



# New Year's Resolutions of the Past: Vices That Became Virtues

Virtues we now aspire to were once habits people vowed to quit

LOUIS ANSLOW

JAN 1, 2026



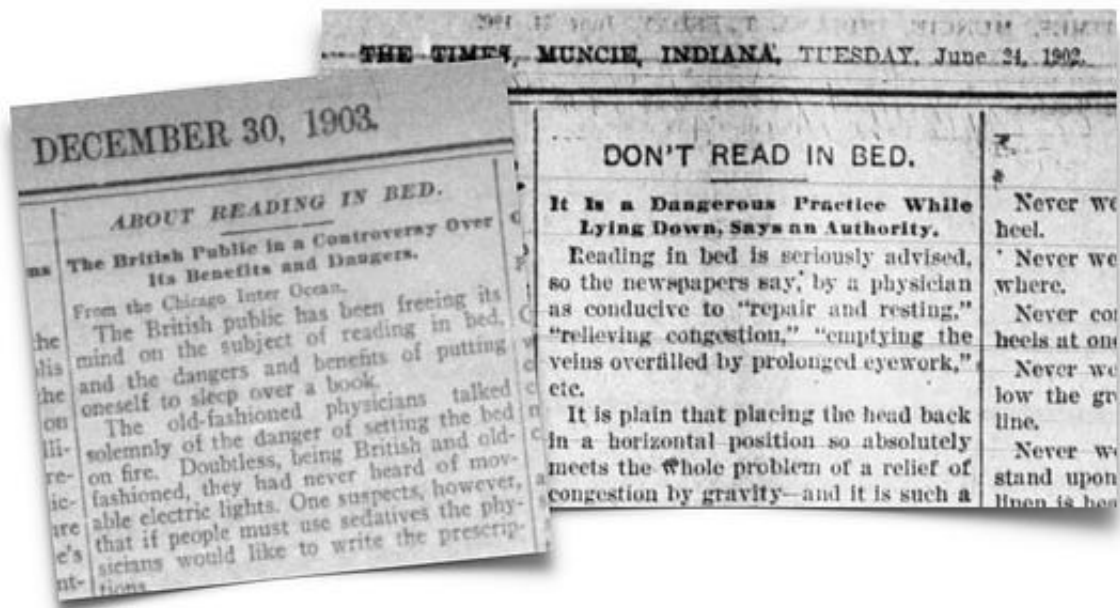
In centuries past things considered virtuous today; *reading*, *cycling*, listening to *radio* or playing *chess* were deemed by some as unhealthy, corrupting vices or a silly waste of time.

This begs the question: ***if today's analog age virtues were once seen as sins of modernity, are some resolutions set today inversions of those set in the past?***

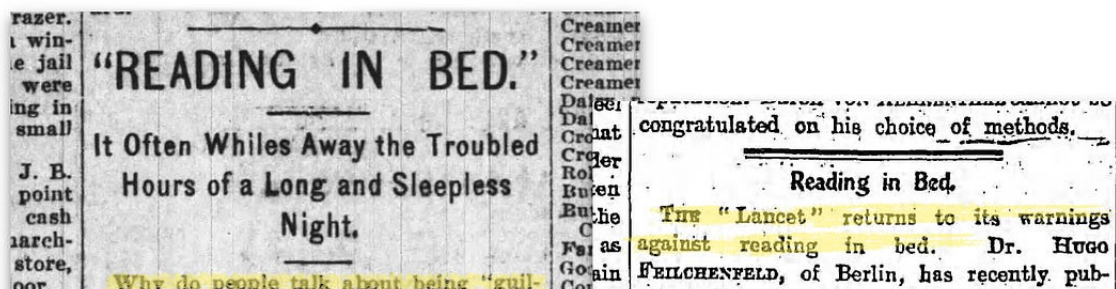
Judging by some of the dialog around them, it is a reasonable assumption:

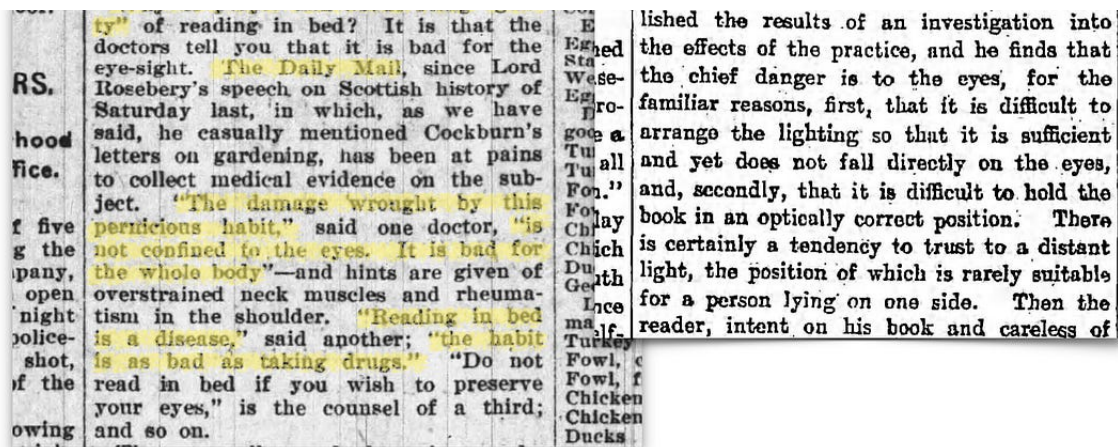
## DON'T READ IN BED

Reading in bed was once considered as degenerate and sleep sapping as bed bound smartphone scrolling, as books became abundant and affordable, they stopped being a status symbol and became a symbol of decadence...



In the late 19th and early 20th century newspapers and medical authorities would sound warnings about the practice having a negative impact on your eyes and sleep patterns... **"Why do people talk about being 'guilty' of reading in bed?"** asked the London Spectator in 1903, noting that medical authorities were sounding warnings - many of which it noted were quoted by *'The Daily Mail'* (yes [that](#) one)





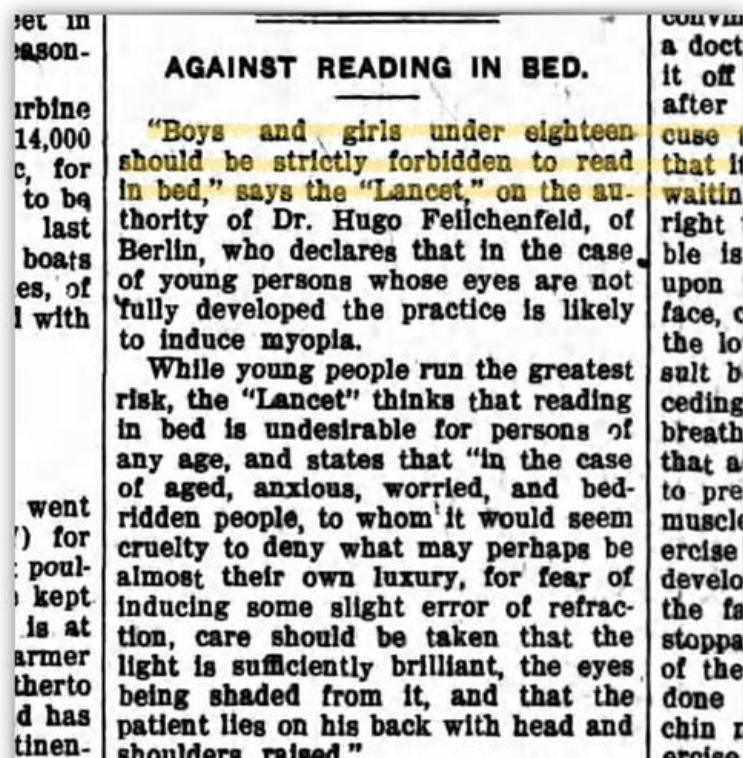
In 1908 the concerns were given renewed legitimacy when medical journal 'The Lancet' **weighed in** on the matter, repeating a warning it **first made** in 1888, even going so far as suggest 18+ age limit on the practice to protect eyes.



Pessimists Archive

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1908: the Lancet calls for 18 age limit on reading in bed





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some

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In 1950 the American Medical Association magazine [warned](#) not to read, as part of its rules of getting good sleep. It is an unfounded notion the [persists today](#), passed down the generations.

## CYCLE LESS

The bicycle boom of the 1890s would garner disapproval from a number of groups... while some physicians argued cycling was healthy others linked it to insanity, deformities of the spine and even a cause for appendicitis.

### *Bicycle Blamed for Appendicitis.*

*Washington Physician Claims Disease  
Is Result of Riding.*

**A** WASHINGTON physician says the bicycle is responsible for the prevalence of appendicitis at the present time. According to the doctor's theory the appendicitis era began with the introduction of the bicycle. Commenting on this idea, the Medical Record remarks:

### *IT SHORTENS LIFE.* *Insurance Companies Awake to the Dangers of Bicycle Riding.*

New York World.  
A man who applied for a life insurance policy to one of the biggest companies in the country was amazed last week when his application was rejected on the ground that he was suffering from albuminuria. "Mind, as with most other people, is

### **BICYCLE DISEASES.**

The doctors of England have what they call the "bicycle face," among their patrons. One of them describes it as an anxious, worn look, the skin pallid, with a gray cast of complexion. The English doctors attribute the "bicycle face" to the nervous strain put upon the rider, in keeping his balance. Of course that effort is constant, though it may not be conscious; and we all know that the nerve centers may be fearfully overtaxed and the person suffering from it be absolutely un-

In his mind, this disease was associated with indulgence in beer. He had been a total abstainer all his life. About the only thing he indulged in to excess was bicycle riding. When he made inquiries about the

...unconscious of the strain, never realizing that anything is the matter until he feels the stage of reaction or collapse coming on.

One [insurance company](#) even refused to insure bicycle riders, while one army recruitment office [rejected](#) applicants who were avid cyclists because it was assumed they had a weakened '*bicycle heart*.'

FRANCISCO: SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 3, 1898.



DAVID BOGER

# MANY MEN REJECTED FOR BICYCLE HEART.

The Disease Alarmingly Prevalent Among the Recruits.

Riders of the "Winged Wheel" Are Its Especial Quarry.

fect, immediate a murmur in the blood of the valve. The man of skin and tectis this knows that early victim. Pugilists, others who liable to be the heart ardently. laid low by heart" that name has mon it has silent stood condition hance compar have issued physicians dition of th who applies Chief Sur ment, who the United lners on th rejections said yester "It is tri

## REDUCE RADIO TIME

The rise of Radio in society was inevitably followed by handwringing and speculation about its possible downsides: dead birds, poor grades and sleep deprivation were just some of the unfounded concerns.



In 1938 it was **dubiously** blamed of mass panic after a War of the Words broadcast, a notion perpetuated by newspapers who felt threatened by the new medium.





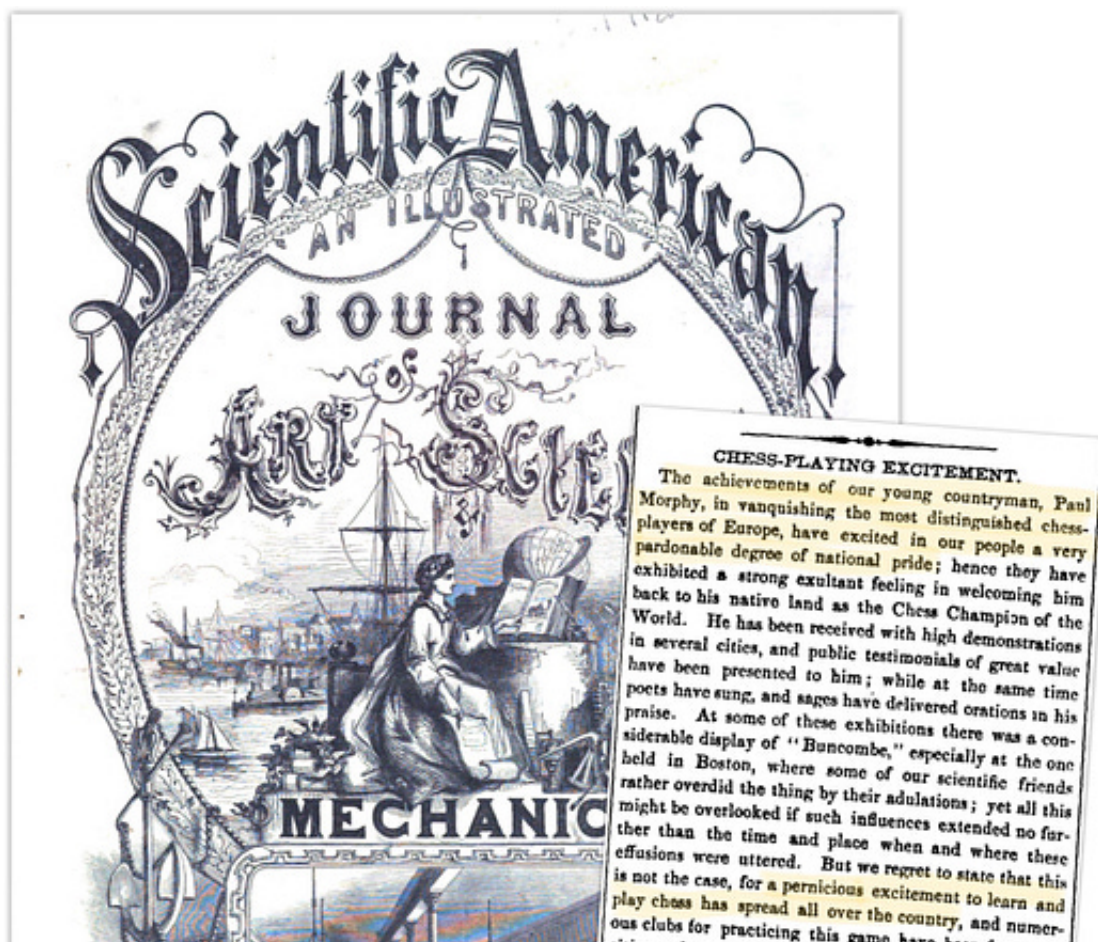
## STIRS TERROR THROUGH U.S.

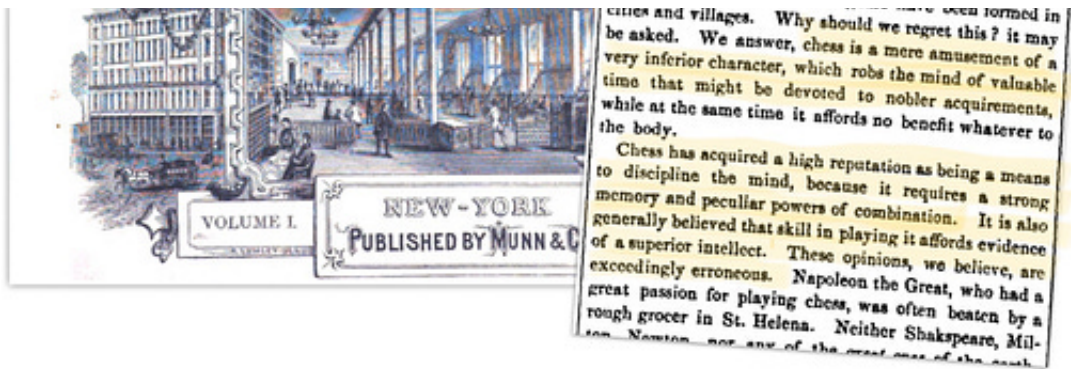
One preacher [declared](#) in 1943 that *“Persons who listen to the radio from dawn to dusk suffer from the disease “radio perpetuum”, a slow but sure softening of the brain”* - what we today call ‘brainrot.’

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## GIVE UP CHESS

In 1858 Paul Morphy [became](#) widely considered the world Chess champion, as a result national interest in the game boomed, leading to Scientific American weighing in on the matter opining: *“Chess is a mere amusement of a very inferior character, which robs the mind of valuable time”*

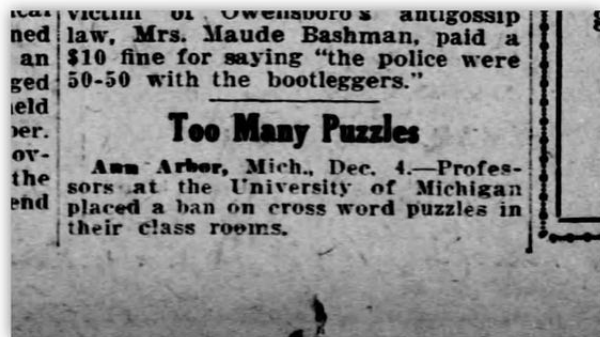




Paul Morphy's mental health would rapidly decline in the proceeding years, Chess was blamed by some for the deterioration, when other champions met similar fates there was [speculation](#) Chess might have a negative impact on players more generally.

## CUT DOWN ON CROSSWORDS

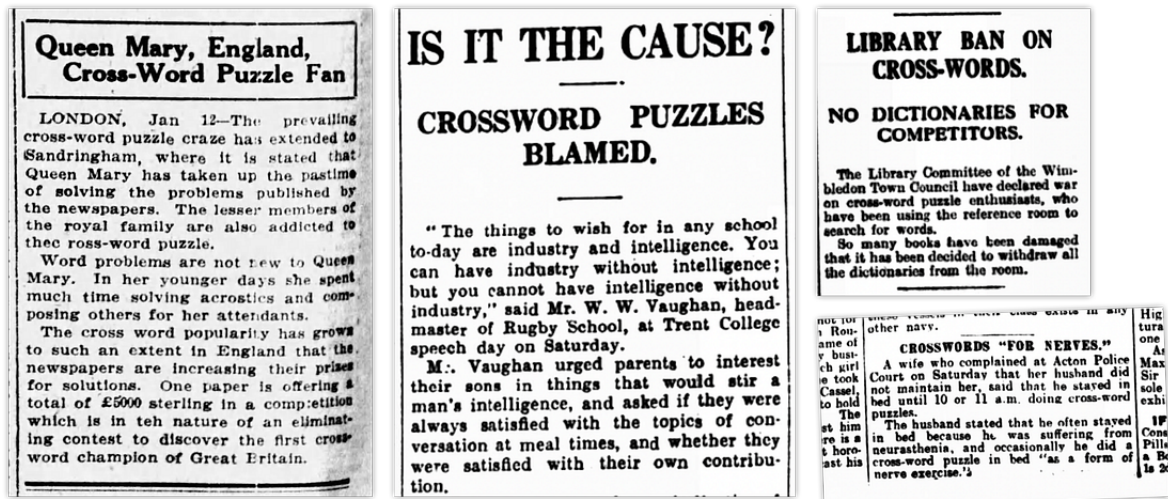
Today word games are widely considered good for our brains, crosswords have survived the transition from print to digital and new word games continue to emerge - like Wordle.



The omnipresence of crosswords in the U.S. was described in detail in a British article that reported the "fad" was *"in trains and trams on omnibuses, in subways, in private offices and counting rooms, in factories and homes, and even — though as yet rarely — with hymnals for camouflage, in church."* Along with other modern trends, the crossword had supposedly *"dealt the*



*final blow to the art of conversations."*



Ironically *The New York Times* - now famous for its crossword puzzle - would [refuse](#) to publish the games for many years, deeming them unworthy of a serious publication. Why? Because they were considered unintellectual and associated with distraction, [earning bans](#) by at least one professor and a judge.

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## Happy New Year

Every generation believes it has finally identified the *real* vices - the habits that must be curtailed for health, morality, or progress. History suggests caution.

As the new year begins, it's worth asking whether some resolutions we set today will look as strange in hindsight as vows to read less, cycle less, or stop playing chess. After all, yesterday's degeneracy has a habit of becoming tomorrow's virtue. Choose wisely.

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