

WHEN it came to finding a glass-sided tank big enough for Professor Allen to enter and demonstrate his "Pose and Mien, taken after the World's Greatest Masters of Painting and Sculptural Attainments," we were up against a special difficulty. The Professor has often thought of having one made so that he can do his Unique Act to the best advantage, but as it has to be watertight, it can hardly be portable, and so he has never had one made.

"That's the trouble, you see," he said, tapping his hand on the table. "There's nothing big enough anywhere, and I can't carry one round with me."

We discussed the possibility of finding anything anywhere that would be big enough to enable photographs to be taken of the Professor imitating the poses of works by Michaelangelo, R.A., Carnel Vane, Lady Scott, Adolf Hitler, etc., and it may safely be said that we tried everything. We rang the water-works, and found that the Thorndon baths are empty for the winter—the Te Aro baths are too dark. One or two school baths have been emptied for the winter; someone suggested that the Milk Department had recently replaced some vast glass vats—that was true, but the old ones, though big enough for the purpose, had steel cases; an amateur

breeder of tropical fish had nothing big enough; finally it narrowed down to the elephant bath at the Newtown Zoo, which the Curator, Mr. Cutler, was generous enough to offer to fill. Its only disadvantage was that we would have to take the photograph from above. Our photographer volunteered to be held over the pool in the trunk of the elephant; but he was relieved of that necessity by the fact that the elephant died some months ago.

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"NEW ZEALAND," The Professor told me, "is a showman's graveyard." He feels nowadays, when he is at the very highest peak of his art, that he must leave the Dominion. At last, after an unspecified number of years (his age is still a secret) he is caught in the current of a trend that affects all of his kind in New Zealand. He must go abroad if he is to make the most of his abilities.

He has made some effort, I gathered, to impress some of his ideas upon the natives here. He has told "them" this, that and the other thing. (When he divulges one of his original ideas or inventions, he talks always of some shadowy "they," by which you understand the general body of Philistines, the unbelieving.)

"I've been in touch with the woollen mills—woollen swimming costumes are no good. Four ounces dry, they might be, but wet, they weigh as many pounds as ounces. A man or a boy or a girl is dragging three or four pounds through the water. I told them, we must get nylon or silk. All those girls out there on the beach, on the diving board, they're proud. Some of these girls have beautiful figures, all eyes are upon them, they're the censure of all eyes! I explained to them, all clothes worn by the human race can be made at home by wives and mothers—except stockings and the swimsuit. The mills have them beat here—so the mills must find something that will cut the resistance down. . . ."

The Professor explained that he once trained a boy to break a record time, swimming in the nude, which he could not break in a suit. Swimming, in New Zealand, he says, is going back and back, and giving boys and girls a wrong outlook on life altogether. He has told "them" this.

"And another thing—there's no racing turn in New Zealand. You watch the shark, the dolphin, the eel, the trout—he doesn't touch the shore when he turns round. He CURLS. I maintain, a swimmer should not touch the end of the bath. Touching is an inducement to rest."

Professor Allen slapped a hand on the table, then he snapped his fingers and closed his eyes, and waved it all away.

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AT our second meeting, the Professor allowed me to ask him for his life history. He was born in Wellington, he told me. His mother came from County Wexford in the West of Ireland, and his father from Barbadoes, where he was a native judge. He had five brothers and six sisters.

"Not one of us ever drank or smoke. Wasn't that extraordinary? Amazing! My mother was a singer as a young girl. She was an old woman when I was born. The Irish have their children very young and very old. . . ."

"Excuse me, Professor," I said, "but did you say you don't smoke?"

"Only under water," he said. He went on with his life story. "I started to swim when I was 12. We went to live at Waiwera and I started to swim there. As a boy I sent to Japan for books on pearl diving."

The Professor talked quickly and vaguely, looking at his hands on the table and tending his nails, which have big pink-tinted halfmoons on them.

"I have studied international law, science, biology, character reading, pearl diving. . . ."

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WATER IS HIS ELEMENT



FULL FATHOM POINT FIVE: Professor Allen, under three feet of water, demonstrates his Eating and Drinking against every Internal and External Pressure. Left: Holding one of the six dates he ate under the water (a pine-needle floating on the surface can be seen on the right of the Professor's head). Right: Drinking coloured cordial with a tube pushed through the paper cover of the tumbler. His head is near the surface. Before entering the water, Professor Allen tests his own heart with a stethoscope and his waterproof watch. He wears a silk dressing gown bearing his name in Latin, and the insignia of The Nations: "The British Lion, the American Eagle, the Chinese Dragon, and the French Rooster, or Chandelier."