

## BODILY HYGIENE

### **Bodily hygiene in England.**

Many micro-organisms are incubated and spread on the surface of the human body, others are transmitted by dirty hands and faces. Given the gruelling manual work characteristic of most people living before this century, it was very difficult to keep the body reasonably clean. As we saw in the account of the various major diseases, almost all of them, except the air-borne viral diseases, are strongly affected by washing and body hygiene. To take just one example, we are told that 'extremely simple precautions of cleanliness almost completely eliminate the risk of typhus.'<sup>1</sup> As McKeown notes, 'Unwashed bodies and infrequently changed clothing and bedding provide ideal conditions for the body lice which carry the organism.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus changes in bodily hygiene may be an important factor in explaining improvements in health. McKeown in a revision of his ideas, has widened them from nutrition to hygiene. 'Second only to nutritional influences over time, and probably in importance, were the improvements in hygiene...', which he believed were 'introduced progressively from the second half of the nineteenth century.'<sup>3</sup> Razzell also has switched from theories associated with smallpox vaccination to lay more emphasis on hygiene: 'it was an improvement in personal hygiene rather than a change in public health that was responsible for the reduction in mortality between 1801 and 1841.'<sup>4</sup> Dubos, likewise, thought that 'The greatest advances in the health of the people were probably the indirect results of better housing and working conditions', which included, for instance 'the general availability of soap...'<sup>5</sup>

At first sight, there seems little evidence of any particular improvements in England until at least the second half of the nineteenth century. The general consensus in relation to England seems to be that until the middle of the eighteenth century, it consisted of the 'great unwashed'. Goubert's conclusion about France, that 'as long as water remained scarce and expensive and until the threat of cholera

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<sup>1</sup>in Glass (ed), Population, 508

<sup>2</sup>McKeown, Modern, 126

<sup>3</sup>McKeown, Food (xerox), 244

<sup>4</sup>Razzell, Essays (xerox), 164

<sup>5</sup>Dubos, Adapting, 365

brought hygiene into fashion, French people seldom washed',<sup>6</sup> is widely thought to apply to England.

McKeown believed that 'Standards of personal hygiene were low in the eighteenth century, particularly because bathing was uncommon, even among the well-to-do.'<sup>7</sup> Buchman writes that 'probably not until 1850 did regular personal washing become routine in large numbers of middle-class households,'<sup>8</sup> Plenty of literary and other material can be found to support such a view. For instance, a doctor writing in 1801 remarked that 'most men resident in London and many ladies though accustomed to wash their hands and faces daily, neglect washing their bodies from year to year.'<sup>9</sup> The picture given of lack of personal hygiene among the poor in the reports collated by Chadwick paint a picture of considerable personal filthiness. 'When they are washing, the smell of the dirt mixed with the soap is the most offensive of all the smells I have to encounter.'<sup>10</sup> Particular cases seemed to support this vision: 'Mr. John Kennedy, in the course of the examinations of some colliers in Lancashire, asked one of them: "How often do the drawers (those employed in drawing coals) wash their bodies?" "None of the drawers ever wash their bodies. I never wash my body; I let my shirt rub the dirt off; my shirt will show that. I wash my neck and ears, and face, of course." "Do you think it usual for the young women (engaged in the colliery) to do the same as you do?" "I do not think it is usual for the lasses to wash their bodies; my sisters never wash themselves, and seeing is believing; they wash their faces, necks and ears".'<sup>11</sup> It would thus be easy to get the impression that there were no real differences within Europe, and that almost everyone was filthy and smelly before abundant water and soap were introduced from the middle of the nineteenth century.

One argument put forward to support this view points to the absence of the tools for the job. The major necessity is a plentiful supply of water. There is indeed plenty of evidence for this, particularly from reformers in the nineteenth century. 'Water is scarce, and on wash-day queues of twenty or thirty may form at the wells.'<sup>12</sup> 'But few houses are properly supplied with water. In very dry seasons, they

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<sup>6</sup>Goubert, *Conquest*, 240

<sup>7</sup>McKeown, *Modern Rise*, 124

<sup>8</sup>Buchman, *Cleanliness (xerox)*, 1225

<sup>9</sup>quoted in Wright, *Decent*, 183

<sup>10</sup>Chadwick, *Report*, 135

<sup>11</sup>Chadwick, *Sanitary*, 315

<sup>12</sup>Thompson, *Working Class*, 447

have to fetch water from a distance varying from a quarter to 1.5 mile.<sup>13</sup> Chadwick reported that 'No previous investigations had led me to conceive the great extent to which the labouring classes are subjected to privations, not only of water for the purpose of ablution, house cleansing, and sewerage...' It had been noted that 'when the supplies of water into the houses of persons of the middle class are cut off by the pipes being frozen, and when it is necessary to send for water to a distance, the house-cleansings and washings are diminished by the inconvenience.'(REF XXX)

A refinement of this was the absence to hot water. Washing in cold water is both less effective and less pleasant. Heating up water for baths is expensive. Yet it is worth noting at this point that two developments in eighteenth and nineteenth century England increased the supply of hot water. One was the use of a cheap form of fuel, namely coal, and the other was the use of hot water which had been a bi-product of industrial use. The latter potential is well described by Chadwick.<sup>14</sup>

A second necessity is for some receptacle and a private space in which to wash. Bathrooms in most houses are a fairly recent phenomenon in Europe. 'Although baths had their origins in antiquity, bathrooms, which were first developed in England, appeared for the first time in France in the 1730s...'<sup>15</sup> The early development of bath-rooms in England in middle and upper class houses is well described by Celia Fiennes in her journeys in the 1680s (???). Sir John St. Barbe's house had 'a backyard where is a Bathing house and other necessarys". At Chatsworth there was a bathing room, with a bath big enough for two people and a hot and cold tap.'<sup>16</sup> Yet all this was pretty much confined to the very top of the society until the later nineteenth century. Even in the 1920's it could be stated that 'In this country the provision of baths in dwelling houses of quite large size was not usual even some fifty years ago. Now, a bath is regarded as almost a necessity in any house, of whatever size.'<sup>17</sup> It is easy to assume that before the advent of private bathrooms it was very difficult, if not impossible, for people to bathe their bodies. There is clearly some truth in this. Affluence may make privacy easier.

Yet there are also many ways in which, if people wished to do so, they could bathe their whole body

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<sup>13</sup>Chadwick, Report, 137

<sup>14</sup>Chadwick, Report, 316-7.

<sup>15</sup>Goubert, Conquest, 86

<sup>16</sup>Quennell, Everyday Things, ii, 106

<sup>17</sup>Lane-Claypon, Hygiene, 84

without needing a bathroom. They can do so using a tub within the house. This is described in Chadwick's report for the nineteenth century, in an account which, like many others, has to be set against the image of a filthy working population.<sup>18</sup> There are no reasons why such an arrangement should not have been used back into the middle ages. Indeed, 'some illustrations are to be found of bathrooms as a curtained alcove with a tub in it' for the fourteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

There were also alternatives outside the house in many parts of the country. To start with there were the sea, rivers, lakes etc. For instance, the seventeenth century Yorkshire diarist, Adam Eyre, recounts on several occasions how he went to the river with his wife to have a bath.<sup>20</sup> Or again, there were public bath houses. Again these seem to have developed, or re-developed, in England: 'after 1848, admiration for wash-houses of the British type began to grow...the technical excellence of the British model was much lauded. Delegations were sent to Britain; they were able to see the success of the wash-houses and praised the rapid and efficient procedures in the wash-houses of London and Liverpool'<sup>21</sup> It would appear that it was such a bath house to which Pepys' wife went in 1665: 'my wife being busy in going with her woman to a hot-house to bath herself, after her long being within doors in the dirt, so that she now pretends to a resolution of being hereafter very clean...'<sup>22</sup> The editors describe the hot-house as 'A public steam-bath establishment, used for hygienic and medicinal purposes, especially (perhaps exclusively) by women.'<sup>23</sup>

The very popular **Orbis Sensualium Pictus** by Comenius in the middle of the seventeenth century described both private and public bathing. 'He that desireth to be washt in cold water, goeth down into a river. In a Bathing-house we wash off the filth either sitting in a Tub or going up into the Hot-house and we are rubbed with a Pumice stone or a Hair cloth.'<sup>24</sup> From the picture accompanying this

<sup>18</sup>Chadwick, Report, 316

<sup>19</sup>Quennel, Everyday Things, 168; cf also iii, 89; and see picture of tub on p.110

<sup>20</sup>Eyre, Diary, 48, 50, 57

<sup>21</sup>Goubert, Conquest, 73

<sup>22</sup>Pepys, Diary, vi, 40

<sup>23</sup>idem

<sup>24</sup>Comenius, Orbis, 153

description, it is clear that the customers were men, though a 'Bath Woman' was there to fetch water in a bucket.

The third necessity, to turn the experience into something which will make a real improvement is either that the water is very hot indeed, and/or that some cleansing agent is used. We have seen the use of a pumice stone or hair cloth, but this would be a great deal more effective against numerous bacteria, lice etc. if it were combined with some mixture which contained an antiseptic property, such as soap. Again, it is believed that nothing much was available until very late. It is first assumed that the only possible agent was soap, and secondly that this was very expensive and out of the reach of most people until the later nineteenth century. For instance, in relation to the latter, it is asserted that 'Soap, a taxed luxury for the rich, remained almost as common as comets for the poor until the nineteenth century.'<sup>25</sup> Both assumptions seem to be incorrect in relation to England.

Soap is thought to be an invention of the ancient Gauls. 'Soap both as a medicinal and as a cleansing agent was known to Pliny', who mentions it as being used by the Germans. He describes it 'as originally a Gallic invention for giving a bright hue to the hair.' It was first made from goat's tallow and beech ash.<sup>26</sup> It was 'known in the late Roman Empire' and 'became widespread in Europe around 800 A.D. and was improved upon in the tenth and eleventh centuries in both the Christian and Islamic regions of the Mediterranean.'<sup>27</sup> In the 13th century it was manufactured using olive oil in Marseilles and in the fourteenth century in England. It was supplemented by other materials which contained similar cleansing properties. For instance, in fourteenth century England 'For washing clothes a lye made from wood ashes was used as soap.'<sup>28</sup> Quennel is not sure whether this was used on the body, while Furnivall claims that soap was only used for washing clothes, not humans.<sup>29</sup>

Whatever the situation before the sixteenth century, it is clear that from the middle of that century the production of soap in England began to rise. Indeed, J.U. Nef has argued that soap was one of the constituents of an industrial revolution in the sixteenth century. He notes, for instance, that by the 1630's between 5000 and 10000 tons per annum were produced for the English market. Before the end of the

<sup>25</sup>Nikiforuk, Fourth, 34

<sup>26</sup>Enc. Brit., s.v. 'soap'

<sup>27</sup>Mokyr, Lever, 39

<sup>28</sup>Quennel, Things, 168

<sup>29</sup>Furnivall, English Meals, lxiii; cf also Pounds, Culture, 164

century a fifth of the increasing production was used in London alone.(refXXX) Soap had become ubiquitous and cheap enough to be one element of the wages paid to wet-nurses<sup>30</sup> or to be mixed in the later seventeenth century in remote areas of England with peat ash to make fertilizer.<sup>31</sup> Writing of Elizabethan home life, Byrne states that 'Balls of sweet-scented soap were at most people's disposal for their ablutions, and although it could be bought at about fourpence a pound it was generally made at home, where it was perfumed with such essences as oil of almonds or musk. Sir Hugh Platt has some delightful soap recipes in which rose-leaves and lavender flowers figure prominently.' It could be bought commercially by the barrel, for instance one family bought a barrel for fifty shillings at Stourbridge Fair in 1562.<sup>32</sup>

It would thus appear that soap was plentifully available in England from at least the sixteenth century. In 1695 Houghton gave a very detailed account of how to make soap and the consumption of soap per head of the population in London - but most of this was for clothes washing.<sup>33</sup> This makes it difficult to know how to judge the effects of the fact that 'Total soap consumption approximately doubled between 1713, when figures are first available, and 1801, the year of the first census: from 24.4 million pounds to 47.6 million pounds'<sup>34</sup> or again the further increase in the first half of the nineteenth century. As Razzell comments. 'These figures must be treated with some caution; not only was soap produced illegally to escape the excise duty - and this varied during the 40-year period - but soap was used in manufacturing processes as well as for domestic consumption.'<sup>35</sup> This caution is further emphasized by the wildly differing estimates. Blane noted that 'Soap is a main article among the resources conducive to human health and comfort. The consumption of it has accordingly kept pace with the incessantly increasing taste for cleanliness, and the corresponding improvement in health.' He quotes figures for a speech in 1822 which claimed that the average annual consumption of soap in 1787 to 1788 was 292 million pounds, while that in 1819 to 1821 it was 643 million pounds. 'The soap used in manufactures not being taxable, is not included in this statement.'<sup>36</sup>The dramatic change in the early nineteenth century seems to

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<sup>30</sup>4 , Diary, 19-20

<sup>31</sup>Lucas, Warton, 145

<sup>32</sup>Byrne, Elizabethan Life, 29-30

<sup>33</sup>Houghton, Husbandry, ii, 133

<sup>34</sup>Razzell, Essays (xerox), 169

<sup>35</sup>Razzell, Essays (xerox), 170

<sup>36</sup>Blane, Dissertations, p.126.

have been in the method of making soap. The processes and extent of the manufacture were revolutionized at about the beginning of the 19th century by Chevreul's classical investigations on the fats and oils, and by Leblanc's process for the manufacture of caustic soda from common salt.<sup>37</sup> This established that soap, which had hitherto been thought to be merely a mixture of mainly animal fat and alkali from ash, could be greatly improved in various ways. Its greater attractiveness is one of the factors that has led some to argue that it was really from the middle of the nineteenth century that soap became widely used for washing.<sup>38</sup> It can thus be argued that the scientific and industrial revolution had a considerable impact on cleanliness through the increased production of this powerful cleansing substance, but that the process was much older than most historians have suggested.

The availability of water, hot and cold, of places to bathe, of a washing agent are all important. Most important, however, is the attitude towards bathing. Here, it is often assumed, was the other major obstacle to personal hygiene. Many believe that the majority of the population made a virtue of necessity - they were going to be dirty, so they might as well make washing a vice.

It is often asserted that there was some kind of folk wisdom which made washing dangerous. Vermin flourished, especially because of the conviction in Europe that one of the most unhealthy things one could do was to take a bath.<sup>39</sup>

Goubert writes that before the nineteenth century "The distrust of contact with water, which had its origins in deep-rooted popular belief, was based on a symbolic code: since the bath symbolized "the turning point between life and death", it was barely possible to take a bath more than two or three times in the course of a lifetime: at birth, on the eve of marriage before changing "state" and shortly before being wrapped in the shroud."<sup>40</sup> I have come across no direct evidence for this in England, except for the occasional vaguely related beliefs among doctors about the dangers of certain kinds of washing. For instance, the washing of hands in cold water was encouraged by the sixteenth century doctor Bulleyn<sup>41</sup> but washing in hot water was thought to be enervating. Or again, a medieval leechbook mentions that

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<sup>37</sup>Enc.Brit, 297

<sup>38</sup>e.g. Buchman, Cleanliness (xerox), 1233-8

<sup>39</sup>Taylor, Infections, 485

<sup>40</sup>Goubert, Conquest, 84

<sup>41</sup>Bulleyn, Government, xxxii

washing and bathing were to be avoided in the month of November as dangerous to health.<sup>42</sup> Yet each of these implies its opposite; that washing in cold water was beneficial and that the other eleven months were one's when people were to bathe and wash. This is indicative of the general problem of almost all the evidence which can be read in two ways.

It is really very difficult to decide what the general attitude towards washing was. When doctors in the sixteenth century instructed people to wash in the morning, were they merely reinforcing what people did, or preaching against the tide?<sup>43</sup> When other doctors accused the common people of being dirty and seldom washing their hands or brushing their hair<sup>44</sup> against what standard were they measuring this? When 'old writers' claimed that southerners, for instance Turks, were cleaner than 'northerners', for instance Germans and English, to what period and what signs were they referring?<sup>45</sup> When Montaigne in the sixteenth century wrote 'For I look upon bathing as generally salubrious, and believe that we suffer in health to no small degree through having left off the custom, which was universally observed in former times by almost all nations, and is still observed by many, of washing the body every day. And I cannot imagine but that we are much the worse for having our limbs so encrusted and our pores stopped up with grime<sup>46</sup>, how are we to interpret this? As a plea against the degeneration of the times? As an account of general grime? As an indication that many people valued cleanliness as healthful?

The general nature of the attitudes towards bathing in Europe, and in particular among the French upper classes, has been established by Georges Vigarello's Concept of Cleanliness. He shows how up to the fifteenth century, public bathing was widespread and baths were positively regarded...He quotes an astounded visitor to Switzerland in the sixteenth century, 'Men and women mix indiscriminately together in baths and steam-baths without any impropriety occurring.' Vigarello continues that 'It was also the practice in thermal baths in the Middle Ages, where naked bodies of both sexes shared the same water. The Fountains of Youth in fifteenth-century Flemish paintings were partly inspired by steam-baths; men and women, transformed into young and slender bodies, swim naked round the spring of life, the better to draw from it strength and youthfulness. Consciously resurrecting pagan themes, as in Bosch's 'Garden of Delight', which combines Dionysian eroticism with a lost paradise, they illustrate a promiscuity which was already beginning to be archaic, or, at any rate, less tolerated.'<sup>47</sup> He gives a

<sup>42</sup>Dawson, Leechbook, 61

<sup>43</sup>Boorde, Regiment, 248

<sup>44</sup>Bulleyne, Government, xxx

<sup>45</sup>Moryson, Itinerary, 3, 441

<sup>46</sup>Montaigne, Essays, ii, 229

<sup>47</sup>Vigarelli, Cleanliness, p.29.



number of reasons for a vast change from the fifteenth century, including the plague, changes in concepts of privacy and order, changing concepts of the body. For example, he writes of the disappearance of both public and private bathing that 'The factors contributing to this disappearance had, therefore, at least a double logic: progressive intolerance by the human environment of places seen as turbulent, violent and corrupting, and fears of the weakness of the body, based on ideas about dangerous openings and fluxes. The impact of the plague was much greater because it affected a practice already unstable and under threat.'<sup>48</sup> It is curious that he does not also stress venereal disease which was in many ways a more serious contagious threat than plague, though he does allude to the fear of 'contagious diseases'.<sup>49</sup>

This retreat from bathing, he argues, was reversed in the eighteenth century. In view of the puzzle of why mortality began to fall in England from at least the 1740s, this is an important line of enquiry. Yet the change came too late. Vigarello sees the change as being anticipated from the 1770s, but bathing was really only 'slowly established in the habits of the elite at the very end of the eighteenth century'.<sup>50</sup> If this was the pattern for England as well, and assuming a lag in the downward movement to the mass of the population the pattern is too late to help explain the eighteenth-century mortality fall.

While we cannot be certain about the situation before the sixteenth century in England, it would appear that there were improvements from then on, in the supply of soap, and later in the supply of water. There is also a growing consensus that a change in medical ideas began to encourage washing and particularly in warm water. Some of the history of this change has been well surveyed by Thomas. He reminds us that 'The monastic orders indeed were notable for their rules about daily washing and periodic bathing'.<sup>51</sup> Gradually towards the end of the Middle Ages the enthusiasm for bathing, and particularly public bathing declined. Thus, according to Thomas, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries 'In general, bathing was regarded either as a sophisticated form of sensual indulgence or as a medical procedure to be undertaken for some specific therapeutic purpose and only after consultation with a physician. Francis Bacon recalled a bishop who used to bath twice a day, but he "was somewhat a delicate person"'.<sup>52</sup> He believes that it 'might be useful as a means of treating certain complaints,

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<sup>48</sup>Vigarelli, Cleanliness, p.34 and see p.39.

<sup>49</sup>Vigarello, Cleanliness, p.6.

<sup>50</sup>Vigarello, Cleanliness, p.159; see also p.94.

<sup>51</sup>Thomas, Cleanliness, 61

<sup>52</sup>Thomas, Cleanliness, 59

whether at home or in the mineral waters of a spa. But it seems to have been less usual as a method of keeping the body clean than it had been in the later Middle Ages.<sup>53</sup> According to contemporary medical advice 'Washing in cold water was a risky procedure which should not be embarked upon by those unused to it, while hot baths opened the pores and were notoriously debilitating.'<sup>54</sup>

Thomas believes that there was a significant change in the medical attitude towards the end of the seventeenth century. 'By 1700, however, there was emerging an influential school of medical writers who recommended baths as a form of personal hygiene.'<sup>55</sup> Several key figures played an important role. One was Sir John Floyer, whose **History of Cold Bathing** was first published in 1697, to see six editions within thirty-five years.<sup>56</sup> According to Mullet 'Cold bathing had gone out of fashion for some time because chemical doctors had discouraged the practice in order to get patients to take their internal medicines. Disuse had also resulted from the religious changes of the sixteenth century, since the virtues of many wells were imputed to various saints who were no longer worshipped.'<sup>57</sup> But 'Sir John Floyer, declared that if the English could only be brought to understand the value of a bath, they would all want to have one in their houses.'<sup>58</sup> Another key writer was Cheyne, who advised all who could "to have a cold bath at their houses to wash their bodies in" and "constantly two or three times a week, summer and winter, to go into it".<sup>59</sup> Then 'during the eighteenth century it became increasingly common for medical writers to stress the connection between good health and frequent washing, and to lament "the shameless disuse of bathing, hot and cold, that prevales in our days".'<sup>60</sup>

This link was forcefully stressed by the most widely read of all eighteenth century English doctors,

<sup>53</sup>Thomas, Cleanliness, 58

<sup>54</sup>Thomas, Cleanliness, 74

<sup>55</sup>Thomas, Cleanliness, 75

<sup>56</sup>Mullet, Baths (xerox), 19

<sup>57</sup>Mullet, Baths (xerox), 19/20

<sup>58</sup>Thomas, Cleanliness, 75

<sup>59</sup>quoted in Thomas, Cleanliness, 75

<sup>60</sup>Thomas, Cleanliness, 76

William Buchan. He wrote that 'When infectious diseases do break out, cleanliness is the most likely means to prevent their spreading; it is likewise necessary to prevent their returning afterwards, or being conveyed to other places.'<sup>61</sup> He believed that 'Were every person, for example, after visiting the sick, handling a dead body, or touching any thing that might convey infection, to wash before he went into company, or sat down to meat, he would run less hazard either of catching the infection himself, or of communicating it to others.'<sup>62</sup> Washing of all the limbs was beneficial. 'Frequent washing not only removes the filth and sordes which adhere to the skin, but likewise promotes the perspiration, braces the body, and enlivens the spirits.'<sup>63</sup> Anticipating much of Chadwick's reforms he wrote that 'To the same cause must we impute the various kinds of vermin which infect the human body, houses, etc. These may always be vanished by cleanliness alone, and wherever they abound, we have reason to believe it is neglected.'<sup>64</sup> In particular, 'Diseases of the skin are chiefly owing to want of cleanliness. They may indeed be caught by infection, or brought on by poor living, unwholesome food, etc but they will seldom continue long where cleanliness prevails.'<sup>65</sup> This is the functionalist, rather than aesthetic, approach too cleanliness which Vigarello stresses as a major change, partly based on the discoveries of William Harvey.<sup>66</sup> As we shall see, it is an attitude which had long been anticipated in Japan.

Thus 'Virtually all the techniques of bathing were in place by the 1800s - dipping, swimming, strip-washing, showering - and it only remained to add the hot-water technique of vapour baths to the art.'<sup>67</sup> From these there developed not merely a desire for bathing, but almost a mania. 'By the 1830s, warm bathing was the new universal remedy. The longstanding Sanctorian doctrine of insensible perspiration remained the all-important channel for the evacuation of vaporous excreta, and retained its position as a truism readily understood by all.'<sup>68</sup> Or as Buchman put it, 'The change from cold bathing to

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<sup>61</sup>Buchan, *Domestic*, 104

<sup>62</sup>*ibid*, 103

<sup>63</sup>*ibid*, 104

<sup>64</sup>Buchan, *Domestic*, 100

<sup>65</sup>*ibid*, 100

<sup>66</sup>Vigarello, Cleanliness, pp.140-1.

<sup>67</sup>Smith, *Physical (xerox)*, 189

<sup>68</sup>Smith, *Physical (xerox)*, 189

invigorate the blood system to warm bathing in tubs to remove dirt came about because of the spreading understanding of the skin's function in the removal of wastes.<sup>69</sup> People became more and more conscious of body dirt and linked it to 'civility'. 'Consciousness of scum and vapor forming on the skin entered more and more into the popular imagination, compelling people eventually to accept the daily wash with soap and water as a necessary routine.'<sup>70</sup> As Thomas concludes, 'it was considerations of health and civility which did most to propel the British people in the direction of more frequent and more thorough washing of their bodies.'<sup>71</sup> There is evidence that in England in the eighteenth century the situation did improve. McKeown believes that 'Standards began to improve in the late eighteenth century, first among the well-to-do, but later in all classes.'<sup>72</sup> Some of the best evidence for such an improvement is given by Place. Writing in the early nineteenth century, he described after a tour of inspection that 'Although it was Friday, the children were clean and healthy. The children of tradesmen...keeping good houses in the Strand for instance....all of them when I was a boy had lice in their hair. The children I examined today do not seem to be at all troubled with these vermin. In many of the narrow alleys there were numbers of very poor children, but even these were cleanly compared with former times...Few were so...filthy as numbers used to be...'<sup>73</sup>

The difficulty here is to decide whether this had much to do with changes in washing. If there was a change in London, it probably started with the improvements in the water supply, which meant that 'One of the conveniences of London is that everyone can have an abundance of water....' as De Saussure described the situation in 1727<sup>74</sup> It seems likely that once there was plenty of water, bathing and washing, which had possibly been fairly widespread before, became even more common. De Saussure noted, for example, 'English women and men are very clean: not a day passes by without their washing their hands, arms, faces, necks, and throats in cold water, and that in winter as well as in summer.'<sup>75</sup> Chamberlayne noted in the same period that among the good characteristics of English women, along

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<sup>69</sup>Buchman, Cleanliness (xerox), 1222

<sup>70</sup>Buchman, Cleanliness (xerox), 1223

<sup>71</sup>Thomas, Cleanliness, 76

<sup>72</sup>McKeown, Modern, 126

<sup>73</sup>Place, quoted in George, London, 71

<sup>74</sup>De Saussure, 155

<sup>75</sup>De Saussure, 205

with their wit and good humour was their "cleanliness".<sup>76</sup>

The topic of bodily cleanliness through washing is an extremely difficult one. Every index can be interpreted in several ways. We can therefore only tentatively conclude as follows. From at least the fifteenth century, the tools for general cleanliness were present in England. It was a country with a great deal of water, particularly when its population was relatively small and spread over towns and villages. As one large centre developed, namely London, effective steps were taken to ensure a good water supply. There were moves to encourage the use of water in cleanliness, through washing, public and private bath houses, in the mass production of soap. It may thus well be that, by the seventeenth century, the standard was reasonable. The great surprise is that during the eighteenth century, when crowding and work and housing conditions worsened, the personal hygiene levels were probably maintained, if not improved.

(APPENDIX. English treatment of the head, teeth. a-enghead)

### **Bodily hygiene in Japan.**

The fact that there is something odd about bathing in Japan was noted very early on. 'Few visitors to Japan fail to remark on the extraordinary Japanese passion for bathing. The early Chinese historians commenting in the third century A.D. on the peculiar habits of their primitive island neighbours to the east, the Christian missionaries and traders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries...all have quickly taken note of the Japanese penchant for frequent bathing, their custom of bathing communally and their delight in soaking in waters so hot as to seem beyond human tolerance.'<sup>77</sup> The peculiarity was shown in the earliest mythical accounts of Japan. 'Izanagi, the principal creator-deity, takes a bath on the very first page of the **Kojiki**, and the divine actors of the subsequent myths about the origins of Japan repeatedly immerse themselves in rivers or the sea and engage in all manner of ritualistic purifications.'<sup>78</sup> Very early on, Grilli writes, 'repeated references to bathing in the creation myths and subsequent events of Japanese mythology' indicate 'a strong identification of evil and immorality with filth and pollution and - by contrast - of virtue and goodness with cleanliness and purity.'<sup>79</sup> This ancient interest in baths and bathing is unique to Japan. As Chamberlain observes, 'Bathing. Cleanliness is one of the few original items of Japanese civilisation.'<sup>80</sup> He continues, 'Almost all other Japanese institutions have their root in

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<sup>76</sup>Chamberlayne, *Present State*, 34

<sup>77</sup> Grilli, *Bath*, p.15

<sup>78</sup> Grilli, *Bath*, p.46

<sup>79</sup> Grilli, *Bath*, p.47

<sup>80</sup> Chamberlain, *Things*, p.60

China, but not tubs.<sup>81</sup>

The contrast of the European and Japanese attitude, as well as the possibly deeper cultural attitudes towards the body, are summarized by the anthropologist Maraini. 'It seems to me that the contempt for the body inherent in Christianity has, over the centuries, resulted in a view of the bath as no more than an unfortunate necessity, as brutish in its way as any other bodily function...' He contrasts this to the Japanese attitude. 'There the act of bathing is no mere concession to the dreadful tendency of bodies to become soiled. It is, rather, an act of respect - amounting almost to worship - for the corporeal being whose worth, in Japan, is not inferior to that of the spiritual being.' Thus he believes that 'With its roots in ritual ablutions and purifications, bath-time in Tokyo is a pious, auspicious and above all a happy occasion...'<sup>82</sup> He writes that 'In Japan the time between five and seven in the evening is sacred to the bath, as, indeed, it was in ancient Greece and Rome.'<sup>83</sup>

This raises the question of why there should be this difference. A part of the answer clearly lies in the cultural and religious attitudes alluded to by Maraini and Grilli. Another part stems from the volcanic landscape of Japan which has produced an unusual situation where there are an abundance of hot springs. The point is well documented by Grilli. He writes in general that 'Few places in volcanic Japan do not have a hot spring within easy reach. Hot-spring guidebooks are published in great quantities by the Japanese tourist industry.'<sup>84</sup> Hence 'Few peoples have delighted in bathing as much as the Japanese, blessed since the earliest times with abundant hot water from mineral springs located throughout their volcanic land.'<sup>85</sup> He adds that 'hot springs were the only universal luxury enjoyed by Japanese of all walks of life. The hot water from natural springs cost nothing and could be found almost everywhere'.<sup>86</sup> More specifically, 'the central mountains of northern Honshu are dense with thermal springs. On the map, some parts of Aomori, Iwate, Akita, Miyagi, Yamagata, and Fukushima prefectures are so

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<sup>81</sup> Chamberlain, *Things*, p.60

<sup>82</sup> Maraini, *Tokyo*, p.57

<sup>83</sup> Maraini, *Meeting*, 25

<sup>84</sup> Grilli, *Bath*, p.124

<sup>85</sup> Grilli, *Bath* p.21

<sup>86</sup> Grilli, *Bath*, p.124

crowded with springs that the otherwise pale-green map turns red. The same is true of the central regions of Honshu.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, Kyushu, 'at the southwest end of the chain of Japanese islands, is nearly as densely populated with hot springs as the north: the seven prefectures that make up Kyushu together possess nearly two hundred springs.<sup>88</sup> It is, of course, difficult to know which caused which. Chamberlain reverses the equation. 'The natural passion for bathing leads all classes to make extensive use of the hot mineral springs in which their volcano-studded lands abounds.<sup>89</sup>

The hot water that gushed from the volcanic rocks contained many minerals believed to be of medicinal value. This led to the proliferation of the Japanese equivalent of the 'spa', where people 'took the waters'. Among the most detailed account of these are by Kaempfer at the end of the seventeenth century. He noted that 'there are besides many and efficacious hot baths in the Country, whither they send, as we do, Patients labouring under stubborn and lingering sickness.<sup>90</sup> For example, in one place 'The Monks of this place have given peculiar names to each of the hot Springs arising in the neighbourhood, borrow'd from their quality, from the nature of the froth a-top, or the sediment at bottom, and from the noise they make as they come out of the ground, and they have assign'd them as Purgatories for several sorts of Tradesmen and Handicrafts-men, whose professions seem to bear some relation to any of the qualities above mention'd.<sup>91</sup> In another, 'that call'd Obamma, is one of the most eminent, and most efficacious. It lies to the West of the mountain Usen, about 3 miles off, and is said to have extraordinary Vertues, in curing several external and internal distempers, as among others, by bathing and sweating, the Pox, which however is observ'd frequently to return, probably because they are not skillful enough to manage this distemper, or by reason of their not understanding the right use of baths in general.<sup>92</sup>

This was Kaempfer's constant criticism: that the virtues of the water were not fully exploited. 'There are also several hot Springs in the Province Fisen, one for instance in the village Takijo, another in the village Urisino. Both would prove very beneficial in curing several distempers, if the Natives did but

<sup>87</sup> Grilli, Bath, p.28

<sup>88</sup> Grilli, Bath, p.132

<sup>89</sup> Chamberlain, Things, p.61

<sup>90</sup> Kaempfer, History, p.319

<sup>91</sup> Kaempfer, History, 1, p.166

<sup>92</sup> Kaempfer, History, 1, p.166

know how to use them.<sup>93</sup> It was a fault which he had observed elsewhere in Asia. 'I observ'd it in all Asiatick Countries which I pass'd through in my travels, that the Natives use the hot baths seldom more than three, or at furthest eight days, by which, probably enough, they will find some benefit and relief, which they are too apt to mistake for an actual cure, and in case of a relapse to lay all the fault on the waters.'<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, the springs were widely believed to be of value for many diseases. 'Not far from the village, on the side of a small river, which falls down from a neighbouring hill, is a hot bath, famous for its vertues in curing the pox, itch, rheumatism, lameness and several other chronical and inveterate distempers.'<sup>95</sup> In other places 'Many cold Springs and hot Baths arise on and about it. Among others there is a famous hot Bath, which they believe to be an infallible cure for the Venereal Disease, if the Patient for several days together goes in but a few moments a day and washes himself in it.'<sup>96</sup> A century later Thunberg echoed his observations, noting for example that 'The Japanese use this and other similar baths, with which the country abounds, in venereal complaints, the palsy, itch, rheumatism and many other disorders.'<sup>97</sup>

The variety of minerals in these springs is described in a modern account. 'Beppu, for example, has hot springs of virtually every type found in Japan: sulphurous springs, alkaline springs, simple salt springs, acid springs, ferrous springs, and springs of high radium content.'<sup>98</sup> This variety meant that almost all diseases were believed to be cured by them. Morse described how 'One spring was supposed to be good for pain in the chest and leg, another was good for stomach disorders; another for weak eyes; and another for troubles in the head, and so on. Each spring was supposed to have different curative virtues!'<sup>99</sup> Whether they are useful or not is an open question. 'In the mountainous districts, where hot springs and medicinal mud baths are found, sufferers from the most loathsome diseases congregate to soak for hours congenially in the pools, doubtless swapping symptoms with as great interest as in some

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<sup>93</sup> Kaempfer, *History*, 1, p.167

<sup>94</sup> Kaempfer, *History*, 1, p.167

<sup>95</sup> Kaempfer, *History*, 2 p.367

<sup>96</sup> Kaempfer, *History*, 1, p.165

<sup>97</sup>Thunberg, *Travels*, iii, 102

<sup>98</sup> Grilli, *Bath*, p.132

<sup>99</sup> Morse, *i*, p.99



other parts of the world!'.<sup>100</sup> Some suggest that it is the effect of boiling rather than the chemical properties which was most useful. It is unclear whether Dr. Balz's assertion that the Kusatsu baths would cure syphilis, rheumatism, and chronic skin diseases was due to the chemical properties of the water or the possibility that the diseases might be boiled out of the sufferers.<sup>101</sup> The latter theory is implied by Rein in the 1880s when he wrote that 'There is **no** doubt that the regular use of warm baths among the Japanese contributes greatly to the maintenance and improvement of their health. Rheumatic complaints...are usually checked in the germ, and are therefore much less common than with us.'<sup>102</sup> What is certain is that the bathing in these hot springs is a very ancient custom, that people's motives were mixed, and that the effects were probably to contribute to the health of the population. Spas and mineral baths were obviously also important in Europe, but in England there was nothing on the scale of the Japanese hot springs.<sup>103</sup>

Turning to ordinary bathing, the actual process of washing off dirt and bathing was believed to have many benefits. It was thought to take away dangerous substances on the skin, exuded by the body. 'In Japan, care of the skin is rightly considered one of the surest safeguards for a healthy condition. A bath, the Japanese believe, removes harmful gases. These gases have to escape through the pores of the skin, and if these are clogged they are naturally prevented from doing so'.<sup>104</sup> This view in the mid-nineteenth century is echoed a century later thus: 'Informants state that by sweating in a bath, 'dirt' from inside the body can be eliminated.'<sup>105</sup> The healthful aspects merged with the therapeutic - the re-invigorating and refreshing effects of hot water. The Japanese usually bath, or sweat, after their days journey is over, thinking by this means to refresh themselves and to sweat off their weariness.<sup>106</sup> 'The peasant, the labour of the day over, can always look forward to the luxury of a hot bath, and a still more luxurious shampooing - if not by his barber or the blind professors of the art, who go about all the evening, with a

<sup>100</sup> Geoffrey, *Immigrant*, p.51

<sup>101</sup> Grilli, *Bath*, p.136

<sup>102</sup> Rein, *Travels*, p.413.

<sup>103</sup>for useful surveys of the English spas, see Mullet, *Baths* (xerox) and E.S. Turner, *Taking the Cure* (London 1967)

<sup>104</sup> Wittermans, *Pompe* (xerox), p.98

<sup>105</sup> Lock, *Medicine*, p.91

<sup>106</sup> Kaempfer, *History*, 2, p.324

while for their cry, seeking customers - he can always make sure of it by his wife's aid.<sup>107</sup> A delightful account of the importance of the bath in a late nineteenth-century rural village is given in the autobiographical novel, Soil. After a hard and cold day's work, Oshina goes off for her bath at a neighbour's house. She is kept waiting, but 'When finally the men were finished Oshina hurriedly took off her clothes, thinking of nothing else but getting into the hot water...As Oshina felt warmth returning gradually to her body she began to feel revived. She wanted to stay in the water forever.'<sup>108</sup> After her death, her husband 'was too tired at the end of the day of steady labour to do much night work, and now that his pura was full he did not have to. Except for a few occasions when he had made rope he spent the long evening bathing.'<sup>109</sup> As Grilli observes, the 'motivations for bathing in Japan go beyond efficiency and transcend physical cleanliness. What the bath offers is a sensual feeling of well-being, of harmony with one's environment and with one's self.'<sup>110</sup> This feeling no doubt reflects some physiological fact. Very hot baths 'tend to pass out of the purview of hygiene and to enter that of the rapeutics. They produce definite effects on the circulation which may be beneficial.'<sup>111</sup> The 'total' effect is summarized by Maraini. 'In Japan the bath originated with ritual purification, hence it is a positive, pleasurable act, and essential ingredient in the rest and refreshment which a man takes after the toil of the day, a function as important and vital as sleep or meals.'<sup>112</sup>

There is one final set of motives which applies to that half of Japanese bathing which is communal, namely the social delight. The communal Japanese bath house, preferably naturally heated from a thermal spring, was one of the central institutions of Japan - as important culturally as the tea ceremony, the Shinto temple, or the Samurai sword. It was to Japan what the village church, village hall and games field combined were for an English community in the past. In Europe the middle and upper classes 'Spas' were frequented by a small portion of the European population from the eighteenth century while the Japanese public bath was available in almost every Japanese village and open to almost every person whatever their age, rank or background.

<sup>107</sup> Alcock, Tycoon, 1, p.302

<sup>108</sup>Takashi, Soil, p.5.

<sup>109</sup>Takashi, Soil, p.123.

<sup>110</sup> Grilli, Bath, p.22

<sup>111</sup> Lane-Claypon, Hygiene, p.84

<sup>112</sup>Maraini, Meeting, 25

This is well brought out in Grilli's account. 'Public bathhouses in Japanese cities have played a role as community gathering places for the last four hundred years, comparable to the central plazas or coffee houses of European towns - centres where neighbours could meet regularly to share news and gossip.'<sup>113</sup> Thus the official function of bathing houses as places to wash 'has been almost secondary to their role as neighborhood centres where friends meet to exchange news and gossip and where the myriad relationships that bind a community are strengthened every day.'<sup>114</sup> Their function as meeting places is well described by Scidmore, 'The public bath-houses, that alternate with the tea-houses in the village streets, have roofs and sides of solid wood, except the street front, which is open and curtainless, and within which men, women and children meet in the hot-water tanks, as at the market-place or street-corners in other countries'<sup>115</sup> It is here that the particularly intense solidarity of the 'small group' society of Japan is both expressed and re-affirmed. The famous Durkheimian 'effervescence' whereby, through rituals, a society expresses and re-affirms itself, occurs not so much in religious ritual as in the steam and conviviality of the bath house where friends and neighbours are made equal and close. '**Hadaka no tsukiai** - 'companions in nudity' or friends who bathe together, the Japanese say, are the closest friends of all.'<sup>116</sup> The joy and warmth that players in a team game feel as they immerse themselves in a hot bath after a good match is something akin to this feeling of togetherness. 'To bathe together with one's group - one's friends, colleagues, fellow students, co-workers - is to establish personal bonds and to reaffirm, in the most intimate way, a sense of kinship and interdependence.'<sup>117</sup> The strength of each group in Japan, the neighbourhood association, the **mura** or village, the firm cannot be understood without this pivotal institution.

In order to estimate the health effects of bathing, the first question to ask is how widespread was bathing. Even with abundant hot springs, how was it possible to have enough bathing facilities cheaply available for the more than twenty-five million Japanese living at 1700 to have a hot bath every day? Surely this would be impossible in a society which was so crammed together, where firewood was expensive, and where, in the huge cities in particular, there would be immense difficulties in providing space for baths.

(APPENDIX on bathing in Japan. a-bath)

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<sup>113</sup> Grilli, Bath, p.16

<sup>114</sup> Grilli, Bath, p.94

<sup>115</sup> Scidmore, Jinrikisha, p.169.

<sup>116</sup> Grilli, Bath, p.34

<sup>117</sup> Grilli, Bath, p.34

Bathing is but the extreme tip of the Japanese concern with washing. Thunberg had early noticed that 'Cleanliness is the constant object of these people, and not a day passes in which they do not wash themselves, whether they are at home or out upon a journey.'<sup>118</sup> The washing behaviour in a middle-class Tokyo household at the end of the nineteenth century is described by Inouye. 'We go out upon a verandah, generally one close to the sitting-room, or into the bath-room if there is one, where the servant has already laid on the sink a brass basin for washing our faces and a bowl also of brass for cleaning our teeth.'<sup>119</sup> 'The family wash one after another, the servant bringing a fresh supply of cold or hot water each time. As we are exposed to the cold in winter, we do not bare our necks and shoulders or wash our hair, but dip our faces only; however, as we take baths daily or every other day, this does not matter much.'<sup>120</sup> There is evidence that face-washing was widespread. Morse noted: 'The other day, in going through the villages in the early morning, I noticed many of the people washing their faces at the wells...and this among the lower classes.'<sup>121</sup>

Hot water was preferred for this ordinary washing. There was a Japanese proverb, 'An old man's cold water,' which meant, 'out of place, unreasonable'. Griffis explained this: 'The Japanese nearly always wash their hands and faces with hot water, and old men invariably do so.'<sup>122</sup> Foreigners noted the ubiquity of this washing, though being much less agile and taller they did not always find it easy. Morse described how 'We finally found at one end of the veranda a wooden sink on the floor with a pail of water and brass basin, in which we managed to wash our faces, though it was very awkward stooping down to it.'<sup>123</sup> He further wrote that, 'In the country a Japanese may be seen in the yard or by the roadside washing his face in a bucket or shallow tub; and at inns, and even in private houses, one is given a copper basin, and a bucket of water being brought has uses(XXX) a portion of the verandah as a wash-stand.'<sup>124</sup> While he found it difficult to use the pail on the floor, Morse was impressed by the Japanese sink; "one admires the Japanese sink, with its durable flat-bottomed basin, capacious

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<sup>118</sup>Thunberg, *Travels*, iii, 124

<sup>119</sup> Inouye, *Home*, p.139

<sup>120</sup> Inouye, *Home*, p.139

<sup>121</sup> Morse, *i*, p.246

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, p.506)

<sup>123</sup> Morse, *Day i*, p.96

<sup>124</sup> Morse, *Homes*, p.205/206

pottery-jar for water, and ample space to thrash about in without fear of spattering the wall-paper or smashing a lot of useless toilet articles in the act".<sup>125</sup> Others added their commendation describing 'the spotless wash-room, with its great stone sink, its polished brass basins, its stone well-curb, half in and half out of the house, which was cool and clean and refreshing merely to look at.'<sup>126</sup> Geoffrey described how 'The washroom was immaculate. Bowls of pale-green porcelain stood on a shelf, flanked by quaint dippers made from a joint of bamboo...'<sup>127</sup>

The daily immersion of most of the Japanese population for an hour or more in boiling water up to the neck, if it continued through the centuries, is a quite incredible social phenomenon. It cannot be doubted that it helped to lead to their reputation. 'The cleanliness of the Japanese is always remarked upon by foreigners...,' 'The Cleanliness of the Japanese is amazing;'<sup>128</sup> the Japanese 'lead all Asiatics in cleanliness of persons and dwellings...'<sup>129</sup>

The result of all this, plus the absence of meat-eating, was the famed smell of the Japanese people. Hearn summarized various opinions. He cited the great Chamberlain: 'as Professor Chamberlain has well said, "a Japanese crowd is the sweetest in the world".'<sup>130</sup> He defended Arnold's view; 'Critics have tried to make fun of Sir Edwin Arnold's remark that a Japanese crowd smells like a geranium-flower. Yet the simile is exact!'<sup>131</sup> The reason was simple. 'In almost any Japanese assembly including women a slight perfume of jako is discernible; for the robes worn have been laid in drawers containing a few grains of jako. Except for this delicate scent, a Japanese crowd is absolutely odorless.'<sup>132</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Morse, Homes, p.207

<sup>126</sup>Bacon, Japanese Girls, 210

<sup>127</sup>Geoffrey, Immigrant, 171

<sup>128</sup> Morse, i, 42, 61

<sup>129</sup> Griffis, Mikado, p.356

<sup>130</sup>Hearn, Kokoro, 30

<sup>131</sup>Hearn, Kokoro, 31

<sup>132</sup>Hearn, Kokoro, 31

(APPENDIX - The Japanese treatment of the head, teeth: a- head)

### **Conclusion.**

Of course, given the stress of the environment and the conditions of immensely hard work in the rice fields, there was still dirt and it would be as foolish to over-emphasize the cleanliness as to underestimate it. For instance while commenting that the Japanese were 'amazing' in their cleanliness, Morse noted that 'the country children of the poorer classes usually have dirty faces.'<sup>133</sup> Certain people found a lower standard in some areas. An outside school-teacher in a remote region was revolted (date???) by the state of his pupil's hygiene. 'That's right', the principal replied..."I too was appalled when I first came here. Most of the children's hands and feet are covered with dirt and mud. Not only do they not take baths, they hardly wash their hands and feet".<sup>134</sup> Yet it seems that this was the exception.

As we have seen, many diseases are transmitted through dirt on the body. The practices which we have described must have made the Japanese by far and away the most bodily clean of all societies before the twentieth century. As Kames noted, they made even the Dutch, who were thought very clean within Europe, seem relatively filthy. And it was appropriately a doctor with the Dutch trading post at the end of the seventeenth century who made the connection between this cleanliness and the absence of many diseases. Kaempfer wrote that 'The frequent and daily use of bathing, which the natives of this Country are so found of, out of a principle of purity in point of Religion, and a natural love of cleanliness, greatly contributes to keep them in good health, and dispels many distempers, which they would be otherwise liable to.'<sup>135</sup> This cleanliness of body also affected the inside of their garments, where many other disease agents can lurk. For 'as the bodies even of the men of the lowest class are constantly washed and scrubbed, it is hardly to be supposed that their garments, though perhaps dusty outside, can be very dirty within.'<sup>136</sup>

When we consider the two cases together, we can see that the outstanding hygiene of the Japanese and the various developments in England probably had considerable effects of various diseases. They would not affect the major respiratory, virus-borne, diseases, but would have considerable consequences in particular on those diseases caused by the bites of animals, insects and ticks and in particular epidemic typhus. The constant washing in Japan may also have had some effects on digestive

<sup>133</sup>Morse, i, 61

<sup>134</sup>quoted in Hane, 121

<sup>135</sup>Kaempfer, History, 319

<sup>136</sup>Chamberlain, Things, 61

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tract disease through the cleanliness of the hands, face, hair and mouth. It may also have helped with lowering the level of venereal disease in Japan and certain forms of worm infestation.