

## HOLIDAY PASTIMES.

## SWIMMING.

Swimming may be ranked both as a pastime and as a purely gymnastic exercise, but it has a still higher claim. It is one of the most essential features in physical education; and it should never be left to the choice of youth to acquire the art, but its practice should be inculcated as an absolute duty. It is strange that this branch of bodily training should have been hitherto so much neglected, even among the classes whose lives are passed chiefly on the waters. But in England a change is in progress, and at some of the public schools the rule has been very properly adopted, that no youth shall be allowed to practise rowing until he has been certificated as a swimmer.

We would have all our readers cultivate this most useful art, not only for the benefit it may possibly be in delivering them at some time from danger, but also as at all times one of the most healthy and invigorating physical pursuits. We shall give a few plain instructions, calculated to assist any youth in learning to swim; but we must advise him to have recourse at the outset, if he can, to the practical aid of some friend who acquired the art. His example and occasional help may inspire the learner at once with confidence in the water, which is the first thing to be acquired in swimming, and will make the rest come easy.

There is little difficulty, either in town or country, in obtaining access to the water. We believe all our large towns are now supplied with swimming baths, in which it is preferable that the beginner should practise, rather than that he should seek an open stream for the purpose. The baths should be attended by experienced persons, from whom lessons may be obtained if desired, or whose help may be useful in an emergency; and at such places the learner may also gain kindly hints and assistance from others who have recently experienced, and are ready to sympathise with, his difficulties. But if the beginner is the denizen of a rural locality which is destitute of such an advantage, he should exercise care in the selection of a spot in which to practise. Let him, in the first place, choose a stream the bottom of which slopes gradually from the bank, and ascertain its precise depth at various distances. Let him be very careful to select a place which is free from weeds, either attached to the bottom and scarcely seen from the bank, or floating freely on the surface. A clear stream, with a gravelly or sandy bottom, is by far the best. One with a muddy or rough and stony bottom should be avoided; and especially keep clear of water the bed of which is full of deep and sudden holes.

Bathing on the sea-shore can only be practised with safety when the beach is shelving, and its general features, as to freedom from rocks, etc., are well known. The novice should select still weather only for the purpose, or the sudden coming in of a wave may take him off his legs, and carry him helplessly out to sea.

The best time for practising is in the morning, an hour or two after sunrise; but bathing or swimming on an empty stomach is not advisable. A crust of bread, with the addition of a cup of coffee if practicable, is all, however, that will be necessary. Bathing either shortly before or shortly after a full meal is injurious, but the latter especially so. Take a brisk walk before you enter the water, that the body may be in a glow when you step in, then strip as quickly as possible, and take your plunge while the blood is still coursing freely through the veins. When you have learnt to swim, you will be able to enter by diving; but until you have, you must walk into the water, and in this latter case you should dip the upper part of the body in and out again, otherwise the blood will be driven too much to the head.

We must say a word as to the mechanical aids to swimming, as the youth desirous of learning the art may, in the absence of all other help, think it necessary to have recourse to such assistance. Hardly any contrivance, however, yet devised is free from some objection, and we must not be understood as recommending the resort to either, if it can be avoided.

Among the most venerable and at the same time the most objectionable of these appliances, are the cork-floats or buoys, which may be seen in the shop of almost any cork-cutter. They usually consist of several circular pieces of cork, of various sizes, fastened together by a strap or thong of leather, the larger pieces in the centre, and the rest tapering off at top

and bottom. Two of these floats are used by each person, and are fastened under the armpits, so that the chest rests upon them in swimming, and the head and shoulders are thus buoyed up in the water. But the contrivance is an awkward and cumbersome one: it hampers the free movement of the arms, and, even if it should lead to nothing worse, it causes the learner to contract a very clumsy and defective style of swimming. The floats, however, are liable also to slip from their position, and in this case they become worse than useless. The novice in this case feels his legs thrown upward instead of his head, and the proper movement of his arms being checked, his supposed means of safety become a source of positive danger. Some fatal accidents have happened in this manner. The use of floats is, therefore, gradually being discarded, as their evils become more widely known.

Better by far, and perhaps best of all such aids, is a modern contrivance made of the same material, and known as the cork jacket. Stout strips of cork are attached together in such a fashion that they encircle the body completely round, and, being fastened by strings at top and bottom, leave the limbs comparatively free, while the necessary buoyancy is obtained from the light armour in which the chest and back are thus encased. This jacket was invented more particularly for the purpose of saving life at sea, but its obvious utility has commended it to the use of persons learning to swim, and it is likely to meet with wider favour as its merits become more generally known.

An ordinary life-belt, fastened round the waist, is sometimes used for the same purpose, and is far less objectionable than the cork floats; but it must be obvious to our readers that even such appliances as the jacket and the life-preserver leave less freedom of action to the body than is the case when they are dispensed with, and consequently that the learner who desires to swim with grace and ease is placed at a disadvantage by their use. Moreover, when such help has been habitually relied upon, it becomes a source of embarrassment to part with it suddenly; something has to be unlearned, and something more to be learned—namely, the power of the body to float by its own natural buoyancy while the limbs maintain a proper position.

Confidence, founded on a right apprehension of the principles involved in swimming, and self-command, or presence of mind in the water, are the first essentials in learning the art. If the learner could trust to theory only, confidence should come at once, for he has only to be told that the specific gravity of the body is less than that of water, and consequently that the body, if left to itself, with the limbs in a proper position, will float of its own accord. Benjamin Franklin's method of demonstrating this, by entering shallow water, and trying at once to dive in the direction of the shore, requires more nerve and coolness on the part of the novice than many are in possession of. All who can satisfy themselves of the buoyancy of the water without such a practical test, may be content to attempt the simple motions of swimming, and leave diving of every kind until they have become somewhat used to the water. Supposing, then, that the learner is about to make his first effort, without either personal or mechanical assistance, he must carry out into practice what we have already remarked as to the selection of a spot characterized by a shelving bottom, and having done thus, walking into it until he is nearly breast high, turn round towards the shore, and try to reach it by swimming. The head must be held up and thrown backward, the chin being kept well clear of the surface of the water; the chest must lean, as it were, upon the water, being well inflated with air before the stroke is taken; and, while the chest is thrown well forward, the back should be allowed, so that all the muscular power of the body may be exercised in the forward motion. Those movements, the work of a second in execution, are preliminary to the stroke itself, which is performed in the following manner.—Bring the hands together a few inches below the surface, and a little in advance of the chin, the elbows being bent below the stomach; the fingers should be quite close together, and the palms slightly concave. Now extend the hands forward as far as possible, and, when the full distance is reached, separate them with the palms downward, and sweep the water backwards in a half circle. The elbows thus come back to the body, and the hands are brought quickly together as before, the edges only being presented to the water until the hands meet.