

Mrs. Grundy On the Job of Reforming the Flapper

By HELEN BULLITT LOWRY

YES, and when we were playing truth, all the girls except Jane and me said they had 'put out,' remarked, serenely, our 16-year-old flapper, at home for a vacation from boarding school.

"Put out!" gasped her puzzled mother. "What does put out mean?"

"Oh, kissed the boys and things like that," explained our flapper, casually, "'put out' petting, you know, and—Fan Walker said we'd missed a lot."

That afternoon was Sunday, and two youths called. This particular mother "put out" great quantities of chocolate fudge cake and a pitcher of lemonade. Blindly, she was trying to "put out" something besides her flapper.

Thus struggled this mother against the changing custom of the times, sticking her finger through the hole in the dike to guard from floods the pre-war ideals—ideals of the period when maids had the grace at least to conceal what they "put out" from each other.

So it goes all over the country. Individuals and organizations are struggling, with their fingers plugged in the dike, to hold back the flood of new morals and ethics and dress of our Younger Generation. Others are trying to bale out, with a nice little tin bucket, the waters that were washed in before the wise elders noticed the holes all along the sea wall. All of a sudden Mrs. Grundy is trying to do something about it. All of a sudden you can't pick up a newspaper or attend an educational conference, listen to the man in the pulpit, or join a woman's club without running into somebody that is trying to launch some plan to reform the Younger Generation.

In a general way the plans can be pigeonholed into two groups. There is the plan to chaperon the flappers on automobile rides and dances. And there is the diametrically opposed plan to develop in them self-government. Since the Young Things have got out into the great wicked world, argue the propagandists of the latter school, parents should put the responsibility up to the girls themselves to take care of themselves and keep up the old standards.

One of the most amusing "plans" comes from Brown University. There the student editors of the student magazine have set out to "reform" the girls at their dances, by assuring them through the college press that the boys really prefer the girls who do not take to "petting." One youth recounts in print his experience as he walked on the campus with the girl of his dreams. Just as he was reverently picturing her in the bridal veil, his emotions too holy even to touch her hand, his dreams were crudely dispelled by the lady's announcing practically:

"Here, we're wasting time in this moonlight." Trembling with emotion, she ardently clutched his arm.

The editor sternly informs all flappers who henceforth shall attend Brown dances that men don't like to have advances made—that men yearn for the old-fashioned reluctantly yielding type of female. As no big dance has been held since the editorials were published, it is too early to tell if the reform is "taking."

The Woman's Auxiliary of the Episcopal Church has entered the ring with a nation-wide campaign. It has definite progress to report,

even if the result of the Brown University propaganda be still held in breathless suspense. The progress it boasts is that many prominent society girls of the Younger Generation have joined its "meetings for girls" to discuss the problem of upholding standards.

As for the Older Generation, it simply jumped at the auxiliary's idea. In the words of one of the organizers; "Philadelphia sends out a thrilling cry for help. The South is calling to us. Even Boston is frightened." Many a diocese now has a flourishing organization, busy getting groups formed in the separate churches. Unofficially, the Episcopal plan is just this: Some of the most influential society people of each community belong to this Church—in fact, it is the Church which the society aspirant is likely to join as soon as she gets her money—so the upholders of standards organize the most fashionable matrons and the most influential debutantes and let them make it "smart" again to be conservative. As for the platform of the "movement," it is a large order: "To eliminate indecent dress, painted faces, joy rides, improper dancing, vulgar conversation and swearing."

Educational conferences have their reform platforms, too. When the National Association of Deans of Women held its annual meeting at Atlantic City, early this month, the morals of the college and high school girls were the main subject of debate. And here, too, as among the other debaters, they cut the cure in two, even as the wise Solomon suggested. Some wanted to resurrect the chaperon system; others proposed to develop more and more the idea of student government.

The most vigorous spokesman for the chaperon of yester-year was the Dean of Morningside College, Iowa. "Although the single code of morals may come into existence, nevertheless it will always be woman who suffers most for transgression," was the way she summed up the impassioned debate. "For this reason women must have the protection of chaperonage."

She denounced the automobile as one of the prime causes of the "riotous license."

What the conference did in the way of action was to pass a resolution urging every high school in the country to have a Dean to look after the morals of the girls and to keep in touch with their outside life—"Dean" apparently being just another name for duenna. The conventional "Whereas" of the formal resolution call attention to the necessity for some wise woman to organize outside activities for the schoolgirls—even as the mother who "put out" the fudge cake.

Stretch forth a hand anywhere in the dark and touch a school—and you will find that some effort is being exerted to find an answer to the problem. I talked with the Dean of a Southern co-educational university, who pins her hopes to student government. She hasn't an ounce of pessimism.

"Help for conditions these days must come from the inside instead of from the outside," was her idea. "You can't tell the college girl of this day, 'You shall not.' But you can say to their student government council, 'Call a meeting and let the girls vote on whether or not they will have cheek-to-cheek dancing. Let the will of the majority decide.'"

"The chaperon's place is on the stairway."



This council, by the way, voted out cheek-to-cheek dancing, and so did the student government of the Washington Irving High School. To tell the truth, this Southern Dean—or glorified duenna, if you will—points out that many of the girls will be glad enough to drop the more "advanced" methods provided the other girls will do it, too. But as long as the majority goes in for the other new freedoms, it is asking martyrlike qualities of one lone girl to stand out against the custom, under penalty of being dubbed a prude.

"Take the girl, for instance, who seems to have decided that one ought to go much corseted to dances," said the Duenna-Dean. "I've heard that she's called Old Ironsides. But when it is the student council that has passed against cheeking, the others almost hiss 'scab' when a girl persists in that style of dancing."

"The problem of the future for Deans is cultivating leadership among girls who are also popular with boys. You are just wasting your time to create anti-petting leadership in a girl whom nobody is trying to pet."

Also the college girl of today can be aroused to a sense of responsibility toward the future where she hasn't a grain of responsibility to the past. The sorority girls of her particular college voted to stop dancing on Sunday afternoons, lest they jeopardize the privileges of their coming "sisters."

"But as for controlling conditions with chaperons," continued the Dean, "we'd just be wasting our time, because, frankly, the girls no longer care what their elders think of them. Through their fault or our fault, we've lost their respect for our generation. The modern young girl values no censorship under heaven save the public opinion of her contemporaries."

For all that, the Older Generation is trying to mold her. Mrs. Grundy has begun to do something. Why else were glaring electric lights put outside the garages of a Hoboken country club? To chaperon the young things that sit in the cars between dances, explains the shocked Mrs. Grundy. Why else did the Principal of a high school in Pittsburgh ban the use of powder and rouge and lip stick? Why else has the Catholic Archbishop of the Ohio diocese issued a warning against the toddle and shimmy and also against

"bare female shoulders"? And why else should the city fathers of Syracuse positively forbid jazz dancing in public dance places? And the college authorities of the same town forbid hiking army breeches for co-eds outside of the college campus—and right after they had banned smoking, too?

These are general cases—a panoramic view of flapper reform. Try a close up of the reforming of White Plains, that pretty little suburb in Westchester County. That will serve as well as another example to show how reforming the flappers works out in detail.

Reform in the suburb began just six weeks ago, when the most "fashionable" preacher in town preached a sermon about the young people of the high school—about their "immoralities," and about their wicked lip sticks. Everything till then had been going along fairly well in the town. Vice hadn't been discovered. The bridge clubs had flourished, with the feet of the mothers tucked comfortably under the bridge tables. But now the old, serene life was over. A mass meeting was called at the high school, a meeting of mothers and fathers and teachers and students.

A young person, whom one somehow pictures as not quite the belle of the ball, rose to her feet to speak.

"If you mothers just knew what goes on in the dressing room at the dances!" said this young person. "The boys get intoxicated. Last dance I saw one carried down the steps."

A youth sprang to his feet. "That was just a fellow that had come in without paying for his ticket, and the rest of us put him out."

The Chairman rapped for order. The mass meeting continued along these ultra-personal lines, to the vast amusement of the casual spectators.

The next meeting of the parents and teachers was held in private, with practical results. Two hundred mothers decided to chaperon their daughters more closely. "Mothers, take your feet out from under the bridge table, and get on your job of chaperoning again," is the clarion call that has gone out. For chaperons in White Plains recently had become what they are in most other communities. They were the harmless kind that the young persons themselves selected. They had come to resemble that famous

Sunday night sandwich that used to be served in New York before the era of prohibition. They were young things themselves, just married. They weren't supposed to be cramping other girls' style.

"But chaperons nowadays have to be all over the place," explains the mother who has helped organize the new Parents-Teachers Associations. "The chaperon's place is on the stairway and out where the automobiles are parked."

As for the other result of the movement in White Plains, it is a request from the girls of this high school for a student government council. "Oh," giggled one of the maids when she first heard the news of the student government, "now we can do just what we like!"

But that isn't the council's idea. Some of the most influential girls are actually frightened by the notoriety which their dances have attracted. "It's time somebody did something," they say, "to stop the chatter." Being members of the Young Generation, they naturally think of doing that something themselves. So the results of the mass meeting may be called rather practical, when compared to the usual outcome of the dress-reform-for-young-people committees that are being formed in the woman's clubs the whole country over.

The chief difficulty in collecting authentic information about what Mrs. Grundy really is accomplishing is that much of her activity accomplishes nothing. The "reforms" that I have enumerated are selected from a few hundred others, because these happen to be the least impractical.

Last week I chanced on "ladies' day" to be in a club whose bar, with all its paraphernalia, had been made into a soft-drink fountain. The wife of one of the clubmen put her high-heeled shoe on the brass rail. With horror her husband caught her arm. "Let's go into the other room, Lucy," he begged. I remembered the preacher who exposed "conditions" in White Plains had mentioned immorality and lip sticks in the same breath!

Reforming flappers is, so to speak, all over the place—but it's very difficult to know which of the reformers to take seriously.