

After the Play

IT would be interesting to discover why Miss Rachel Crothers, who is a sensitive and knowing dramatist, decided to stoop to conquer. In spite of her stoop "Old Lady 31" is decidedly to be seen. From the point of view of a producer it is even quite courageous, but it makes concessions which, granting how intelligent Miss Crothers is, provoke a morbid curiosity.

Any one who has ever talked to a theatrical producer may imagine how "Old Lady 31" first hit that professional mind. Twelve old women on the stage for three acts, old women in the decrepitude of an old ladies' home. You can imagine this thought impinging on a Broadway mind. Nothing but old women—old women with their hair in nets, old women with high shell-combs, old women with shawls, old women with mittens, old women with caps—frumpy, toothless, deaf, quavering, senescent old things listening for the soundless footsteps of death. You may guess how this might strike a producer. Miss Crothers is an artist, with a strong sense of character. She could see it. But a producer! What do you see in the crystal, my dear? I see \$42 in the house and ten old women on the stage. What do you see now, my dear? I seem to see twelve old women on the stage, and \$18.75 in the house.

To produce "Old Lady 31" for Broadway was not considered possible until it was heavily "sugared up." After the fashion of sunshine biscuits and sunlight soap and sun-kist oranges, it was termed a "sunshine comedy," to begin with. That was undoubtedly supposed to remit some of the perils of asking Broadway to contemplate old age. It meant, in the sight of poverty and loneliness, that assurance of optimism which Broadway is supposed to crave. But the advertisement of optimism was not enough, the written bunkum of "wholesomeness" and sunshine. It had to be squirted into the play. And, in the prologue and also at the end, the syringe of sweetening was used.

The old couple Angie and Abe are leaving their sun-kist cottage—Angie to go to the old ladies' home, Abe to go to the poor farm. They have been married many, many years, but there are no children. "'Twan't to be." This is a real situation, one in which there is a great length of human retrospect, a definite pathos, a chance to reveal human nature and make the most of the drama to come. Well, Belasco couldn't have done a fouller deed. There was much excuse for the old lady's inevitable allusion to a lifetime of marriage without a single misunderstanding or a cross word. The couple next me held hands at this touching misrepresentation of intersexual experience, but I noticed he went out to smoke at the end of the first act and left her to boredom, just as usual. The rest of the prologue was a desperate effort to establish Angie's angelic character. She scrimped a little tobacco every day so that Abe might have a last smoke. "You beat all, mother." She regrets the poor auction at the end of their lifetime but rejoices that her old tea-strainer brought three cents more than it cost. Think of it, the good Lord letting fall that crumb of consolation. "Ain't the pansies sweet to-day? I'm out here talking things over with the pansies." Then a little sunshine philosophy. "That's what the pansies understand."

Few people know What Every Pansy Knows, of course, but is there anything more pestiferous in real life than these cooing human beings? Angie is to be the sweetest of old ladies. When she refers to her "bridal wreath" and blows a kiss to her old house, when she gives Abe a flower to press in his bible or plucks a bouquet for Abigail, she

is to be the dearest old thing. It is a matter of scientific record, however, that mature women who live in the past to such degree as this, who hold conversation with the pansies at sixty and rejoice over a three-cent episode at an auction sale, are merely half-witted. If they had had less sentimentalism and more sense, there would have been absolutely no necessity for an auction. No sea-captain could have survived to old age with such a spouse. While he was at sea he might have gotten away with it. That is one of the attractions of life on the ocean wave. But if he had lived "to hum," as Miss Emma Dunn and Mr. Reginald Barlow so exultingly pronounced it, he would certainly have arisen one night while Angie slept, and tenderly extinguished her forever under the tea-cosy, and then strode forth to take the good news to the sheriff.

So far "Old Lady 31" is sheer conformity to the professional idea of what Broadway wants. The minute we get to the old ladies' home, however, and have Miss Crothers reveal the human nature of the women in that home, there is that precious veracity which is bound to dominate a comedy audience. Louise Forssund's book may have given Miss Crothers many pointers, but it is she alone who made possible for the stage the reality of these superannuated types. The conventions of the stage required performers who were not actually as much "old ladies" as the title suggests. But this hardly interfered with one's sense of reality. One beheld, first, a rattlepate, spittfire, "gabby" person rocking violently on the veranda, in conversation with an imposing and funereal doctor's widow, joined in a few minutes by a saturnine practical person, a Martha in a universe of Marys, a "grouch." Nothing could have been more humorous than this idiomatic talk on the veranda. It was soon enhanced by the addition of a coy, gurgling creature with Victorian curls. The kindness with which these "inmates" were observed in all their foibles and sensitiveness and pettiness and magnanimity was not at all like the sentimentalism of the prologue. It had an artist's sagacity and penetration, and took the whole performance out of theatricality and back to the immense divertiveness of the world we know.

The pathos of the play is the separation of old Abe from Angie, at the door of the old ladies' home. Its inventiveness is shown in the successful revolutionary proposal to have a place made for Abe in the home, as "Old Lady 31." Had Miss Crothers gone into the business of projecting this story without knowing and respecting her human material, it would have been a thin entertainment. But she had such a strong grasp of the characters she proposed to deal with that the new factor of a man in their communal life gave her just the chance she needed to exhibit their amusingness. Every kind of femininity comes out in the galvanizing presence of Abe, and every kind of masculinity is produced in Abe, and in the misogynistic Mike, by the presence of so many concentrating women. In all this part of "Old Lady 31," the core of its drama, there are the qualities which make Miss Crothers a genuine contributor to American drama and America's capture of its own life. Aided by an admirable cast of women, and by a remarkable costume designer in A. Deutsch, a drama has been honestly placed in one of those neglected yet ramified areas of possibility which an integral group always provides, and not only has it been placed there with regard to its plausible occurrence but with regard to the fine interest of the group itself. By reason of her ability to appreciate such a group, to see its powerful interest regardless of the supposed needs of Broadway, Miss Crothers really equips herself extraordinarily to write gen-

uine drama. And that one enjoys about "Old Lady 31." But my enjoyment is marred by the stupid conventional-ity of the ending—Abe's windfall—and by the sunshine so assiduously poured in and about the character of Angie. Miss Crothers has integrity as a creator. It is worth fighting for, against Broadway and hell combined, and she has apparently not managed to plan for her integrity or to risk profit for it as much as she should.

F. H.

An International Program

International Government, by L. S. Woolf. With an introduction by Bernard Shaw. New York: Brentano's. \$2.00.

THE problem of world peace is the problem of international organization. Admitting this basic truth, we have been wont to think of it in utter hopelessness because of our belief there is an unavoidable dilemma. We have become convinced that the alternatives are "Utopia or Hell," and that one is as impracticable as the other is undesirable. There has been no dearth of vague aspirations; but it required the shock of war to awaken us to the imperative necessity of a practical program.

The Fabian Society was among the first to respond to the new impulse. The question of international organization was referred to its research department; a timely donation provided the necessary endowment; and an investigator was secured in Mr. L. S. Woolf to make a study of what has actually been accomplished in the way of international government. The report was thoroughly discussed in the research department, and then offered for general public discussion as a supplement to *The New Statesman*. Later on it was submitted to a summer conference including a number of non-Fabian experts, among them a group that had been working independently on the subject under Lord Bryce. It is now published as being as good as the Fabian Society can make it at the present time. It is not too much to say that it not only refutes the unavoidable dilemma, but contains the most practicable and constructive suggestions for organization yet offered to a distracted world.

It has been a fatal defect in most projects for international government that they have disregarded the experience of history. They have assumed that there could be no half-way house on the road to Utopia. We have had a great variety of utopian schemes for world federation, but few serious attempts really to find out how far we have already progressed toward international government. The opinion has been too widely held that we have not progressed at all. Mr. Woolf and the Fabians approach the problem from a different angle. They start with the premise that we already possess a rudimentary international authority, not the perverse invention of cranks, but the result of a spontaneous growth to meet international needs. They entertain no illusions as to what international government of the future is to be. Instead of Utopia they see that it must be "a duller and heavier structure placed logically upon the foundations of the existing system."

If the vague protoplasmic authority already developed is to become an effective agency of international government it must offer a rational alternative for war as a method of settling international disputes. International disputes are of two kinds: they are either justiciable or non-justiciable. They are justiciable if they can be reduced to an issue of fact or of law and determined by judicial proceedings.

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They are non-justiciable if they involve issues of policy or controversies as to what the law ought to be. The Fabians are right in repudiating the traditional notion that the importance of certain disputes affecting honor or vital interests makes them non-justiciable. It is well known to students of international relations that this is no test of justiciability. Judicial settlement of such issues has frequently been accepted where a suitable procedure existed and the question could go to the tribunal as an issue of fact or law. The Fabian project undertakes to define justiciable issues and to make their reference to judicial settlement obligatory, while leaving the greatest possible freedom in the matter of choosing a tribunal. An international High Court is to be created with power to enforce its decrees by ordering non-intercourse or joint coercive action, but the importance of the central tribunal is not exaggerated. The purpose is to provide a court of easy access before which disputes must be brought if the parties cannot agree upon another tribunal. "The art of administering and interpreting international law," says Mr. Woolf, "has only just been born, and we know so little about it that by trying to confine it to rigid lines we may easily kill it in infancy."

Some of the most important international controversies are essentially non-justiciable and require a legislative procedure for their adjustment. We already possess, in the machinery of international conferences, a rudimentary legislature that has shown remarkable efficacy in preventing war. We have also a large body of international legislation secured through conferences, public international unions, associations for securing uniform law, and other agencies. The immediate problem is to develop existing machinery