

*When Society First Took a Bath**

THINK of an America without bathtubs! And you would not have to think very far back. Indispensable as we now regard it, the bathtub in which one could get "wett all over at once" has been in fairly common use scarcely a full century; in some parts of the country, indeed, the bathtub era falls well short of the century mark. The supremacy of washbowl and pitcher yielded but slowly to the vogue for new-fangled "contraptions"; there was much obstructive prejudice to overcome. Even after popular opinion in Philadelphia, Boston and New York grudgingly accepted the bathtub as an accessory of respectability, the "Saturday night" inhibition often restricted its use to weekly ablutions. Not forty years ago, one good woman in Philadelphia, whose family had just met with "unexpected financial prosperity" and moved into a fashionable city neighbourhood to a house with *two* bathrooms, told an admiring visitor she was so excited about the unwonted bathing splendour and convenience she could hardly wait for Saturday nights to come round! Later still, a Philadelphia family of high social standing and two bathrooms decided they needed only one of them; the daughters kept their ballgowns, laid out full length, in the upstairs bathtub!

All this may be humiliating to cleanliness-boosters who like to proclaim the U. S. A. the bathtubbiest country in the world, and would fain boast a long, honourable past for that present distinction. But it will temper pride and beget livelier thankfulness for bath

* The author desires to acknowledge his obligations to *The American Hôtel*, Jefferson Williamson, Knopf, 1930; *Not So Long Ago*, Cecil Drinker, M.D., Oxford Univ. Press, 1937; *Rats, Lice and History*, Hans Zinsser, Little, Brown & Co., 1935; *Devils, Drugs and Doctors*, Howard W. Haggard, M.D., Harpers', 1929; *St. George Tucker; Citizen of No Mean City*, Mary Haldane Coleman, Dietz Press, 1938; Helen Uner Price in *National Historical Magazine*, June, 1940, and sundry diaries and early books of travel: also to Joseph Carson, Edward Carey Gardiner, Dr. Francis R. Packard, Edward Robins, Lawrence J. Morris, Richard H. Shryock, Dayton Voorhees, E. Milby Burton, of the Charleston Museum, William Sumner Appleton, of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Clarence S. Brigham, of the American Antiquarian Society, Miss Elizabeth C. Litsinger, of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, all of whom furnished valuable data, and to Berthold A. Sorby, of the New York Public Library, who called attention to many useful references.

and shower blessings if we recall the trials and tribulations through which we have reached our current state of grace as the best-washed nation on earth. This compliment the London *Times* paid several years ago, when it published a discursive analysis of cleanliness statistics, giving America first place, Japan second, and England third.

England fell to third rank—notwithstanding proverbial British solicitude for bathing—largely on the basis of bathtub and shower distribution. Anyone who has had to face the ordeal of a clammy hat-bath (filled over night) on a chill November morning, or go unbathed, will give a sympathetic chuckle at England's award to *third* place. Recollections of old English country houses with one or, perhaps, two baths at most; the matutinal wait for a shy little housemaid's or a valet's knock and summons, "Bath's ready, sir"; and then the hasty scramble in dressing gown and slippers to reach the distant bathroom before somebody else popped into it, make one endorse the slogan "a bath for every bedroom."

But England is heaven in the matter of baths compared to rural France or sundry other parts of the Continent, where getting a bath at any time, but especially in winter, is a real achievement, even now. *Par exemple*, a right reverend Monsignor, a chaplain in the first World War and billeted one winter in a French village, relates a ludicrous experience. He wanted a bath and addressed himself to the local *curé*. M. le *Curé* threw up his hands with a shocked "*Mon Dieu, en hiver!*" Then, remembering that all Britons were half-mad, he called his housekeeper to gratify this strange whim. A wine barrel sawed in half she placed near the kitchen fire. Into it, a dipperful at a time, she ladled water from a large cauldron. Taking the Scriptural injunction "watch and pray" quite literally, M. le *Curé* sat by with his breviary to superintend the performance. When the Monsignor stepped into the barrel and began to trickle the tepid water over himself with a sponge, the *curé* was convulsed. The Monsignor felt more respectable afterwards, anyhow. It was a bit more comfortable than some of the early morning baths of his Yorkshire boyhood days; he and his brother sat in tin hat-baths while a groom sprinkled them with cold water out of a big garden watering pot. The Monsignor's French bath recalls an anecdote recently recounted by a medical friend. During the first World War, the doughboys in his company had to bring him their letters to censor.

In one of them he was amazed to read 'the French had chain-stores, just the same as in America, only they all seemed to belong to a Mr. Bain who specialised in baths. Whenever you went into a village and found Mr. Bain's name over a door, you could always get a bath'!

In the face of inertia and prejudice, the initiative and perseverance it took to form our present bathing habits and build our national reputation for cleanliness, entitle the first promoters of bathtubs and showers to everlasting gratitude and respect. At the risk of being thought cranks, they did a patriotic service and eventually made society bath-minded. Incidentally, when American society first really took a bath is not merely a matter of academic interest; the whole situation is full of intimate humour.

As early as the seventeenth century folk of the "better sort" went to "take the waters" at "baths." New England had its springs and wells that attracted favourable attention; so had Maryland and Virginia, before the last of the Stuarts ascended the throne. In Pennsylvania, the springs in Chester County and Bucks drew their clientèle of fashionable Philadelphia visitors as early as the second decade of the eighteenth century. A little later, certain seaside places on the Jersey Coast became the objectives of brief holiday visits for those Philadelphians who fancied salt air and sea bathing, for there were, to be sure, a few hardy souls who liked to swim in rivers or bathe in the surf, if the water was right, and the air was right, and the sun shone brightly. If we judge by the bulk of written or printed evidence of the period, the main object in swimming was *exercise* (highly approved by B. Franklin); resulting cleanness, a secondary consideration (when considered at all), was incidental. Perhaps we ought rather to say it was often *accidental*, if we assume the element of "intention."

All this while, visitors to the inland spas almost invariably confined their "taking the waters" to drinking copiously (with Spartan resolution if the "waters" were nasty); bathing externally was "a horse of another colour" and needed some exceptional urge. To the average person in good health an all-over bath was not at all a necessity, not even a desideratum. He considered a visit to one of the advertised springs or bathing places an occasional lark, to be attended by sundry diversions and amusements and, of course, en-

ting food and drink; he was quite ready to accept the old Roman idea of concomitant entertainment, take in the side shows, consume the food and drinkables, and then generally omitted the bath! It makes one think of the old couplet,

“Mother, may I go in to swim?”

“Yes, my darling daughter.

Hang your clothes on a hickory limb,

But don’t go near the water!”

A few sybaritic voluptuaries might, at sufficient intervals, indulge in the extreme luxury of an all-over bath, but it was not a thing to be mentioned any more than it would be nowadays for a person to boast of bathing in a tubful of milk or champagne. A bath might, indeed, be a real punishment—like the wetting administered scolds in the ducking-stool, or “keel-hauling” refractory sailors; again, it might be an inconvenient penance prescribed by the family doctor. Although, perhaps, Benjamin Franklin’s famous copper slipper-bath that he imported from France was not exactly a penitential device, the philosopher frequented it to allay a disorder of his increasing age. Being eminently practical-minded, he rigged up a bookrack on the instep of the slipper and assuaged the tedium of bathing by reading as he soaked. The receipted bills for his bath thermometers are still preserved in Philadelphia in the library of the American Philosophical Society. While he was sitting in a similar slipper-bath, Charlotte Corday killed Marat, and Napoleon is pictured in a tub of the same kind.

Common indifference to complete synchronous ablution provokes sharp comment from Charles Brockden Brown, in the early nineteenth century (*vox clamantis in eremo*), in one of his notes to his translation of Volney’s book on American soil and climate, published in Philadelphia in 1804. Alluding to our hot summers, he speaks of the vast numbers who pass through a long life

amidst all these heats, clothed in cloth, flannel and black fur hats and lying on a feather bed at night, drinking nothing but wine and porter and eating strong meats three times a day, and never allowing water to touch any part of them but their extremities for a year together.

It makes one itch and swelter to think of it! Some of the more austere religionists viewed the bath as a frivolous amusement, a

sinful luxury; as such, it was a diversion for sober godly folk to eschew. Such a thing as our notion of a daily bath for the sake of comfort as well as cleanliness entered the heads of few. When Mary Baker Eddy, in *Science and Health*, wrote: "Washing should be only to keep the body clean, and this can be done with less than daily scrubbing the whole surface," she was voicing only a slightly belated antipathy to the bathtub.

Personal cleanliness in polite society, after all, has been a matter of varying standards through the ages. The Romans loved to bathe and were clean throughout nearly the whole social scale; only the lowest city rabble and the *pagani* were unwashed. In the Middle Ages, on the other hand, there was an accepted connection between dirt and holiness; vermin and sanctity were by no means strangers, witness the hegira of "inhabitants" that crawled out of St. Thomas à Becket's clothing after his murder. According to the chronicler:

The vermin boiled over like water in a simmering cauldron, and the onlookers burst into alternate weeping and laughter.

The "odour of sanctity" must have been a sickening stench.¹ Louis XIV, although he hated it, had to use strong scent on his handkerchiefs because the great ladies and gentlemen of his Court were definitely malodorous, thanks to their dislike of soap and water; they considered Madame eccentric because she liked to bathe. Madame de Sevigné, writing to her daughter, notes the "curious fact" that "we wash our hands, but never wash our feet"! In the reign of Louis XV, we know that the courtiers had an ill-developed ablutionary sense, to say the least.

In seventeenth-century France, England and America, the louse, who flourishes only where there is personal uncleanness, though not exactly a cherished pet, was a recognised member of the social system. Shakespeare probably voices the limit of easy-going tolerance when he makes Sir Hugh Evans say,

It is a familiar beast of man and signifies love.

¹ During the Middle Ages and Renaissance there were bathing and swimming opportunities aplenty, public or otherwise accessible; opposition from the Church arose, not from any ecclesiastical approbation of uncleanness *per se*, but from the opinion (not altogether unjustified) that the usual bathing facilities and practices were accessory to immorality. The annals of ceremonial ablutions disclose appalling indifference and ignorance with respect to sanatory considerations.

Ordinarily M. *le Pou* incurred active disapprobation. Samuel Pepys complains that he had to go to his Westminster barber's "to have my Periwigg he lately made me cleansed of its nits, which vexed me cruelly that he should have put such a thing into my hands." When George Washington copied his "Rules of Civility" in his fourteenth year (that was in 1746), he wrote, "Kill no vermin, as Fleas, lice, tics, etc. in the sight of others."

Later in the eighteenth century, when ladies of quality wore their hair dressed over towering "drums," and often kept their coiffures in place for four or five days on end, and even longer—both because of the scarcity of hairdressers, and also the time, labour and expense involved—they now and again complained in hot weather of "rancid heads," and small wonder, smeared with pomatum and grease as their pates were. Small wonder, either, that their scalps beneath these lofty confections of greased hair and ribbons often itched agonisingly so that they sought relief by inserting silver louse-scratchers—very like short meat-skewers; they occasionally turn up in antique shops, one of the "elegancies of uncleanness"—and pursuing the unwelcome guests. In France, there was a precise etiquette of scratching. Reboux, describing the education of a princess of France in the middle of the seventeenth century, writes,

One had carefully taught the young princess that it was bad manners to scratch when one did it by habit and not by necessity, and that it was improper to take lice or fleas or other vermin by the neck to kill them in company, except in the most intimate circles.

If French princesses of the blood royal were thus minutely instructed before whom it was or was not permissible to hunt and kill lice, we may be sure of two things—elsewhere in exalted society there were codes of louse-etiquette also, and there were lice to hunt and kill. The closed season was presumably short and intermittent.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the louse was taboo in the "highest circles" and had been relegated to the polls of the "lower orders." Whenever redemptioners or other bound servants, white or black, entered the family's service, Elizabeth Drinker, of Philadelphia, notes in her *Diary* the pains she was at to have them scrubbed and disinfected, and their clothing burned if necessary. Here is a sample entry, in October, 1794:

We discover'd a day or two ago, that black Scipio had contracted acquaintance while in Jail, that was realy too disgusting to be easy under . . . Sall, after a strict scruting found three, which was three too many to be born with, the difficulty was, he had no change of raiment, linnen excepted, I had him strip'd, and wash'd from stem to stem, in a tub warm Soap suds, his head well lathered and when rinc'd clean, pour'd a quantity spirits over it, then dress'd him in Girl's cloaths, 'till his own could be scalded &c, he appear'd rather diverted, than displeas'd.

Rum infused with larkspur was a valued exterminant, and larkspur used to be in demand on Southern plantations to rout "boogers" from the heads of the blacks.

M. *le Pou* doesn't like soap and water. Had there been sufficient bathing, he wouldn't have been as much in evidence at the end of the eighteenth century as he was, even among humbler folk. Unpleasant as it may be to admit it, it is undeniably true that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many highly-respected persons were definitely untidy, or worse, and had at least casual acquaintance with objectionable parasites. This would not have been so had society in general taken bathing more seriously.

The impetus towards better standards of cleanliness had mixed origins. There were the owners of springs or wells, to which, rightly or wrongly, valuable medicinal properties were attributed; they tried to exploit the waters for profit and offered various attractions to draw the public thither. There were progressive individuals, or sometimes communities, who took advantage of natural local conditions favourable for swimming to establish baths and showers, more or less as a seasonal amusement but with quasi-cleanliness intent. And there were fastidious persons who always looked with favour on bathing and, being blessed with inventive ingenuity and initiative, from the mid-eighteenth century onward they made independent efforts to contrive for themselves and their families suitable bathing facilities in advance of the customary "inadequacies" of their day. Their stimulating example was not wholly lost on the communities in which they lived, although it seems to have taken an unduly long time for their support of the "gospel of soap and water" to make a measurable public impression.

One of the earliest instances of stressing the desirability of really bathing at medicinal springs occurred in 1765, when Bathtown or Bath, in the Northern Liberties of Philadelphia, attracted some attention. As already pointed out, people were ready enough to *drink*

the waters; to *bathe* in them, the public had to be enticed by the bait of food and entertainment, and there was always the likelihood of their taking the bait and not the bath. John White, "living near the new Bath," advertised that he humbly proposed, with his wife's assistance, "to accommodate the ladies and gentlemen with breakfasting on the best tea, coffee, cream, etc., which articles may also be had in the afternoon." After mentioning some kind of Turkish bath and noting other attractions, mostly of non-aquatic nature, however, he hopes the "salutary purposes which the founder intended" (which meant actually *bathing*) would now be "effected." The founder was that enlightened and public-spirited physician, Dr. John Kearsley. One should add that tradition says William Penn knew of the spring and had some notion of establishing a bath there. One more point, that, to the score of Penn's wise vision.

Despite the well-meant efforts to make Philadelphians bathe, Bathtown seems to have enjoyed only a passing vogue. For that degree of cleanliness indispensable to ordinary decency, society obstinately clung to washbowl and pitcher. People of means and a taste for elegance often had Nanking china bathtubs—large round affairs, about twenty-one inches in diameter, with straight or slightly inward-sloping sides, and about six or seven inches deep—like that of Dr. William Smith, the first Provost of the University of Pennsylvania. These handsome blue and white porcelain bathtubs, raised on low wooden stands, about eighteen or nineteen inches high, permitted considerably more splashing than an ordinary washbowl on a much higher washstand. Modern antique hunters sometimes imagine they were intended for exceptionally capacious punch receptacles, for goldfish, or else for jardinières—the writer has seen them used for the latter purpose—but they were really the most luxurious of the bedroom appointments for bathing in that day. People still living remember them as bedroom accessories in their Philadelphia childhood homes. Really cleanly, fastidious persons mastered an adroit washcloth and bowl technique. There were adepts in this technique surviving well into the present century. To one such old lady—she was very clean but abhorred bathtubs and never got into one—an irreverent member of the younger generation suggested giving an ink eraser for a Christmas present as a possibly useful toilet adjunct.

Trenton had a public bath as early as 1771 for, when the Drinkers were there on a visit from Philadelphia, Elizabeth writes in her *Diary*:

June 30, 1771: First day; . . . H. D. went into the Bath this morn^g. . . S. Merriott Sen. Molly Hall, Anna Humber; and Self, went this Afternoon into y^e Bath, I found the shock much greater than I expected; . . .

July 1: . . . took a ride this Morn^g. to y^e Bath, had not courage to go in.

By July 4th, however, she had screwed up her courage to the sticking point for "at 11 o'clock I went into y^e Bath; with Fear and trembling, but felt cleaver² after it." Public baths at this time, whether swimming, plunge or shower, apparently were open only during warm or mild weather, as we see by an announcement in the New York *Royal Gazette*, April 18, 1778:

Bathing Machine, Upon the plan of those used at Margate, and other Watering-places in England, is to be established on the North River near Vauxhall by June 1. The subscription price is a guinea a season, or five shillings a bath. . . . It is to be open from June 1 to the end of September from 6 A.M. until 12 noon.

The "Bathing Machine, Upon the plan of those used at Margate," finally got started two months late. It is not recorded how New Yorkers took to it. We may be thankful the fashion didn't continue indefinitely and become national.

By 1794, the vogue for summer "bathing" as a frolic had grown apace amongst New Yorkers. In his *Travels*, Henry Wansey records what was evidently the forerunner of Coney Island:

June 29. I made another excursion into Long Island, with a gentleman of New York; we crossed at nine in the morning, at Brooklyn Ferry, with our horses, and rode through Flat Bush to Gravesend, near the Narrows, where there is a beautiful view of the sea and all the shipping entering the harbour. A Mr. Bailey, of New York, has just built a very handsome tea-drinking pleasure house, to accommodate parties who come hither from all the neighbouring ports; . . . it seems parties are made here from thirty or forty miles distance, in the Summer time. . . . So much company resort to this pleasant island on each fine Sunday, from New York and other places, as to keep four large ferry boats, holding twenty persons each, in constant employ.

The expressed intention of Mr. Bailey "also to have bathing-machines, and several other species of entertainment," as well as

² This "v" is correct, not a misprint for "n." "Cleaver" was her way of spelling "clever." She would not have admitted feeling "cleaner." "Clever" was a rather favourite Quaker word, and when Mrs. Drinker said she felt "clever," she meant "bucked up."

the "handsome tea-drinking pleasure house," however, would seem to indicate that the holiday-makers still felt distinct hesitancy about really going into the water and getting wet without the inducement of a contraption (the "other species of entertainment" thrown in for good measure) to make the unwonted occasion a more thrilling adventure. Bathing, for the sake of the bath, still lacked the element of spontaneous enthusiasm.

Equally considerate of the prevalent "hydrophobia," and equally diplomatic in promising additional enticements to lure the public so that the obligation to bathe should not be too pressing, was the advertisement of the Harrogate waters and baths in the Philadelphia papers of 1784. The obliging Boniface who kept the inn at Harrogate (then about four miles outside the city) praised the properties of the waters, duly attested by the most eminent physicians; mentioned the "houses erected over the Harrogate waters" with "two shower baths and two dressing rooms" and also, at "the Chalybeate spring," the "convenient bath for plunging or swimming"; but he laid especial emphasis of both space and verbiage on the garden, which "is in excellent order, and additional improvements made to render it agreeable and pleasant," and the fact that he "is determined to keep the best of liquors of all kinds." Likewise, the type didn't let the reader forget that "breakfasts, dinners, tea, coffee and fruits of all kinds may be had at the shortest notice, and also excellent accommodations for boarding and lodging." Harrogate eventually became popular as a public garden, numbering frequent concerts and exhibitions among its attractions.

That people were gradually becoming bath-minded, or at least bath-conscious, appears from a letter John Jones wrote Franklin in April, 1785, seeking the illustrious Doctor's advice about what was evidently a contemplated business venture. Jones had "long entertained a high opinion of the utility of bathing" and was "desirous of seeing the practice of it brought into general use in this country." He intended to have "a building erected where the different kinds of baths," including Russian vapour baths, might be "commodiously united"; he hoped to have Franklin's suggestions about plan and other practical details before proceeding. Another evidence of dawning bath-consciousness crops up in such co-operative community efforts as that mentioned by Elizabeth Drinker, on a visit to Down-

ingtown, in Pennsylvania, in September, 1798. A bath house had been built "by a subscription in this neighbourhood." The bath house was locked, but Mrs. Drinker "could discern through the key-hole, the Bath, the Pump &c."

During the last two decades of the eighteenth century, enough public baths came into being to show that at least the idea of bathing, *versus* total dependence on washbowl and pitcher, had taken root, however infrequently the more progressive members of the community might practise it. Besides the various baths and gardens established in Philadelphia—then the wealthiest and most luxurious as well as the most conservative city in the country—there were noteworthy bathing opportunities in New York, then, as always, forward-looking. In 1782, Henry Ludlam advertised a "bathing house for the use of ladies which he has erected in his yard on the North River, adjoining Powles Hook Ferry." In 1792, Nicholas Denise announces that he

has just established, though at great expence and under M. Boucher's directions, a very convenient Bathing House, having eight rooms, in every one of which Baths may be had with either fresh, salt, or warm Water

This seems to be the first instance of warm water at a public bath. In 1797, Abel S. Fisher opened a "Tea Garden and Bathing House," where also there were warm and cold, salt and fresh, baths. Bathing, however, still had to be assiduously advertised.

The pioneers of bathing *at home* contrived divers ingenious expedients to secure the occasional luxury of a real bath. However clumsy, inadequate and inconvenient we should now consider their devices, we owe them gratitude for their initiative and the example they set. So far as we know, they were all persons of acknowledged position and anything they might do was bound ultimately to have weight with public opinion. In striving to gratify their own personal desires for cleanliness, they set a soap and water fashion that eventually benefitted all ranks of society. The earliest of these domestic equipments date from the latter part of the eighteenth century.

At Rose Hill Manor, near Frederick, in Maryland, the home of Governor Thomas Johnson from 1794 to 1819, is what is said to be the first bathtub in the state. A great stone bason, about eight by five feet, and four feet deep, stands in a little stone house at one side

of the main dwelling. This room—for it is really nothing more—was heated by charcoal stoves. Tradition says that on Monday mornings the slaves filled the tub with water and then let it temper in the heat of the stoves till Saturday night, when the Governor took his bath.

Another early garden bathhouse the Honourable St. George Tucker devised at his home in Williamsburg about 1796.

Like Thomas Jefferson, with whom he corresponded frequently, he was always inventing mechanical contrivances of every sort. He turned the little dairy house by the well in the Tucker House yard into a bathroom far surpassing in luxury anything of which Williamsburg could boast for the next hundred years.

Beside the well house, close to the converted dairy, a channelled stone was raised on two posts. Water from the well buckets was poured into the hollowed stone and ran thence by a lead pipe, which divided in two and poured into each of the two copper bathtubs in the old dairy. These coffin-shaped copper tubs were raised from the floor and there was room enough under each to insert two or three braziers to warm the water. A great-grandson of St. George Tucker, now living in the house, distinctly remembers at least one of the braziers, and also the lead pipe, bits of which he abstracted as a lad to make shot for his “slappy.” We constantly encounter reticence and timidity amongst the first feminine bathtub bathers. Mrs. St. George Tucker was no exception. Henry Tucker, writing to his father (then away from home) in June, 1796, says: “Mama has taken a bath and enjoyed it very much though at first she was quite frightened.”

It was evidently deemed the proper thing to have the bath in a small separate building outside the house. Taking a tub bath was a nasty, splashy business and would only mess up the tidy rooms of the house. Besides, when there was no room in the house provided for them, the bathtub contrivances would have been unsightly. And then there was the lack of piping or drainage to get rid of the water afterwards. In 1796, at The Highlands, in the Whitemarsh Valley, Anthony Morris built a beautiful octagonal spring and bathhouse. The “bathing room” is on the upper floor and has a handsomely-executed fireplace and other woodwork. The early tradition of detached bathhouses in the garden, and the inconvenience and unsightliness likely to be occasioned in the house by a tub, probably had something to do with the feeling that seems unquestionably to have

existed later, when there was no real reason for it—namely, that it was *infra dig.* to have a bathtub in the house, not quite nice, and that really respectable people did not do it. At any rate, at or about the time that Nicholas Biddle was making his 1830 addition to Andalusia, he built a separate bathhouse about sixty feet away from the kitchen wing. He then procured from Italy a deep white marble bathtub, about the size of a generous horse trough, and much like an old Roman sarcophagus in appearance. When he wished a bath, the servants carried out pails of hot water and filled the sarcophagus. It is now in the garden and makes an ideal abode for goldfish.

Old Philadelphia diaries, account books and letters afford many enlightening details about eighteenth-century bathing habits and, as Philadelphia was the wealthiest and most luxurious Colonial metropolis, it had the best of whatever there was. To Joseph Carson, merchant and shipowner, belongs the credit for having the first shower bath on record in Philadelphia. On December 23, 1790, he paid four pounds, fifteen shillings for it. Whether he had it put up outside his house or installed within is not chronicled. We have more light on the shower-bath experiences of the Drinker family. They were progressive folk as well as bath-minded and, in 1798, they had a shower bath set up in the backyard of their town house. On July 31, 1798, Elizabeth Drinker writes in her *Diary*:

Nancy pulled the string of y^e Shower bath again this even^g. she seems better reconciled to it.—y^e water has stood some hours in the Yard, which alters the property much, she goes under y^e bath in a single gown and an Oyl cloath cap,—her maid Patience and our Sally went into the bath box together, used y^e same water with a little added to it—it was a fine frolick for them. . . .

Although the shower was installed in 1798, it was not until July 1, 1799, that Mrs. Drinker herself became “reconciled” to it and conquered her timidity. On that date she inscribes in her *Diary*:

Nancy came here this even^g. she and self went into the Shower bath. I bore it better than I expected, not having been wett all over at once, for 28 years past.

A shower bath installed in the Pennsylvania Hospital about the same time was supposed to have an especially beneficial effect upon insane patients. In structure, the shower bath of the late eighteenth century apparently resembled a modern telephone booth. Some seem to have been placed in old Boston houses about this period. (The

Bostonians evidently did not put them in the backyard as the Drinkers did.) The bather entered and closed the door, while an assistant outside mounted a stepladder and poured water into a sieve-like receptacle on top. (The Drinker shower had a chain to pull that released the water from the overhead cullender.) The water ran out through a hole in the bottom of the shower box and into another receptacle put there to catch it. The idea of water dribbling from an overhead channel or box on the bather was not new—old illustrations show that the Swiss had such contrivances in the sixteenth century—but the enclosing box was a modern improvement that ensured privacy to the bather and kept the sloppiness of the operation within bounds.

What really gave a marked impulse to the spread of bathing habits among the more modern-minded element of the community was the appearance, about the turn of the century, of “bathing tubs” and, soon afterwards, the establishment of fairly adequate municipal water systems in the different cities of the Eastern Seaboard. The “bathing tubs” were elongated ovals in shape, about seven feet long by two-and-a-half feet wide, made of wooden staves like the old-fashioned round washtubs, and had one end brought up in a high arch—the whole effect rather suggestive of a mummy case. The Drinkers bought one of these in 1803 and often lent it to “neighbours who had illness in their homes.” For this wooden creation, “lined with tin and painted . . . with Castors under y^e bottom and a brass lock to let out the water,” they paid \$17.00.

On January 27, 1801, Philadelphia’s municipal water supply was turned on—other cities got piped water at subsequent intervals—and one of the French *émigrés*, Joseph Simon by name, opened a public bathhouse, near Third and Arch Streets, where his patrons could bathe in permanently fixed bathtubs equipped with running water and drains. It is encouraging to know that he had sufficient custom to continue his enterprise for more than twenty years, when he retired with a competency and sold out his baths to a successor. His customers, however, were not always frequent in their attendance. Mrs. Drinker says, in July, 1806:

My husband has been twice in the french man’s bath and William once this Summer—It is a little more expensive but much less trouble for the men, than getting it [the “bathing tub”] ready at home. . . .

For economy of time and labour, the "bathing tubs" at home sometimes got used at one filling by a succession of bathers. To quote Elizabeth Drinker once more, on August 6, 1806, she chronicles:

I went into a warm bath this afternoon, H. D. [Mr. Drinker] after me, because he was going out, Lydia and Patience [the maids] went into y^e same bath after him, and John [manservant] after them—If so many bodies were censed, I think the water must have been foul enough [Bacterial apprehension still non-existent!]

When Robert Sutcliff, an English Friend, landed in New York at the end of July, 1804, the very next day his friends took him to see a recently established public bathhouse as one of the notable "sights" of the town. In his journal, under date of "7th Month 31st, 1804," he writes:

This morning I was conducted by my companions to one of the Public Baths kept in the city of New York. These Baths are upon a plan I had not seen before. On each side of a long and spacious passage, is a range of small rooms, in each of which is a Bath sufficient to accommodate one person; with suitable Conveniences for dressing and undressing. On the side of each Bath are two brass cocks, the one furnishing warm and the other cold water; so that the bather may have the water at what temperature he pleases. There is also a valve, by means of which, if there is more than is pleasant, he may let part of it out. Some of these Baths are made of white marble; and are so constructed that a person may lie down or sit in them. So grateful it is to remain a considerable time in them, in the warm season of the year, that it is a common practice for bathers to take books [detestable habit] with them to read while they thus indulge themselves in the Bath. There are also Baths in a different part of the house set apart for females.

Note that Sutcliff—probably taking his cue from his American friends—speaks of bathtub bathing as a luxury, an "indulgence," an agreeable warm weather diversion, not a daily necessity, the year round.

Even with well-appointed public bathhouses and running city water readily available, the idea of frequently getting "wett all over at once" for the sake of cleanliness, and the satisfaction of feeling well-groomed, seems to have taken hold of only a small minority of the public. The "man in the street," and also plenty who would resent that classification, had to be urged and coaxed to bathe. Taking a bath ought to have a pretext or an excuse. On June 1, 1824, in a newspaper advertisement trumpeting the innovation as the last word in modern luxury and elegance (but stressing luxury), the pro-

prietor of the Worcester [Massachusetts] Coffee House plainly implies this reluctant attitude when he

INFORMS his Friends and the Public generally, that he has recently added to the former *Convenience* of his Establishment, a commodious BATHING HOUSE, in separate apartments for Ladies and Gentlemen, where Visitors may be at any time accommodated with WARM AND COLD BATHS, in a perfectly retired and convenient situation. Pure Spring Water is now brought through Pipes, for the use of his House and to supply his Baths; this Luxury, in a hot and dusty season, together with an ever-flowing SODA FOUNTAIN, the choicest of Liquors, a well filled Larder, and indefatigable endeavors to render his House pleasant and agreeable to his Customers, he flatters himself will insure a continuance of Public Patronage.

The "ever-flowing SODA FOUNTAIN" is a blandishment to cajole visitors into trying the novelty; the "perfectly retired and convenient situation" (probably in the basement, where the earliest hotel bathing arrangements were usually placed) suggests the furtiveness of a speakeasy, where the surreptitious bather will not be found out and exposed to ridicule as an extravagant sybarite and a sissy, or one of the "gentler sex" accused of "indelicacy" in letting it be discovered that she was taking a bath.

About five years later, when the epoch-making Tremont House in Boston opened its doors to the public, October 16, 1829, there was no deprecatory tone in the announcement that among its "numerous superiorities" there were eight "bathing rooms" in the basement "adjoining the housekeeper's apartments, the laundry and the larder." The Tremont was the pioneer "luxury hotel" of America, in fact, the first in the world. Educational intent as well as business instinct actuated its promoters, and they saw no occasion to adopt an apologetic attitude about their basement bathing establishment. It was as good as any the most up-to-date plumbing skill could then compass; it was an important feature in the hitherto unknown policy of "luxury and maximum service to patrons" they were just inaugurating. Another of the Tremont's "superiorities" was that every bedroom had a washbowl and pitcher, and free soap! This, while one could still say of the country in general that

a few innkeepers . . . had a supply of bowls and pitchers and would send one up to a guest's room, with a supply of water, on request, but it seems to have been a service grudgingly granted. In most of the inns of that period the guest could wash himself before breakfast and at other times in the bar-room, or, if at a country inn, he could wash in the kitchen or at the backyard pump.³

³ Jefferson Williamson, *The American Hotel* (Knopf, 1930).

In May, 1836, when the Astor House in New York opened as the *dernier cri* in hotel luxury and splendour, it proclaimed with almost brazen effrontery its seventeen basement "bathing rooms" and two showers. The public was getting used to bathing announcements, even getting used to the occasional sight of bathtubs.

Little by little, forward-looking persons were overcoming the inertia about bathing and were installing bathtubs in their houses, in spite of the conventional semi-disapprobation of such gadgets. It is encouraging to know of the 401 baths in Philadelphia reported by the Watering Committee in 1823, but the names of the enlightened and courageous owners have not so far been discovered. The first private Philadelphia bathtub with attached plumbing of which we have definite record, Henry Carey, the publisher, installed in his town house in 1826. From about 1829 onwards, plumbers advertised bathtubs and shower baths, and presumably their advertisements met with some response, however limited. Many of these illustrated advertisements appear in the Philadelphia directories of the period.

If a tub bath was no longer to be reckoned in one of the four categories previously noted, nevertheless with most persons it was still infrequent enough to be counted something of an event. The comparatively few bathtubs so far installed in private dwellings and the convenience of public bathing establishments favoured such enterprises as the Philadelphia Baths that William Swaim, of "Panacea" repute, opened in 1828. The advertisement quotes Count Rumford's observations on the beneficial effects of bathing and cleanliness, and assures prospective patrons that there are

apartments for each of the sexes, having several and separate entrances; the best female attendance being provided for the service of the ladies . . . every provision has been made for shower bathing, so that the latter salutary application may be enjoyed at pleasure, by means of appropriate contrivances under the complete control of the individual who employs it.

A contemporary description, in equally highfalutin language, characteristic of the time, tells us that

the northern section, which comprises a double range of bathing rooms, an ample shower bath, and a suite of parlours, all well furnished, is appropriated exclusively to ladies; the southern section is for the accommodation of gentlemen. Here also are two ranges of bathing rooms, a bar room, and a reservoir, twenty-six feet by ten, in which the water is tempered by steam, and may be raised to the height of

six feet. . . . The bathing vessels [the writer means bathtubs], fifty in number, are composed either of Italian marble finely wrought, or copper ingeniously plated with Banca tin.

There was a swimming teacher in the "swimming room" to teach the "natatory art" in perfect security and "without hazard." With such "elegant" surroundings, it was becoming a fashionable fad to bathe. Swaim's baths prospered.

For his aid in bringing about the gradual change in public sentiment towards bathing, instead of dependence on washbowl and pitcher, Sylvester Graham—the Graham for whom bread and crackers are named—deserves grateful recognition. As early as 1830 he started his crusade for health reform, and insistence on frequent bathing—"in very warm water at least three times a week"—was one of the cardinal points of his programme to achieve his "*mens sana in corpore sano*" ideal for the American public. His efforts produced widespread effects; Graham organisations of one sort or another and Graham publications started up all over the country, and Graham principles and practices were thoroughly discussed. How timely was his advocacy of frequent bathing appears when the *Boston Moral Reformer*, in 1835, quotes a "young man of great promise" who enquires of the editor: "I have been in the habit during the past winter of taking a warm bath every three weeks. Is this too often to follow the year round?"⁴

About 1844—only two years after the appearance of the mythical "first American bathtub" in Cincinnati, according to the hoax perpetrated by Mr. Mencken—came the first private baths in hotels, destined to play an increasingly potent rôle in the programme of "luxury and maximum service" now being adopted by hotelkeepers throughout the country. About 1835 the Philadelphia Common Councils had tried to pass an ordinance prohibiting tub bathing between November 1 and March 15. In 1845, Boston had actually proscribed bathing in winter except upon medical advice, while Virginia, some time before, had imposed a tax of \$30.00 a year on every bathtub brought into the state, and up to almost the middle of the century popular opinion held it actually dangerous to bathe in a tub during the winter months. But by 1850, between the large city hotels and multiplying bathing establishments, aided all along by a

⁴ Richard H. Shryock in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XVIII (1931), 172.

rapidly developing system of the best plumbing in the world, for both public and domestic equipment, bathing came to be almost a craze.

To bathe was the smart thing to do. Those who didn't take a bath, at reasonable intervals at least, just weren't "in it." Baths of all kinds—Turkish, mud, galvanic, Russian, Swedish and what not—sprang into existence and were well patronised at all hours of the day and night. At many of the public baths, the old diverting etceteras were not forgotten—"one could get mint juleps to drink while sitting in a bathtub"—but they were now definitely minor considerations; the bath was the thing.

Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century—the discouraging ordeals and laborious mechanical inconveniences of bathing now things of the past—bathing had come into its own as a recognised social institution. Thanks to hotelkeepers, bathing-house proprietors, and skillful plumbers a fashion had been set. Society in general had at last taken a bath and daily bathing had become a cardinal virtue.

Philadelphia

HAROLD DONALDSON EBERLEIN