

HOME-BATHS AND BATHING.

BY A NAVY SURGEON.



AM not by any means a hydropathist; neither, on the other hand, do I blindly pin my faith on the British pharmacopœia; but I will say this for hydropathy—I have cured very many cases of chronic illness, of lingering children's and women's diseases, skin and liver ailments, and dyspepsia, by a judicious system of baths and bathing, which never

would have succumbed to medicine alone. As for the latter, I must say (and your own doctor will tell you the same, if you choose to ask him) the amount of physic taken by people, in real or fancied illness, whether prescribed or not, is not only generally quite unnecessary, but often highly injurious to the constitution.

The household bath is very much neglected in this country. Of course, everybody above the rank of labourer or shopman has "a tub" in the morning, and very much surprised is everybody if you tell him that, in five cases at least out of ten, this tub, as taken, does more harm than good. Perhaps, indeed, the greatest benefit that accrues from the custom is that it eases a man's mind, and gives him an idea that he has done what is right, in order to strengthen his system, and render him proof against cold and infection. And that itself is something; for, oh, what a wonderful thing faith is! Mind you, the amulets and charms worn in ancient times *did* often cure the diseases they were meant to, simply by easing the mind, and removing from the brain and nervous system the depressing influence of fear. Nature was thus allowed to rally, and complete her own cure.

The luxury, the pleasure, and the benefit of the bath were known and understood by the most ancient of nations. We read in the Bible that the Jews adopted bathing as a means to cure the sick. The more modern Jews, Josephus tells us, also used the bath. We are told, too, by an ancient writer that the Egyptians used both the hot and cold bath for the sake of cleanliness, and the benefit of health. Persians, also, and Hindoos, and Arabs, all knew the virtues of water; and we need hardly remind the reader of the baths of Pompeii and ancient Rome. But not to go so far back—have you never heard the story of the Countess of C—, one of the loveliest women in the court of Napoleon I., how she kept her age, unwrinkled and fair, till long past the allotted span of threescore years and ten, but could never be prevailed upon to tell how she managed to retain such beauty and bloom. She did not divulge her secret until she lay on her death-bed. Then she did, for in the grave she had no rivals to fear, and much surprised her friends were to hear it—*rain-water*. Ah! if

you only knew the virtues of rain-water, fair lady, as a cosmetic, you wouldn't use white lead, bismuth, or rouge either, and your *perfumier* would hang himself, or go to America.

It is the custom of medical men, in this enlightened age, when prescribing any particular remedy or plan of treatment, to describe to the patient, as far as possible, its mode of action. This is a very proper custom too, as by this means a patient can easily distinguish between the genuine physician and the unlettered charlatan or quack, and it gives the patient hope and faith, two of the best tonics in the world.

Before, then, going on to describe home-baths, and simple but correct methods of using them, let us just for one moment call to mind some of the functions which the skin, that great emunctory, has to perform. It isn't a dry subject by any means—at least it should not be.

All the organs and systems of the body are on the best of terms with each other, and the one never hesitates to do a good turn for the other. They are quite neighbourly, so to speak. For example: it is the duty of the liver to eliminate bile, but if the stomach has a large dinner party on, the liver has just rather much to do, and the kidneys very kindly perform part of her duty, in order that the brain and nervous system may be supplied with blood as pure as possible, and everything go on straight. Next morning perhaps the liver has got to make up her own lee way, very often under the influence of a blue pill. With such bad management, it is no wonder the kidneys, liver, or stomach have so often to give up work, and go on the sick-list. Again, if the skin is not properly attended to, more work falls upon not only the mucous or lining members of the alimentary canal, but also on all the other eliminating and secreting organs of the body. The skin is one of the great emunctories of effete matter, which, if retained in the system, clogs the brain, and poisons the blood, and causes to be felt a want of freshness, youth (for one to be well should always feel young), and activity throughout the whole system.

I need not at any length here describe the glands in the skin. Suffice it to say that they are of two sorts—the sweat glands, which are the most numerous, and the sebaceous or fatty glands. The former carry off water, about the same quantity daily that the kidneys do—viz., two pints. From this it can easily be seen what an aid the skin is to the kidneys, and how the work of the kidneys must be increased to their detriment when the skin is not acting. These glands also carry off carbon, and thus aid the liver in its work; and lactic acid, in which it comes to the assistance of the stomach. Now, if this lactic acid is retained in the blood, even in small proportions, it produces languor, tiredness, and a feeling of unnatural laziness; if in large quantities, gout or rheumatism is the result. It is surely then within the comprehension of the most

obtuse, how important it is for the health of the body that the functions of the skin be duly performed.

The month of October is just the month to commence a regular system of daily ablution. People who have been at the sea-side, or in the country, have, it is to be presumed, laid in a reasonable stock of good health, which it would actually be a sin not to maintain when it can be done with so little trouble. Besides, the weather is not yet cold enough to frighten one from his morning tub, and once the habit is commenced, very few will care to give it up again.

The matutinal tub is certainly the simplest and one of the best sorts of home baths. Everybody, even the poorest mechanic, can afford a zinc tub, and also the time for a tub. The accessories to this kind of bath are likewise very simple—viz., a large sponge—the larger the better—a flesh-glove, and one pair of Russian crash towels, and a *rough flannel one*. Before entering the tub, have a drop of warm water and some soap, and by aid of the glove very quickly but energetically rub yourself well down, then tub, dashing the water well over your body for about two minutes, or longer if agreeable. Then dry yourself thoroughly, and finish off with the *flannel towel*. This is the towel for the sebaceous glands; if you use it well you will never have *acne*, or those nasty little black ticks which a medical man is so often asked to prescribe for. As regards the temperature of the water, if you are not very strong it will be as well to begin with tepid water, and reduce it just two degrees every day till it is about the same temperature as the air. In cold weather it is, as a rule, the safest plan to add a little warm water, thus having your bath about an equal temperature all the year round. For my own part, I like to break the ice on my tub, but only spare wiry men must attempt a bath so cold as this. I sleep with my window open winter and summer; I mention this because I want to give you a warning, if you follow my example—remember the window must be fully and widely open; a little bit at the top or bottom will only cause a *dangerous draught*.

A large tumbler of cold spring water, drunk slowly while slowly dressing, is an excellent adjunct to the benefits of a morning tub.

The shower-bath, for those who can stand it, or get themselves by a free use of the other bath strong enough to stand it, is very bracing for the nerves, and highly exhilarating. For an expenditure of a few shillings, if you possess the least genius in the way of mechanics, you can have one fitted up in a spare room. Indeed, every house, however small, ought to have a small room set aside for the purposes of thorough ablution.

For lowering the temperature of the body when the skin is hot and feverish, *cold effusion* may be resorted to with great success. You must seat yourself in an

empty bath, and get some one else to come and pour four or five buckets of water over you. You must be then quickly dried, and placed comfortably in bed. Refreshing sleep is sure to follow.

I have often got up at twelve o'clock at night, when my skin was hot and dry, and I felt sleepless and restless, after a hard day's brain-work, and lowered myself bodily into a large cold bath. How soothing and delicious to every sense! and how certainly sleep the soundest followed such immersion!

It is a good thing in cases like this never to be afraid of bathing, but always to let your own feelings and the state of your skin be the judges as to whether your bath shall be warm, tepid, or cold; for if the temperature of the body be very high, even a warm bath proves a cooling agent.

The mustard foot-bath, two ounces of mustard to two gallons of warm water, is an excellent remedy in the first stages of colds, in headaches, and some female disorders. So also is the sitz-bath, and various kinds of local baths—as the local douche-bath, by which you play upon stiff joints, sprains, &c. &c., and which you can easily arrange by attaching a yard or two of india-rubber tubing to the tap of the cistern.

In many cases of fever, sponging the body with one pint of vinegar to three of water is very refreshing.

A wet compress worn around the stomach could hardly be called a bath, but it is a very valuable remedy in some cases of diarrhoea, constipation, and dyspepsia. It is formed of seven yards of rough cotton cloth about fifteen inches wide. One half is wrung out of cold water, and rolled round the stomach, and the dry end covers it. If you can't wear it all day, you may with advantage all night.

The last sort of bath I shall mention is one I invariably use myself, and can highly recommend. The accessories in my case are a sharp axe and a load of wood, but you may use the dumb-bells. When I wish to have a bath I rush out and go at it with that axe on that wood, till the perspiration runs down my back and I haven't a dry stitch on. "The doctor's doin' a buster," I overheard the stable-lad remark to Kitty the maid the other day. Young rascal! I've had him over a year, and never yet saw him "doin' a buster."

When I have induced free diaphoresis (perspired freely), I enter my room, and have a nice wash down with warm water, soap, and the flesh-brush. Then follows a cold shower, dry underclothing, a cup of coffee, and half-an-hour on the sofa with a favourite author, and I feel like a new being.

The answer I received from a Scotchman only yesterday, to whom I had recommended a course of baths for chronic debility, speaks volumes.

"I took yer advice, doctor," he said, "and now I'm as strong as a cowtie [colt], and, man, what a savin' in *whuskey!*"

