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108 North Third Street



BATHTUBS RARE IN U. S. 100 YEARS AGO

History of Bathing from Ancient Times Shows Ups and Downs; Details

Practically every modern hotel today has a bath for every room and cleanliness has become such a fetish in America that many modern homes are built with a bath for each bedroom. Yet it is only 100 years ago that Andrew Jackson had a crude tin tub removed from the White House so that the pioneers who had elected him would not be offended by this evidence of dandified living and condemn him as undemocratic.

This is one of the amusing and significant incidents of the history of bathing sketched in The Golden Book magazine by Leonard R. Baxter.

The White House tub, one of the first vessels in America definitely built for bathing, was simply an oversized wash basin to which water had to be carried and was installed by Mrs. Madison about 1810. It was not until 1842 that a wealthy resident of Cincinnati bowled over his neighbors by installing a stationary bathtub with plumbing, such as we know today. It was the first of its kind in America.

The fact is that the practice of bathing has waxed and waned throughout history, Miss Baxter points out. From a simple hygienic measure it has been carried to the point of vice. And for long periods it has been discarded entirely.

The Great Mogul who founded his empire in India, 1,500 years before Christ considered public baths as important as colleges in developing civilization, and he created them on a great scale. Egyptians practiced bathing regularly even before that era, and in Greece, Lyncurgus made himself famous as the first advocate of the cold bath when he forced his army of Spartans to plunge into the river each morning, the soldiers rubbing and pounding each other with wet sand in place of soap.

But in Rome bathing was carried to such an extent that it contributed to the downfall of the empire. Immense marble bathing palaces were erected, and citizens were known to spend six or eight hours a day lolling in hot water, being rubbed with scented oils and resting on steam tables. When the Huns arrived they found a decadent people, so softened by indulgence and luxury that they were unable to defend their capital.

The reaction from the Roman period carried civilization to the other extreme. The early Christians denounced bathing along with the other luxuries of their predecessors and the race passed into an age of filth and pestilence which affected all classes. Isabella of Spain, it is reported, took but two baths in all her life, and even 10 years ago there was but one bathroom in all of the miles of palace which formerly housed Catherine the Great of Russia.

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