

Once again to home returning
 After many a struggling year,
 Stand I 'neath the well-known portal
 Half in hope and half in fear.
 What ! is this shy blushing maiden
 She I left long years ago—
 She who led me smiling brightly,
 Lifted up her young face lightly,
 Kissed me 'neath the mistletoe ?

What is this her arms encircle ?
 Mistletoe and holly bright !
 Omen this that seems to tell me
 She has ne'er forgot that night !
 So, with glad hope strong within me,
 To her side I softly go,
 Pluck a green twig from her shily,
 Lift her sweet face blushing shyly,
 Kiss her 'neath the mistletoe.

G. W.

SWIMMING A PART OF EDUCATION.

BY CAPTAIN WEBB, THE CHANNEL-SWIMMER.

NR. JOHNSON has defined the word education as "the formation of manners in youth." Time alone will show how far the London School Board will succeed in imparting a sound education to the lower classes. I fear, however, from what I see around me in such places as Upper Street, Islington, and the Thames Embankment on Sundays, and in some of the back slums in our larger provincial towns, that their efforts must extend over many years before they succeed in producing a result that would satisfy the Doctor's definition.

In considering this all-important question, it should never be forgotten that there is not only the education of the schoolroom, but the education of the playground. If we contrast the usual course of instruction in the present day with that of, say, twenty years ago, we shall the better realise how great a change has taken place in the views of some of our modern instructors.

If the teaching in our lower-class schools be merely confined to reading, writing, and arithmetic, but little will be done to raise the tone of the rising generation; the knowledge gained will, in all probability, be lost soon after leaving school, or if retained, used merely for the purpose of reading a class of literature more injurious than not reading at all.

The class of young men we require to supply our shops, our factories, our mines, as well as our army and navy, are clean, healthy, intelligent, sober, and truthful lads, and these qualities have to be acquired quite as much in the cricket-field as in the classroom.

It is the brutal, untutored rough that howls loudest under the lash. Education in its highest form alone will produce a set of lads who, like the Spartans of old, will remain unmoved while being scourged on the altar of Diana.

What would Eton be without its cricket, its rowing, its athletic sports? Nothing, for it is only by means of the body being kept healthy that the mind is able to retain its power of acquiring knowledge.

As an instance of what that monster, custom, is capable of, any day may be viewed in the heart of London, hundreds of lads dressed in petticoats, vainly endeavouring to amuse themselves on a gravelly waste that, if sold, would probably realise a

sum sufficient to educate and clothe twice the number, under a blue sky, with a bright green heath to re-echo to their healthy shouts.

It seems that both the highest and lowest of our schools have recognised swimming as a part of education. We have swimming made compulsory at Eton, and we have swimming taught in connection with the London School Board. I believe the amount of good that will probably result from the latter body having recognised the importance of swimming being generally taught will be simply incalculable.

How many thousands of young lads are there throughout the country who stand before us just in the state that little David Copperfield reached his aunt's house at Dover—ragged, hungry, and footsore! Why cannot we as a country bring ourselves down calmly to view such a child in the simple spirit of philosophy of Mr. Dick?

"What would I do with David's son?" said Mr. Dick. "Why, I should wash him."

Now, of all sports that are practicable in London itself, swimming stands almost alone. Not a quarter of London exists but has its swimming-bath. Suppose now a knowledge of swimming was made compulsory among boys, just as a knowledge of reading is, and suppose school inspectors were to examine in swimming as well as in writing, what would be the effect on the population? For, bear in mind, compulsory swimming to a certain extent implies compulsory cleanliness.

It has been well said—

"E'en from the body's purity the mind receives
 Its secret sympathetic aid."

There is at Eton a strict rule that no boy is allowed to enter a boat until he has learnt to swim. There is such simple common-sense in this excellent rule, that it is with feelings almost of amazement that we find the good example thus set not followed out in some of the ordinary laws of the country.

If a boy is not allowed to risk his own life, how much more important is it that no man should be granted a licence to risk not only his own life, but those of others! There are a certain class of men called licensed watermen, not only on our rivers, but around our coasts. Of our river watermen, perhaps, the least said the better. I wish some of our legis-

lators would, like Haroun Alraschid of old, make occasional excursions, and judge for themselves of the class of men who, remember, are *licensed* to carry passengers. I would recommend a few trips after midnight, and try the effect of requesting to be put on board a vessel in mid-stream. Start, say, from St. Katherine's Wharf to begin with, and try a few starting-points lower down the river in continuance. And yet we boast of London being the most civilised city in the world!

But our seaside watermen unconnected with ports are a different class. Yet how often at some popular watering-place will you see a little open boat with a heavy living cargo, comprising perhaps some little children leaning over the side of the boat, and paddling their little hands in the water! Suppose one was to fall over, or, still worse, suppose that boat were to upset, probably none would be more helpless in the water than the huge and clumsy fellow who is licensed to carry his cargo to death.

Surely in granting all licences some inquiry into the character of the person licensed should be made. You would not license a cabman who did not know London, and could not drive, why therefore grant a licence to a waterman who cannot swim?

It would, perhaps, be a hardship to deprive men of their licences who have had them for years, yet there could be no possible hardship in giving notice that after a certain period no fresh licences would be granted unless each applicant could prove himself a good and powerful swimmer.

It is a mistake to suppose that in order to learn to swim it is necessary to have some great professional teacher of swimming as an instructor, though, of course, the better the master, and the greater his experience of swimming, the more likely are you to learn quickly, and also to acquire a good style. What I mean is, any healthy boy with a little pluck and patience can teach himself. I lately published a book on the art of swimming, and in it you will find full directions as to how to swim, not only on your chest, which is the most important method to learn first, but also on your side. These directions, with the help of the diagrams by which they are illustrated, are quite sufficient to teach any person to swim, but then they must make up their minds to work at it just as they would work at any other fresh occupation. It will often be found, too, that swimming will all come at once. A man may have been trying perhaps for a fortnight, and can scarcely take two strokes, when all of a sudden he will find himself able to swim perhaps twenty yards.

It is, I fear, in middle-class schools that swimming is most neglected. The country, especially round London, is studded with capital private schools for boys, but how few possess a swimming-bath! When, therefore, there is no swimming possible on the premises, how easy would it be to march the whole school two or three times a week to some bath in the neighbourhood, and insist on every boy—unless ordered otherwise by a doctor—learning to swim!

At some of our garrison towns, such as Dover, some

of the regiments are marched down every morning to bathe in the sea; and, from what I have been told, the improvement in the men's health in consequence is something wonderful.

Now, of all classes where a knowledge of swimming is of the utmost importance, there is none like my own, viz., "our seamen." I believe much good will result from the importance attached to swimming which is now so generally recognised in those nurseries to our navy—the training-ships. Yet in the Royal Navy why is not swimming made more a *sine quâ non* than it is? For instance, there is no appeal so strong as that which touches a man's pocket. Perhaps nothing would do more towards making our sailors swimmers than a slight, a very slight difference in the scale of pay. The theory should be that a man who accidentally fell overboard, and who could keep himself afloat with ease for, say, half-an-hour, would be a more valuable servant—everything else being considered equal—than one who could not. Why, therefore, should not this man receive slightly higher wages than one who at probably the most critical moment of his life would be helpless or demoralised? It is a good old worldly maxim that you cannot get anything without paying for it.

Every captain of a ship knows that thirty good, smart, sober, disciplined men, are worth fifty who simply do what they are obliged to do from fear, and nothing more.

I do not wish to boast, but there is no doubt that in a wreck twenty men like myself would be worth any number of men who felt that immersion in salt water for two moments was another name for death.

We read in the newspapers not long ago of a man-of-war's boat being upset twenty yards from shore, and of all but two being drowned. The fact has been recorded, and is simply a standing monument of disgrace to the country.

It is the duty of every parent to insist on his sons learning to swim. It ought to be a shocking thought to the parents of all those thousands who are annually drowned throughout the United Kingdom, that they are partially guilty of the children's death. Now in teaching swimming, as in fact in teaching everything else, persuasion is better than force. Many a young child is forced to bathe, and perhaps some brutal nurse has tried to conquer the little thing's terror by slapping. I honestly believe some children's minds have been affected for life, by what they have been made to undergo in early life, through the stupid thoughtlessness of others. What would some of you mothers feel if suddenly some gigantic blue creature were to seize you and plunge you into a roaring sea, out of your depth? Recollect, the horror and terror you would feel is what hundreds of you have inflicted on your children, when the blue bogey in the shape of the bathing-woman has taken by force the struggling little one from the nurse, who turns a deaf ear to its streaming eyes, its outstretched arms, and frantic appeal for mercy. Many of what are known as timid children, and who remain timid for life, owe their ruin to their first dip.

You may think I am speaking strongly, but at times when I have walked past a row of bathing-machines, and heard the frantic shrieks set up by some poor little child, I have felt inclined to walk into the water, seize the foolish mother, carry her out to sea for five or ten minutes, and give her a practical lesson on the importance of doing unto others as ye would they should do unto you.

The same system applies even to teaching a puppy. If you take a young dog, say six months old, and throw it into the water, you will ruin it for life, just as many have ruined their children; you will make the dog cowardly, and the chances are you never will get it to enter the water of its own accord at all.

Now, to teach a very young child to swim, the best place of all is a large puddle in the sands at low tide. The child, like a puppy, will begin by paddling. If you throw a cork into the water, you will see the puppy run in up to his depth, and give a short bark; and the chances are, especially if there is a grown-up dog that can swim to set him an example, that in a day or two he will take his plunge of his own accord, and very proud he will be of his first suc-

cess; only here again, don't overdo it; as soon as the puppy has been in, walk away and call him, and he will be the more anxious to go into the water another time. The principle is somewhat similar to Sam Weller's letter: "She'll vish there wos more, and there's the great art o' letter-writin'."

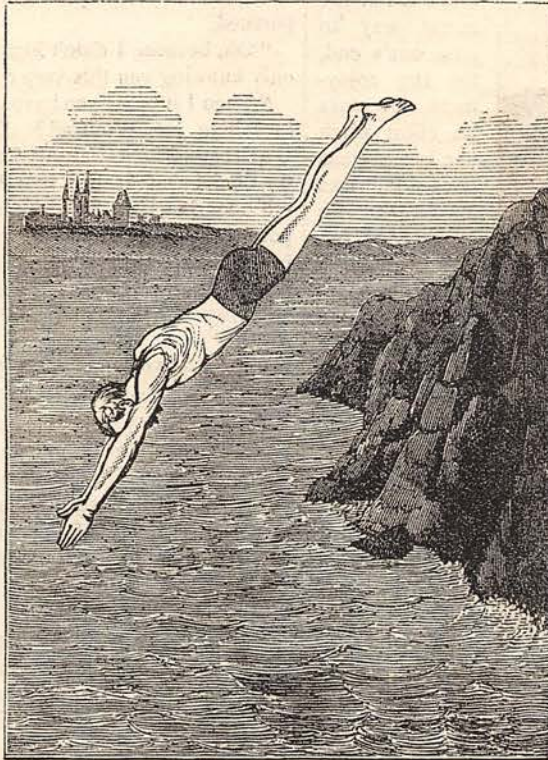
Now, pity your child like your puppy; entice him in, and if you can get some older child who can swim to go in with him all the better, but let the child do just as he likes. Perhaps the first day he will be afraid to go into the water deeper than his knees. Here again a little artifice may be employed. Get two children to play at splashing one another—they will enjoy the fun,

and gradually getting excited, will very likely venture in deeper and deeper.

Recollect it is impossible even to begin to teach young children, or any one else, swimming, until they have thoroughly overcome their fear of the water. You will see some persons, the moment they enter the water, appear to entirely lose their breath. In fact, their breath goes from them, and they gasp and clutch frantically to the side of the bath, or the steps of the

bathing-machine. Now, to attempt to swim while this feeling lasts is an act of insanity. You might as well teach a man in the last stage of consumption. The lungs for swimming must be fully inflated, or else the body will not float at all. I believe many persons who have this catching in their breath owe it to the very cause I have been speaking about—viz., they have been frightened at bathing when young.

Perhaps, now that swimming is so much more thought of than it used to be, some public recognition of it may take place. A Government grant of five hundred pounds, placed in proper hands to be given away fairly in prizes, would do an immense amount of good. And let the races be open to



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all, without making any distinction.

In the race for the first of Sir William Frazer's gold medals, it was with the greatest difficulty that Harry Gurr was entered, the entry being at first refused on the ground of his being too young, and that it was ridiculous for a child like that to swim against grown-up men, some of whom were six feet high. The boy, however, won the race with the greatest ease. There can be no doubt that boyhood is the best time to learn. I trust some grant may before long be given, for I firmly believe that it wants but some such encouragement to make us what I hope I shall live to see—a nation of swimmers.

