

## A Curious Cure.

By J. RUSSELL.

*Illustrations from Photographs by R. D. Roberts.*

“**C**ROTESQUE as it may appear, it is good physic for me,” concluded my friend, “and I am going back for a third dose this summer. Will you come?”

Experiment and companionship were alike attractive; I was said to need a holiday; there was a justifying balance at the bank. “I will!” I cried, and I did; and this is the story of our doings.

Husbands and wives, we were a party of four. For ten pounds odd per head we were carried, second-class, and in some forty-eight hours, through Paris, Zurich, Innsbruck, and Toblach to Villach. Thence, a few shillings and a few more hours of train brought us to the village of Veldes, Oberkrain, Austria, the scene of the experiment—nearly a thousand miles from home, barely a hundred from the Adriatic, and remote enough from the conventionalities of civilization to warrant the strange life we were about to lead.

Veldes, scattered about an idyllic lake, lies some thousand feet above sea, amid the easternmost undulations of the Julian Alps. Away in the west rises the lofty dolomitic mass of the Triglav, and from north to east, within easy walking distance, runs the range of the rugged Karawanken. A brown river brawls through the valley; tufts of the fragrant wild cyclamen scent the woods; picturesque white villages, set amidst orchards and maize-fields, and teeming with unintelligible peasant children, are dotted about the lower slopes of the hills; beyond stretches for miles the solitude of juniper bush and pine forest.

The clear, dry atmosphere, some supposed virtue in the water, and the general charm of the surroundings bring, each summer, many a jaded Viennese to Veldes in search of sun and air as ordinarily prescribed. But ours was a different quest. The first—and every sub-

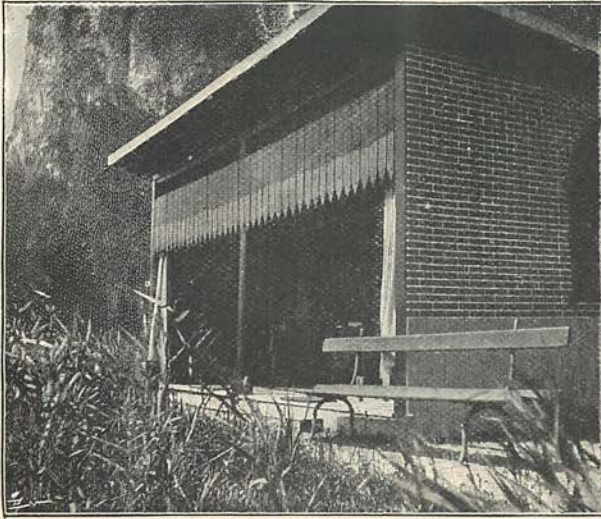
sequent—night of our stay, for instance, we spent upon the edge of the lake, within a few feet of the water, in a couple of rough wooden huts without fronts—with some forebodings, it must be confessed, although it was in August; but, as we afterwards found, with only good effects.

We had come for a month as the paying guests, amongst a hundred others, of a man who for thirty years past has been preaching—not altogether in the wilderness—the healing power of light, sun, and air, applied to the body of man as God made it. The tailor’s art, he insists, is anti-hygienic, a source of moral and physical degradation. There may be occasions for simple covering, but there are equally, in the interests of wholesomeness and vitality, occasions for absence of clothing.

In accordance with the rules of the game, therefore, we rose every morning soon after five, and having walked, my friend and I, to the Hill of Men, our wives to the Hill of Women, in the scantiest clothing consistent with what is called decency, we forthwith spent the early hours wandering or reclining in sun or shadow, jumping, digging, or reading, according to temperament, and breakfasting on the milk, bread, and honey we had brought with us from the hut. The humours of the situation we may leave to the ready imagination—they will appeal to everybody; the delights—though our tastes will be called in question—we can vouch for out of our own experience; the advantages, which will be obvious probably to nobody,



VELDES.



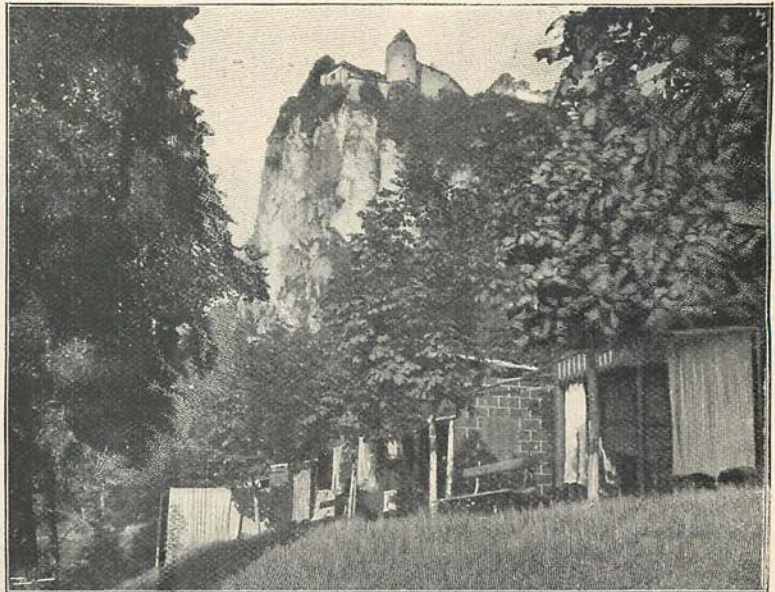
OUR AIR-HUT AT THE WATER'S EDGE.

shall be set forth by the "Doctor," our host, in his own words—put into English some twenty years ago, and still unretracted:—

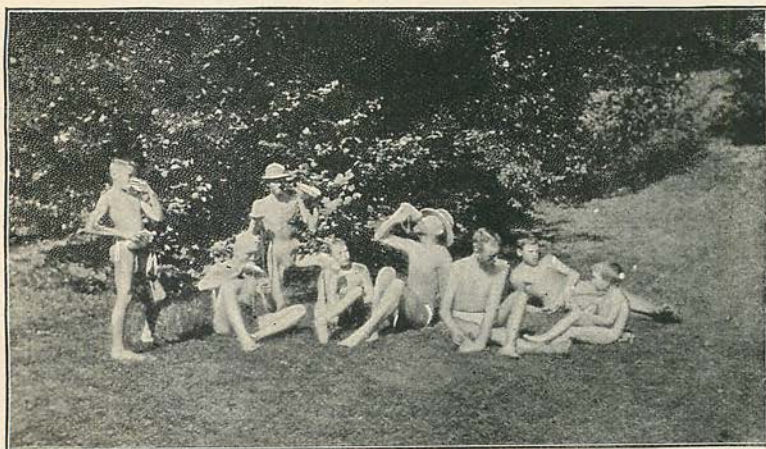
"There is no life without air: no health without light . . . we not only breathe through our lungs, but through our skin, which contains millions of minute blood-vessels thirsting for oxygen, and millions of nerves thirsting for light. Where there is blood there ought to be air; where there are nerves there ought to be light. . . . The light of the sun favours the change of matter; in other words, the process of life. . . . Another beneficial influence of the air-bath lies in the constant changes of sunlight and shade, heat and cold of the atmosphere, by which the skin is stimulated—a stimulus that does not remain confined to the surface of the body, but is extended, through the nerves, to the remotest internal organs. . . . Thus, in opposition to the common allopathic system which makes the *stomach* the scape-

goat of its efforts, the physico-hydratic system effects its cures principally through the *skin*. Leaving the internal organs undisturbed, and allowing them to perform their functions in peace, or to repair damages themselves without any direct stimulus on the part of the physician, the alternate application of heat and cold on the surface of the body produces a powerful effect, not only on the skin, but through the skin upon the whole organism in its remotest parts. Millions of peripheral nerves propagate the impressions received to the nervous centres and the vital organs; millions of capillary vessels discharge the effete matter with which they are loaded through the pores of the skin, and carry the oxygenated blood to the interior of the body. No poisonous drugs are required to call forth a healthy reaction. The vitality of every molecule is raised, the strength of the individual increased."

After our strange air-bath on the top of the hill, we used to walk back, clothed, to another strange bath at the bottom, where, for the best part of an hour, we lay out on a slanting roof bare, save for our heads, to the full blaze of the sun. Then, for twenty minutes by the clock, we were swathed tight



AIR-HUTS.



ON THE HILL OF MEN—A BREAKFAST PARTY.

in our blankets, and then taken indoors, plunged into a tub of tepid water, and massaged by expert attendants. By the time we got back on our bare—and not infrequently tender—feet to the huts, we were quite ready for the simple vegetarian mid-day meal that awaited us under the huge common dining-roof.

“The chief object of the light and air bath,” to quote for the last time, “is the invigoration of the nervous system of the whole organism, while the chief object of the sun-bath is the purification of the blood. . . . The direct effects of the sun upon the skin are remarkable: the skin is reddened and raised, the capillaries are swelled up, readily yield the effete matter with which they are loaded, and greedily imbibe the oxygen of the surrounding air, the peripheric circulation becomes much improved, stagnations are resolved, rheumatic pains relieved, and the change of matter accelerated. . . .

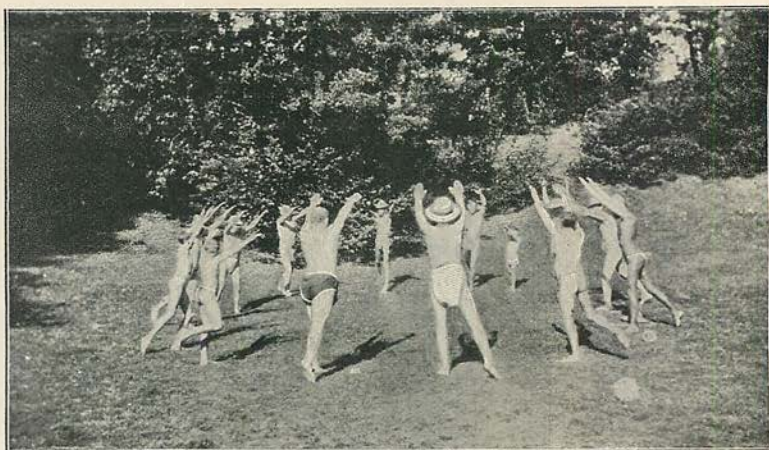
It is through the complete removal of the waste peccant matter and the invigoration of the nervous system that harmony in the functions of the organism is restored, the body as it were rejuvenated. But no rejuvenation can take place without the assistance of air, light, water,

proper diet, and exercise. We cannot buy health in the apothecary's shop.”

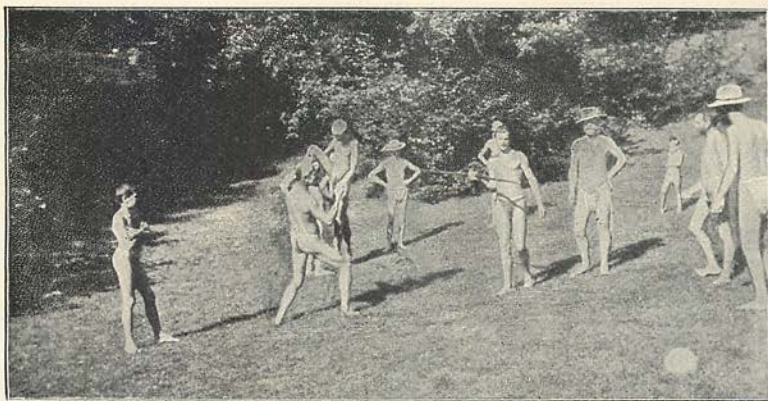
The virtue of strenuous laziness during the healing time being also sternly inculcated by the healer, the afternoon generally opened with delicious sleep, followed, at the option of the individual, by either a modified repetition of the

morning's airing and sunning, or by a lazy stroll with camera or book. Soon after six the evening meal of soup, vegetables, and sweets was over, and by nine—coffee, tobacco, and chatter having achieved their purpose—we were generally sleeping our Adamic sleep. On the nights when, for the purposes of the cure, the body, or some part of it, was “packed” in a cold water bandage, dreaming was sometimes delayed; but if that particular part of the treatment was distasteful, you were a free man as soon as the attendant's back was turned.

Though the “Doctor's” fees are based upon sound commercial principles—the inclusive charge per month ranging from £12 to £15—he has absolute belief in his own seriousness. And his numerous patients for the most part take him seriously, though in varying degrees. The consumptive, for instance, who has been to him for fifteen

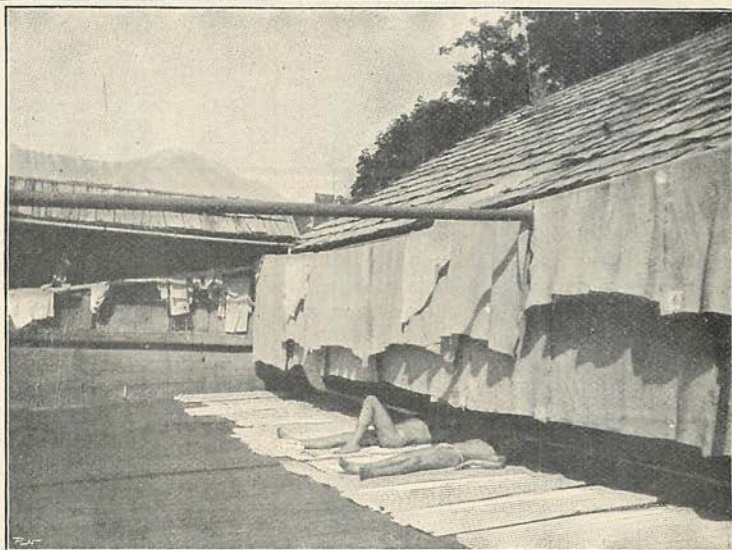


ON THE HILL OF MEN—GYMNASTICS.



ON THE HILL OF MEN—  
PATIENTS AT PLAY.

successive summers and is still alive, takes him most seriously; my friend, who is returning for the fifth time this summer, because he finds he weathers the winter after a month in Veldes better than after a month anywhere else, takes him more (or less) seriously; while I, who have been twice and still would go—partly for the rents it patches in the body,



IN THE SUN-BATH.



A GRIM JOKE.

chiefly for the rents it tears in the commonplace — can hardly be said, I suppose, to take him not seriously.

Two questions will occur to every reader: How often does it rain, and how far off is the nearest medical man with the

orthodox qualifications? We have never recorded, or seen recorded, either the depth or the frequency of the rainfall, so we can only give the general impression formed by our own experiences—that rain is apt to fall in Veldes as elsewhere, but that it does not spoil upon an average more than one day a week. Indeed, “spoil” is scarcely the word, inasmuch as soft, warm rain upon the naked body is an added delight, and a bath of steam instead of sun an added experience. We have, it is true, been sometimes kept indoors—if indoors it can be called—by heavy cold rains, or terrific thunderstorms, but even they have had their compensations.



THE STEPS—VELDES.

The nearest qualified doctor is to be found in the institution itself, to which, by order of the Austrian Government, he is attached as responsible medical officer. Any, then, who will trust the qualifications of other lands need have no fear. But it should be said that the nursing staff, like everything else, is rough and primitive, and that delicate people accustomed to gentle-handed attention should, if inclined to make the venture, take

lake is good for swimming and boating, and for such as love them there are cycles, and tennis courts, and music gardens. For myself, when I tired of book or friend, meditation upon the strangeness and significance of my doings afforded a sufficient distraction. The body is still too often confounded with the flesh, and it is a stimulating experience to assist, even in so small a measure as at Veldes, in its spiritualization.

with them their own attendant and — *pace* the "Doctor" — their own medicine-chest.

I am not in league with this arch-heretic, so do not recommend all sorts and conditions of sick men and women to exchange physic for nakedness. But I am sure no man whose fleshly ills go no deeper than my own could fail to profit by making the experiment. Nor need there be any fear of boredom. The



THE ISLAND—VELDES.