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Contributors

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WHY DO NOT WOMEN SWIM ?

A VOICE FROM MANY WATERS.

Ladies' National Association for the Diffusion of
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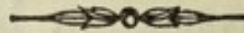
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WHY DO NOT WOMEN SWIM?

WONDERFUL women for a certain kind of zeal about health, are we English. If we meet our particular friend, we give her no saintly greetings, say nothing about mind, soul, or estate, but straightway overwhelm her with touching enquiries after the outer woman. In our social gatherings, health and the weather form the staple dishes at "the feast of reason." We spend fortunes on doctor's fees, and patent nostrums; and our purse, tight-clasped as it is, relaxes in a moment at the "Open Sesame" of the vampyre-charlatans who prey upon us. We, whom the senior Mr. Weller too truly pronounced "*the soft sect*," in the dual meaning of that term, make our land a very El Dorado for the greatest quacks the world has in it. Let the man be never so great a knave and dolt, if he can but tell us some bold falsehood about health, we fly to him, as foolish moths to the flame which consumes them.

But our much ado about health is "all cry and no wool;" we are a wofully unsanitary set of folk, and have yet to learn some of the very first of Hygeia's lessons. We have yet to learn, that while we go seeking Health among the bottles and pill-boxes at the 'pothecaries, she will, like another Robin Goodfellow, elude us at every step, and laugh at us for our pains. We have yet to learn, that in things sanitary as well as spiritual, the best blessings are obtainable "without money and without price:" that the free gifts of air,

water, and means of exercise and recreation can do for us, what the whole contents of the Pharmacopœia, applied with the wisdom of Esculapius and Solomon to boot, never will. When shall we leave off our wild-goose-chase after Health in the consulting rooms of charlatans, and know that she lies hidden in the bright wave and shady glen, and sits wooing us among the flowers on the meadow-side? In vain, for most of us, the fresh mountain breeze blows, in vain the fields are green and beautiful, in vain volumes of health-giving water circle our island home; we value them little, because of their very freeness.

Our depreciation of Nature's rich gifts is shown in nothing more strikingly, than in the fact, that, though we have numerous beautiful inland streams, and though our insular position gives easy access to the sea, few people avail themselves so little of the great advantages derivable from bathing. "Water is the most grateful, the most necessary, and the most universal of the gifts of a wise Creator; and in an age when man drew his luxuries more from nature, and less from his own productions, when water was his friend more than his servant, it was regarded as a representative of the Deity, and was raised to the dignity of a mythological god. Thus the rivers of Greece and Rome were represented allegorically by a tutelar god, with his attendant nymphs, and to this day the Ganges is adored by the votaries of Brahma. The worship of rivers has undoubtedly, in some instances, obscured its principle, a remark applicable in the most modern times, and in the most civilised countries, to most serious objects; the principle evidently is *the utility of water to man*. From the first hour of his existence to his latest breath, in health and in sickness, on the throne and in the cellar, water is an universal good. Baths were dedicated by the ancients to the divinities of Medicine, Strength, and Wisdom."* But sapient John Bull, possibly by way of fleeing ancient idolatry, turns his best rivers into disgusting sewers, and leaves the sea to be a bath for the

* Erasmus Wilson.

barnacles ; while we, his daughters, submit ourselves to a sort of chronic hydrophobia.

It is remarkable and strange, how small a number of female bathers are seen even in our best watering-places, and in the beautiful rivers of our inland towns none bathe at all.

One great reason of this is, that most of us cannot swim, and, consequently, cannot derive the full benefit and pleasure which bathing is calculated to bestow. While this is the case, the sea will be literally "a waste of waters," and we shall lose one of the most valuable means of health which the world has in it.

Bathing, as at present practised, is a very absurd affair. Dignified and pleasant it is, to stand and be "ducked" by two bathing-women. Equally pleasant, to be tied to the end of a rope, like a miserable donkey to a tether, and there stand shivering, in mortal fear of being capsized. It is true, that when an upset happens, its results are generally not very tragic ; the crestfallen bather is generally fished out "all alive oh," with far less detriment to health than to temper : but we all know how far it is from always being so. Periodically, so surely as the bathing season commences, we hear of numerous drowned bathers ; the number of young lads thus taken away is something appalling, and the sacrifice of adult lives is by no means inconsiderable. If to these deaths, be added the numberless ones which occur when persons unable to swim are wrecked at sea, or in any other way exposed to danger from water, nothing more is needed to prove that a knowledge of natation is a positive duty, which the great law of self-preservation renders incumbent upon all of us. To all of us, at least, who have not resolved, as some poor sufferers from hydrophobia do, never to leave *terra firma*.

To make so foolish a resolve, is, in effect, to deprive ourselves of one of the greatest blessings and pleasures which the world contains. It is also to determine never to visit other lands, and thus to hinder our mental growth, and retard the coming of that time

when, through increased intercourse, all nations will lose their national jealousies and prejudices, and acknowledge the universal brotherhood of humanity. We read of a time when, "there shall be no more sea," that is, according to our great apocalyptic writer, water transit will be so rapid and easy, that the present great characteristic of the sea, that of a barrier between the nations, shall cease to exist. There is no doubt but that Puck's unfulfilled promise, to "put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes," will ere long be performed by our engineers; "perhaps we may not live to see the day;" but those of us on the sunny side of forty may reasonably expect sometime to be able to leave London in the morning, take "pot-luck" with our particular friend in New York, and get back to "an early tea." When the undiscovered extent of inanimate power and human genius is considered, what reason is there to believe, that while a cannon-ball travels at the rate of hundreds of miles in an hour, sound, of thousands, and light, of millions, flesh and blood must always go at the comparatively "snail's trot" of sixty? Certain astute modern philosophers tell us, we are full of electricity, to our very finger ends; is it not, therefore, among the *possibilities*, at least, that we shall one day be seen spinning along some future Transatlantic Telegraph wires? Britannia is the centre of human progress, her ships are its radii, and thousands of us, her daughters, are needed to go forth as teachers, missionaries, and emigrants, to introduce the blessings of our own civilisation to grim heathendom. In such days as these, then, it is certainly our bounden duty to qualify ourselves to travel on "the great highway of the nations," without putting our lives in hourly jeopardy. People who are good for anything, as you, dear reader, undoubtedly are, cannot be spared: the greedy sea has already devoured enough of earth's choice spirits, from Kempenfelt and his "twice four hundred," down to Shelley, Margaret Fuller Ossoli, and Caroline Jewsbury.

The greater part of the dangers of water transit could be sur-

mounted, if every person could swim well. In the majority of shipwrecks and other accidents on the water, an expert swimmer could either reach land, or keep afloat till help came: we hear of but very few Leanders. There is a method of floating which requires very little exertion, and by which even a weak woman, may sustain herself on the surface of the water for several hours. Now, when an accident happens, even a dozen yards from land, women can do nothing but cling, in helpless groups of five or six, to some brave man who risks his life to save them; and the result is, all sink in one miserable heap.

The burning of the steamer "Indiana," on the 17th July, 1856, was an appalling instance of preventible loss of life by drowning. The accident took place at eleven o'clock in the morning, and "though the horror of a night surprise was spared, though there was an abundant provision of life-preservers and of boats, and though assistance was presently at hand, fifty lives were lost to about one hundred and forty saved. If the passengers could have confided their lives to the charge of their own limbs, in fresh water on a summer morning, all might have been saved. As it was, a poor Irishwoman, named Bridget Glynn, afforded a strong contrast, not only to the women, but to the most of the men on board. While a strong man, who had no resource but holding by a rope, purposely or unconsciously kicked off a poor young lady, who immediately sank, Bridget Glynn was saving four lives with her own. The ladies on board, who had nothing but life-preservers to trust to, had committed the inconceivable folly of using these belts as pincushions, in undressing at night; and they were found, drowned by the score with their collapsed belts on. Bridget Glynn set to work in a different way. She had her four young children with her—the youngest a babe. If she had not learned to swim, she had learned what to do, and how to float, in the water. Choosing a favourable moment, she threw the children into the lake and leaped after them. She calmly told the elder ones how to keep their heads up, and kept them from struggling

while they held on by her, and she raised the babe out of the water. A boat ran down one child; she balanced herself, watched the moment of re-appearance, and caught the child by the hair. Several times each went under, and she recovered them; while others were helplessly floundering and sinking, they were all quietly floating when boats came to pick them up." * One might fill pages with such heartrending accounts, and with the pseudo-pious comments made upon them. They are generally ycleped "inscrutable providences," "mysterious dispensations," and so on. Sad and strange it is, to see how continually we employ these "inscrutable" scapegoats, instead of penitently ascribing our misfortunes to our own "inscrutable" stupidity, as we ought to do. We expose ourselves to ocean dangers without learning to cope with them; of course some of us get drowned, and then, forsooth, it is a "mysterious providence!" others of us kill ourselves by continual violations of Health's laws, and that is another—and so on to the end of the chapter of our follies and their penalties. While we choose to give vent to such palpable absurdities, we shall continue to make brazen scepticism chuckle and triumph, and true faith "hide its diminished head," for very shame of the great truth which we wrest.

But if death by drowning were as rare as translation, and independent of the great value of swimming as a mere means of safety, its claims as a means of health and enjoyment, are so great that they alone are sufficient to prove, that it ought to be practised very generally.

Nothing can be a better muscular exercise than vigorous swimming. It formed an integral part of the far-famed system of physical training, practised in old Rome and Greece, when their inhabitants arrived at a point of physical perfection never equalled before or since, and the embodiments of which, in their imperishable statues, stand before us now, so surpassingly beautiful that one feels ready to believe they represent real divinities, rather

* *Daily News*, August 23rd, 1856.

than that mere outward divinity of humanity, which we too might possess. The saying used by the ancient Greeks in describing an ignorant person, "he can neither read or swim," shows how prominent a place natation occupied in their educational system.

Well would it be if every modern educator would follow their example. The great fault of female education in our day, is neglect of physical training. Our teachers have yet to learn that the aim of education should be, not to make mere pianists, wax flower makers, or Encyclopædias in crinoline, but *women*. Women, such as the Creator meant them to be, with not only a mind to see, and a heart to feel the world's needs, but also with physical power to work hard, and supply them. The car of progress sticks in the mire, like the Boætian's wain, waiting for woman to put her shoulder to the wheel. But woman cannot come; when she is called, she is sure to be suffering from some one, two, three, four, five, six, or more of her "thousand and one" ailments, and must stay at home to nurse herself. We can never take our right place among the world's workers, till we have more physical working power; and this we shall never get till we adopt some more efficient means of bodily exercise, than those we now generally practise. Things are altered since the days of our respected great grandmothers; *they* got up in the small hours of the morning, milked cows, churned, cooked, cleaned, and "did about" all day, at a rate which it makes one quite hot even to think of; *we* rise a little before noon, and pass our time in sedentary occupations, which hardly exercise a single muscle, or give us any opportunity to put forth even the forty-mouse power which we possess. No one who has just ideas of womanly life, can be sorry that we are no longer required to expend our energies, in the household drudgery of our ancestors: but there is great cause to regret, that while we have abandoned these active domestic duties, most of us have adopted no efficient method of obtaining the bodily exercise which they afforded. This we must do; and the sooner we do it, the better, for it is quite certain, that the greater part of our ailments

and weakness result from nothing more or less, than sheer want of muscular action. Nothing can meet this want more effectually than judiciously-practised gymnastics, and swimming, which may be justly termed aquatic gymnastics.

To those of us who reside in large towns, where, with the exception of riding, any out-door exercise beyond a measured, stately walk, is considered a violation of all the proprieties, swimming would be invaluable for its action on the muscular system alone, independent of the accompanying beneficial influence of the water upon the skin and entire body.

Moreover, the injurious rush of blood to the head, which in many persons immersion of the body in cold water invariably produces, and which in many cases more than counterbalances all the benefits of sea-bathing, is almost always prevented by the vigorous motions of the limbs which are made in swimming. For it is a law in human physiology, that any parts of the body which are in action, shall receive a larger supply of blood than those which are still: accordingly, by the action of the limbs in swimming an increased supply of blood is drawn to them, and less, therefore, goes to the head. Upon this point, it is worthy of remark, that some of the most effective actions, used in the treatment of congestion of blood in the head by the "Movement-cure," consist of various motions of the limbs very similar to those made in swimming. The present manner of bathing, is generally more injurious than beneficial to those who, through undue mental activity, or any other cause, have too great a flow of blood to the brain. This class of persons—a very numerous one in the present day of ceaseless mental "wear and tear"—is therefore too often unable to bathe, though it happens to be the class to which the bracing influence of sea-water would be specially beneficial :—

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear,"

and among them lies a certain "pearl of great price," health by

name; but we, poor animals, who have over-tasked brains, will never find it till we can swim for it.

The recreative mental influence of swimming, is another of its great recommendations. Whether a cheerful party swims together, and holds a naiad's ball among the pearly spray, or whether a solitary swimmer floats silently on, gazing on the glorious expanse of sea and sky, and listening to the sighing melody of wind and wave, the effect is alike exhilarating. Many a nervous hypochondriac, could get almost all her blueness washed out by a few weeks' daily swimming practice.

The open sea is by far the best place for swimming, not only because of the cheering influence of the view, and the greater tonic influence of sea-water, but because of its greater density, which renders swimming in it far more easy than in fresh water. But swimming in rivers, or swimming-baths, is also so highly beneficial, that it is passing strange that we have lived so long without practising it. The women of London are this season, privileged with access to an excellent swimming bath, and with instruction from a competent female teacher of natation, at the Public Baths, Marylebone Road.* It would be well if this example were followed by the bath proprietors in all parts of the kingdom; at present, at Brighton and other towns possessing excellent bathing accommodation, a woman cannot gain access to the swimming baths upon any consideration.

But if they were universally accessible to us, it is to be feared many would be slow to avail themselves of them; for against swimming, as against most other good things, people make some most absurd objections.

Absurd objection, No. 1, with a certain class is, that swimming is utterly inconsistent with womanly decorum. What state those minds must be in, which can see indecorum in this, or in any other so rational and necessary a means of exercise, it is

* See "Opening of the Swimming Bath for Ladies," in the *Englishwoman's Journal* for August, 1858.

difficult for one possessed even of a modicum of true purity and common sense, to conceive; all that can be said is, "my soul enter not into their secret." It is passing strange that these lynx-eyed guardians of womanly decorum, cannot see that swimming in a becoming dress, like that worn by the female bathers on the continent, is far more decorous than wading and "ducking" about in a "slit sack," as Englishwomen do now.

Objection No. 2, is that swimming and all such exercises have a tendency to make us "masculine." Here, for once in a while, "the right nail" is "hit upon the head;" swimming *does* tend to make a woman "masculine" in some of the popular acceptations of that term; and herein lies its greatest recommendation. It would tend to bestow upon us that physical vigour, those firm muscles and strong nerves, which in our day are so rare among women, that they have gone out of fashion for them, and come at last to be regarded as masculine characteristics, though they belong alike to well developed humanity of either sex. "Masculine" and womanly, like many other terms in our day, convey to the popular mind ideas quite different to those which they originally and legitimately expressed. The popular ideal of female perfection, lacks some of the very elements of true womanhood. The nation professes to take all its types of excellence from Scripture teachings and characters; but its ideal of womanly perfection is, in many leading points, described nowhere so accurately as in the works of Byron, and other similar writers; and the grand mental, moral, and physical proportions of the "honourable women" of Scripture, are now seen nowhere but in a few noble characters whom the great part of society outlaws, and brands with the terrible *sobriquets* of "unsexed," "masculine," "strong-minded," &c. Happy is it for "Deborah, the judge of Israel," Abigail, and the Queen of Sheba, and others of their genuine metal, that they are dead and canonized; for had they lived now, they would have been thus outlawed and branded likewise. She who would rise into all the power and loveliness of true woman-

hood, must turn off her eyes from society's Byronic models—things too weak in brain to think, and too weak in body to work, “leaning in beautiful (?) helplessness on man”—and use all means of developing her physical powers.

“To sum up the whole, women should try to become as tall, as strong, as capable of enduring mental and bodily exertion, as it is possible for them to be; and till they have attained this maximum point, they have not fulfilled the intention of God. To it the public taste must conform, and no means be left untried for its attainment, still less must any such be regarded as indecorous. The usual and purely arbitrary notion of only certain bodily motions being decorous for the female sex, is a miserable restriction on the ‘individuality of the individual.’”*

It is quite beyond the sphere of a short tract, to describe the best methods of swimming, or give the hygienic rules relating to it: the former can be acquired under a good teacher far more easily than from written instructions; and the latter are to be found in most popular works on health. The best work treating specially of swimming and bathing which the writer knows, is a French pamphlet, entitled “*Hygiène des Baigneurs*,”† this is very excellent.

But there is one rule “not in the books,” and which it may be well, therefore, to name here. That is, that whoever goes swimming, should try to make it as cheerful and pleasant an affair as possible; then it will do her three and a-half times more good, than if she went about after the funereal manner of English-women. In some countries, a bathing party is as merry an affair as an Irishman's wedding. But many of us, unfortunately, believe in a false classification of things, which places the good little spirit of fun among the imps of darkness, and perpetual elongation of facial muscle among the necessary accompaniments of right-

* Bessie Rayner Parkes.

† “*Hygiène des Baigneurs*,” par A. Debay. Garnier freres, 6, Rue des Saints Peres, Paris.

mindfulness; and we, as a people, do everything with a queer, dignified gravity most wonderful to behold, and as much out of place in our social recreations, as "snow in harvest." True wisdom is, to make "the web of life of a mingled yarn," tears, and smiles, work and play, philosophic musings and Puck's fun. Would that somebody would write a book on the "solemn duty" of laughing in due season! for we sadly want some of our Dutch gravity shaken out of us. For the sake of physical, and even of mental and moral health, we must "become as little children," not only in their simplicity, purity, and trustfulness, but also in their buoyant, mirthful spirit.

So you, dear reader, when you swim, do not go about like a floating coffin, but be cheerful, enjoy yourself *and other people*—and much good may it do you!

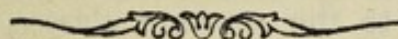
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FOR THE

Diffusion of Sanitary Knowledge,

The Principal Object being the Preservation of the Health of Children.



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THIS Association has been recently formed by a few Ladies, who beg earnestly to recommend it to the attention of all who desire to elevate the physical condition of their neighbours.

It is an acknowledged fact, that by far the greater part of the debility, disease, and premature mortality in this country, is the result of preventible causes; but it is an equally evident fact, that very few preventive measures bearing upon the personal habits of the people have yet been adopted.

The originators of this Association believe, that in a majority of cases, the principal cause of a low physical condition is ignorance of the laws of health; and they have therefore combined to propagate this important branch of knowledge.

They propose to effect their object :—

1st.—By establishing Institutions in which Schoolmistresses and Pupil-Teachers, belonging to any schools for the working classes, can attend, gratuitously, a course of theoretical and practical instruction in all subjects relating to the preservation of health, in order that they may impart this branch of

knowledge to their pupils. By these means, school-girls, the future wives and mothers of the working classes, will obtain information which, though necessary to *all*, is at present possessed by very few. Classes will also be formed for private Governesses and other Ladies. Special attention will be paid to instruction in the management of Infants and Children, as being one of the most important duties of woman. In order to make this part of the instruction thoroughly practical, some orphan Infants will be reared in the Institutions. Schoolmistresses will thus have an opportunity of gaining a thoroughly practical knowledge of all matters relating to infantile health; and, through them, this knowledge will be imparted to the working classes, who have at present little opportunity for gaining it, except from dearly-bought experience, or from books, which, in many cases, they have neither inclination or means to purchase, or intelligence to comprehend. Nursery-maids will be admitted to this part of the instruction; and the Association hopes thus to supply that great desideratum, intelligently-trained nursery-maids, to whom Infants may be safely entrusted. Clergymen, Medical Gentlemen, and all who are interested in sanitary reform, are earnestly solicited to use their influence to establish such Institutions in connection with Branch Associations in their various localities.

2nd.—By compiling and publishing interesting, simple, and practically-written tracts, on all subjects relating to the preservation of health (see list). Ladies will thus be enabled, during their visitation of the poor, to bring the influence of tract literature to bear upon the physical condition of those visited, as well as upon their spiritual condition, which, though pre-eminently important, certainly ought not to be the only subject of tracts distributed among the poor, as it generally is.

3rd.—By establishing loan-libraries of popularly-written interesting books upon all subjects relating to the preservation of health.

4th.—By arranging for the delivery of popular lectures on the preservation of health.

The Association has obtained the free use of a room, for lectures, &c., at 14A, PRINCES STREET, Cavendish Square, London, and of a commodious house, 17, EGREMONT PLACE, Brighton.

The Association is entirely dependent upon the contributions of benevolent individuals, and it earnestly solicits the assistance of those who approve its objects.

Subscriptions, Donations, Books for the Libraries, Manuscripts for Tracts, etc., will be very gratefully received by MRS. ROTH, Treasurer, (pro tem.) 21, Gloucester Place, Brighton; MISS BESSIE R. PARKES, "*Englishwoman's Journal*" Office, 14a, Princes Street, Cavendish Square, London, W.; MESSRS. WILLIAMS, DEACON, and Co., Bankers, Birchin Lane, London.

Communications may be addressed to the Secretary, 16a, Old Cavendish Street, Cavendish Square, London, or 17, Egremont Place, Brighton. Inquiries may be answered personally at the former place on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, from Two till Four o'clock, and at the latter on all week-days from Two till Four o'clock.

The Secretary will also be very glad to receive suggestions on any subject connected with the objects of the Association.