

The most outstanding alumna and the special honor class of university women students meet for a Sunday afternoon chat. Here are Mrs. Walter Ferguson, front row, third from right, and the group of students judged the most talented on the campus.

Mrs. Ferguson Defends Grandma

By JEANETTE TURNER, 34as

(Member of the women's honor class)



MRS. Walter Ferguson, '07ex, columnist for Scripps-Howard Newspapers, visited the campus recently and spoke before the University women's honor class.

The prominent Sooner alumna of Tulsa, who writes the daily syndicated column, "A Woman's Viewpoint," brought with her a new viewpoint concerning grandma and the generation which is passing beyond the horizon.

Mrs. Ferguson, a product of the times preceding the modern generation and following grandmother's day, found the contrast between the two periods most interesting. "The Victorian Woman" was the title of her address in which she presented a unique picture of the Mid-Victorian woman of the "corseted age."

Presupposing that today's generation is inclined to think of grandmother in her youth as a prude and a bore, Mrs. Ferguson defended the passing generation. She pointed out that moderns consider cleverness a greater virtue than character, but she questioned whether Victorian prudishness could be more tiring and objectionable than modern frankness.

The old theory that the women set the pace in morals was exploded by her and she substantiated her statement with facts showing how Victoria, probably the most typical person of that period, was motivated in all her actions by her husband, Albert.

"In order to understand the Victorian woman it is necessary to understand the Queen, in whom rested all the most cherished virtues of the age, who embodied all those qualifications of greatness so dear to the Victorian heart, and from whom there was diffused throughout the civilized world, a standard of morals that has never been known before or since," she said.

Mrs. Ferguson stated that, "Under Albert's firm and skillful fingers, Victoria became the model for a proper wife and mother. Very early she acquired the right sense of feminine duty, according to Albert's ideas. She practiced nobleness until her own subjects became pained with her ardors.

"And it was she who became not only the mother of Kings but gave birth to false emotion of that type of sentimentalism which became for a time the bane of woman's existence, and to a certain extent remains so.

"Albert," she said, "was the perfect husband and father, according to his rules, but he was never animated by any spark of romantic love for his wife. He never attained the full measure of manhood. He remained always a callow school boy, occupied with his copy book maxims, and making over and over again the gestures of simulated emotion, without ever once having experienced the searing flame of passion."

It was in the particular quality of incorruptible loyalty for Albert, even after his death, that Victoria's strength and weakness lies. The columnist declared that "it made her famous, but it also made her a hypocrite."

"The one thing to keep in mind about the Victorian age," Mrs. Ferguson said, "is that every freedom we now enjoy had its inception during that period. And when we feel inclined to criticize their materialism and their faith in the efficacy of the machine, let us not forget that it was no greater than ours during the period when our sage of Northampton represented the finest flowering of American intelligence. Mr. Coolidge said a good many things in print that sound like the most pompous of Victorian platitudes.

"Grandma could stand the gaff. Our gay sophisticates like making jokes about

the romantic attitudinizing of past generations, and this old fashioned grandma of Victorian proportions remains the butt of many wise cracks. The chief thing we hold against her was that she was a sentimentalist—and being sentimental is, with us, the one unpardonable sin. It needs, however, only the most cursory glance at history, fiction, biography to make us realize that we, and not grandma, are the true sentimentalists. In love and marriage, for example, the old fashioned wife can hardly be said to have been a softie. She was in truth the sternest of realists."

Mrs. Ferguson has found that we have too few codes to challenge our loyalty today. She believes that we are the complete and utter sentimentalists, theatrical in our approaches to life, artificial in our attitudes, pantomimists making fine gestures of sincerity and wisdom. The reason for such characteristics, she thinks, is that "we behave as if love were something to be caught in one's hand. We chase it in and out of the divorce courts and seek it before many marriage altars. What's worse while engaged in this naïve and childish quest, we talk about how hard boiled we are, and how well we understand life.

"Our behavior doesn't reflect any particular discredit on grandma, as we sometimes foolishly believe. Sometimes it leaves us with our faces red. The essential difference was this. Grandma believed in the sanctity of the home and willingly sacrificed the individual for the group. We believe in the sanctity of the individual and often find both group and individual sacrificed to the modernism of the idea."

The word Victorian has come to have a legendary meaning for us of the twentieth century. Chronologically speaking it extended from 1819 to about 1910, but

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lett, '18as; Mrs. Cathryn Simpson, '29M.A.; Mercedes Sloss, '25as; Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, '26as; Elna Smith, '25M.A.; Dorothy Snedaker, '19as; Bess Snell, '14as; Ruth Snell, '18as; Mace Spangler, '27as; Amy Sparks, '23as; Mrs. Elizabeth Steen, '24as; T. R. Stemen, '22M.A.; Mrs. Bess Strong, '26ed; Mrs. Velma Strong, '27fa.

Vivian Tallant, '29as; Doris Taylor, '28as; Emma Jo Taylor, '28as; Lucile Taylor, '22as; Roberta Terrell, '29as; Mrs. Mary Gray Thompson, '21fa; M. V. Van Meter, jr., '28as; Frances Vincent, '27as; Henrietta Von Tungeln, '26as; Julia Wardner, '14as; Mrs. Irene Wilkerson, '21ex; Mrs. Beulah Wilkins, '21as; L. W. Weber, '28M.A.; Hannah Welch, '29as; Lucile Wharton, '24as; Frank W. Whinery, '11as, '16M.A.; Althea Wise, '33as; Mary Woodward, '29fa; Charles R. Young, '22as; and Vivian Zirkle, '29phys ed.

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it cannot be fixed by definite dates nor bounded by geographical outlines. In speaking of the Victorian era, Mrs. Ferguson spoke of a state of mind rather than a distinct period of history. "To the man in the street," she said, "Victorianism is just a word that is used to tag the individual whose mental and spiritual agility is not quite able to cope with the leavings of the modernists. It has grown into a misconstrued term

meaning severe reproach, almost one of condemnation.

"I am inclined to think that after we have tried all our exciting experiments and explored our new freedoms, we shall return to that which carried her (the Victorian woman) through an infinity of frustrations, the Creed of Unselfishness. It may be we shall go back to truths that were to her eternal—That love is found only through relinquishment of self, and that homes are built of something more precious and more intangible than brick or stone."

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