

MORALS PAST AND PRESENT

By LADY SUSAN TOWNLEY

THE question of comparative morals between one generation and another often crops up in conversation between women, and always leads to interesting discussion. Is the youth of to-day more moral or less so than its immediate predecessors? Of course it is difficult for one who faces west to gauge with perfect fairness the rising tide of youth around her. A woman of a past generation naturally inclines to favour the ideals of her own day, even though she may have suffered under the limitations which they imposed upon her. Yet personally I don't feel out of sympathy with youth, and I don't see why contemporary manners and morals should necessarily suffer by comparison with the past. The social conventions of to-day are in essentials the same as those of yesterday. They are still based upon the Law of Moses as set forth by the prophet in the Ten Commandments given to the Chosen People, and they are as binding upon us as they were upon them. It is not *morals* that change from one generation to another, but the angle from which life is viewed, and the degree of acceptance or rejection of the constraints they impose. Good taste, however, that great safeguard of morals, is stretched nowadays to a limit of tolerance that would fairly have taken away my grandmother's breath.

UNDOUBTEDLY the total and complete independence of parental control which is the leading characteristic of modern education promotes self-reliance. Maybe it is responsible for the excellent spirit with which youth of to-day faces

life with its ups and downs. In many ways I think that young people are more tolerant and charitable, more easy going, and better tempered than we were. Possibly modern sport has helped to develop these traits. But liberty, intoxicating as it is, is a dangerous gift to place unrestricted in the hand of youth. I am sure that things happen now which never could have happened to girls whose lives were sheltered as ours were.

I DON'T pretend that we were as happy as the young ones are to-day. Indeed, I personally was often very unhappy, being particularly high-spirited, and invariably ridden on the curb. Many a tear have I shed in secret over a tryst I could not keep, a letter I could not answer, or a lark I could not enjoy because the maternal surveillance was so strict, so absolutely uncompromising! We might not walk in the streets unattended when I was young; we might not choose our own hats, far less our partners; we might never enjoy unrestricted comradeship or uncensored correspondence with even the safest of the other sex. Yet I think we were more feminine and more nice-minded than the girls of to-day, though I am quite sure we were not so attractive to look at. In the matter of hair-dressing alone, how could a "bun," secured with an army of hairpins, bear comparison with a "shingled" head? I don't blame the girls of to-day, who giggle as they turn over the pages of our old photograph books. Oh! how terribly we were handicapped by the fashions of those days. When I think of myself



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at eighteen, with heavy skirts trailing on the pavement, with a waist forcibly reduced to twenty-three inches, with "leg-of-mutton" sleeves, and strings to my bonnet—how I envy the modern Diana in her short, transparent chemise-frock and her charming "cloche" hat.

YET we had one advantage over the girl of to-day, we were "modest," a quality most precious in a feminine make-up. In those days there was no toleration, far less encouragement, of indecency in any form. Mixed sun-bathing had not become an accepted pastime, nor aquatic tea parties, where boys and girls in skin-tight bathing suits fool in a garden pool in the intervals of swallowing cakes. Bedroom hospitality, pillion riding, and flirting at night in the public squares were not forbidden, because they were unthinkable diversions.

WE were innocent, too, in more ways than one. The natural processes of Nature as far as they concerned child-bearing, often remained mysteries till the very eve of marriage. I actually remember a girl friend of mine telling me, a young married woman, that she did not much care for the man she was going to marry, but had accepted him for the sake of having a baby. "How many times must I let him kiss me to make sure of it?" she asked.

THIS was perhaps an extreme case, and I can hear the modern girl laughing at my poor little friend

—but all the same I am not sure that something may not be said for her, when I think of another young friend of mine, a modern girl this time who, with possibly, nay, probably equal ignorance and innocence, recently accepted from a ballroom partner the second berth in his wagon-lit compartment because there was no other accommodation available in that train. She herself saw no harm in it, and marvelled at my prudishness in objecting to it.

ANOTHER modern young friend, travelling by herself in France, gambled at some casino or other, and so ran short of money for her return journey to England. She was lucky enough, according to her own story, to meet a man friend in Paris, and without hesitation she tacked herself on to him. He took rooms for her at the Ritz, and incidentally laid himself out to give her "a good time" in the gay capital. Shades of my grandmother!

AFTER all "autre temps autre mœurs." The girl of to-day is the product of her generation, just as I was the product of mine. Anyhow she is luckier than I was, in so far as she suffers from no restraints whether of stays, hairpins, or public opinion. The world moves on, whether we like it or not. Even queens march with the times; they may publish their emotional experiences in the Sunday Press, or they may pass, unchallenged angels of mercy, tolerance, and hope, through the wards of a girl-mothers' home. "Honi soit qui mal y pense."