

"Whiteoaks": Peggy Asprey Succeeds in Difficult Role

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Renny Alan Ward
 Augusta, Lady Buckley Jean Jarrott
 Ernest D. Kellett Cameron
 Piers Peter Buchanan
 Nicholas Ley Outridge
 Wakefield Tom Hearle
 Finch John Dolby
 Pheasant Betty M. Brown
 Adeline Whiteoak Peggy Asprey
 Meg Mavis Busch
 Mr. Patton George Gordon
 Merlin
 Nip
 Boney

Play Produced by Clare Clarke.

Act 1: Grandmama Whiteoaks, aged 101, interrupts her numerous sons and grandsons at supper. She is a peppery, bad-mannered, self-centred, choleric old lady, declaring that she "won't be left out of things." She flies off at all sorts of tangents, and does it consistently till the very end.

Succeeding scenes: There is a good deal of pointed discussion as to how the old lady will dispose of her fortune when she dies. The old lady knows it, and in between reminiscences of "Great Days! Great Days!" makes one or two tentative inquiries.

Still later: She dies over a game of back gammon.

The last scene: The effect of the will on the household.

That is what might be crudely termed the plot of "Whiteoaks," *Mazo de la Roche's* play which was presented by the Repertory Theatre last night. Obviously the play stands or falls by its characterisation. Indeed one could go even further and say that the play stands or falls by the specific gravity of Peggy Asprey, who played the old lady, and it just about supported the strain. Is a play with the success of the whole depending solely on one character a good repertory play? Let that pass.

Here is a play, therefore, with more than the average danger points for a repertory company. To put it mildly, a large number of character parts were handled in a manner which was a trifle short of ideal. In the first act, the tempo was far too fast, and one felt that the whole structure would collapse if things continued in this fashion. Miss Peggy Asprey did not make a good impression at the beginning. She spoke in a high pitched squeaky voice, which

pression at the beginning. She spoke in a high pitched squeaky voice, which made hearing difficult. In fact I cannot imagine people farther back in the stalls hearing what she said at all. Someone must have passed along the word behind stage in the first interval for thereafter she pulled the threads of the character together wonderfully, and scene after scene was progressively better and better until she died gratefully in her chair in what might for want of a better term, be called a blaze of glory. Taking all things into consideration therefore Miss Asprey, who is a young miss in her teens so I am informed, gave a rather good delineation of the character of this old curmudgeon. She looked the part, and she played it for all it was worth. She was never better than in her final scene when with bursts of absent-mindedness she played backgammon, with her long fingers hanging like talons over the pieces on the board. The only difficulty in her make up was the eyes which were uncannily alive inside her otherwise frail body.

The Whiteoaks family is a horsey family. They have no time for

musicians, and when one of their number dared to aspire to musicianship there was an unholy rumpus. That brought the part of Finch, the musician, into the limelight. John Dolby played it with more than his usual amount of restraint and dexterity. He always appeared to be weak, which was as his brothers and uncles saw him. But the old lady saw beneath exteriors and selected him as her heir, much to the chagrin of the rest. The majority of the other players did well enough, the truth being that the well was not quite enough. That is the difficulty with many of the repertory productions. They seem to be satisfied with a standard that is just short of good . . . perhaps the "that near enough" attitude. Perhaps the producers do not see it that way, but the players certainly do. Otherwise we would not have half the prompting that goes on. Last night there were the usual long, awkward pauses with everyone looking a trifle uncomfortable while some one was given his line. Admit that one of the main offenders in this regard was a man who had but a fortnight to learn his part. Even so these things should not be. The flickering of lights after the curtain has gone up is another fault in production that should be corrected forthwith. Apart from these things Miss

in production that should be corrected forthwith. Apart from these things Miss Clare Clarke did a very fair job of production. That first act moved along very naturally although it was trifle on the fast side. And generally there was a pleasing naturalness about the whole company in much that happened then and in later scenes. Of the other players Alan Ward achieved a smooth naturalness and etched in what was virtually a character with a good deal of nobility in it. Peter Buchanan did some good spots of acting when it might not reasonably be expected of him. Ley Outridge and D. Kellel Cameron lost all individuality somewhere in the presentation of two colourless characters. The boy, Tom Harie, did excellently, for a boy, if he is one.

The play will be repeated this evening

A. H. T.