



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

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

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JAN 1, 2026



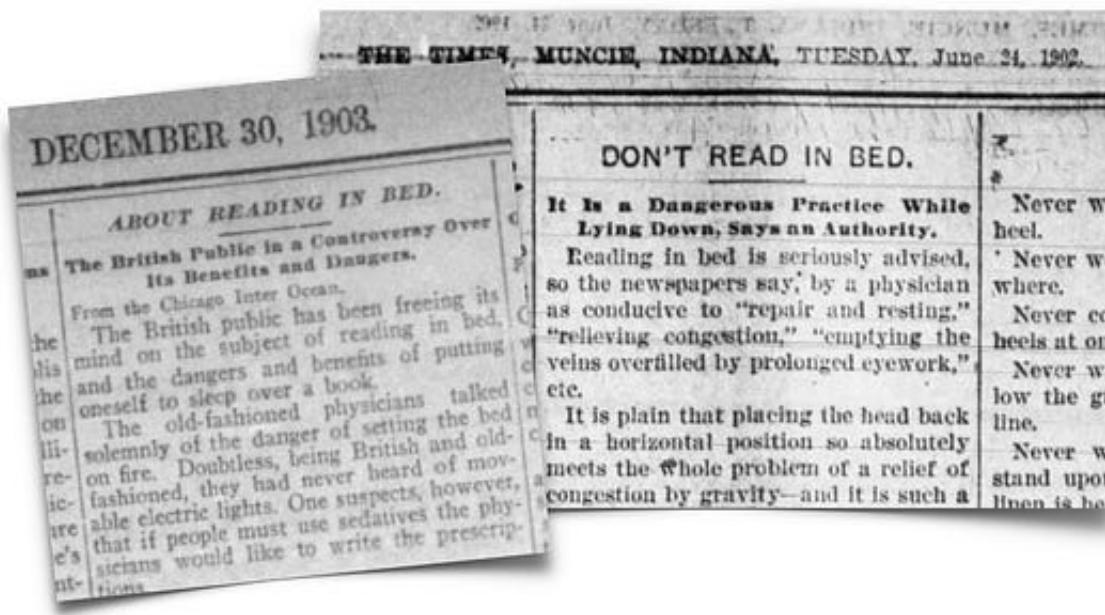
In centuries past things considered virtuous today; *reading*, *cycling*, listening to *radio* or playing *chess* were deemed by some as unhealthy, corrupting vices or a silly waste of time.

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?*

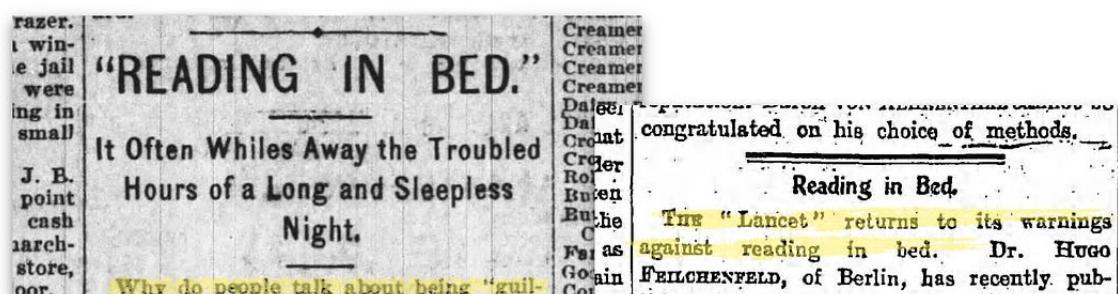
Judging by some of the dialog around them, it is a reasonable assumption:

## 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)



RS.	ty" of reading in bed? It is that the doctors tell you that it is bad for the eye-sight. <i>The Daily Mail</i> , since Lord Rosebery's speech on Scottish history of Saturday last, in which, as we have said, he casually mentioned Cockburn's letters on gardening, has been at pains to collect medical evidence on the subject. "The damage wrought by this pernicious habit," said one doctor, "is not confined to the eyes. It is bad for the whole body"—and hints are given of overstrained neck muscles and rheumatism in the shoulder. "Reading in bed is a disease," said another; "the habit is as bad as taking drugs." "Do not read in bed if you wish to preserve your eyes," is the counsel of a third; and so on.	E Eg Sta We Eg Bro goe a Tu Tu Fon." Fo Ch Chich Du Ge Lice ma Turk Fowl, c Fowl, f Chicken Chicken Ducks	lished the results of an investigation into the effects of the practice, and he finds that the chief danger is to the eyes, for the familiar reasons, first, that it is difficult to arrange the lighting so that it is sufficient and yet does not fall directly on the eyes, and, secondly, that it is difficult to hold the book in an optically correct position. There is certainly a tendency to trust to a distant light, the position of which is rarely suitable for a person lying on one side. Then the reader, intent on his book and careless of
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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

@PessimistsArc

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

set in ASON- irbinc 14,000 c, for to be last boats es, of I with	<b>AGAINST READING IN BED.</b>  "Boys and girls under eighteen should be strictly forbidden to read in bed," says the "Lancet," on the authority of Dr. Hugo Feilchenfeld, of Berlin, who declares that in the case of young persons whose eyes are not fully developed the practice is likely to induce myopia.  While young people run the greatest risk, the "Lancet" thinks that reading in bed is undesirable for persons of any age, and states that "in the case of aged, anxious, worried, and bed-ridden people, to whom it would seem cruelty to deny what may perhaps be almost their own luxury, for fear of inducing some slight error of refraction, care should be taken that the light is sufficiently brilliant, the eyes being shaded from it, and that the patient lies on his back with head and shoulders raised."	convic a doct it off after cuse that it waitin right ble is upon face, c the lo sult b ceding breath that a to pre muscle ercise develo the fa stoppa of the done chin r ercise
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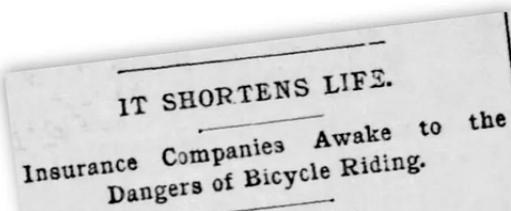
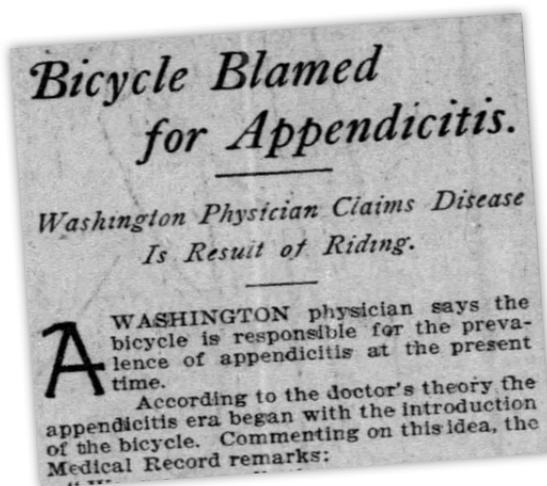
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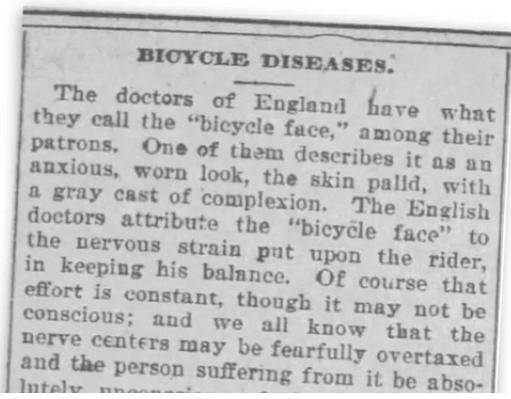
In 1950 the American Medical Association magazine [warned](#) not to read, as part of its rules of getting good sleep. It is an unfounded notion the [persists today](#), passed down the generations.

## 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.



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, a condition as with most other people, associated with over-in-



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.



## MANY MEN REJECTED FOR BICYCLE HEART. The Disease Alarming- ly Prevalent Among the Recruits.

Riders of the "Winged  
Wheel" Are Its Es-  
pecial Quarry.

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ment, who the United iners on th rejections. said yester  
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## 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.

THE TRUE VOICE EDITION Sunday

## Pope Warns Against Abuse Of The Radio

Tells Executives To  
had been reported he had sailed  
for the Philippines.

## Too Many Women Are Radio Addicts

He got a divorce—and she got the radio. That was the way a California judge decided a divorce suit in which a husband charged his wife "wouldn't clean house, care for the children, cook my meals or talk to me" because she was always listening to the radio. It's a bit extreme, but

That case is a bit extreme, there are plenty of women in the country who keep their radios turned on too much for their own good—or the good of their marriages.

Used with discrimination the radio helps the housewife keep up with world events. It helps her

## RADIO BLAMED FOR INSOMNIA

## New It Is Being Blamed for Loss of Sleep, Vi- tality and Pep.

## *Radio Addicts Subject To Softening Of Brain?*

Persons who listen to the radio from dawn to dusk suffer from the disease "radio perpetuum," a slow but sure softening of the brain, Rev. James Trimble Marshall, Jr., declared yesterday at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Norwood. Rev. Marshall advised radio addicts to hearken to "less strident voices that speak only to the soul."

He cited Saul of Tarsus, who is reputed to have heard the voice of Jesus, and Lieutenant James C. Whittaker, who, in his book describing the rescue of the crew of Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, wrote: "We thought we heard the angels sing."

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.

## Nation Is Swept By Hysteria Over 'Martian Invasion'

## RADIO DRAMA CAUSES PANIC OVER NATION

## **"TOO MUCH RADIO IN AVERAGE HOME"**

THERE was far too much radio in the average home, and its over-use tended to encourage a "passive" attitude to life, the State Librarian (Mr J. D. A. Collier) said at Hobart last night.

HE was addressing a meeting sponsored by the New Town branch of the Liberal Party.

no effort for themselves, and left no time for free thought. It had also a discordant and disturbing effect, he said.

## Improvements To Beaches Planned

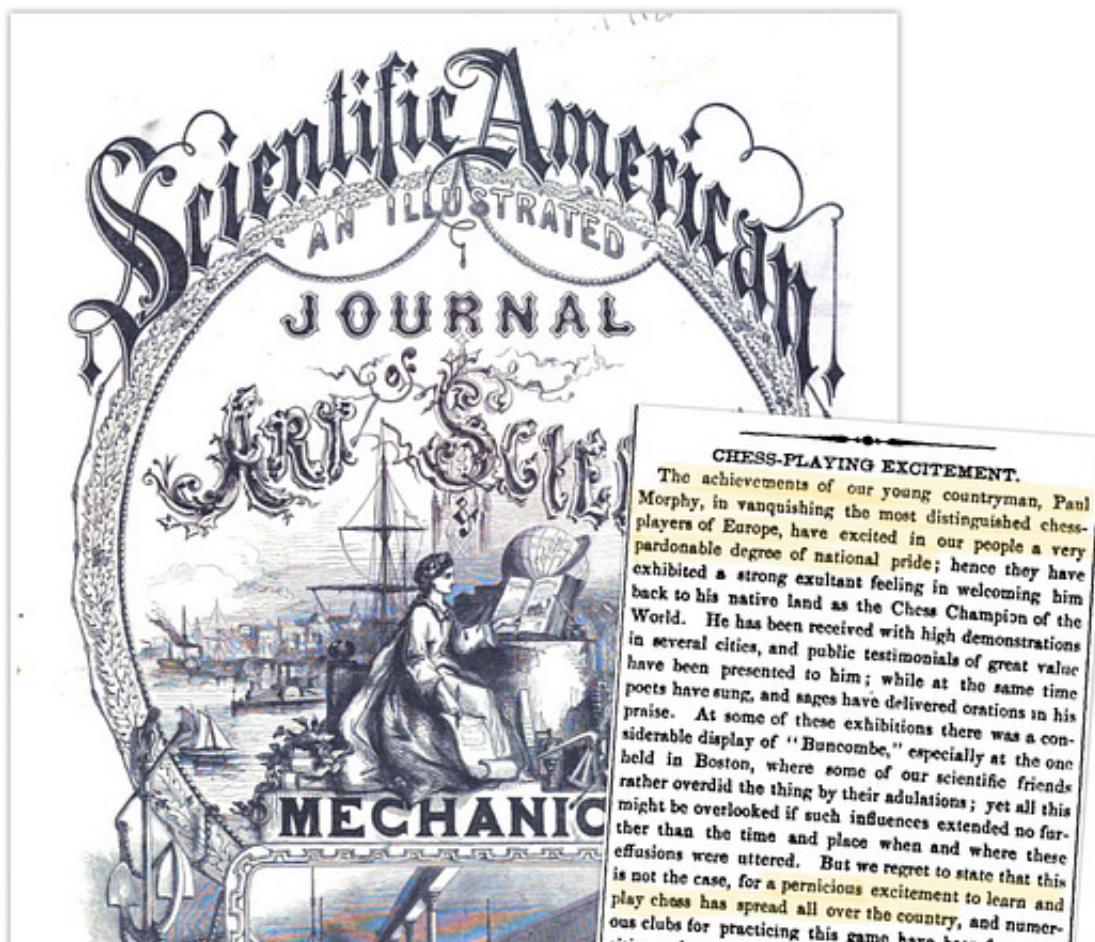
# FAKE RADIO 'WAR' STIRS TERROR

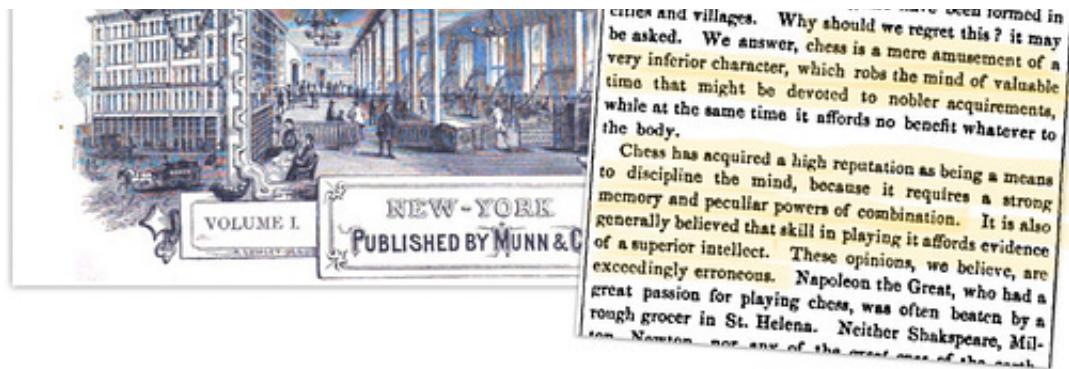
STIRS TERROR  
THROUGH U.S.

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.’

## 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*”





cities and villages. Why should we regret this? it may be asked. We answer, chess is a mere amusement of a very inferior character, which robs the mind of valuable time that might be devoted to nobler acquirements, while at the same time it affords no benefit whatever to the body.

Chess has acquired a high reputation as being a means to discipline the mind, because it requires a strong memory and peculiar powers of combination. It is also generally believed that skill in playing it affords evidence of a superior intellect. These opinions, we believe, are exceedingly erroneous. Napoleon the Great, who had a great passion for playing chess, was often beaten by a rough grocer in St. Helena. Neither Shakespeare, Milton, nor any of the great men of the earth

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 CROSSWORD

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

<p><b>Cross-Word Puzzles Clog The Wheels of Justice</b></p> <p>Magistrate Earl A. Smith had to order court attendants, policemen, lawyers and their clients to cease pondering over cross-word puzzles when he convened the Traffic Court yesterday. The Magistrate had mounted the bench before his attention was attracted by a group of</p>		<p>Victim of Owensboro's antigossip law, Mrs. Maude Bashman, paid a \$10 fine for saying "the police were 50-50 with the bootleggers."</p> <p><b>Too Many Puzzles</b></p> <p>Ann Arbor, Mich., Dec. 4.—Professors at the University of Michigan placed a ban on cross word puzzles in their class rooms.</p>
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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."*

QUEEN MARY, ENGLAND,  
CROSS-WORD PUZZLE FAN

LONDON, Jan 12—The prevailing cross-word puzzle craze has extended to Sandringham, where it is stated that Queen Mary has taken up the pastime of solving the problems published by the newspapers. The lesser members of the royal family are also addicted to the cross-word puzzle.

Word problems are not new to Queen Mary. In her younger days she spent much time solving acrostics and composing others for her attendants.

The cross word popularity has grown to such an extent in England that the newspapers are increasing their prizes for solutions. One paper is offering a total of £5000 sterling in a competition which is in the nature of an eliminating contest to discover the first cross-word champion of Great Britain.

IS IT THE CAUSE?  
CROSSWORD PUZZLES  
BLAMED.

"The things to wish for in any school to-day are industry and intelligence. You can have industry without intelligence; but you cannot have intelligence without industry," said Mr. W. W. Vaughan, headmaster of Rugby School, at Trent College speech day on Saturday.

Mr. Vaughan urged parents to interest their sons in things that would stir a man's intelligence, and asked if they were always satisfied with the topics of conversation at meal times, and whether they were satisfied with their own contribution.

LIBRARY BAN ON  
CROSS-WORDS.

NO DICTIONARIES FOR  
COMPETITORS.

The Library Committee of the Wimbledon Town Council have declared war on cross-word puzzle enthusiasts, who have been using the reference room to search for words.

So many books have been damaged that it has been decided to withdraw all the dictionaries from the room.

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.

## 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.