

BATHING AND CLEANLINESS DURING INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD.

During infancy.

cleanliness is essential to the infant's health. The principal points to which especial attention must be paid by the parent for this purpose are the following:

At first the infant should be washed daily with warm water; and a bath every night, for the purpose of thoroughly cleaning the body, is highly necessary. To bathe a delicate infant of a few days or even weeks old in cold water with a view "to harden" the constitution (as it is called), is the most effectual way to undermine its health and entail future disease. By degrees, however, the water with which it is sponged in the morning should be made tepid, the evening bath being continued warm enough to be grateful to the feelings.

A few months having passed by, the temperature of the water may be gradually lowered until cold is employed, with which it may be either sponged or even plunged into it, every morning during summer. If plunged into cold water, however, it must be kept in but a minute; for at this period, especially, the impression of cold continued for any considerable time depresses the vital energies, and prevents that healthy glow on the surface which usually follows the momentary and brief action of cold, and upon which its usefulness depends. With some children, indeed, there is such extreme delicacy and deficient reaction as to render the cold bath hazardous; no warm glow over the surface takes place when its use inevitably does harm: its effects, therefore, must be carefully watched.

The surface of the skin should always be carefully and thoroughly rubbed dry with flannel, indeed, more than dry, for the skin should be warmed and stimulated by the assiduous gentle friction made use of. For this process of washing and drying must not be done languidly, but briskly and expeditiously; and will then be found to be one of the most effectual means of strengthening the infant. It is especially necessary carefully to dry the arm-pits, groins, and nates; and if the child is very fat, it will be well to dust over these parts with hair-powder or starch: this prevents excoriations and sores, which are frequently very troublesome. Soap is only required to those parts of the body which are exposed to the reception of dirt.

During childhood.

When this period arrives, or shortly after, bathing is but too frequently left

off; the hands and face of the child are kept clean, and with this the nurse is satisfied; the daily ablution of the whole body, however, is still necessary, not only for the preservation of cleanliness, but because it promotes in a high degree the health of the child.

A child of a vigorous constitution and robust health, as he rises from his bed refreshed and active by his night's repose, should be put into the shower-bath, or, if this excites and alarms him too much, must be sponged from head to foot with salt water. If the weather be very cold, the water may be made slightly tepid, but if his constitution will bear it, the water should be cold throughout the year. Then the body should be speedily dried, and hastily but well rubbed with a somewhat coarse towel, and the clothes put on without any unnecessary delay. This should be done every morning of the child's life.

If such a child is at the sea-side, advantage should be taken of this circumstance, and seabathing should be substituted. The best time is two or three hours after breakfast; but he must not be fatigued beforehand, for if so, the cold bath cannot be used without danger. Care must be taken that he does not remain in too long, as the animal heat will be lowered below the proper degree, which would be most injurious. In boys of a feeble constitution, great mischief is often produced in this way. It is a matter also of great consequence in bathing children that they should not be terrified by the immersion, and every precaution should be taken to prevent this. The healthy and robust boy, too, should early be taught to swim, whenever this is practicable, for it is attended with the most beneficial effects; it is a most invigorating exercise, and the cold bath thus becomes doubly serviceable.

If a child is of a delicate and strumous constitution, the cold bath during the summer is one of the best tonics that can be employed; and if living on the coast, sea-bathing will be found of singular benefit. The effects, however, of sea-bathing upon such a constitution must be particularly watched, for unless it is succeeded by a glow, a feeling of increased strength, and a keen appetite, it will do no good, and ought at once to be abandoned for the warm or tepid bath. The opinion that warm baths generally relax and weaken, is erroneous; for in this case, as in all cases when properly employed, they would give tone and vigour to the whole system; in fact, the tepid bath is to this child what the cold bath is to the more robust.

In conclusion: if the bath in any shape cannot from circumstances be obtained, then cold saltwater sponging must be used daily, and all the year round, so long as the proper reaction or glow follows its use; but when this is not the case, and this will generally occur, if the child is delicate and the weather cold, tepid vinegar and water, or tepid salt water, must be substituted.

