

## CHAPTER VI

### SWIMMING

The most fun of all was to go swimming. Grandfather still recalls clearly his first lesson in outdoor bathing. It was when Grandfather was six years of age or thereabouts that one of the boys suggested it would be fun to go swimming. We did not stop to think that it would be better to consult our mothers first - in that day boys were sometimes forgetful of important details - but that was a long time ago and boys today are more thoughtful. Well, it turned out to be great fun, but as no one in the crowd knew how to swim, we thought it better to play where the water was shallow and we could enjoy the sunshine and, spitting the water with our hands, could throw the water at each other. This was so much fun we spent the whole afternoon doing this.

Next day a strange disease broke out among the boys in the party. Their backs were all red and blistered. Grandfather's mother was very sympathetic and was quite distressed. Wondering what in the world this strange disease might be, she went over to consult one of the neighbors who had several boys, and this neighbor, without stopping to think what effect it might have on Grandfather's tranquility of mind, ventured a guess that Grandfather had been swimming and got sunburned. Grandfather then discovered that it had been a mistake not to have discussed the matter with his mother before going and now that he had reason to believe that she did not approve of his going swimming, decided not to go again that season.

Next season, being now a big boy of seven, he felt sure his mother would not care - besides being a big boy he did not need to make a fuss around home when he got his back burned.

One day we asked another little boy's mother whether he could go swimming and she replied, "No, Johnny cannot go swimming until he has learned to swim." What a terrible situation, you say, (and the worst of it was all the mothers appeared to feel the same way about it) for obviously boys could not learn to swim without going swimming - so how then could the boys ever get a chance to go. I really hate to let you in the secret, but the embarrassing fact is that the boys, having found that their mothers preferred them to learn to swim before they asked permission, did that very thing. Long before their mothers had any idea they thought of going swimming, the boys had become quite adept. One little fellow, whose last name was Gordon, came swimming while he still wore dresses and the boys helped him to dress and undress.

But, you say, would not their mothers immediately know that the boys had been swimming from the fact that they brought their bathing suits home all wet? No, dearies, the mothers of that day would never find out in that way - for, the truth must be told, although it makes me blush to tell you, that, as a matter of fact, we had no swimming suits other than such as Nature had provided.

Really, in that fact was the whole trouble with the situation. You see that the mammas and papas of all the boys should have taken them down to the river and showed them how to swim, but in a town where there were no bathing suits you can see that that was, so to speak,

impracticable. Grandfather as a boy read once an advertisement of a bathing suit and sent 25 cents and received a pair of "trunks". This was the first swimming suit which the old swimming hole had ever seen. Grandfather remembers proudly walking out on the bridge to display this novelty. He does not have a clear recollection of what became of the "trunks", but does not remember having seen them after that first dive.

When we "went in" we parked our clothes almost anywhere and sometimes while we were having a good time in the water, bad boys would tie hard knots in the sleeves of our shirts. Sometimes the bad boys even wet the shirts so as to pull the knots harder. In that case, the only way to untie them was with the aid of one's teeth - "chawing beef" it was called. That was not nice, was it? Grandfather is quite sure you would not tie knots in another boy's shirt even if you guessed maybe he was the one who had tied knots in yours the day before.

Well, you see that the absence of swimming suits appeared to deter our parents from going swimming with us, and besides Grandfather always surmised that most of the papas and mamas did not know how to swim themselves - so the boys had to find out by themselves - and as a matter of fact, the older boys did look after the younger ones.

Grandfather can remember as a small boy standing on the swimming hole bridge and shouting to the bigger boys below: "Look out, I am going to jump and I can't swim." and then jumping in where the water was very deep. Do you not think that was very rash and foolish indeed? It certainly was - you might easily have been without one of your grandparents.

Grandfather can well remember saving the life of one little boy who could not swim and who slipped off into a deep hole. Grandfather and another boy were on the bridge over the old swimming hole. Noticing an unusual commotion among some small boys down by the spring board, they ran down and saw a boy's head just under the water. They pulled the little lad out, rolled the water out of him and, after a while, the lad was able to walk home. Such events we did not report to the city paper - we thought it might appear boastful if we told our mothers of our hero stunts in pulling drowning boys out of the swimming hole. No child was drowned either in race or river during the span of Grandfather's childhood and youth which, as he now views it, is striking evidence of the efficiency which older children in the absence of grown-ups took care of young children.

Swimming was the principal occupation for many of the small boys. The plan was to go, soon after breakfast, to take a swim; when the next crowd appeared, go in again and so on all day except for a brief intermission to go home for lunch. Grandfather remembers that one day it was decided to keep count of just how many times we went in that day. The count showed ten times and Grandfather has no reason to suppose that that day was much out of the ordinary.

During the end of that summer several of the boys decided to stay in bed for a few days. No, we were not exactly sick; we just felt tired and thought that it would be pleasant to lie still for a day or two. The doctor diagnosed our trouble as too much swimming and advised our mothers to keep us out of the water for the rest of the season. All of which shows

that too much, even of a good thing, may produce unpleasant results.

It was fortunate for Grandfather that he learned to swim well, for on three different occasions only by being a good swimmer did he save his life. The first time was when he was a boy. In spring time, when the little river became a torrent, the bank caved in with him, throwing him into the swift current and filling his coat pockets with mud. Had he not been a strong swimmer, he would have been swept down with the current.

Later, when a student in the University, he fell through the ice well out from shore on Lake Mendota and still later when he was teaching in DePere, in unusually swift water before the grates of the paper mill, his boat capsized. It is, you see, very important that you become a good swimmer.

Another important fact about swimming is illustrated by an incident from which as boys we got much amusement. One day a small boy came running breathlessly to the swimming hole, his clothes all wet, and told excitedly how he had fallen into the race down by the "Second Bridge" and he declared: "I was just going down for the last time when I suddenly remembered I could swim and swam out."

We all laughed heartily at his tale, but it was probably true. In his excitement at falling in the water he lost his head and forgot that he had recently learned to swim. The most important thing in any accident and especially in an accident in the water, is to be calm and "keep your wits about you."

Just one more story and we must leave this interesting subject. When Grandfather had graduated from high school (age 16) his mother took

him for a long trip from Wisconsin to her old home in Maine. Perhaps you will read more of this trip in a later chapter, but enough for the present to say that your great, great Grandfather Burnham's home to which we went was at Machias, almost at the very nose of Maine, on the Machias River about seven miles from the ocean. Soon after we arrived, a "clam bake" was arranged and many relatives and friends went on a picnic to the seashore.

Now Grandfather had always had a great desire to swim in the ocean. He had read that the sea being salt was more bouyant than fresh water, and he wished to test this for himself. So, unobserved, he quietly slipped away from the crowd and going beyond a rocky point quite out of sight, he donned the kind of swimming suit in which Grandfather with much embarrassment explained to you he was accustomed to go swimming when a boy and ran and took a big jump into the ocean. There were just two jumps to this swim - one jump in and a quicker jump out.

Grandfather did not know that any water could be so cold as that water was. He had broken through the ice a number of times, but that was in the winter time and he wore warm clothing. But this was a bright sunny day in June and should not the water have been warm? Some day you will learn that an ocean current from the Polar sea comes down along that portion of the continent and that the water off the nose of Maine is never warm enough for a comfortable swim. At any rate, if you ever were tempted to go swimming there, Grandfather suggests you feel of the water before you make up your mind to run and jump in.