

Real Swimming

I saw him in the distance, as the train went speeding by,
A shivery little fellow standing in the sun to dry.
And a little pile of clothing very near him I could see:
He was owner of a gladness that had once belonged to me.
I have shivered as he shivered, I have dried the way he dried,
I've stood naked in God's sunshine with my garments at my side;
And I thought as I beheld him, of the many weary men
Who would like to go in swimming as a little boy again.

I saw him scarce a moment, yet I knew his lips were blue
And I knew his teeth were chattering just as mine were wont to do;
And I knew his merry playmates in the pond were splashing still;
I could tell how much he envied all the boys that never chill;
And throughout that lonesome journey, I kept living o'er and o'er
The joys of going swimming when no bathing suits we wore;
I was with that little fellow, standing chattering in the sun;
I was sharing in his shivers and a partner of his fun.

Back to me there came the pictures that I never shall forget
When I dared not travel homewards if my shock of hair was wet,
When I did my brief undressing under fine and friendly trees
In the days before convention rigged us up in b.v.d's.
And I dived for stones and metal on the mill pond's muddy floor,
Then stood naked in the sunshine till my blood grew warm once more.
I was back again, a youngster, in those golden days of old,
When my teeth were wont to chatter and my lips were blue with cold.

Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)