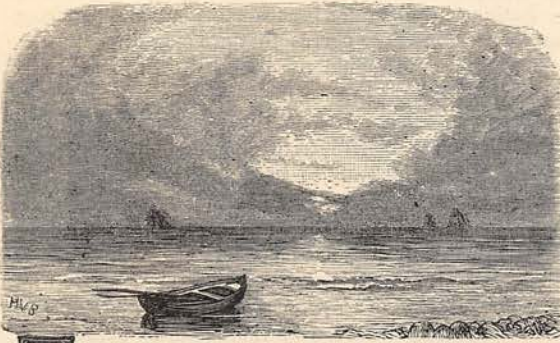


ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF SEA-BATHING.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



THE winter of 1878-79 has been one of the severest that most people can remember, and the spring of 1879 one of the wettest and most dreary. I shall be surprised, therefore, if by the time this paper reaches the hands of my readers very many of them are not burning to get away at the sea-side, if not actually there already, or packing their traps to start.

There can be no question about it, that sea-air and sea-bathing, if the latter be used in a sensible and judicious manner, are valuable remedial agents. But at the same time I feel sorry for, and just a little cross with, those who, having abused Nature, having worn their constitutions nearly thread-bare, during the spring and summer months, with hard work, or over-study, or high living, imagine that when autumn comes round they have only just to rush away to the sea-side, enjoy a week or two's bathing, and be once more as fresh as daisies.

Nevertheless, a month at the sea-side can be turned to excellent account by those who know how. Like any other remedy, sea-bathing is not to be prescribed recklessly; if it be, harm may follow, and the last state of the case be worse than the first. No one thinks of doubting the efficacy of certain tonics in the cure of disease—quinine, for example, in the lingering convalescence that sometimes follows acute illnesses. But what would you think of a medical man who mixed you up a large bottle of quinine mixture, and presented it to you with the words, "Here, take that—that will put you to rights," without labelling the bottle, or even telling you when to take it, or how much of it to take at a time? And that is just how sea-air and sea-bathing are prescribed every day at this season of the year—not so much by doctors, of course, as by patients themselves.

It would be a good thing if every one who meant going to the sea-side for the benefit of his health—if merely going for pleasure that is another matter—would previously have a little talk with his own medical adviser, and just get a few general instructions for his guidance. If you are bad enough to need sea-bathing, you are bad enough to need a consultation.

And—listen to this—you may be worse than you think you are, for Nature is no alarmist, she does not often tell men all the state of the case, but she never fails to give a hint.

Without entering into a physiological account of the *rationale* of sea-bathing, and its action on the system, I will try to point out to you some of the cases in which benefit may be expected from a residence at the sea-side, and others where bathing would be detrimental.

The effects of sea-bathing, intelligently taken, combined with sea-air are stimulating, and in a high degree tonic. It is not therefore likely to suit acute illnesses of any kind, but is admirably adapted for that stage of convalescence after severe attacks, whether of fever or inflammation, in which weakness and nervousness seem inclined to become chronic.

There are certain organs of the body, such as the lungs, the liver and the kidneys, and the skin, which have for their functions the elimination or excretion of products that would prove deleterious if retained in the blood. If any one of these were to cease to perform its duties entirely, death would ensue as a matter of course; but their actions, from many causes which I need not here mention, are often sluggish; a certain proportion of poisonous matter remains in the blood, it may be carbonic acid, it may be bile or urea; but at all events, without feeling decidedly ill, the patient, probably ashamed even to complain, does not feel quite himself; he hasn't the heart to do his work as he ought to do it, that is, cheerily; although often feeling drowsy during the day, he gets but indifferent sleep at night. The sleepy feeling he has by day, especially after eating, is not a healthy drowsiness, that would conduce to sweet refreshing sleep; it is more like that produced by some heavy narcotic. He is easily tired, and slight exertion produces copious perspiration. I've heard such people say emphatically, "I know my liver is all wrong." But give patients like these some excitement, or even some work, that calls for some mental exertion, and for the time being they feel as well as ever they did in their lives; because they have no real illness, or rather no real definite disease: the blood is impure. But such a state of matters may become chronic, or may last long enough to induce serious mischief. Remedy: sea-air and sea-bathing, *plus* a little corrective medicine, which his own doctor must furnish for each individual patient.

The same cure may be hopefully prescribed by those who are suffering from the effects of over-work, whether mental or bodily, or a portion of both—the same cure with certain reservations, for do not forget that the general sense of fatigue, which is induced by long-continued strain upon the mind and brain, is a real ailment, and one in many instances which the knife of an anatomist could reveal to the naked eye. For the brain and nervous system first, and the

heart secondarily, have been the sufferers. Healthy exercise for muscles, heart, and brain is necessary for life itself, but over-doing it is simply another way of spelling death. Example: my friend, Mr. Davis, has one of the biggest, finest, and oldest mills in the country, and one of the biggest and finest mill-wheels. When there is just enough water and no more, round it goes steadily and cheerily withal; but in flood-times, when it gets too much, it won't budge a bit any more than if it hadn't a single drop. Now, reader, your heart is just like a mill-wheel: give it enough exercise and it will go, give it too much and—why, *you'll* go.

People who have worn themselves out by over-work should go to the sea-side about this time of the year, but they must on no account dream of bathing until their frames are sufficiently invigorated, by healthful exercise in the open air, to secure a good reaction; for the benefits which accrue from discriminate sea-bathing greatly, if not entirely, depend upon this reaction. "Healthful glow" are the words generally used to describe the sensation of the coming on of the reaction, but this healthful glow is not always present to any *appreciable* extent, and still good comes of the bath. The absence of distressing feelings after bathing is, in many cases, as good a sign as any that the sea-water dip is beneficial.

The warm sea-water bath, temperature about 90°, time of immersion ten minutes, followed by a good rubbing down with a moderately rough towel, should be taken every forenoon for a week, by those who come to the sea-side to recruit from the evil effects of over-work, and even after this the cold salt tub of a morning should be taken for another week, before the patient makes his *début* in the open sea. I cannot think that less than six weeks can do such a one very much good, but if he spends the first two as I have said, he will still have a month of daily sea-bathing. Let him be cautious and careful, however; recovery of health must always be slowly progressive.

There are many kinds of constitutional diseases which are greatly benefited by sea-air and sea-bathing; want of space forbids me mentioning these, but it can seldom be wrong to take a weakly, or what they call in Scotland a "dwining" patient to the sea-side for a short time. Cases of asthma, chronic catarrh, chronic bronchitis, chronic rheumatism, gout, nervousness, indigestion, and a host of other ailments are benefited by a residence at the sea-side; in fact, as a general rule, wherever there is a want of tone either about the whole system, or certain organs of the body, with no active mischief going on, no sleeping volcano waiting the

opportunity to burst forth, I cannot do better, I think, than advise the cautious, careful use of sea-bathing. In the first stage of consumption a residence by the sea and bathing does good, in the latter it only increases the symptoms and hastens the end.

Bathing in salt water braces and tones the capillary arteries and minute nerves that are spread out in the skin, but people should not bathe who have any irritation of the skin.

Those who even suspect heart complaint of any kind may reap benefit from sea-air, but they should on no account attempt to bathe without having first consulted their ordinary medical adviser.

I have known more than one case where apoplexy was undoubtedly produced in plethoric persons by the incautious use of sea-bathing, let therefore those who are stout and full of blood, as the saying is, have a care how they tempt the sea in the shape of bathing, or evil instead of good may result. Neither can the aged or very young children well and safely withstand the shock of the sea-bath. Let me here say one word in behalf of the poor children. They are often shamefully used by nurses and even by their parents at the sea-side—unthinkingly, I grant you; but delicate infants should never be ruthlessly plunged under the waves.

Let every one who goes to the sea-side beware how he eats or drinks. Hunger is always a sign that the tissues are being wasted, and consequently that the body demands more food for their repair, but there is such a thing as over-eating, and bringing on severe bilious attacks, which greatly mar the pleasure of the month by the sea.

Never bathe after a full meal, nor when fatigued. Walk slowly down to the sands or rocks, and do not expose the head to a burning sun. To those who are going to have a maritime holiday I would say, begin a few weeks before you start to take tonics, gentle aperients now and then, the salt-water bath in-doors, and exercise. Put yourself on a little course as it were. You will thus have less to do at the watering-place to which you go.

Look out beforehand for good quarters, or what is in many cases better, go to a respectable cleanly lodging-house; you will thus get rid of lots of care and worry; for the sea-breezes are calmative to the nerves, that is one of the beauties of them, so pray leave nothing undone to give the nerves a rest.

Although the English are a maritime nation, few of us learn to swim. This is a pity, but it is a still greater pity that the majority of us do not know how to bathe in the sea intelligently, and with discretion.

