on Baths, &c. Philadelphia.



duction of its depressing effects, which can be better resisted in proportion to the previously high temperature on the surface of the body. Hence, a person whose body is moderately warm, or whose skin is in a state of passive perspiration, would experience less inconvenience and danger from going into a cold bath, than one whose skin is cool, or when its vital powers are depressed. The advantage of cold affusion in fevers, when the heat of the body is steadily above the natural temperature, is well known, and is a further illustration of the same principle.

In Great Britain, the regulation of the functions of the skin by bathing, especially the use of the tepid bath, has been more neglected than in perhaps any other country. A vast proportion of persons, both in the metropolis and in the country, though scrupulously particular in the ablution of visible parts of the body, as the face, neck, and hands, seldom or never think of taking a general bath; and notwithstanding the greater density of its atmosphere, and the number of its inhabitants, which should render the use of the bath more imperative, London possesses but few facilities for bathing, in comparison with many of the continental cities, where the baths are numerous, well arranged, and at a price which puts them within the reach of all. It appears,



however, that a greater degree of attention is now directed to this important circumstance, the number of public baths having increased in London within the last few years.

In fact, when we consider the extent of surface occupied by the skin, its varied uses, both as the chief organ of sensation, in which the ultimate ramifications of the blood-vessels and nerves terminate, and also as that in which the important functions of absorption, perspiration, and the secretion of the sebaceous matter, by which its surface is lubricated, are carried on; its analogous office to the lungs, in favouring the decarbonization of the blood, and its extensive sympathies with other parts, especially the mucous membranes of the air passages of the alimentary canal and the kidneys, we cannot fail duly to estimate the importance of bathing, as the means best adapted both for maintaining this organ in a healthy condition, and also of rectifying many disordered states of the economy; and yet how seldom is it that baths are recommended in chronic diseases! Can it excite surprise, that in individuals who pass months together without taking a bath, or perhaps even without washing the surface of their bodies (as is the case especially with the poorer classes of the community) the functions of the skin should become materially



impaired, its circulation torpid, its secretions obstructed and vitiated, frequently giving rise, by their re-absorption, to deranged states of the health, of which the cause is seldom ascertained, and which the practitioner vainly endeavours to remove by the internal administration of medicines.

Among the numerous patients who daily apply for relief at the various hospitals and dispensaries, and whose skin is generally dirty and in a disordered condition, how rarely is it that a bath or ablution is ordered ! It is true, that the recommending baths to these patients as part of the treatment of their diseases would be of little use, so long as the medical institutions in England are so indifferently supplied with them as at the present time. But even in private practice, where there would be no obstacle to the freer use of baths, how seldom do they form part of the treatment, unless there should happen to be any existing disease of the skin ! I am convinced, that in many instances, the digestive powers become deranged, and the general health undermined, from a neglect to pay proper attention to the state of the skin ; that a large proportion of the catarrhal, rheumatic, and nervous affections, so prevalent in the variable climate of Great Britain, might be traced to the same source ; and that the tendency



to these complaints, as well as to pulmonary consumption, would be materially lessened, were persons, while in health, accustomed to attend to the functions of the skin, by the employment of bathing and cold ablutions more frequently than is generally the case. Many people, it is true, who perhaps never take a bath, yet enjoy good health, for the influence of habit will often enable the body to support many things that are generally prejudicial. But, on the other hand, there is no doubt that many suffer from various unpleasant sensations and disordered states of health, which might be prevented by the more frequent adoption of the practice.

The cold-water treatment employed in proper cases strengthens the nervous and muscular systems, gives tone to the body generally, and to the skin in particular, consequently there is a greater inclination and ability for exercise, a diminution of the undue susceptibility to atmospheric changes, and to morbid impressions on the nerves, which in a high state of civilization are so frequently productive of disordered states of health. The pure air, bodily exercise, plain diet, the drinking freely of water, and consequent copious excretion of fluid, by means of the skin and kidneys, must tend powerfully to renew the mass of blood, and to eliminate noxious matters



which sometimes remain long in the circulation and give rise to intractable diseases. A vitiated state of the blood, as the cause of disease, has in fact been more overlooked by English than by continental practitioners, though even abroad it is only of late years that due attention has been sufficiently directed to this point. A physician of eminence (Kreysig) observed, "Physicians are in the habit of regarding the solid parts as the primary agents of life, to which the fluids are subordinate; but, on the contrary, the blood and the nervous substance are the primitive and essential instruments of all the organic functions, while the solid parts occupy an inferior grade, and are but of secondary importance in disease. The elements of general and internal disease, or the morbid predispositions which form the most important objects of treatment, may then all be reduced to vitiated states (*dyscrasies*) of the blood and lymph, or to derangement of the nervous system."

The extent to which the employment of active medicines in chronic disease has been and is still carried in the British dominions, is made a subject of just reproach by foreign practitioners. The public, however, is, in great measure, to blame for the practice, by encouraging the custom of remunerating the great body of practi-



tioners, not according to the attendance, but in proportion to the quantity of medicine sent. To this custom may be ascribed that habit which many have acquired of dosing themselves and their families with active drugs on every slight deviation from a state of health. It is gratifying, however, to observe that of late considerable alteration has been effected, both as regards the doses of medicine and the mode of remunerating professional services; though there is reason to apprehend that a long period must still elapse before the generality of the public and medical men will become aware that their true interest consists in the abolition of this system. The manner in which mercury is frequently used, or rather abused, (though not so much at the present day as a few years ago,) occasions the production and continuance of many nervous, dyspeptic, hypochondriacal, and other complaints, which are generally relieved for a time by the medicine, (in the same way that the dram of spirits or the dose of opium excites for a period those accustomed to their use,) and this temporary relief often tends to keep the practitioner and patient ignorant of the principal cause of the intractableness of the complaint, either till recovery takes place in some instances from the medicine being discontinued, or, what amounts



to the same thing, from the homœopathic regimen,—or from some accidental circumstance, as change of air, scene, &c., or till, in other cases, the general health is seriously impaired, and not unfrequently a foundation laid for the super-vention of organic disease of important parts.

The small and daily repeated doses of this agent, which it is the practice of some to recommend in the majority of dyspeptic cases, and which have been considered to be comparatively harmless, are more pernicious from the gradual accumulation of mercury in the system, than larger doses given at longer intervals, as these are carried off by the increased alvine secretion which they produce. Let me not be misunderstood in the preceding remarks, as wishing to depreciate the proper employment of medicines, and of one of the most efficient agents we possess for the treatment of many diseases, both medical and surgical, in which large quantities of mercury are often exhibited with great advantage; it is against the too indiscriminate use of powerful medicines by some practitioners, and by non-professional persons, especially in cases of stomach and bowel derangement depending upon chronic irritation of the mucous membrane or morbid susceptibility of their nerves, and in nervous affections occurring in the young and



delicate, (the nature of which is so frequently mistaken,) that I am induced thus strongly to protest.

Eruptions, boils, or abscesses, are not unfrequently induced during the water-cure, and these are generally considered by patients as critical and evacuating morbid humours, though in the majority of instances they are but a consequence of the excitement of the skin by the process. In some patients, however, the perspiration eliminated has a strong fetid odour, and the cloths and compresses are not unfrequently stained, and retain a bad smell. Dr. Schmitz mentioned to me a case which fell under his observation of a patient who had taken sulphur-baths seven years previously, but who had not used sulphur since that period. After she had been pursuing the cold water cure for some time, her room smelt of sulphur, a bracelet she wore became tarnished, and her linen was stained a yellowish colour. Other foreign matters have also been detected by analysis in the perspiration and urine of these patients.

A system which acts so energetically upon the constitution may well be enumerated among the *heroic* remedies, and as such requires much discrimination in the selection of cases. As with Cadets de Vaux's method of treating diseases by



hot-water, as well as with many other methods and remedies which have been adopted for a time and have subsequently fallen into neglect, so also the too general application of the cold water cure has been followed by accidents, and an aggravation of the diseases it was intended to remedy. With respect to this point, the author whom I have already quoted observes, "But no rational man can doubt that the possession of scientific knowledge would enable Priessnitz to be much oftener successful than he is, and would lessen the number of his failures. Certainly it would prevent his taking in, and submitting to a tedious treatment, many cases which such knowledge would have taught him at first were perfectly hopeless. *There are many such cases in the establishment at this moment.*"

"And I foresee," further observes this author, "that much evil will at first result, and many a life be sacrificed, from the *apparent* simplicity and innocence of the remedy, inducing persons to practise, both on themselves and others, (to the injury of both,) without the knowledge necessary to do so with success." \*

It is generally acknowledged by the profession in Germany that this mode of treatment is calculated to be of great service in several diseases. I

\* Dr. E. Johnson.



shall content myself with briefly alluding to the principal complaints in which it has been found advantageous, as it is my intention in this place merely to give an *aperçu* of the method. A great number of works have been published of late years in Germany and France, by medical and non-medical persons, in which its advantages and disadvantages are fully considered; and as some among these authors are not prejudiced in favour of or against the treatment, a tolerably accurate idea may be formed from their perusal of its results.

A story is told of a man in Paris who had acquired a great reputation for curing the diseases of lap-dogs by some means which he kept a secret, but which being afterwards divulged, was found to consist in his placing all the animals entrusted to his care in a large open space, giving them to eat only plain meat and bread, and water for drink, of which the pampered creatures at first refused to partake, till their appetites were sharpened by the exercise which he obliged them to take by going in several times in the day with a horsewhip, the dread of which was sufficient to induce them to scamper about in a manner to which they had been previously but little accustomed. By means of this regimen they were generally returned to their fond mis-



tresses sleek and healthy at the expiration of two or three weeks.

Good air, exercise, plain diet, abstinence from stimulating food and drinks, and tranquillity of mind, have been repeatedly insisted upon by medical men and others, as being the most essential means of preventing and obtaining the removal of the majority of diseases which a high state of civilization and luxury induces ; and the former of these are more influential with the human race than with others of the animal creation ; for though man be an omnivorous animal, and requires a variety in his food, yet by the too free indulgence in highly-seasoned viands and stimulating potations, (the habit of which generally becomes more strong at a period of life when there is less disposition for muscular exertion ;)\* not only is the appetite excited and a larger quantity of food taken than is required by the wants of the system, but there is also a greater demand upon the nervous energies ; the quality of the blood itself, and consequently of the various secretions, becomes altered, which state of matters cannot long exist without derangement of the health manifesting itself in one way or

\* “ An excess of food is incompatible with deficiency of inspired oxygen, that is, with deficient exercise.”—*Liebig, Organic Chemistry.*



another. This state of predisposition to disease, and several of the disorders to which it gives rise, might often be remedied by the exercise, early hours, and temperance enjoined as part of the water cure: but it is seldom that persons, so long as they feel themselves tolerably well, have the resolution to break through the chains of habit so far as to adopt even partially these precautionary means, by which the future assistance of the physician might be obviated; but they go on in their accustomed manner, dosing themselves at intervals with medicines to relieve their most urgent inconveniences; and it is not until the germs of disease become rooted in the system, and the symptoms are so strongly manifested as to indicate material interruption in the performance of important functions, that they are awakened to the necessity of sacrificing some of their accustomed enjoyments, and are forced to resort to other than merely palliative means for a restoration to health, which cannot at this period be effected solely by hygienic measures, and which is more effectually accomplished by a combination of these measures with remedies which alter and improve the quality of the blood, and impart tone to the nerves, by their general and gradual operation, than by others which have a more directly exciting effect



upon particular organs. Hence the reason why so many have recourse to mineral waters, and lately to the cold-water plan, which, though more disagreeable in its operation, and more energetic in its immediate action than mineral waters, may yet be applied to several of the diseases of which I have spoken when treating of these remedial agents: especially to some forms of long standing disorder of the digestive organs, particularly when arising from the causes which have been already referred to, viz. repletion, and a too luxurious and sedentary mode of life; some gouty and calculous disorders, which are so often dependent upon the same causes, especially when occurring in the young or middle-aged of full habit and otherwise healthy; inactivity of the skin; complaints arising from exposure to cold and suppressed perspiration,—such as fixed and shifting rheumatic pains and stiffness, which are sometimes so intractable as to resist mineral waters and other means, are likewise not unfrequently cured by this treatment; and the undue susceptibility to atmospherical vicissitudes by which they were perhaps originally caused is often removed, as is also morbid excitability of the nerves, and its consequences, hysterical and spasmodic attacks; long standing intermittent complaints, either in the form of ague, neuralgia,



or irregular muscular movements, after having resisted other measures, have sometimes yielded to this treatment, than which few things could be more calculated to counteract the influence of habit by which similar complaints are so often kept up; syphilitic cases, particularly when of long duration, and when much mercury has been previously taken; a too copious or otherwise disordered menstruation, leucorrhœa, and some other local complaints, as piles, ulcers, &c., depending upon constitutional causes, as well as some cutaneous diseases in which a revulsive action upon the skin is indicated:\* as also relaxation of the system, and other derangements of the general health, may often be removed or mitigated by this plan of treatment.

Notwithstanding, however, the advantage which the water cure may be calculated to produce in some disordered states of the economy, it must not be supposed that it is either so generally applicable or so successful as some of its advocates would have it considered; and the exaggerated accounts of its efficacy which have been given to the world by interested or enthusiastic parties, are likely to do much harm by leading to its indiscrimi-

\* M. Gibert has employed the cold water cure with advantage at the Hospital St. Louis, in some cases of *lepra*, psoriasis, and other intractable diseases of the skin.



nate adoption in cases to which it is but ill-suited. Thus, one non-medical author, after extolling Priessnitz as "one of the greatest benefactors of mankind—one of the most astounding geniuses of this or of any other age—a second Hippocrates—the founder of a system by which all curable diseases, and many declared by the faculty to be beyond the power of their art, are to be cured by the sole agency of cold spring-water, air, and exercise,"\* fills his book with cases of cure of acute and chronic disorders, chiefly from the publications of practitioners of this method, who, like others interested in crying up any particular mode of treatment, would generally abstain from bringing forward instances which would cause the success to be questioned. What, in fact, are the majority of publications written by watering-place practitioners, but one-sided accounts of the virtues of the waters of their particular locality, without any reference to other remedies or other places where the waters may be of equal if not superior efficacy, in the very complaints of which the account is given? The same may be said of many remedies which have at various times been trumpeted forth to the world, and though perhaps efficient in many cases, have nevertheless been subsequently laid aside, in consequence of their not answering the

\* Claridge on Hydropathy.



exaggerated expectations raised by their too enthusiastic advocates. It must also be borne in mind, in estimating the value of remedies, that it is not because a person gets well while pursuing a particular mode of treatment, that his recovery is a necessary consequence of the treatment, as the same result would very often occur under a different mode, or even where no treatment at all was adopted. The *post hoc* is, especially in medicine, very often mistaken for the *propter hoc*. On the other hand, some less partial observers, who likewise followed the practice at Graefenberg, and whose works are favourable to the cold water treatment, state that many patients go away without any amelioration in their condition ; and that a large proportion labour under no more serious ailments than might be remedied by a residence in pure air, by exercise and plain diet. “ I expected,” says Dr. Ehrenberg, “ to find an assemblage of the most rare and serious diseases ; and on almost all sides I saw only robust individuals and fresh-coloured countenances. Several days were required for me to discover any presenting the symptoms of serious disorder of the vital functions. This enigma was not long in being solved. Among the fresh visitors who daily arrived, there were not wanting individuals afflicted with serious diseases, who



for their part would willingly have contributed to increase the fame of Graefenberg; but when the first glance taught Priessnitz that they were seriously ill, he sent them away for the most part. The opportunity afforded itself of my making the acquaintance of some of these unfortunates deceived in their hopes. They had been dismissed in exactly the same terms as we had; though their diseases did not in the least resemble each other, yet they had all been told they would not have strength to go through the treatment.”\*

The acknowledged ability and tact of Priessnitz is, however, frequently insufficient to counterbalance the absence of medical knowledge, as regards the proper discrimination of cases to which this method is applicable; and I have already adduced the testimony of Dr. E. Johnson, that many of the cases at Graefenberg are such as are not likely to be relieved, and the attempt is necessarily a failure. “Priessnitz himself,” continues the author above quoted, “does not conceal, that at most an eighth of the number of those who address themselves to him are admitted into his establishment. One might then expect that all those whom he receives obtain a cure. This, however, is far from being the case; and, for my part, all those whom I saw

\* Exposition des Méthodes Hydriatriques, Paris, 1842.



go away from Graefenberg, left it suffering very much, and several, whom Priessnitz had declared incurable, were cured by Weiss, at Friewaldau."

"Chance furnished me with several opportunities of meeting, a month or two after their departure from Graefenberg, with persons whom I had seen give themselves up to all the exaltation of their enthusiasm, and I was quite surprised at the change which had taken place in their sentiments. A short time ago I met a young Russian officer, with whom I had dined several times at the table of Priessnitz. "And how are your headaches?" said I, after the usual salutation, recollecting his bragging, of which I had been a witness more than once; he replied, with some confusion, "My pains are the same as before; and I should have done much better had I gone to pass six weeks at Teplitz, instead of losing six months at Graefenberg." Another patient told me, that far from being satisfied with his journey, he believed he could date from that period the sufferings which now tormented him much more than those for which he had gone to Graefenberg. A lady who had taken care to avoid the ordinary excesses of Priessnitz's guests could not find terms sufficiently strong to express to me, how disagreeable is the time which follows an hydropathic treatment; the continual



use of cold water had become to her a condition of her well-being, and when she was obliged to limit it in some degree, she experienced the same inconveniences, as those which occur when one is suddenly deprived of a stimulant of which one has contracted a habit."

These instances would be found to be multiplied, if the truth could always be known. Many persons who feel themselves in better health at the time of the treatment, or for some time afterwards while still under the influence of the stimulation, and have consequently spoken highly of it, would, after a period, and on attempting to return to their ordinary mode of life, find the amelioration not to be of so permanent a character as they had expected, though comparatively few would, like the Russian officer, be disposed to recant what they had previously said, and to acknowledge that their expectations had been too highly raised. This remark is equally applicable to the results of other methods which have been unduly lauded by particular individuals, but which an impartial experience in time reduces to their proper level. "*De tout chose il faut voir la fin.*"

"It is evident," observes the same author, "that the laws of prudence are violated each hour of the day at Graefenberg; and this truth is beginning to make its way in the world, for, dining



one day at Neisse with several Prussian officers, I heard one of them say, that they were greatly indebted to Priessnitz, whose treatment had contributed to render promotion more rapid, by hastening the end of some of them, whose names he mentioned ; which, however, did not prevent one of the guests from maintaining that Priessnitz cured every kind of intermitting fever in three days. I then recollected the only two patients attacked with fever whom I had known at Graefenberg, and who were not yet cured at the end of a month or six weeks. One of them had even given up the water, and had recourse to ordinary medicine. This assertion of the guest whom I have mentioned confirmed me in the opinion that Priessnitz is a favourite of fortune, such as is seldom seen ; for, at the moment when at Graefenberg an intermitting fever was braving him by its obstinacy, a few leagues off a panegyrist was found of his sagacity and the infallibility of his method. After my departure from Graefenberg a lady died there ; it was then the custom to ascribe the occurrence of death to the bursting of an abscess internally, but on this occasion also, the opening of the body gave the lie to the favourite explanation. When the relatives inquired what had been the cause of the fatal termination of the case, the answer which they



received was, that the patient's neck was too short to allow her to live. Where could there be found another man who would dare thus to express himself? In what other place than Graefenberg would there exist a public who, instead of perceiving in such an answer the proof of the grossest ignorance, and of an unblushing effrontery, would, on the contrary, discover that of a profound wisdom? What, then, will be the end of this direction of people's minds? What will become of hydropathy, when it shall no longer be in fashion, and when time has torn off the tinsel with which it has been covered? These questions present themselves spontaneously, when on casting an eye over the history of medicine, we see that so many systems which have enjoyed so great a degree of fame, are fallen into complete oblivion. It is a bad sign for hydropathy, that it counts at the present time among its most zealous advocates, people who but lately spoke with enthusiasm in favour of homœopathy. Precisely, because its value has been exaggerated, it will not be able to avoid a reverse of fortune.\*

The Italians (as well as the English) have a proverb "*Ogni medaglio ha il suo reverso*;" and on viewing the reverse side, as regards the cold

\* Exposition des Méthodes Hydriatriques, par Ehrenberg et Heidenhain, Docteurs en Médecine, Paris, 1842.



water cure, it will be easy to perceive that the method is not so generally successful as some of its more enthusiastic partisans would lead us to suppose ; and that some of the cases have a fatal termination, even while under the treatment, or within a short time afterwards. Some of the exclusive advocates of the method boast of the small number of deaths which have occurred in the establishments where it is practised, as compared with those which take place where a purely medicinal treatment is pursued ; but the comparison is not a fair one, inasmuch as the number of those who would leave their homes, when in a state of health attended with danger, to resort to a water cure establishment, must be extremely limited. The great bulk of the cases met with in these establishments is composed of persons labouring under various derangements of the health unattended with danger, which is most to be apprehended from the imprudent use of the remedy from which they seek restoration. "Of the patients who resort to Malvern," says Dr. Wilson in his recent work,\* "for the treatment by water, air, exercise, and diet, seven out of ten labour under the interruption of more or fewer of the organs which minister to the digestion of food ;" and in fact the same may be said of a large pro-

\* The Dangers of the Cold Water Cure.



portion of those frequenting the different baths in the summer season, where, out of a large proportion of invalids, the mortality is extremely small on the spot, though many may subsequently find their sufferings aggravated, or have their lives shortened, by an improper use of the waters. With respect to the treatment of acute disease, in which the cold water has been strongly advocated, it may be observed, that in certain cases, its modified adoption as regards the external use could not fail to be beneficial, and the application of the wet sheet repeated according to circumstances, would be the most efficient means of lowering the temperature of the body, and of diminishing fever, being in fact but a variation of the practice recommended by Dr. Curie, of cold affusion in fevers; the rule to be observed being, *that the surface of the body be steadily above the natural temperature.* Where, however, the feverish excitement depends upon inflammation of an important internal organ, there would be great danger, from the frequent application of cold, of the increase of the inflammation, in consequence of the blood being driven upon the internal organs at a time when the powers of the system, and consequently of reaction, are weakened. Wet compresses, covered over and allowed to remain, are sometimes beneficial as an adjuvant to other



means, as a revulsive, especially in inflammation of the tonsils or sore throat.

Hence it will be perceived that much discrimination is required as to the cases in which the water cure is likely to produce benefit, or to merit a preference over other means of treatment. An unbiassed opinion can only be formed on this point after minute inquiry into all the circumstances and peculiarities of individual cases; and those persons would often find themselves grievously mistaken, who from hearing the account of cases of gout, rheumatism, or any other disease being cured by this or any other exclusive method, were to infer that it is necessarily suited to all or even to the majority of cases of those diseases, which cannot thus be considered in the abstract, but each case must be examined separately in order to modify and adapt the treatment to it according to the varying circumstances and peculiarities. It is true, that as there may be several roads leading to one place, so also in medicine, the same disease may frequently be cured by or subside under different modes of treatment, and it consequently behoves both the practitioner and patient to select the one which is attended with the smallest amount of positive inconvenience, and which requires the least time. Now the cold water treatment is not



only a very unpleasant process, but a long course is in most instances insisted on by those who practise it, and a patient would not have much reason to congratulate himself upon his relief from an ailment, by a two, three, or four months' residence at a water cure establishment, when by medical treatment, or by a properly directed course of mineral waters, he might have been cured in a much more agreeable manner and in half the time. I do not say that this is generally the case, but it is not unfrequently so ; and what I am desirous of advocating is, the necessity of a proper discrimination by unprejudiced practitioners, in the selection of the cases to which different means of treatment may be applicable with the greatest amount of benefit to patients. I have, in the volume to which this account formed the appendix, endeavour to show that mineral waters, which have no ephemeral reputation, but which have been used in all ages, and appear to be specially bestowed upon man as a means of relief from a large proportion of the diseases to which he is subject, present the most natural, efficient, and agreeable mode of treating the majority of chronic diseases. A foreign author observes upon this point : "The evidence of antiquity with regard to the efficacy of mineral waters, the experience of centuries which con-



firms this efficacy, the universal favour in which they are held among all civilised people notwithstanding the difference of medical theories, sufficiently demonstrate that they are of all remedies those of which the reputation is the most justly established. Nature bestows these remedies liberally upon us in order to invite us to have recourse to them in our diseases ; she has consulted, as much as possible, our delicacy, our taste ; she has tempered the virtues and the power of the waters and has adapted them to different temperaments. We obtain from plants and minerals many medicaments, but they almost all require certain pharmaceutical preparations ; whereas mineral waters are always naturally at our disposal ; they contain sulphur, carbonic acid, and neutral salts, which are frequently employed in the practice of medicine. Why, when found in nature's laboratory, should these substances not have an equal degree of power as when taken from that of the apothecary ? Most mineral waters are not harmless ; they cannot be used with impunity in cases where they are contraindicated, and every year there are persons who become the victims of their imprudence."\*

These statements are further corroborated by the progress of chemistry, which has demon-

\* Patissier, Manuel des Eaux Minerales, Paris.



strated the direct action of solutions of salts and other substances contained in mineral waters, in altering and modifying the condition of the blood and secretions, as well as upon the nervous system, of which point I have fully treated in my works on the German and English mineral springs.

The position of a water cure establishment is a matter of great importance as regards the results of the treatment. It should be in an undulating or hilly country, and an agreeable locality, well wooded and supplied with shade, so as to present inducements to its inmates for walking exercise, without the monotony of a plain and uninteresting country; the water should be of the purest kind, and the supply abundant. The combination of these advantages is found at Boppard, which I have recommended from personal knowledge. There is also an establishment near Coblenz, which is advantageously situated. As, however, there is now abundance of these establishments in England, those persons to whom the water cure is recommended, or who may be disposed to make trial of it on their own responsibility, need not undertake a long journey to Silesia or other parts of the continent. Malvern is perhaps one of the best positions in England for an establishment of this kind, and from what



I have known of Dr. Wilson, I should say that his judgment and experience of the method fully qualify him to superintend the treatment of those cases in which it is indicated. The experience of Mr. Weiss from Friewaldau, now of Stanstead Bury, is likewise very extensive.

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