

LOOKS TO STAGE TO MEND PRESENT DAY MORALS

Miss Rachel Crothers, Who Wrote 'Nice People,' a Play Portraying the Younger Generation, Is Confident Modern Girls Will See the Folly of Extravagant Dress, Too Much Freedom and Aimless Existence

DECADENCE in modern morals and manners, discussed week by week in the columns of THE NEW YORK HERALD by important men and women, is the subject matter of a current play, "Nice People," the author of which, Miss Rachel Crothers, to-day tells how she was led to write it by her observation of this trait in modern society.

In this playwright's work from her first piece, "The Three of Us," played in New York in 1905, and including more recent successful plays, "The Little Journey" and "39 East," a serious vein is apparent. Her talk about the manners of the younger generation is a valuable contribution.

HOW did I come to write the play "Nice People"? If I had not written it somebody else would; it was in the air; everybody was talking of the things that make the substance of the play—the commonness of the current manners of young women and men; the lack of a moral tone—not merely a high moral tone, but a decent one—and the subject simply had to be put on the stage. Is that a sufficient reason?

Miss Rachel Crothers, who explained herself and the present social conditions, that to many persons seem to reflect decadence of morals and manners, in the above words, was far from Broadway as she uttered them. Safe from the insinuating cocktail, the prevailing smoke of cigarettes, far out of hearing of jazz, in a pretty summer home that she has remodelled from a farmhouse more than one hundred years old in the Berkshire foothills, the dramatist was in a situation and in a mood to philosophize on life and to draw a moral from it, as she has done to some purpose in "Nice People."

"The effect of this stage piece," said she, "is another proof of the wonderful, the all powerful work of the theatre. I always marvelled at it from the way it influenced me, and the older I grow in knowledge of the world (I hope) as in years, I wonder more and more.

"Do people realize what the stage can do? It can preach a sermon that people who have forgotten the way to churches stop and listen to. A transcendent power—yet we waste it, we fritter it away!

"Don't imagine that this kind of moralizing piece reached the footlights without some obstacles having to be overcome. There were the gravest doubts felt that its message was so openly revealed as to offend people and strangle the play before it was fairly born. I never feared this unhappy fate for it, but, as you know, the author of a play is not the only person who has to be considered—there are managers and critics and all sorts of people of little faith.

"But the facts have been these: Parents have gone to see this piece and after the performance have said: 'That girl (the heroine) talked exactly as our own daughter does—she used her very words.' Young men have taken their sweethearts to see it and turned to say at the close of the first act: 'The scene might be in your own home. Why, the people are ourselves!'

Happy Ending Is Criticized As Due to Box Office Orders

There have been criticisms to the effect that the author in the first act took an exaggerated condition of things and then, to suit the exigency of the box office, compelled a happy ending. I don't want to talk of the play any further than to use it as a theme for what you ask of me, my opinion of present day manners and morals and what they lead to, but in justice to the piece I do want to say this: The first act is a bit of life in New York itself; it is realism with a vengeance. The heart of the play is in it, and it couldn't have gone on to a finish unless that first act were true.

Miss Crothers then asserted that her pessimistic critics were wrong in finding, as they thought they found, a "box office" ending in the piece.

"I am optimistic about the future of the young people whose manners nevertheless shock me. And I believe the present conditions are bound to change and that girls like *Teddy* will come to their senses, see themselves as they are and correct their faults of taste.

"For, classify all the things, all the in-

fluences, that make men and women of society what they are, the leading one, the most influential one, is taste. Persuade a girl of the 'nice people' type that she is giving an exhibition of bad taste and you'll find that she quickly reforms her most glaring faults.

"To 'carry on' with my optimistic vein—already some of the things we have all witnessed with fear and trembling are dying out; already there is a change for the better in dress and deportment. There is less drinking (there has to be less for us all) among young people; girls don't smoke quite so much because they have found that immoderate indulgence is bad for their throats and gives a bad note to their voices and their manners with the callow youth of the opposite sex are not so free.

Says Five Years Will Show Disappearance of the Evils

"I predict that in five years most of the disagreeable sights and sounds we have been seeing and hearing in society will have disappeared.

"And I have never thought the girls like *Teddy* were downright immoral. No, indeed; I believe there is as much absolute chastity among women to-day as there ever was. In the very high and in the very low a lack of this quality has always persisted. But it has always persisted in the great middle class, where—don't the philosophers and moralizers always say it?—our safety has lain and will always lie.

"These girls—flappers, sometimes called—are not bad girls. They do the *outré* thing in order to be remarked for smartness. They are true at the core. They will be cured of the vices we rail at by a shock, a disillusion, some terrible unhappiness. This thing is bound to come to restore the sanity of the race.

"I predict also that these very girls, who claim independence, who want to see 'life' and go to look at it in dangerous places, will recover balance. Love is by no means worn out; they will fall in love and marry. There will be mistakes, there will be divorces, but the majority of these new marriages contracted between boys and girls who enjoyed a real comradeship will turn out happily.

"Another thing: the girls of the present generation who escape will know what they have escaped. Mark what I say, it is this: These very girls will bring up their children more carefully, more wisely, than they themselves were brought up.

"No, indeed; men soon learn their mistake if they presume on a conclusion that a girl of the day is immoral. It is the elder woman who is. Her influence—that of a gay, reckless, amusing woman of the world, who has sought and yielded to every form of excitement—constitutes the dangerous element in a young girl's life and not the gay young man.

"The stage has been seeking, in a small, tentative way, to be sure, to enforce this fact. Isn't it the cynical married woman or divorcee portrayed on the stage that justly carries all the subtle evil of a play?

"The stage will go a step further, I believe, and perhaps no later than next season, to try to demonstrate to the younger generation that it can be a dynamic force for good as well as for evil. If a New York girl realized how far her personal example penetrates, yes, to the remotest hamlet of this broad country, she would hesitate for very decency's sake to make it a debasing example.

"New York itself, the city, for all its civic pride, does not fully appreciate what it can do to make the country purer and nobler. Everything is drawn from New York. There used to be a time when the leisured classes of small Middle Western cities went to the nearest large city, like Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, etc. of manners, its kind of amusements, its

Francine Larrimore as *Teddy* in "Nice People." At right, Miss Rachel Crothers, who says her play will help mend modern morals.



style of dress. They do this no longer. They come to New York. Any fashion must have the New York trade mark.

"I draw an illustration from my own home town. Years ago, in the generation before mine, a saving, industrious man and his wife bought some acres in the corn belt of Illinois. He added to them and added to them and died a multi-millionaire, leaving nine sons. Eight of the boys had been sent to Eastern colleges; one, the eldest, stayed at home to help his father.

"The family wealth was equally divided and that generation lived comfortably, even luxuriously, until the automobile generation arrived. Then the grandchildren of the founder of the family married in turn and turned their attention to New York. They spent their money in New York; they wore New York clothes, and among other customs, good and bad, which this third generation adopted was the divorce habit. They took it badly. Divorces have divided the family into almost endless divisions, and the great fortune, once considered a total, has been lost or cut up into insignificant portions. In this family the New York example has worked havoc.

"All this will be changed, I think, without New York losing its pre-eminence, by the oncoming generation learning to beware what they do, since evil associations here corrupt so widely.

"Part of the lesson these clear eyed girls of ours, who have craved to know life at too early an age, will learn, will be to grow less

self-conscious—to think less of their clothes, less of what kind of impression they are making, and more on how or by what traits of character they are making it. They need the shock that *Teddy* gets in the play to point this new way to live, but—don't worry—they will get it.

"The boys will teach them. After all it is said, the young men are much more satisfactory. They already see that the way we live now is not real living; they are becoming serious, and this will carry over to the girls.

"Why, already one hears the young men attributing a good many things that they don't like to the way women behave. They say that women's lack of restraint in the use of tobacco, for instance, is what is giving power to the anti-cigarette league. I have no opinion to give about that. I do not believe that women had much to do with prohibition, but I advance this sort of undercurrent resentment as another thing that will have weight with women. The world has not changed; women still court popularity with the stronger sex—it still is the breath in their nostrils.

"The playwright was gently but firmly invited to return to the argument of "Nice People" from those excursions far afield. She promised to do so provided she could first report what she had heard a woman 75 years old say at a fashionable wedding.

"Some people were inveighing, as usual, against the very open faults of our girls, and this wise old lady said:

"Dear friends, what the girls of to-day are doing—that is, moving fearlessly and equally among men—is exactly what we wanted to do in our young days and—didn't dare to!"

Story of the Play Simple, But Carries Lesson Well

Then Miss Crothers told the story of her play, which is, in truth, very simple. Its heroine, a motherless girl, spoiled by the overindulgence of her father, when the latter seeks to curb her at once goes further in the road of audacity than she had ever intended.

This heroine, *Teddy*, for short, is painfully disillusioned by the discovery she makes that one of her suitors, for whom she thought she cared, values her by a money standard and with utter selfishness.

The pair, in one of their wild "joy" rides by night, are driven to find shelter in a lonely house. There the self-seeking suitor discloses himself and when she resists him he taunts her with the jibe that she has lost her reputation unless she marries him.

But the storm blows in another type of modern young man. He believes in *Teddy's* purity without proof or witnesses, and her gratitude is not long in turning to a warmer feeling. The play ends in a perfectly reasonable expectation of happiness for both.

"For, you see," said Miss Crothers, "*Teddy*, had intelligence. So have our younger generation. They will cast off the present day hampering fashions because they are clever enough to know they hamper. They will make good wives, fine housekeepers, sensible mothers, because they are intelligent.

The essence of this chat, with its illustrative anecdotes, is to be found in the play. Its cruelties in the first act, the atmospheric act, as the playwright called it, picturing only reality. As its more dramatic scenes follow, the reader may judge for himself whether or not the author has used the right adjectives to describe it.

Part of the Dramatic Opening Of the Play, "Nice People"

the play opens *Theodora* (*Teddy*) *Gloucester* is giving a little dance in her father's apartment on Park avenue, and to her aunt, *Margaret Rainsford*, who has come (she thinks) to chaperon the girl, *Theodora* presents her guests when she thinks of it. To describe *Mrs. Rainsford's* dress is to describe her; a black evening gown at once modish and conservative, with an exclusiveness which lifts it above mere smartness. The manners of the young people shock her, but she preserves her sang froid until toward midnight a plan of running uptown to a dance hall is proposed. The tolerant father lends his daughter his car and one of the young men asks as a matter of form:

Aren't you coming with us, *Mrs. Rainsford*? *Mrs. Rainsford*: Thank you, no, unless you need me. Who is going to chaperon you?

Teddy (laughs): Chaperon? Heavens! Aunt Margaret, we're not babies. I haven't been any place with a chaperon for a million years.

Mrs. Rainsford: You're twenty, I believe.

The young people banter one another in rather a coarse way, and as they are starting *Teddy* suddenly remembers that she is without money and she "touches" her father, explaining that this is her party. *Mr. Gloucester*

fer hunts through his pockets and produces \$80 and the gay party sets forth, with *Teddy* calling back:

"If anybody telephones tell them we're—no, I don't know where we'll be. I'll be home early in the morning."

Mrs. Rainsford and the father are left to talk *Teddy* over. The aunt finds what she has seen and heard "simply appalling." *Mr. Gloucester* soothes her, saying: "Why, these are the nicest kind of young people. Smart families, every one of them."

Mrs. Rainsford: That's just it. That's what makes it so horrible. If they were common little upstarts and parvenus it would be easy enough to understand. But *nice people*. What are their parents thinking of? Can't they see what it is going to do to the future generations?

Gloucester: Why Margaret—there never was a generation that grew up that didn't think the next one coming on was going to be dogs. They're freer—yes—because they are younger. I believe they are actually safer than the bottled up age I went through—when we had to sneak about all the devilry we did. They're perfectly open and above board about it; you'll have to admit that.

But the aunt reviews what she (and the audience) have seen, girls smoking cigarettes, drinking cocktails, and cries out: "What are their parents thinking of? Can't they see what it's going to do to the future generations?"

She appeals to the memory of her dead sister, *Teddy's* mother, exclaiming: "How she would have hated it! She wouldn't let you give that child \$80 to throw away in an evening. She wouldn't have let her go about half naked!"

And she adds: "The emptiness, the soullessness of it all. I've been here three days and I haven't heard her or any of her friends say a single word or express a thought about anything on earth but their clothes and their motors and themselves. They all talk alike, think alike, dress alike . . . and the drinking! Your house is the best in heaven's name and she is doing all he can to make his daughter happy. 'She's all right,' says he, 'she's a nice girl and she's perfectly capable of taking care of herself.'"

Mrs. Rainsford: She isn't! She isn't! She's only a child. She's surrounded by everything that can hurt her and by nothing that can help her. It's all chaos and waste and degeneracy . . . she's the essence of this thing that's in the air. America's infinitely worse than Europe . . . there's some excuse for it, perhaps . . . in the "inevitable reaction."

But why in heaven's name are some decent people over here allowing themselves and their children to wallow in food and clothes and pleasures at the expense of their breeding, their culture and their inheritance of wholesome American common sense? Why have you let it kill *Theodora*?

Theodora comes in with her follower and is surprised to find her aunt and father still up. She explains that the party has changed its mind and is going some "place further up." Her father asks what place. *Teddy* turns to the young man, but he isn't sure where it is. The hour is 1 o'clock. Influenced by what *Mrs. Rainsford* has been saying, *Mr. Gloucester* says she can't go.

Teddy: Really, you're funny. I'm not going to disappoint those people.

Gloucester: You'll not go.

Teddy: You can't speak to me that way; I'm not a baby. I'm going. You're extremely disagreeable, you can't make me break a positive engagement.

But *Mrs. Gloucester* is firm and *Teddy* dismisses her attendant, then turns to her father:

You've never questioned my good taste before about where I go and what I do. Why this sudden . . .

Gloucester: I hope you've never done anything before that needed questioning.

Teddy: Do you think we've never done this before? We do it all the time and then we come downtown and have breakfast at *Child's* . . . and it's late or (fun and I intend to keep on doing it, or anything else I want to do. I suppose I can thank you, Aunt Margaret, for this sudden interest in my affairs. I have never been so humiliated in my life!

The father orders her off to bed, and the girl exclaims with an unpleasant laugh: "Are you going to decide when I am to go to bed, too? You'd better put me on a leash, father. It will be easier for you."

Before she goes, however, her aunt explains that what she has said was because she wanted to help her niece.

Teddy: What a joke! *Mrs. Rainsford*: The very dress you have on is indecent. These boys . . . this promiscuous love-making that I see going on here all the time . . . the familiarity . . . the kissing—it's all wrong—as wrong as it can be.

Teddy: Kissing? How stupid. There are kisses and kisses. Kissing doesn't mean any more now than 'slapping hands did—I suppose—when you were a girl.

Mrs. Rainsford: Don't you know that you are wasting the most precious years of your life without doing one summer of good to anybody? Or thinking one thought of anything but yourself and your body? Don't you know you are spending too much money, wasting it here and there, when there never was a time that greater good could be done with it? Don't you know you are being horribly criticized for it?

Teddy: You've said quite enough, Aunt Margaret. *Mrs. Rainsford* (going to door): I've hurt you and I only want to help you.

Teddy: But I don't need your help. Good night. *Mrs. Rainsford*: My dear little girl—try to see that I'm only—won't you kiss me good night?

(*Teddy* does not move and *Mrs. Rainsford* goes out. Slow tears come into *Teddy's* eyes. She fights them away, crosses the hall to the telephone.)

Teddy: Hello. Is there a young man down there? Ask him to come to the telephone. Hello Seattle—I'll change my gown and be down in fifteen minutes. Telephone the others and ask them to wait for us. I know a peach of a place to go for breakfast. What? Yes, of course, he nearly choked. Stuff. I hope you don't think I'm afraid of Dad. He was only showing off before Aunt Margaret—trying to make a noise like a father.

She puts up the receiver and the

CURTAIN FALLS.

Chasing Rum-Runners on the Canadian Border

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having conversation with a farmer in a general store.

"Decided not to go right home, hey?" started Wilson.

"I am trying to sell the colt," explained the fat man.

"Tell us about yourself."

"It's none of your damned business," growled the big fellow.

"Maybe, maybe," mused Wilson, "but you better keep straight because we're looking at you for a week or so."

So we left, still certain that there was something queer about it.

"We'll get that whole outfit one of these nights," said one of the Canadian officials. There was a dance in progress in a hall at Huntington. It was quite an affair. The orchestra was entirely overwhelmed by hootch and a girl was whizzing the big drum with an empty bottle. An American tried to drive a Ford into the place and we decided to run along before the ensuing fight reached the bottle-throwing stage.

"That's for the police to settle," said Wilson.

The return trip was uneventful until we reached a cross road within a mile of Wilson's station north of Trout River. At the side of the road stood a long, two seated car, in which a girl sat. Peering into the engine was a man.

"What's the matter?" demanded McMillan.

"Don't know. Was runnin' up to a farm here to get a couple of bottles of hootch for a party we're giving next week."

"That's too bad," said Wilson. "But maybe you're in luck you weren't comin' home with the stuff. Not that we have any objection to you havin' your party."

"Oh, they're policemen," screamed the girl.

"We're not," protested Wilson, "and we'll give you a tow to my place down the road, where we can look at the engine in the light."

The engine responded to treatment and the pair hit out for home back in the States. They decided to have a dry party.

"There are many like that," said Wilson. "They're decent people, who didn't abuse liquor and it's those folks who suffer for the bootleggers."

It is not possible to set down here or elsewhere the approximate amount of liquor coming into the United States from Canada. It would be like trying to estimate the amount stored in the private vaults and cellars throughout America. It comes into New York via the Niagara frontier and the St. Lawrence River. From the nominally dry Province of Ontario it seeps across the border into Michigan and down to Ohio by boat. It can be had and guessed—a wild guess. Montreal liquor dealers do not publish their sales nor do the Ontario distillers.

The greater portion of the stuff comes down from Montreal. From Michigan comes

word that as much as ten freight car loads have arrived in Detroit in a day, and the average freight car will carry from 600 to 700 cases. There is little if any secrecy. Along the border bootlegging is laughed at. The rum-runner is something of a hero to all but the more rigid folks.

"Bootleggers?" laughed a policeman in one town visited by the writer. "Well, stranger, they ought to be tagging everybody 'I am a bootlegger' or 'I ain't a bootlegger,' so's there wouldn't be any confusion. 'They say everybody here's bootleggin' except the minister and the school teacher, and personally, I have my doubts about the parson."

Most of the smuggled stuff is Canadian rye. Scotch has the call in New York city, but elsewhere they crave red liquor. The prices vary. Canadian rye—standard brands—may be had in Quebec as low as \$18 a case. Of course, it's vile stuff, but it has the desired effect. Then you can get less vicious concoctions for \$30 a case and the very best and genuine Scotch brings \$60 in Canada. The price is doubled and tripled by the time it reaches the consumer, of course.

It stands to reason that Canada, apparently on the verge of air tight prohibition herself, cannot manufacture all the whiskey the combined wants of both countries call for. She is importing a great deal, and, for the greater part, drinking the imported stuff and shipping her own product to the States. From all countries Canada imported

only 2,697,021 gallons during the ten months immediately preceding January 1, 1921. Of this, 1,347,933 gallons came from the United Kingdom and the value thereof is recorded as \$12,000,000.

Now it is discovered that liquor importations into Canada are exceeding all past records. At the present rate the Dominion will import about three times as much whiskey this year as last. The reason and answer are simple.

The American liquor importer, outlawed in his own country, has opened shop in Canada. And he is seeing to it that the stuff is getting to the United States in the rum-runner's car. Spend a week along the border. See and talk to acknowledged rum-runners. Watch how cheerfully they pay their fines, lose their huge touring cars and expensive cargoes. They use only the best, the largest and the fastest automobiles. They have but to telephone and bond is forthcoming. Their fines are paid swiftly and invariably. By whom? Certainly not by these rough neck lads who laugh when arrested and laugh again when the courts fine them.

Out of the District Attorney's office in Buffalo comes the statement that the traffic is controlled by a Cincinnati syndicate that did a \$1,000,000,000 worth of business last year. Be this true or not, the fact remains that the Canadian wholesalers laugh when you speak of the financial risk they take. They insist that the money is always forthcoming and that they have ample guarantees against losses.