

Stables Gordon

Turkish and Other Baths: A Guide to Good Health and Longevity



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Preface

No apology surely is needed for a work like this, and its preface need be but brief. Small is the book, in size little more than a pamphlet; yet mayhap it contains hints that will not be thrown away on any reader, and may be invaluable to many who wish to secure health, long life and happiness.

The Author.

Christmas Morning, 1882.

Chapter One.

The Skin – Its Uses and Great Importance in the Animal Economy

Apart from any consideration of the bath as a remedial measure, in cases of disease, its importance as an agent for preserving the health, and granting to those who use it judiciously a reasonable hope of long life, cannot easily be over-estimated. But in order to understand properly the beneficial action of baths on the system, we must have some little knowledge of the physiology of the skin. Without such knowledge, all arguments that we could adduce in favour of the constant use of the bath in some shape or form, would be of the *post hoc propter hoc* kind, and therefore of little value.

What, then, we may ask, are the uses of the skin, for what ends has Nature designed it, and what is its *modus operandi*? Briefly stated, the uses of the skin are as follows: – Firstly, it covers and protects from violence the surface of the whole body, and the various tender and sensitive parts that lie immediately beneath it; secondly, it is the organ of touch; thirdly, it is the great regulator of the heat of the body; fourthly, it performs the duties of a great emunctory, and by means of its millions of sudoriferous, or sweat glands, each with its efferent duct; it carries off and out of the body a vast quantity of effete matter, which, if retained in the blood, would poison it, and therefore unfit it for the healthful performance of its functions; fifthly, the skin acts as an absorbent; and, sixthly, it is to some extent an organ of respiration.

The use of the skin as a protective covering to the body is apparent to every one, and we cannot help admiring its great and perfect adaptability for the purpose. On the soles of the feet, and palms of the hands, it is thicker than in other places, being thereon subjected to more wear and tear; on the trunk of the body, and on the arms it is soft and smooth, and it is everywhere wonderfully elastic and pliable. Moreover, it is lined throughout with a base work of fat, which gives extra support and security to the muscles, and, wherever in the body protection from the results of pressure is needed, we find that this fat is deposited in actual cushions, as under the heels, under the balls of the toes, on the hips, etc.

And here we may remark that, whenever the elasticity of the skin is impaired, as it is in the bodies of those who do not accustom themselves to the bath and perfect ablution, loathsome diseases are apt to be the result, which not only interfere with the actions of the skin itself, but lower the vitality of the whole system.

The use of the skin as an organ of touch is equally apparent. Being supplied with a most intricate network of blood vessels and nerves, the skin is all over a most sensitive organ, and thus serves to warn us in time of the approach of anything likely to be detrimental to our health. If we sit in a draught, the skin of the body chills almost at once; it begins to creep, as it were, warning us that it is time to move, time to seek shelter, or protect ourselves by an extra garment. Some portions of the skin are far more sensitive than others; that of the eyelids, for instance, which is agitated by the slightest breath of air, or by a touch communicated to it by the least pressure on the eyelashes.

By means of, or through, the medium of its vast number of sweat glands, the skin regulates the amount of heat in our bodies. This is a function which is much more important than most people might at first imagine. The temperature of the body in health is about 99 degrees Fahrenheit, if it rises much above this – even a few degrees, indeed – or if it falls much below it, severe illness is indicated, danger is apparent, danger even to life itself. An equable temperature of the body it is therefore evident is alone compatible with perfect health, but if it were not for the perspiratory system, when any extra strain is put upon the body, as by hard work, or hard exercise, heat would accumulate in the system, and the temperature of the body would be raised, to our discomfort, detriment, and danger. But the pores of the skin are our safety valves; from exertion the blood is determined to the surface,

the sweat glands are thus excited to increased action, and perspiration is thrown off in abundance, which, passing off in steam, carries with it – in obedience to a law too well known to need explanation – all the extra caloric. In hot weather, a great deal of heat is thus expended through the skin; in cold weather the kidneys are more active, and they excrete the water which otherwise would have passed through the pores, and by storing it for a time in a reservoir designed for the purpose, conserve the heat of the system, and prevent lowering of the animal temperature.

By means of these same sweat glands with their ducts or pores, an immense amount of effete matter is carried off from the body in the course of twenty-four hours, which, as already stated, if retained in the system, would tend to lower vitality by poisoning the blood.

If the reader recollects that the lungs also perform a renovating function on the blood, and thus on the body, that oxygen is inhaled, and that air loaded with carbonic acid, water, etc, exhaled, he will readily understand how much assistance the respiratory organs receive from a healthy acting skin.

Nor can the intelligent reader be unaware that the nutrient portion of the food we eat, after undergoing the process of digestion performed in the mouth – where it is masticated and mingled with the solvent saliva – in the stomach, where it is reduced by muscular action, and the gastric juices to the pulp called chyme – in the upper portions of the intestines – where it receives the secretions of liver and pancreas and becomes chyle, is collected by a series of absorbent vessels which unite at last to form the thoracic duct, or grand chyle canal, which empties itself of its valuable contents directly into one of the largest veins in the body, and is thus mingled with the general circulation. He knows, too, that the pure life-giving arterial blood, which, rushing onwards from that mighty force-pump, the heart, is distributed to every atom of the system, returns at last laden with the used up particles of the tissues; that, in fact, a constant change is going on in the system, a constant deposit of new matter, a constant discharge of old. And that the dark venous blood, containing the effete matter, rushes through the lungs, therein to be spread out, and chemically united to the oxygen of the air that we breathe, before it is again pumped out towards the tissues to supply them with heat and life. But it must not be forgotten, that not the lungs only, but the kidneys, the liver, and the spleen have each and all of them their duties to perform towards the blood; and last, but not least, that the skin, when in a state of health, assists them in no small degree in performing their several functions.

But there are other glands which receive assistance from the skin in the performance of their duties. We refer to those distributed here and there in the frame-work of the body, notably in the axilla, the groin, and under the skin of the neck, and whose functions are to purify, in some way or other, the matter collected by a series of vessels called the lymphatics, before it is again applied to the purposes of nutrition.

“The amount of fluid,” says a well-known physiologist, “exhaled from the skin and lungs in twenty-four hours, averages about three or four pounds. And there is good reason to think that this excretion is of the greatest importance in carrying off certain substances that would prove injurious if allowed to remain in the blood.

“That which is called the Hydrophatic system, proceeds upon the plan of increasing the cutaneous exhalation to a very large amount; and there seems much evidence that certain deleterious matters, the presence of which in the blood gives rise to gout, rheumatism, etc, are drawn off from it more speedily and certainly in this way than in any other.”

If space permitted, the utility of the skin as one of the greatest emunctories of the system might be much enlarged upon; we trust, however, we have said quite enough to establish its importance in the animal economy.

Chapter Two.

How to Maintain the Skin in Health

If the skin then, is an emunctory of so much consequence, as we have endeavoured to shew it to be, it stands to reason, that even the impartial performance of its functions, is incompatible with healthful existence. One might go farther and boldly aver, that a person who is a stranger to the bath, is as much to be pitied as a being with only one lung; both may exist, neither live.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that there are thousands of men and women in these islands, who seem to enjoy a large share of robust health, and who possess what assurance companies would call, “good lives,” but who never indulge in the luxury of either a bath or a bedroom tub. But it will generally be found, that these people belong to the out-door working classes, who take abundant exercise in the open air, people whose pores are kept patent by the toil they undergo, and who, moreover, possess capacious lungs, substantial livers and healthy kidneys. Nevertheless, did these same persons make a practice of constantly using some form of bath, they would throw far less strain upon their internal organs, their blood would be purer, and their minds consequently lighter, and they would stand far less chance of catching cold, and succumbing to inflammation of some vital part. A person whose skin is not in easy working order, and who depends upon exertion and exercise alone, for keeping it up to the mark, must, if thrown on a bed of sickness, have a harder struggle for life than one whose skin is, in every sense of the word, a healthy one.

Everything seems to point to the conclusion that the health of the skin is a matter of paramount importance to the individual, we cannot therefore be wrong if we devote this chapter to the consideration of the best means within our reach, of maintaining it in a sound and vigorous condition.

So intimate is the connection between the skin and internal organs of the body, and so constantly and incessantly do they act and re-act on each other, that the state of the former may generally be taken as a key to the condition of the whole system. If the skin be dry, harsh, hot or in any way possessed of an uncomfortable feeling, the general health is, for the time being, out of order, or if it be cold or rough and chilly, the health must be below par, even although that state of being should be but momentary.

A feeling of warmth, comfort and geniality, pervades the skin of the man who is well; deprived of this feeling he is deprived of health, he is ill, acutely subacutely, or chronically ill.

DIET: – The influence of diet on the skin is very great.

This is a fact which should be borne in mind by all, but especially by those who are subject to any kind of skin complaint, or to gout or rheumatism. The latter disease, from which so many people suffer periodically, is, with a good show of reason, believed to be caused by a superabundance of acid in the blood. This acid is easily got rid of at most times, by means of the sensible and insensible perspiration; but if, through some error in diet, an irritable condition of the mucous membrane of the alimentary canal is produced, and a larger proportion of acid than usual is the result; and if at or about the same time something – a cold, or chill, for instance – interferes with the free action of the skin, it stands to reason that an attack of the old enemy, gout, or rheumatic gout will supervene, and the character of the attack will greatly depend on the condition of the patient’s system at the time. If he be full blooded and robust it may be acute or sub-acute. Thus it often happens that at the very time when a man of rheumatic diathesis is in finest form, he is suddenly laid prostrate by the return of his foe. If, on the other hand, he be not of a full habit, the disease will be less violent in its nature, and this probably accounts for the fact, that men of spare habit are, as a rule, capable of weathering more rheumatic storms than men who have been cast in a larger mould.

No medical man now-a-days thinks of prescribing for a patient without at the same time giving him advice as to what he should eat, drink, or avoid. Some hundred years ago, physicians were, we

may presume, not so skilled as we are now-a-days, but neither were they so apt to lose themselves in that labyrinth we may call *causae morborum*, and they never lost sight of the state of the stomach and bowels. Indeed, the exhibition of aperients was often a kind of sheet anchor with them, with which they held on with determination when everything else failed them, and we can scarcely doubt that they were often right in doing so. Nor is the belief so common with the illiterate, that if a man can eat and drink moderately well, there cannot be much the matter with him, so very erroneous after all. Diet is of paramount importance with all of us, for the simplest reason possible. Our blood is generated from the food we eat, and as the blood is, so will the system be, which it has to nourish. No matter how clever a mania, or how rich, or how eminent, if he is guilty of errors in diet, he is but a golden calf with feet of clay.

But he who lives judiciously in the matter of diet, possesses a truly marvellous advantage over his fellows who do not. A man in health should begin the day early. He ought to have his morning tub by half-past seven at the latest. He ought to dress leisurely, and have, if possible, a five or ten minutes' walk in the open air, before he sits down to breakfast.

Well-made tea is probably the best beverage for breakfast, and if between meals a man requires some refreshment, a cup of coffee or tea will be found more sustaining and less dangerous than either beer or wine.

The breakfast maybe a moderately hearty one, and the dinner should be an early one, and nothing ought to be partaken of which is known to disagree. Supper should be early and light, but not necessarily sloppy. Solid food is more likely to be quietly digested than slops. A biscuit and glass of milk, or beer, may be partaken about half an hour before retiring, if it is found that sounder sleep is acquired by such indulgence.

The errors in diet which should be avoided are: – First, eating too fast; second, taking stimulants of any kind to provoke an appetite; third, the use of rich sauces and peppers; fourth, eating too much; and fifth, partaking of too many varieties at one meal. A man should eat with *regularity* and *moderation*, and *frequently change his diet*.

DRINK. – Pure water is the best, but water that will not wash is unfit for drinking or making food, withal. Cocoa, coffee, tea, and milk in moderation, and in summer whey and buttermilk are healthful drinks. Iced waters, cooling cups, and too many effervescing mixtures are to be avoided.

Regularity in the times of going to bed and getting up should be studied.

PURE AIR. – One cannot have too much of this. The air in rooms ought to be kept pure and sweet, and that of the bedroom moderately warm. Bedrooms ought to be large, and not overfilled with furniture, especially things likely to collect dust. Curtains about beds do more harm than good.

DRESS AND CLOTHING. – No more should be worn than is necessary to keep the surface of the body agreeably comfortable. It should not be tight, and mackintoshes and goloshes are injurious to health. Bed clothes should be light and warm. People, as a rule, heap their beds with far too much clothing, and sleep is thus often banished.

SLEEP. – Secure it by natural means; *never*, unless under medical advice, by taking draughts, or “night-caps.” Regularity in living, exercise, and the bath, are the best narcotics, but a pipe of mild tobacco last thing may often do good.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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