

EDITORIAL

AN ASSIGNMENT FOR WOMEN—The dean of a well known school for young women tells about three embarrassed young men coming to her office with an apology. On a visit to three girl students they had broken some furniture in the girls' residence and they wanted to pay for it. The dean would not accept payment. She explained that she held the girls responsible for having failed to create a social atmosphere in which such behavior would have been unthinkable. Action was then taken against three very surprised girls and the fact that the boys helped them in the manual work of restoring the wreckage did not obscure the dean's point.

Most of us are very ready to remind girls that it is their responsibility to maintain standards of decency and graciousness in their social life and that, with rare exceptions, when they establish a standard men will live up to it. Perhaps we sometimes forget that it is a woman's responsibility all through a lifetime to create a social atmosphere where second-rate behavior is "out of place."

There are varied ways of doing this. It is on record that years ago in an area largely inhabited by Quakers, a saloon was opened in the market town where farm women came by train with their butter and eggs. There had been petitions to keep the saloon out of the town but the promoters argued that people needed a waiting-room between trains—the saloon would provide such a place; and to advertise this hospitality chairs were set among the rubber-plants in the foyer, just outside the bar-room door.

Now Quakers have a policy of passive resistance to evil; and to the consternation of the saloon-keeper, on the first market day three decorous farm wives in Quaker bonnets moved in, took out their knitting and sat down in plain view of the bar. None of their neighbours frequented the place that day. For the next several days women appeared in relays to make use of the waiting-room; and during their presence the bar's business with farmers was practically nil. When it seemed that the saloon was not likely to gain any new customers from out of town, the women quit their vigil. It was an original way of meeting the problem but it worked. Because of what these women stood for in the settlement, their presence was all that was needed to keep men sober.

As the outcome of discussions on the needs of their communities several Institutes have launched live campaigns of community improvement; and the improvements haven't all been material. Many have been for the creation of a social tone, an environment and a behavior pattern in which there can be little of either opportunity or desire for cheapness.

We hear of many Institute meetings addressed by an authority on the Juvenile Court or Parole and Probation or the John Howard and Elizabeth Fry Societies. Usually delinquency is not a problem in the community but one never knows when or where it may raise its head and perhaps the women want to forestall it. So when the Juvenile Court Judge tells how children's misdeeds may be traced to lack of parental love or understanding or discipline, Institute mothers may search their own ways for error. Sometimes they arrange a conference with school teachers or have child guidance films at a meeting open to all the parents in the community. They are reminded that young people need social life and if they don't find it in one place they will in another; so we find Institutes sponsoring supervised dances for teenagers, providing playgrounds and skating rinks. Institute members learn that youngsters get into gangs and lie and steal and stick with the gang because they must "belong" to something and they have no higher loyalties; or some who would not go to this extreme may drift into harmless but mediocre company. Perhaps this is why Women's Institutes are so ready to help scouts and guides and cubs and brownies and juvenile hockey teams and 4H Clubs, especially homemaking clubs for girls. Maybe a psychologist brings the message that an active mind, an interest in good literature and music and drama and art can relieve our stresses and save our sanity; then the Institute takes a new interest in the library and music groups; perhaps it brings high class musicians or lecturers to the community occasionally and certainly it makes a place for home talent plays and concerts.

All of this and more, an organization of women can do to create a stimulating, nurturing, protective atmosphere in community life. Other things and more far-reaching, a woman can do individually, through her own way of life, her own personality. When Robert Browning wrote: "Love if you knew the light that your soul casts in my sight; how I look to you for the pure and true and the beautiful and the right," he wasn't thinking of an organization.

Ethel Chapman