

bestowed on their bodies, survivals of which belief linger on at the present day. According to Mr. Hunt, in his "Romances of the West of England," fishermen dread to walk at night near those parts of the shore where wrecks have taken place. It is affirmed that the spirits of the drowned sailors haunt such localities, and many a fisherman has declared that he has heard the voices of dead sailors "bailing their own names." This idea is not confined to this country, but is found in various parts of the world.

THE HABIT OF WASHING.

No practice, no custom, however long established, has ever been allowed a permanent right to respect, or even to existence. Sooner or later its turn will come to be weighed in the critic's balance, and its quality will have to be proved. Let us quote, as a recent illustration, the habit of daily bathing, the utility of which has, of late, though not for the first time, been seriously questioned. The reasonableness of doubt in such a matter, and under ordinary circumstances, does not, we confess, says *Lancet*, commend itself to our judgment. Whether the opponents of ablution fear the shock of cold immersion, or whether they dread the cleansing stimulation thus applied to the excreting skin surface, their objection must appear to most persons possessed of ordinary health and vigor to threaten impairment of both by fostering uncleanness. If, on the other hand, it is too free application of heat by Turkish and other warm baths which appears objectionable, we will not deny that there is here a possible ground for complaint. Let it not be supposed that we ignore the curative influence or the cleansing property of this method when used with judgment. It has undoubtedly its fitting time and places if rightly applied. It is no less true, however, that experience has often proved the mischievous effects of its misuse—in case, for example, of cardiac weakness or general exhaustion. Cold bathing in like manner is not without its occasional risks. It is not suitable for persons enfeebled from any organic cause, though mere nervous languor is often braced and benefited by it. It has no proper place among the habits of those who are subject to chronic visceral congestions. As regards one advantage derived from bathing, i.e., its cleansing property, there is no reasonable ground for difference of opinion. Man, whether savage or civilized, appears, as a rule, to have no doubt on the subject. Wherever we find him with water accessible he is a bather. Less practiced by one people than another though it may be, there still is commonly recognizable a constant habit of ablution, and this fact in itself attests at least an almost universal belief in the necessity of ensuring cleanliness by means of washing. Nor can we find reason to doubt the general soundness of this belief. In bathing, temperature is, of course, a chief consideration. For the robust, cold immersion followed by rapid friction is a valuable tonic of nerve, skin, and heart function. For less vigorous constitutions—those, for example, which have been tried by disease, and those of young children—the addition of heat up to the temperate point is only judicious. With some persons a warm bath is a daily luxury. Notwithstanding its efficacy as a means of cleanliness, however, this custom is, or ought to be, discredited by its inevitable action as a nervous depressant, which places it in an unfavorable position compared with the more bracing practice of cold effusion. The benefit derived from bathing, therefore, is likely to assert itself in spite of all adverse criticism, and its mismanagement, which is only too common, should not

be suffered to condemn it in the eyes of any judicious and cleanly person.

NOTES AND NEWS.

In an Austrian periodical, says the *Lancet*, a regimental surgeon named Thurnwald makes an interesting comparison between the wounds caused by the new small calibre bullets and those caused by less recent forms of projectiles. His verdict is favorable. The soft parts are less bruised, and the bones less shattered. At fighting distances the bullets hardly ever remain in the body, and the wounds are smooth, clean, and of small diameter—conditions giving fair chances of recovery.

—At the end of 1890 a census was taken of the population of the Austrian capital, which showed (*British Medical Journal*, Aug. 29, 1891) that it contained 1,380,917 inhabitants, being an increase of rather more than 23 per cent as compared with the enumeration made ten years before. The proportion of the sexes was 51.63 per cent of females to 48.37 per cent of males. The number of persons suffering from mental or physical infirmity was 3,964, of whom 983, or 24.7 per cent, were blind; 980, or 24.7 per cent, were deaf and dumb; 1,627, or 41.04 per cent, were idiots or insane; and 374, or 9.44 per cent were cretins. Of the whole number, 53.13 per cent were males, and 46.87 per cent were females. The excess of males as compared with females, however, holds good only as regards cases of deaf-mutism, insanity, and idiocy; the cases of blindness are equally distributed between the sexes, and as regards cretinism, the fair sex leads easily, the respective percentages being 39.3 males to 60.7 females. On comparing these figures with those of the census of 1880, it will be seen that while blindness has diminished by nearly 10 per cent, and deaf-mutism has remained stationary, insanity and cretinism have increased by 32 per cent. This increase is greater in the female sex than in the male, in the proportion of 43.02 to 23.2 per cent. Of the 983 blind persons, only 21, or 6 per cent, were born blind; the causes of the condition are said to have been blennorrhoea neonatorum (in 14 cases), small-pox (in 11), other affections (in 295), and injury (in 17). Of 381 deaf-mutes not inmates of public institutions, 127, or 33.3 per cent, became deaf and dumb after birth. Of the cretins, 63.4 per cent are between ten and thirty years of age, and 31 per cent can do ordinary household work.

—At a recent meeting of the Asiatic Society of Japan in Tokio, a paper full of curious and interesting information of the condition of the blind in Japan was read by Professor Dixon. In early ages the blind were regarded as unlucky or uncanny, and their condition was one of great misery, until one of the imperial princes was born in this state. His father collected around him a number of blind to amuse him, and when, on attaining maturity, he was appointed governor of three provinces, he took with him blind men to assist him, and for about three centuries the administration of these provinces was always in the hands of the blind. This prince also introduced the practice, which prevails at the present day, of the blind shaving their heads. During the civil contests of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries between the families of Taira and Minnamoto the blind officials were everywhere ejected, and those afflicted with loss of sight fell into their early condition of distress and misery. In course of time orders were issued to the local authorities to provide for the blind in their districts, and now they receive the attention and education usual in all civilized countries. The members of the blind guild, which has long existed, commonly followed two occupations, music or chanting and shampooing or massage, those who practised the former being of a higher grade and frequently enjoying much popular favor. To this day all towns and villages in Japan have their blind shampooers, who go about after night fall with a strange, musical cry. The less skilful among the musicians become professional story-tellers. The higher official grades, which were at one time opened to the blind, were eagerly sought after; those who held them were provided with special marks of their office, and during civil wars blind musicians were frequently employed as spies. The art of shampooing as pra-