

A PLUTOCRATIC EDEN

JUNIUS HENRI BROWNE SCORES FASHION IN PROUD NEWPORT.

The Place Not So Charming, After All. Why Fashion Does Not Bathe—All a Glorification and Perfection of Money. A Pen Picture.

[Special Correspondence.] NEWPORT, R. I., Aug. 21.—Most persons would, I imagine, be disappointed by Newport on their first visit after hearing so much of its delightful situation and miscellaneous charms. I remember that I was when I first came here as a boy, and that I wondered at its reputation, which was far less than it is now. Its praises have been so loudly and persistently chanted that one might expect to see a kind of modern Eden, and indeed it is so regarded by the rich summerers who give it fame and constitute its society. It may be called, therefore, a plutocratic Eden, for the plutocrats have done all that wealth could do to make it attractive, and they look at it almost entirely from the standpoint of wealth.

This renowned resort is pleasant—very pleasant, locally and climatically—and in general would be so considered doubtless, had not its exaggerated encomiums been so continually dinged in our ears. Still it seems to me that it owes far less to nature than it owes to art, or perhaps to architecture, contributed with a most lavish hand.

The sea view is not nearly so extensive as might be inferred. There are many cottages—it is yet the custom to so designate the sumptuous villas here—from which no part of the ocean is visible. And from the Ocean House, the old time hostelry, scarcely a vestige of water, except in the evers, may be seen. Hence in all likelihood its name—namely, being selected nowadays from their total unfitness.

Ocean avenue, running at right angles to Bellevue avenue, is much the more inviting thoroughfare of the two, though less conspicuous. The cottages on it have their rear seaward, and the rear piazzas command the best views of any here.

The noted ocean drive, which runs around the fort (Adams) does not deserve its notedness. The road is not particularly good, and a large portion of it is away from the sea. But the summerers drive over it, unless the weather be unpropitious, as regularly as they dine, and speak of it as if it were another Corniche.

Some of the most attractive parts of this island—it is not generally known that Newport is on the island of Rhode Island—are seldom visited, the majority of people limiting themselves to the immediate entourage of the old town and its summer addition, much the more important of the two. The old town is decidedly interesting, but scarcely any one who comes here ever thinks of it, being absorbed by the showy and pretentious modern quarter. Nevertheless it had a century ago great commercial consequence, being a rival of New York and bustling with enterprise and expectation. Now it is but a fashionable resort. The smart set think that it has advanced because its members possess it utterly, and it may be added, emptily.

This is often spoken of as a bathing place. It is such potentially, though not actually to the summerers, especially to the feminine portion, who never bathe. What a horrible imputation on fine, nice women! The charge would seem to be unparadiseable. What I mean is that they never bathe in the sea—those women at least who consider themselves fashionable, and earn the consideration by the variety and elaborateness of their attire. They are continually putting on and taking off costly gowns and their accompaniments, and this involves time and trouble, even with a maid to assist at the process. They are delighted to dress and undress a dozen times a day when vanity and mode require, but not for a plunge in the sea.

Everybody, even men, know that to don and doff a bathing suit, particularly on account of the stickiness of salt water, is a bother and a burden. And it may easily be imagined why women, to whom self-decoration is the chief end of life, are unwilling to occupy an hour or two daily for a purpose that does not show, or, what is worse, shows to disadvantage. They are certainly justified, as they look at it, in their objection to sea baths.

What is most striking and alluring here is the superb cottages and grounds, the general pageantry of the place, the gorgeous panorama, as it may be called, of the opulent colony. As a spectacle it is not in my opinion equaled at any resort at home or abroad—not at Brighton, Trouville, Nice, Wiesbaden, Hamburg or Baden-Baden in their most dazzling season. Whatever money, taste, study, contrivance, social ambition or selfishness can do for outward splendence is done here to the utmost. It is well worth seeing, very impressive, full of suggestiveness. He who wishes to admire it should accept its appearance; should not look below the surface; should not attempt analysis. This might spoil the flavor of the exhibition and alter our opinion of its value.

The panorama looks beautiful, though much of its interior is ugly, even hideous. Men who seem so brave and self-satisfied are really alarmed and discontented. Women who seem enviable and happy are consumed with heartburnings and wretchedness. It is all a show; a splendid show, but only a show. Newport is a small world in itself, hollow, aching, meretricious, mostly devoid of simplicity and sincerity—the principal virtues of wholesome existence. In such a circle these are impossible.

Those acquainted with the colony are aware to what an extent it is seamed with gossip, generally false, often malicious, not seldom true. Women meet, embrace, pay mutual compliments, and yet hate one another cordially. They are well bred, as the phrase goes, and breeding, but what is disagreeable or painful. Behind the brilliant gaze and the sweet smile the fever flashes and the cancer lurks. Newport is an epitome of the world.

It is hard for any one outside of the gilded ring to comprehend how its members can take pleasure in continuing here the artificial, fast, furious, wholly unwholesome life they lead in town. And they name it rest and recreation in unconscious irony. It might be supposed that they would tire to dissolution of the incessant round of gaiety, make-believe and dissipation. But they do not, apparently, though the death of many may be justly charged to society. What iron constitutions, what elastic systems they must possess, after all! So incessant a chase of folly is enough to kill a giant, and seemingly delicate women survive it season after season.

While the habits represent various cities, most of them are from New York, which in many respects is seen here at its worst. Gossip it is you may say, this society is at base a parasitic, parasitic of money put to its worst uses. New York is the best school on this continent for the deterioration and unmaking of American citizenship. JUNIUS HENRI BROWNE.

Consumption From Improper Breathing. The breathing of compressed and rarefied air is attracting wide attention at the present time in connection with the prevention and the treatment of pulmonary consumption and is another mode whereby the chest capacity can be decidedly improved. When air is breathed in this manner, there is felt during each inspiration a gentle distention of the whole chest, while during expiration a feeling of emptiness is experienced.

Consumption is not a disease which originates in a day, but it is the outgrowth of morbid habits and agencies which may even antedate the birth of the individual. Defective breathing is one of these habits, and its pernicious prevalence is more widespread than is generally supposed.—Dr. Thomas J. Mays in Century.

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