

From Flapper to Girl Scout

By HELEN BULLITT LOWRY

THE real reason for the flapper's cigarette, the inciting cause of her pocket flask, the motive that lurks behind her petting parties, is her assertion that now she has become man's equal—and as such has a right to the sins he's been 20,000 years accumulating. In other words, this twentieth century product, whose wild doings have been feeding the thirsty ears of the gossips, is nothing more nor less than the left wing of the feminist movement.

When man first came out of the biological fastnesses, with his woman trotting beside him, bearing the household skins, she wasn't cutting up any high jinks and demanding the right to flap. By the time the Garden of Eden was planted, the double standard had been nicely standardized. The Lady Lilith had entered Eve's Eden. Man had the upper hand.

But we aren't discussing 20,000 B. C., when woman knew her place and conducted herself accordingly. This happens to be the year of our Lord, 1921, when the flaunting behavior of the later-born has been shocking the old generation, and when, alas! most of the reforms suggested for the benefit of the wild young things are sillier than the wild things they can think up for themselves. For example, the dress reform advocates who would legislate georgette out of existence and the camel walk, and enforce the dress eight inches from the floor along with the perpetual two-step. Therefore, some comfort is found when you run into an organization which is approaching the problem intelligently, and has already a definite record to show of making over flappers into something less alarming. It takes the selfsame flapper who has been demanding man's age-old perquisites of follies and deals her out instead a few of man's more wholesome privileges.

If it is called by a name which suggests play rather than preaching that, perhaps, is not its least practical merit. Anyway, I mean Girl Scouts.

Not least of man's equal rights that the Girl Scout has found is the knack of having as good a time without men as men can always have without girls. Men like nothing quite so much as to get away from the womenfolk—and throughout the ages they've scoffed at the female species because hen parties always fall flat—from the harem soirees to the "ladies luncheon" at the Knights of Pythias convention, to which the wives tagged along. And right the men are, such parties do fall flat—but why?

As a woman, I can give inside information that the kind of amusements the ladies by heredity indulge in aren't as much fun as the pleasures that have been man's inalienable right. Take the old formal dinner, where the ladies left the men at the table for a half hour. What were the two brands of entertainment meted out to the twain? The men had, if not wine and walnuts, at least brandy and cigars. The ladies drew a demi-tasse. And they scoffed at us that the female of the species had a slower time than the male! Santa Claus has been wishing off dolls on little girls throughout the ages. Little boys have inherited exclusive rights to the "swimming hole" of each small town from generation to generation, and the men—they have blamed the girls because the poor feminine dears couldn't have fun out of doors—unless you threw in a moon and a man.

"Camping" to the girls has meant a canoe and a proposal. To man it has meant getting off from the women and roughing it with his fishing tackle or his gun.

The present scribe writes feelingly on the subject. She happens to be one of those who has had to go in for the proposal and canoe brand of tenderfoot camp—for the very good reason that there was no other kind available. Our part has been to stand clinging vishly by—and admire the way the great big man builds fires.

Full well I remember my last "mixed" camp—where our hosts had got together and decreed (lest rivalries cleave male friendships) that they would each and all leave each other's girl alone, each cleaving only unto his own. And I was Somebody's "girl." With him only did I canoe in the moonlight. I sat by his side at meals. If a walk were taken, we walked it together. When night came and the men of the party played cards, no man ever yearned more passionately to be rid of womenfolk than I for a manless nature. It was my last mixed camp.

Now the Girl Scout program throws tradition into the discard, for it operates on the theory that a girl can practice woodcraft as well as a man can—can build a fire and construct an incinerator, can pitch a tent and police up barracks, do the Australian crawl and climb a mountain. This new feminist movement is rapidly infringing on man's preserves.

For, take the mere matter of legs—man's most cherished perquisite throughout civilization. For generations he has forbidden legs to the ladies. Why, one old painter of Spain was literally excommunicated because he painted Our Lady's foot and indicated her knee under the folds of the draperies. Only a generation ago and any nice girl had just feet pasted to the hem of her dress. Well, modern woman has rebelled. Behold the left wing of the feminist movement—the flappers who roll their own.

But, because she has been made body-conscious by the centuries of the past over which she had no control, the young girl in her teens, regaining her legs and discarding her lacings, does it as a flaunt in the face of conventions. Generations of self-conscious concealments of commonplace items of physical equipment, like legs, have made these young pioneers of equal rights acutely sex-conscious. Ask Brother Straton—he knows.

So the dress-reform advocates would solve the problem by turning back the sands of time—by squeezing these breezy little birds back into the egg shell of the nineteenth century. Instead of such folly, the Girl Scout movement goes the flappers one better. On camp, it takes them entirely out of skirts and puts them into bloomers and briar-proof stockings. It starts the radical idea that legs are given us neither that we should conceal them by skirts nor that we should display them by silk stockings—but instruments to swim and climb mountains with. That is the crux of the girl



"Making over flappers into something less alarming."

Scout philosophy toward the human body.

"Flapping" is the logical evolution of our centuries of civilization. Qualities have developed in the flapper that cannot be ousted. They can only be sublimated—which is a perfectly good Freudian word. I was "brought up" before Freud was invented—or at any rate discussed—but my mother had the same idea when she started me in art—art spelt in noble capitals. She called it getting me past the boy-struck period. In our new jargon it would be known as an "outlet for the emotions." Anyway, it was four years before I discovered my mother's secret—that I was not a genius—but during those four years nine-tenths of my emotional energy had been sublimated.

That is the theory that Girl Scouting operates on. Scouting is just one emotion after another. Never on land or sea were there such noble rules and pledges—from "To do my duty to God and country" to "Do a good turn daily."

For the teens are the noblest period of life—in spots. It is in the teens that each Catholic girl goes through a period of planning to take the veil. It is in the teens that maidens in love marry a man "to reform him." It is in the teens that half-grown boys would barter all to be Nathas Hale. In the teens any selfish girl would volunteer as Red Cross nurse. In the teens any high school boy would sacrifice life itself to the football team. It is in the teens that heroes (away from home) are made. I know a small flapper who in a moment of high emotion signed up one-half of her

year's boarding school allowance to buy her a starving Armenian.

And it is this emotional energy which the Girl Scout idea utilizes. I talked with one of the Girl Scouts—a pretty little piece of 16, with Pickford curls, but with unrouged lips and unpainted round cheeks—gazing as frank-eyed as a nice boy at me over her uniform. And this nice young thing was "carrying on" about scouting in exactly the same gushing vein that her contemporary flappers do about boys.

"Oh! I simply could not live without scouting." Ardently her eyes were raised to the ceiling, which passed muster for the sky. So other maids in their teens inform their stern parents that they simply cannot live without Teddy somebody or other.

"Oh! the wonder of it and the thrill when I passed my tenderfoot test—and the moment when I became invested. And yet every merit badge that I win brings again that same wonderful thrill." Gloriously she held out her khaki right arm, which was as covered with insignia as Sousa's breast. "And now there is before me the winning of the Golden Eagle—the highest honor that a scout can receive. When I win that—" She positively trembled. And I saw why it was that "ruffles and flourishes" have been worked into every least detail of scouting—until you cannot set the table at home while earning your Home-maker Merit Badge or borrow a neighbor's baby to practice laundering babies on, without experiencing one of the major emotions.

"A Girl Scout's word is her honor," went on my little Girl Scout friend. "If she breaks her word she dishonors scouting. She injures each and all of her sisters. Did you notice that I did not say to you that 'I am glad to meet you'? That would have been a lie—because how could I tell whether or not I was glad to meet you when we had not exchanged a word?"

Again, "To be clean in word and thought and deed—that is scouting—think what it means. And then: "That first night in the camp when taps were sounded—when I saw Old Glory floating in the breeze—when I saw Old Glory quivering down to rest against the hush of God's nature." The metaphors began to get a bit mixed, but the deflected thrill was there all the same. An ideal for youth had been lifted up that has more potentialities in it for growth

than the ideal of getting into the movies. And it is safer for the teens to thrill about Old Glory than about Wallace Reid's sleek coiffure or the Princeton football hero's toddle—according to the teens' walk of life.

Indeed, on such a basic need of human nature in its teens is this paraphernalia for thrills founded that the cult has been spread equally among the rich and the poor and the middle class. Admiral Sims's two daughters are enthusiastic Girl Scouts—that "take it hard." There is a tale of a "tough young 'un" on the lower east side who would have none of the tough local boys after she took up scouting. "They aren't good enough for a Girl Scout, talking like they do and slapping you and acting familiar," confided the erstwhile tough young 'un to her Scout Captain.

A certain Edna out in middle income Fordham used to sit on a bridge till all hours of the night, entertaining the "beaux" she had picked up in the neighborhood skating rink—with what the neighbors frankly gossiped about as "petting parties." At about 10 o'clock—and at 11, maybe—her mother would come over from the home apartment house and beg, "Now, Edna, come on to bed," to which Edna paid about as much attention as do the majority of high school girls in New York to their antedated mothers. Influencing daughters, like spinning and baking, has been taken out of the home these days.

Now, Edna was really a very clever girl, but whose energies from 18 to 16 years had been absorbed by "vamping." Fortunately for her prestige on Fordham Bridge, the local beaux had not discovered the dark secret that she really had brains. But scouting, like Masonry, brings a necessity for study, if you're to climb high in the order and secure your dozen merit badges. By some accident of a friend becoming a scout, Edna became one, too, and, for the first time in her short existence, began to use her mind. And Edna learned the fundamental lesson of the equality of the sexes—that you just naturally can't feel sentimental about the dominant male if you chance to know more than he knows.

The petting parties have been discontinued on Fordham Bridge. The left wing of the feminist party is becoming really radical.