

# THE REVEL OF LUXURY

Summer Season's Record of Money-Spending by Americans Who Can Afford  
the High Cost of High Living



Crowd Blocking Broadway in Its Attempt to Enter a Movie Theatre—Not One of the Cheap Places, but a Show That Costs \$1 or \$2 a Ticket. Brown Bros.

By REMSEN CRAWFORD.

WITH the national debt climbing toward the thirty billion mark and the cost of the necessities of life 80 per cent. higher than before the great world war, seven million dollars worth of diamonds are pouring into the country each month and are being rapidly purchased by a gaping trade; millions of dollars are wagered daily at the race tracks; automobiles are sold far in advance of the factory output; Summer hotels, at rates ranging from \$7 to \$25 a day, have reaped the richest harvest of their existence; amusement resorts are making plutocrats of their promoters; theatres are booking in advance, and "the pursuit of happiness," so innocently fostered in the Constitution of our forefathers, has become hysteria with the luxury-loving part of our population.

What follows is not a revelation of

American prodigality. That is no new thing. It is simply a record of the high cost of luxury in connection with the high cost of living; a plain, straightforward annal of the dying Summer, the most extravagant season ever experienced on American soil.

The Vice President of the United States began this story a fortnight ago, but was interrupted by his interviewer. Mr. Marshall said with a delicate thread of sarcasm that he had often felt tempted to go on strike because the pleasures of life now cost too much for a man in "a lazy job" like his. Apparently, he said, the only remedy would be for a Vice President to strike for an increase in salary.

If luxury and leisure have conspired to set a pace of money spending hitherto undreamed of, this dissipation hitherto ascribed so exclusively to New York society has become diffused and general.

There is nothing sectional about the exuberance of today. Vacationists from the smaller cities of the South and West have vied with the man from Wall Street in the distribution of easily acquired wealth. There is nothing in it to rekindle class hatred, so effectually effaced during the period of the war, for the reason that there is "class" now among the masses. Railroad wage-earners boasted a two-million-dollar relief fund before hinting of a strike. The man from the forge is buying diamonds; clerks bet a cool thousand on the races, and the farmer who has not already bought an automobile is planning to do so with the singing of the next harvest song.

Where does the money come from? That's a question that borders on somebody else's business. But there will be millions of Americans, young and old, male and female, who will be

saying good-bye to their Liberty bonds. Indeed, the activities of these papers in the bond market during the last few months have already been taken by astute and circumspect financiers as furnishing the explanation of the source of the rivers of gold which have been flowing about the pedestal of pleasure.

More than 350 splendid hotels have been planned for construction before next Summer in all parts of the country. The building of many of them is already under way, the cost ranging from \$7,000,000 down. Not a few of these luxurious establishments will cost a million dollars, or thereabouts, each. It is in this field that much of the money has been and is being spent. There is no better authority upon hotel conditions in America, perhaps, than Jack Ball, editor of the technical section of the Hotel Review. Mr. Ball has just returned from a tour of the country from coast to coast;



Massed Throngs on the Grand Stand at the Sheepshead Bay Track. Now Used for Automobile Races.

Brown Bros.

The New York Times

Published: September 21, 1919  
Copyright © The New York Times

he attended on his outward journey the Greeters' convention in Portland, Ore. the Greeters' being an association of hotel clerks who stand "out front" and greet the guests. Returning eastward, he was present at the hotel men's show and convention in Chicago. He called upon hotel men in St. Paul, Banff, Lake Louise, Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Grand Canyon, Albuquerque, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Denver, Manitou, Wichita, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland, and Rochester.

All over the country Mr. Ball found a condition of prosperity for hotels never approached in the past. Particularly have the fashionable resorts of the West prospered, for there have been no rainy periods there to interfere with the business as in the case of the Eastern hotels. "Although the hotel rates have been steadily advancing to keep pace with the high cost of living," said Mr. Ball "the leading hotels of the country have found it difficult to find rooms for the tens of thousands of guests that have been coming in an unprecedented stream all Summer long in every section of the country, and particularly at the Summer resorts."

In many parts of the country the overflows of motorists have resorted to a plan of accommodation over night which is a novelty in the hotel business, known as "the auto-camp." On pleasure bent, they take with them tents and cots for themselves and families, and, finding no rooms at the hotels of a resort, they are directed to the nearest auto-camp. There they find a shed built in the woods for their automobiles, and a secluded place for pitching their tents. They sleep in their tents and use the hotels for their meals and other necessities and pleasures like regular guests.

It would be impossible to estimate the fortunes that have been spent at the American Summer resorts during the season. The profits would be so bewildering if put in strings of numerals they would be well nigh unbelievable. Let it go at this—American hotels have experienced their highest records of receipts and profits, despite the high cost of living.

But the unparalleled elasticity of private fortunes has perhaps been more wastefully revealed at the race tracks this year than elsewhere. It has been no uncommon thing for the attendance at the races to run above 25,000 a day. The price of admission at Saratoga was \$8.80 for the club seats, \$3.30 for the grand stand, and \$1.50 and \$1.10 for the field. This meant that the receipts would run from \$65,000 to \$100,000 a



Brown Bros.

The Automobiles Which Took to Sheepshead Bay This Season Only a Small Proportion of the Crowds.

day. The tax on this sum was 10 per cent. But the gate receipts, great as they were at Saratoga, form the smallest part of the evidence. It was the money that was wagered on the races. One of the foremost operators at the track was asked to estimate the amount of money that had changed hands one day when the betting was free. He put the figure at more than \$2,000,000.

And this is not all. To visualize the great American gambling scheme, one must be familiar with the fact that there are telegraph wires at the track which connect every important city in the country with the sport. Each race is reported in detail over a great circuit of telegraph wires, and the tickers of the big cities chatter busily all the afternoon. Agents of handbook makers are ubiquitous to those on the "inside."

The extent to which gambling on races has grown during the last Summer would shock the reformers responsible for having racing "outlawed." There is scarcely a sky-scraper, or office build-

ing, or store of great size in the largest cities of the country that is not visited every day by agents of the unseen and unseeable bookmakers. By the thousands, clerks and stenographers who cannot go to the track place their wagers with these visiting agents of the betting ring, and sometimes the trick is turned by telephone. A true sport's word is as good as another man's writing. There never has been any way of definitely estimating the amount of money that is bet on the races daily.

There has been a lot of other gaming, too, at Saratoga this year, apart from the races. Not as conducted in the old way, it is true—not as it was when Canfield's temple of chance was in full swing. But hundreds of thousands of dollars have been pivoted upon the turn of the cards, or upon the illusory circumventions of the little roulette ball. Bridge and poker, likewise, have lost none of their charm at the Summer resorts because of the high cost of living. Don't fancy for a moment that the players are exclusively from among the affluent and conspicuous families of New York. The truth is, that it has been a new crowd of unfamiliar faces at many of the resorts this year, people who have come from various towns and cities, and even from the farms, just as the old Southern planters used to gather at Saratoga each Summer and bet their bales of cotton or barns of tobacco. The higher the cost of luxury, the deeper is the plunge, and this year there have been plungers from every walk of life.

Something has already been told through the press of the increase in the sales of jewelry since the war. Even now when remedies for the high cost of living are being sought by the State and Federal authorities it is perfectly bewildering to view the crowds of purchasers of high-priced jewelry in the leading shops of this hitherto exclusive trade. People are buying diamonds who never bought them before and who know little of their standardized value.

"It has been one continuous Christmas season all Summer," said T. Edgar Willson, editor of the Jeweler's Circular, official organ of the National Jewelers' Board of Trade, alluding to the trade.

"Nobody in the business has ever seen anything like it before. It is nothing short of hysteria, the way everybody is buying jewelry. And it is not cheap jewelry, either. It is the real jewelry—jewelry that enables one to carry a fortune in one's hand. As all jewelers know, there have always been two main sea-

sons of sale, Christmas and Easter, but there has been no let up at all this year. Men, women, and children of all conditions of life are putting money in diamonds and other precious stones. Frankly, I do not believe it is entirely due to the vanity of wearing jewels. I believe many of these people who are now purchasing real diamonds are doing so with a view to investment, or saving. They have been made acquainted with the fact that a diamond will always hold its value and pass current as cash. They know that a diamond can be pawned for cash on the spur of the moment to bridge over a tight pinch. Economy during the war, perhaps, is putting its savings in jewelry instead of into the banks."

Not many of the yachts which were lent by men of wealth to the Government during the war have as yet been put into commission. This is one luxury which has been handicapped by the high cost of everything. It required from \$3,000 to \$20,000 a month for upkeep of a yacht before the war, depending upon the size of the craft and the number of the crew. The wages demanded by sailors since the war are around \$100 a month. One of the larger yachts, like J. P. Morgan's Corsair, requires about forty members in the crew. The cost of feeding the crew, too, has increased three times over the former cost, while the cost of fuel and other necessities of yachting must be added.

A good many of the smaller yachts appeared at Larchmont and other meets, however, this season, and it is very important to note that it isn't the mere matter of cost that has kept the yachts out of this great game of extravagance. Orders have been placed with the designers for building new yachts which will keep them busy for more than a year to come. Included in these orders are specifications for some very large and luxurious ones. Every yachtsman is making ready for the international championship races next year, and the money he would otherwise have expended on upkeep this Summer is being put into preparations for extended indulgence in the sport next year.

Pleasure, pleasure! Who can turn churlishly from all these contemplations of luxury and give heed to the cry about the high cost of living? Who can take seriously the wail of hard times when blacksmiths are joining the jeweled ranks?

Is this the America that stopped every wheel just one year ago when the Government needed gasoline?



Brown Bros.

A Motor Car Made to Order—One of the Many Automobiles Outfitted for a Buyer Who Couldn't Find a Ready-Built Vehicle Elaborate Enough for His Fastidious Taste.