

Types of Feminine Slackers in New York

Random Observations on the Squanderer, the Waster, and the Trifler—Tinfoil as Proof of Patriotism—The Cost of Showy Gowns and Pekingese Spaniels

By GENEVIEVE PARKHURST.

AS a rule she lunches at a hotel in the Washington Square neighborhood and "teas" at another near by, and occasionally she dines at an uptown restaurant popular with artists and theatrical folk. I found it easy to strike up an acquaintance with her.

"How often do I come here? Oh, nearly every day," she said lightly, in answer to my question. "Just wait a moment—I must telephone Harry. If I don't feel like going home I let him know and he sends the children to the store to get some dinner. He doesn't mind. He knows I must express myself in some way."

After she had telephoned she resumed her conversation, enlivening it with gossip about the other women in the café. I asked if she did any war work.

"Oh, certainly," she replied hastily. "I go to the Red Cross once a week, and I'm collecting tinfoil. A housewife is not expected to do more." And she displayed to me a diamond mounted in platinum—a recent acquisition.

She was one of many women I encountered in following up a chance suggestion. It was during the last Liberty Loan drive that a member of the Woman's Committee, who devoted her time from 9 in the morning until late at night to the campaign, remarked: "There is a certain class of women which it seems impossible to reach. They are women one sees about the tea-rooms in hotels, in cafés and restaurants, overdressed and covered with jewelry. They fritter away their time, leading just the same lives as they did before the war.



"I go to the Red Cross once a week, and I'm collecting tinfoil."

slackers are of three classes—squanderers, wasters, and triflers.

To the squanderers, time, money, materials, and energy have no significance except as they may cater to personal pleasures. Life to them is just one bubble after another, blown through the clay of small desires. Their mornings are given over to the masseuse, the beauty specialist, or the modiste, their afternoons and evenings to frittering. By the dozens they frequent restaurants and cafés, sipping and smoking, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by young dancing men. More often they are driven to seeking the company of their own kind. Seldom do they wear the same gown two days in succession. The latest in jewelry, furs, and costume is their fad.

Fifteen cafés, visited in as many days, gave a working average of statistics. Seven out of ten of these women are married. Four of the seven are mothers. Not one of the ten is self-supporting. The husbands of the married ones are, for the greater part, prosperous salesmen, either itinerant or stationary. Their homes are in apartments or hotels. Some of them keep two maids, others but one. A few do their own work, taking most of their meals in restaurants or patronizing the nearest delicatessen.

Getting acquainted with these women is the easiest thing in the world. They will talk with any one. Their family histories and troubles become an open book. One woman had her two Pekingese spaniels with her. She had traveled all the way from a Middle Western city.

"It is such an expense carrying them around," she complained. "You know they have to have certified milk—a quart a day each, and it costs me \$2 a day at the hotel for them."

When it was suggested that it might be a good idea to give them a change of diet and send the milk money to the children of France, she exclaimed aghast: "What! Why, the poor little dears would suffer. They've always had their certified milk and cream and I could not think of depriving them of it." She almost wept upon their smoothly combed coats.

Her remark about the cost of keeping dogs at hotels led to investigation in that direction. From eight clerks in hotels where special quarters for dogs are provided, it was found that there

were sixty women who paid \$500 a year each for the keep of their dogs. Smaller hotels, charging from \$10 to \$25 a month for their keep, showed that out of every fifty women who live in hotels one supports a dog. Computing from these figures, it would bring the number of women in New York who cater to canine pets up into the thousands. Judging from the daily parades, between the hours of 9 and 11 in the morning and 5 and 7 in the afternoon, which take place in the apartment house sections and in the parks, there must be ten times that number in town.

Some of these women are doing many things toward winning the war. They are conserving food and clothes, entering into Red Cross activities, investing in Government securities. Rather are they wasters than squanderers. Not for the world would they be called slackers. In their class also are those who still buy things they do not need. A fitter in a fashionable dressmaking establishment said most women were buying good things, but not so many as formerly.

"They buy with an eye to durability. And yet, do you know," she added, "that Mrs. —" (and she mentioned the name of a woman prominently identified with war work) "has five gowns turned out every week, just as she did before the war? She is always talking about the need of conservation in others, too. And yet she spends two hours every day for dress fittings."

A woman prominent in intellectual circles, who has done a tremendous task in helping Herbert Hoover, said, in speaking of these women: "They think if they follow the food card that their full duty is done. They can't see that they have not the right to waste any kind of food, with part of the world starving. One woman I have in mind follows all the regulations as to wheat and beef and pork, and yet she gave a dinner of twelve courses to thirty guests recently, at which she served imported luxuries."

The third class of woman slacker, whom I have dubbed the "fritterer," would be grossly insulted if it were hinted that she was not doing her full share. She is up bright and early about this thing and that. She spends an hour or two folding bandages, another hour or so at a canteen, another hour fiercely driving soldiers about in an automobile. If such a thing as real work is sug-

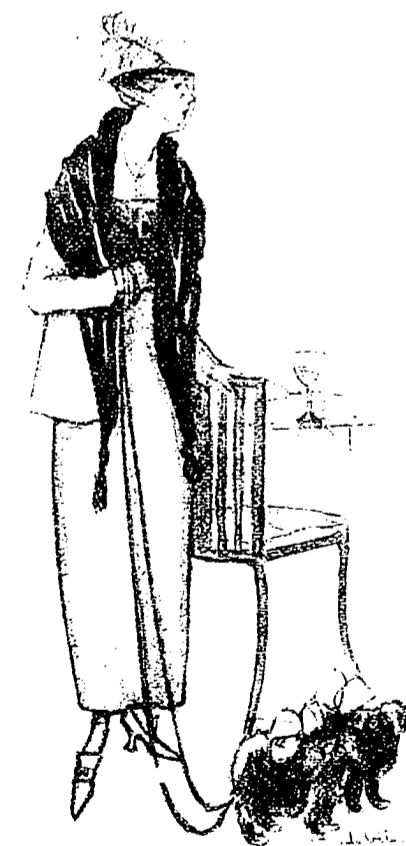
gested—washing dishes, sweeping the floor, or lifting supplies—she disappears. She works all day and does nothing. Her name is legion. It is this class that always objects, and strenuously, to any contrast between the women of England and France and those of America. It is this class which should be touched by the testimony of women like Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst.

"The noblewomen of Europe are doing the most menial work," Mrs. Pankhurst has said, "for they realize that women who must support their families must fill the more remunerative positions. They never accept a place unless they are sure the salary is small. Neither do they accept salaried work which requires a trained mind unless they are sure they can do it and that no woman with a trained mind and responsibilities needs the salary."

And so it all comes back to the question asked by the woman on the Liberty Loan Committee: How are the woman slackers to be reached? In an age when women have received political equality, it seems as if there could be but one answer to it.

Although the women of this country, as a majority, are doing their well-intentioned best toward winning the war, the reports of the United States Department of Labor show that there is an incessant demand for workers; that, while there may be a surplus of them in some districts, there is a shortage in others; that, because of the wholesale absorption of men workers into industries essential to warfare, the need of women to take their places in essential industries has become immediate. The problem of manpower for essential industries has been nicely solved by the Government's order, "Work or fight."

Such phrases as "releasing men for the front," "full organization of woman power," "conservation of energy," "wo-



"She had her two Pekingese spaniels with her."

I would like to know how they can be made to see the light."

Her remark reawakened in my mind a desire which had taken root during a trip across the continent in which several of the larger cities of America were visited—a desire to know just what average the woman slacker (who thrives in all large cities) was striking, what her sorts, and how she could be reached. During a fortnight I visited cafés, restaurants, and hotels, and talked with workers in some of the dressmaking shops. And I concluded that women



"She spends two hours every day for dress fittings."

man and war economics," "division of labor," have become as numerous as bumblebees in a June meadow. It is all very well to employ those two overworked sisters, persiflage and camouflage, to begof real issues. The hour is here when the American woman must face facts. She must sum-total them and set about to discover just how close her accomplishment is to her margin of possibilities.

Men who would not fight and who would not work have been made to fight or work.