

# War as a Tonic for Jaded Feminine Nerves

Physicians Say They Are Now Treating Fewer Women Whose Ills Are Imaginary—  
 Military Heels, Sensible Toes, and the Erect Carriage Instead of the Slouch



Farmerette.

By RICHARD BARRY.

HERE are some war gains noted in the course of a tour among physicians to fashionable women:

1. Nervous disorders are on the decrease among these women.
2. Sanitariums hitherto employed chiefly in coddling wealthy feminine patients are being released in preparation to receive the genuine wrecks soon due from the battlefield.
3. The Red Cross, the Y. W. C. A., the Y. M. C. A., and scores of related war activities are profiting from women's revitalized interests outside themselves.
4. A revolution has occurred in the styles of women's footwear. This alone is an improvement of such vast moment that some authorities say it will be worth to the nation in the coming decade, in heightened efficiency, more than the total of all the Liberty Loans.
5. The "slouch" in the posture of women has lost its vogue. This, for the coming generation, to say nothing of the present, will be of great benefit.
6. A movement is slowly gathering momentum to standardize women's dress and create a national costume. Already committees are at work in Washington and in New York laying the groundwork for a memorial to Congress which shall seek to set a Governmental fiat for this most elusive of conservation problems.

A few doors from Fifth Avenue, conveniently uptown, the writer discovered a surgeon whose list includes many of the town's well-known names, whose operative fees go frequently into four figures, and whose consultation, if only for a few minutes, costs \$20. Assured that his name would not be used, he surrendered about a hundred dollars' worth of his time.

"You are correctly informed," he said, "there is a marked decrease in nervous

diseases among women during the last year. Figures are not available on the subject. The Health Department has no means of tabulating these returns, and in estimating them one must rely merely upon his experience and observation. Judging by mine, I would say that the upper-class women of New York had forgotten their ills by from one-third to one-half.

"You are mistaken in assuming that this is a hardship to physicians. In the first place, physicians have been drawn away to the war in such numbers that those of us who are left are overworked, and we are only too glad to be relieved of the cases whose ills were in whole or in part imaginary. It doesn't make any difference how wealthy the woman is or what the fee she is willing to pay. The fact that she takes a physician's time, unless the need is imperative, is a serious matter now. Fortunately, that problem, always a facer heretofore, has been reduced to a minimum by the war."

"Are women physically stronger, or do they only think so?"

"Now you are getting into the border-



Policewoman.

land of speculation. I won't attempt to answer. The fact is that hundreds, yes, thousands of wealthy and well-to-do women in this city are giving less thought to their physical ailments than ever before in this generation. Take one case that occurs to me—not one of my own, by the way. This woman for ten years went from one physician to another. She had at least half a dozen of our best-known practitioners in consultation at various times. Twice she was on the operation table. The time she spent at sanitariums 'recuperating' would aggregate probably two years of the ten. Not one week of her life did she fail to call in some busy man to listen to her bill of complaint. I won't go so far as to say there was nothing really the matter with her in view of the fact that two very able surgeons operated on her.

"However, about a year ago she took charge of the packing station of a Red

Cross depot located in one of the leading hotels, and not a physician has seen her since. I understand she rises every morning now at 7. She used to get up at 9, 10 or 11. She spends ten to twelve hours a day at the hotel in active supervision of about thirty other workers and has taken personal responsibility for everything that goes out from her depot. She has no time to be 'ill.'

"This is far from being an isolated case. There are many like it. One woman said to me a few days ago: 'Doctor, three times in the last six months I have been on the point of consulting you, but each time I started it happened that I received word from some friend that a relative at the front had been wounded, and I became so upset in thinking of those poor boys over there that I hadn't the heart to let any one know I was ill. My own little complaints seemed so trivial I was ashamed of them.'

"So it goes up and down the list of women in easy circumstances. The war, in its manifold appeals, has proved a powerful stimulant, more potent than any medicine that might have been administered. It is the Spartan appeal, the stoic remedy than which none is better. Every reputable physician welcomes it, for it relieves him of the nonsense that always cluttered his practice, and, besides the values added to the general community, it has permitted physicians to be released for more needed work on the other side, in addition to clearing the sanitariums and hospitals of a lot of deadwood. This cleansing process is most encouraging, and will doubtless be accelerated as the war goes on."

The chief health benefits of the war to women so far, according to Dr. Eugene L. Fisk, director of the Life Extension Institute, whose business is not so much to cure ills as to prevent them, lie in the direction of their unconscious absorption of the military atmosphere which has enveloped the nation. The institute examines physically thousands of women each month.

"The most gratifying physical change



Motor Driver.

in women," said Dr. Fisk, "is in their posture. Time was, not so far distant, when the slouch was a fashionable attitude for women. This began in society, was seen on the stage, and was reflected widely among workingwomen. It was accentuated by the hobble skirt and the turkey trot, just before the war.

"The last year has come like a breath of fresh air to the physical habits of all women. I believe the unconscious influence of the military largely accounts for it. The soldier has captured the popular imagination. The military bearing, the military salute, the military appearance appeal to the women even more quickly than to the men, and they react to it automatically in their physical manners. A girl who glides or slouches or minces along is no longer considered desirable by young men or envied by her associates.

"Women are knitting, knitting, millions of them, and thinking, thinking of the strain to come. They are learning the inanities of fashionable fripperies and the real attraction that lies in a healthy body, bright eyes, shining teeth, and an upstanding, graceful carriage that goes with fresh air and exercise and the tonic of work and service.

"Women adjust themselves quickly to meet man's demands on them. Without reasoning it out, they know that the future militarily trained young man is not going to like the same sort of dawdling, slouching woman the easy-living young man of the past admired.

"The question arises, Suppose there had been no war, what would have been the ultimate fate of these men, who only a few months ago were soft and pampered, slumping at the shoulders, wearing toothpick shoes, and many of them devoted to no serious purpose in life? Luxury and commercialism and pacifism were making them decadent. Suddenly they have been transformed in a short time, a few months, a year or so, into vigorous, right-walking, correct-breathing, healthy human animals. Do you think the women are not also compelled to keep pace? Not to so intensive an extent, to be sure, but the influence is there just the same. We already feel it in our examinations, and we expect to feel it more and more as the months and years go on."

On the question of women's footwear Dr. Fisk might be termed almost a "crank."

"It is likely," he observed, "that foot abuse and foot strain are, next to mouth infection, the most widespread hygienic sins committed by civilized man. Sixty-five per cent. of our recruits have abnormal feet formed by distorting and crippling shoes. The percentage among women, if it could be taken, would doubtless be higher. Perhaps 85 or 90 per cent. of women would be found to have abnormal feet.

"Men's shoes are bad, women's shoes are diabolical. The hygienist who can persuade himself to look into a show window where women's shoes are displayed suffers a sense of physical pain. The pointed toes pierce his brain and his X-ray imagination pictures the bony distortion, the pitiable crippling, the deformed, misshapen members that fill these shoes. Can we sneer at the Chinese women who carry this matter—or did until recently—to the nth power of foot crippling, while we permit shoes to be manufactured that may easily help fill the divorce courts? It would be an interesting research to ascertain how much marital misery is accelerated by foot misery and its reflex effect on nerves and tempers.

"Fashion in women's footwear is already adapting itself to the new requirements, but the change is not yet radical enough."