

The Thrills of 1924, March 1, 1924

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“No, we don’t drink,” one sophisticated young debutante confessed frankly. “That is, we don’t drink much. Or you might put it that we don’t drink much often. I noticed in the first article of this series in which I suppose I’ll be quoted, the comment on the fact that women don’t drink or smoke while they’re gambling. Gracious no! Gambling is enough of a strain on the looks without that. I go to bed sometimes with my face just stiff, frozen into a horrid mask, after an evening at dice or poker. And I sleep with my teeth clenched and wake up with a pain at the back of my neck. I don’t know what I’ll look like by the time I’m thirty.

“The temptation to drink is after the excitement is over. There’s a fearful let-down then. Sunday evening’s a bad time and you can’t imagine the number of young women who proceed to get pie-eyed, or blotto, to use a still more elegant expression. Why last Sunday afternoon after we’d come in from the country club, we found—but no, I’ll talk generally but not specifically.

“For the most part though, we’re too fearfully concerned with our appearance to dissipate in that way.”

“The society girl is probably the one who suffers least,” one doctor who has offices in the Maison Blanche building and looks after the physical welfare of the upper ten, said. “That’s because she has a good physique to start out with and some supervision from her elders and a great deal from her own class. But even so, at the end of the season, she is such a physical wreck that she has to take to her bed to recover. She has danced herself into a state of absolute physical exhaustion and is so physically tired that her nerves are deadened.”

“Racing gets me more than anything else,” one middle aged woman with eyes that were like burnt coals, said. “I can’t keep away from the track and every day when the seventh race comes around, I have all the symptoms you read of in patent medicine advertisements. Every day I swear is going to be my last, but I’ve no strength of character left.”

Dr. Oscar Dowling, president of the board of health, contributed his statement on the subject. “The effect of such diversions as horse racing, roulette or poker on the health of women who indulge, is hard to determine,” he said. “Much depends on the individual, her temperament and physical inheritance.

“There are women, who season after season keep up a round of social engagements without visible effect. These fortunate women are endowed with a nervous system which correlates

activities with the least amount of worry or annoyance. They are the women probably who can order their lives as they please and in whose minds there is no conflict. But the others are in constant conflict with the environment, its pleasures as well as responsibilities. These belong in the category of neuropaths and they often develop 'nervous breakdown,' technically, neurasthenia.

"Neurasthenia has been called by Europeans, 'the American disease' mainly because the life of the American people has been conducive to its development. The worry and care of the modern woman, the inability to relax, in fact the almost total absence of any knowledge of how to relax is responsible for premature aging with all its attendant evils. The arteries harden, the heart dilates, the kidneys contract and in the years when she should be able to sit peacefully and watch life satisfactorily from the back row, she is stricken with disease. The social butterfly wears out her arteries and loses her looks if she leads a life that is too strenuous in the pursuit of pleasure."