

MAY-DAY — DIPPING DAY

by
Pat Efford

Some Watery Reflections

It's a cliché to say: "We take water for granted". It's a phrase that's trotted out ruefully when the plumbing freezes up or there's a hose pipe ban, much the same way we might say when commiserating with a friend: "You don't know what good health (your own teeth) a steady income is until you lose it".

But being a cliché doesn't mean it's a worthless observation. Ask any Ethiopian.

What I want to do is ask you to open your mind to the wonder of that amazing substance; H₂O (the best known chemical formula) and join in a celebration of its properties, uses and potential.

Every school child becomes acquainted with the fact that water can come as solid, liquid or gas, that the points of change give us the basic range for measuring temperature, but how many become blasé at the first snowfall of the year, have no wish to taste icicles or test out the pond for skating? And then as adults we worry about the heating bills, the plumbing and driving on the roads. How easy it is to miss the fun, the beauty, the awe-fullness of solid water.

With technological progress, only the nostalgic, the historically romantic enthuse about steam any more. Or are they so alone? Anyone who's tried a sauna and everyone who's been in need of a cup of tea, has had reason to welcome water vaporizing at 100°C.

But it is in its liquid state we most commonly have dealings with water. We add it to Scotch, the car radiator, wash our bodies, clothes and floors in it, we even occasionally take it neat. There was a time when it drove machinery, carried cargo and provided a fortification and an arena for warfare.

On this prosaic level we're guilty of taking water for granted. And I've been pretty shallow (!) in my consideration of the element. Let's look a little deeper.

Water as the source of life, the symbol of regeneration and purification is a near global concept. The Hindus have a sacred river, the Ganges, whose waters washed the skies, came to earth to cleanse it and retain still the power to purify both body and soul. Before Mohammed began to have visions

and states of religious ecstasy, his only claim to fame was that his grandfather was the keeper of the Holy Well at Mecca. He was later depicted in Turkish art having water springing from his hands and Muslims are obligated to undertake ritual washings daily. The symbolism is potent in Judaism when God turned the river to blood and delivered his chosen people by parting the waters and subsequently drowning their foes. In the Christian religion, baptism with holy water signals re-birth into the faith and is the only way of reaching heaven when life on earth is finished. Ancient Britain and Europe were littered with holy wells and springs, each containing healing powers. And the Romans were great believers in the health-giving properties of natural springs. They put a good deal of resources into building beautiful bath houses at spas.

The symbolism is carried into colloquial language when, at the onset of labour, the flowing of fluid from the womb is called "the waters breaking", and modern medicine is re-learning the potency of water's curative powers under the scientific name of "hydro-therapy".

It's telling too, that now we have allotted leisure time a relatively new sport facility; swimming pools are listed under "recreation" in the phone book.

And it's here I get on to my hobby-horse, or take water wings! As an

enthusiastic swimmer of no great ability, let me persuade you of the benefits of getting on good terms with yourself, your body and your friends and relatives down at the local pool.

Once the slightest familiarity with full immersion in water is achieved, the way is open to that invaluable activity: play. Nowhere else will you find normally staid and sombre adults so ready to abandon inhibitions and even in spite of, or perhaps because of their near naked state, enjoy playing freely. The other invaluable activity that becomes possible, of course, is exercise. Just a quarter of an hour ploughing up and down the pool can stimulate the circulation, benefit respiration and tire muscles without the slightest strain to those parts so easily abused in other exercises; the joints. The heady experience of going through the pain barrier is easily had for those who want to build up stamina or are interested in altered states of consciousness.

But for me the delight of swimming is in its sheer sensuality. To feel my body flexing, moving, pushing through water, to be aware of my skin all over, and my hair, my eyes, my mouth, my breathing. To get tired and feel my heart pounding, my blood racing, and then to give my body up, to relax in every portion and lie face up, bobbing about on that marvellous stuff water. That's coming alive, that's water as recreation!

D.H. Laurence set his best erotic scenes between Connie and Mellors in a cloud burst, a deluge, and in a fine misty drizzle. He knew about the sensuality of water, and joined it to the Spring, the time of rejuvenation and new life.

And on a topical note, water used to play a part in country celebrations of May Day, known as "Dipping Day". Any young person too tardy to arm themselves with a sprig of May blossom in the early morning would be doused with buckets and pitchers

of water as they went about their business during the rest of the day. Their tormentors would shout: "Hurray, hurray, 'Tis May, 'Tis dipping day".

Go on, celebrate May-Day with that beautiful, giving, life-enhancing stuff we take for granted. Take the plunge, either at the pool in public with a good exhilarating swim or at home, making wet slippery love to a friend in the tub.

'Tis Dipping Day!

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER



DEPARTMENT OF EXTRA-MURAL STUDIES
in collaboration with
PSYCHOTHERAPY SERVICE, EXETER HEALTH DISTRICT

"USING GESTALT THERAPY"

A THREE DAY NATIONAL CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITY OF EXETER, 18 - 20 JULY

ENQUIRIES TO: Dr. C.A. Lewis, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University of Exeter, St. Luke's, Heavitree Road, Exeter, EX1 2LU. Tel: 74425 or to Dr. Richard Tillett, Wonford House Hospital, Exeter, EX2 5AF. Tel: 77358.