

THE PUBLIC BATH

BY LEE HANCOCK

I FEEL," said Johan Stal, "like I'd just had a drink from the Fountain of Youth. I feel as though I could fly. Or as though I could lick Joe Louis in a boxing match. In short"—Johan lifted his arms skyward and stretched luxuriously—"I feel good all over."

Johan, an American youth of Finnish extraction who lives in Fairport, Ohio, had not been swallowing any of science's new miracle drugs. Nor had he just inherited a million dollars. He had simply taken a bath. Along with his sixteen-year-old sister, and his father and mother, he had gone to the public bathhouse and joined his neighbors in their bi-weekly ritual of the Finnish bath, or *Sauna*.

Of Fairport's several thousand inhabitants, a goodly number are of Finnish extraction. And wherever you find Finns, there you will find the Sauna. Here in America the Finns congregate in public baths. Back home in Finland there are some 550,000 gray, brown, or red cabins scattered all over the country. In them Finns of both sexes sit on wooden platforms next to blazing hot stoves. On top of the stoves are piles of stones. Next to the bathers

are several buckets of water. By throwing water over the stones, which have become white-hot from the heat of the stove, the bathers are able to revel in clouds of steam in temperatures which have been reported as unbelievably high as 190 degrees Fahrenheit. They beat one another with moistened birch twigs, to stimulate circulation; or scrub one another with a very stiff brush. After thoroughly cooking themselves, it is the custom for the bathers to go directly outside, sans clothes, and either roll in the snow or bathe in one of the lakes of Finland, that "thousand-laked land."

The Finns are lavish in praise of this custom. Sibelius, they say, went regularly to the bathhouse before composing his celebrated music. He found that the procedure inspired him. Finnish prowess in the Olympic games is held to be directly due to the Sauna. It keeps its devotees fit. Up until recent times Finnish women preferred to give birth to their babies in the steam rooms.

To Johan, as well as all Finnish followers of the Sauna, Americans, with their one-man tubs and habit

of locking the bathroom door, seem a lonely, somewhat anti-social lot.

MOST Swedes, who have a similar custom which they call the *Bastu*, feel the same way. One astute Swedish lady has pointed out that while an American can talk about taking a bath with the same casual indifference with which he describes the act of putting on his shoes, a Swede can't discuss the *Bastu* without getting enthusiastic.

In the cities of Sweden, provision for the *Bastu* type of bathing is connected with every swimming pool. But the little wooden bath-houses such as one sees in Finland also dot the landscape of Sweden.

Bastus are enjoyed in mixed company by families and close friends. It's frowned upon in Sweden to bathe *au naturel* with a casual acquaintance of the opposite sex. But if it's someone you've known for a long time and are on friendly terms with, it's quite all right. An ordinary *Bastu*, of the hut and stove variety, comfortably accommodates about six people. Three men and three women — of long-standing acquaintance, of course — make a congenial group.

Followers of the *Bastu* have the feeling that they've really accomplished something when they've gone through the routine of a Swedish bath. They claim it makes them feel as though they were born again. A young American reporter of Swedish ancestry avails himself

of the custom of his native country whenever possible.

"When I was a cub reporter at Marchfield, Oregon, [now Coos Bay]," he reminisced, "I used to go to the public baths all the time. Once I took a prize fighter with me, told him it was just what he needed to keep him fit. The bath was arranged with bleacher seats so that the higher you climbed the hotter it got in steam. My prize fighter friend keeled over at the fourth level and I had to carry him out. But then," the reporter concluded generously, "he wasn't a Swede."

Why are Americans so blasé about the business of bathing, while a goodly portion of the rest of the world is so enthusiastic? It can't be because Americans have more bathtubs than any other people in the world, which of course they do. They also have more automobiles. No one ever accuses the American of being casual about his car. Why should taking a bath alone, American style, be simply a somewhat boring social obligation, while the same act, with company, becomes a stimulating psychological experience?

ONE psychologist, pressed for an explanation, came up with this answer:

"The human body," he said, "is, generally speaking, a rather unlovely thing. Most of us either have too much flesh in the wrong places, or not enough in the right places.

We spend a good deal of time and money on clothes which camouflage this unhappy state of affairs. Subconsciously, most of us feel that people wouldn't even speak to us if they saw us in our natural state. The followers of the communal type of bathing get rid of this feeling. Through the whole ritual of the Sauna or the Bastu, which alternates between being stimulating and relaxing, they discover that their fellow bathers are, by and large, as unpretty as they are, and friendly besides. The mere fact that a representative section of the population will engage in friendly conversation with them while in a state of nudity probably raises their morale."

The Japanese find it hard to understand the American desire for privacy while bathing. Murasaki Jenkins, a Japanese war bride, now comfortably established in a Chicago apartment with her American husband, approves of everything in America except the bathing habits of its citizens.

"Back home," she says wistfully, "bath time was just about the nicest time there was. It was a time when the whole family was together. It was more—" she fumbled for the right word, "it was more friendly."

The Japanese, as any G.I. who has visited them can tell you, are the cleanest people in the world and the most gregarious as regards their bathing habits. A large, circular wooden tub is standard equipment in any Japanese home. One tub full

of exceedingly hot water serves the whole family. The father bathes first, then the sons. Then the women and girls. To the latter falls the job of cleaning out the tub.

This heavy usage of one tub of water becomes easier to understand when one learns that even members of the Japanese working classes often bathe two or three times a day. Further, Japanese don't really wash themselves in their tubs. They merely boil and soak, in water with temperatures as high as 120 or 130 degrees Fahrenheit. The real scrubbing, with *bran* bags and an extra bucket of water, takes place on a wooden platform next to the tub. In cold weather the Japanese take more baths than ever. It's a very good way to keep warm, always a problem in the barnlike and airy buildings of the Japanese.

As to the *bran* bags, Japanese of the old school don't use soap. They have heard that it makes the hair turn red, a belief also held by the ancient Gauls, who, having admiration for red hair, used soap for that very reason. The Japanese feel differently about it. Red is the color of the Japanese devil and they want no part of it.

Japan, too, has public baths, most of which cost only one or two cents per bath. No attempt is made to achieve privacy. Anyone who chooses can look through the latticed bars and watch the bathers.

It was the Romans, of course, who

set the precedent for the fancy type of communal bathing. Some two thousand years ago they turned baths into convivial gatherings that would make modern American cocktail parties seem tame by comparison. And they were cheap, too. In those days one could have quite a time in Rome for a quadran, or a quarter of a cent.

For that small sum one could, in addition to getting extremely clean, enjoy the company of the opposite sex and also a considerable amount of entertainment. One could play games, hear a favorite poet recite.

Ruins of those baths, found all over the Roman world, show them to have been magnificently constructed, with marble or mosaic floors, gilt bronze doors, and clerestory windows. Diocletian put 32,000 marble seats in the one he built. So beautifully fashioned were these baths that they have been an inspiration to designers of public buildings ever since. The Pennsylvania Station in New York, for instance, is, architecturally speaking, simply an up-to-date Roman bath.

TOWARDS the end of the Empire the goings-on in the baths of Rome reached such a peak that the Church Fathers issued stern admonitions. The bath, they said, was supposed to be taken for the purpose of getting clean, not for pleasure. By that time the prevalent custom of men and women bathing together had struck the early

Christians as leading to no good.

It was a point of view open to argument. Bastus were flourishing in Sweden and Saunas in Finland even then. The Norsemen point out that there has never been any indication that this practice has resulted in a lowering of moral standards in their countries. As to the idea of limiting the bath to the single function of cleansing the human body, Norsemen feel that's a sad misuse of time, roughly analogous to putting on formal evening clothes for a quiet evening at home. The idea of stepping into the bathroom alone, locking the door, removing one's clothes and immersing oneself in a tub of water for an indeterminate period of time, strikes the communal bather as a rather dull procedure. They point out that while it is possible that there are Americans who have a hilarious time performing this ritual in their lonely strongholds, they apparently never discuss it, thus practically nullifying whatever pleasure they get. A joy unshared is, after all, hardly a joy at all.

They're all for the free and easy comradeship of the public steam rooms, the friendly switching with the birch branches, the invigorating shock of the final cold plunge. There's nothing like it, they say. Americans may have 90 per cent of the bathtubs in the world, but they certainly don't have any such monopoly on the fun that can go with bathing.

Facing the Facts in Germany

By Freda Utley

CHINA was lost and the Korean war thrust upon us because a gang of Communist sympathizers and dumb "liberals" got their hands on the levers which control our public opinion and policy. Europe may be lost because the western powers are still letting passion and prejudice overrule reason, or because the American public is today as ignorant, or misinformed, about Germany as it used to be about China.

The realities of life in the "peoples' democracies" are too well known by now for the creation of another Yenan myth. However, in the case of Germany, the Kremlin has no need of such characters as Owen Lattimore, Stewart Service, John Patton Davies, Carter Vincent, Edgar Snow, E. C. Carter, and the rest of the band which served it so well in China, but has now fallen victim to "McCarthyism." All that is required to keep Europe disunited and defenseless is to pour a little oil on the smouldering embers of the fires of hatred, resentment, and distrust lit by Hitler's abominable crimes and by two world wars. In place of the Institute of Pacific Relations, Moscow now enjoys the aid

of such outfits as the Society for the Prevention of World War III, which propagates a Nazi theory in reverse (namely, that the German race, or nation, is innately wicked and aggressive, and constitutes a far greater menace than the Soviet Union or Communism). Since most people are afraid of being smeared as "pro-Nazi" if they raise their voices in favor of an enlightened and intelligent policy toward Germany, the Dictator of All the Russias can sit back and watch the apostles of race hatred and vengeance do a better job for him than the Communists are now capable of performing.

Like it or not, every sensible person knows that Europe cannot be defended unless the Germans are enlisted on our side. It stands to reason that this cannot be done so long as we continue to treat them as delinquents with inherited criminal tendencies requiring constant supervision and denied the rights and liberties which we ourselves enjoy. In a word, we must cease to apply either the old Roman adage of "woe to the vanquished," or the modern "totalitarian liberal" principle of guilt by heredity, if we are to create