

THE DOCTOR LOOKS AT SWIMMING

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Swimming is the King of Sports. Its great age, its excellence as exercise, its world-wide enjoyment, and its rating as big business warrant this title. Wherever the climate permits, swimming is a leading sport. Football, with its costly stadium, high salaried coaches, and highly trained publicity experts pales into insignificance beside the millions invested in an Atlantic City, the pageantry of a Miami Beach, or the interest in the selection of the bathing beauty of the year.

If there is the slightest doubt concerning the transcendence of swimming over other sports, a trip to the World's Fair at New York will remove it. There is no place on the Fair Grounds where a goal can be kicked from the field, nor a ball driven into the bleachers with all the bases filled. But swimming! Ah - there is a difference - a colossal difference. An aquacade in which glamorous girls glide gleefully through the glowing water pursued by ex-Tarzans and ape-men makes the fans and bubbles of a Sally Rand seem Victorian and cumbersome as a bathing suit of the Gay Nineties.

Solo swimming, duet bathing, and water "clowns more exhilarating than seals" both entertain and bewilder. A whole corps de ballet of swimmers go through geometrical figures to the rhythm of an orchestra. Between swims there are parades of pretty girls in Parisian costumes designed by Pene du Bois. They are set forth in bold relief against a background painted by so gifted an artist as Albert Johnson. Swimming, Mr. Chairman, is not only the King of Sports, but also the Sport of Queens.

The date of the return of our ancestors to the water after having left it for the trees is lost in the mists of the uncertainties of evolution. Some of them, while swinging from limb to limb in over-confidence, slipped, there was a splash, and the first stroke was taken; or possibly one of our Neanderthal grandsires, finding himself between a saber-toothed tiger and the deep blue sea, chose the less of two evils, took to the water, lived to tell of his experience, and became the first instructor in swimming.

Through the eyes of a doctor, swimming is not only a plunge and a stroke, but exercise, the cultivation of grace, the promotion of health, the institution of safety procedures, big business, romance, and art. He sees swan dives, Australian crawls, blistered backs, drownings, and artificial respiration. Yes, even "two-piece bathing suits of hand-blocked wool with a pine tree figure," symbolizing man's existence in the primeval forest before Eve ate the forbidden fruit and discovered she was naked, (a fact ascertainable on a modern bathing beach without taking dessert). When a doctor looks at swimming, he sees beauty contests, parades of pulchritude, a trial in Hollywood, a trip to Reno, or, more happily, a column telling us they lived like doves ever afterwards.

To the physician, even the radio is an important accessory of swimming. Through it the daughters of Eve are promised creams to match the seashore, or an ideal tan while the handsome lifeguard takes time out for a coke. They hear the brevity and low visibility of the latest creations of bathing costumes extolled by high pressure salesmen with baccalaureate degrees from colleges of commerce, and learn "puny softies" may acquire form and vigor from vitaminized cans, sunkist drinks, and rejuvenating cigarettes.