

Distinguished Company



FOR some three weeks now, the main New Zealand cities have been honouring distinguished guests. They are Dame Sybil Thorndike and Sir Lewis Casson, who have been celebrated, both singly and together, for at least half a century. The route they have travelled from modest beginnings to their present eminence has been neither a Royal

road nor a straight one. It has branched and ramified; it has led Sir Lewis to the Court Theatre under the famous Vedrenne-Barker aegis which first made the name of Bernard Shaw widely celebrated, to the Old Vic as actor and producer, through seasons of Greek Tragedy and Grand Guignol to intimate domestic comedy; Dame Sybil acted in Miss Horniman's renowned Repertory Theatre in Manchester before the First World War, and then at the Old Vic from 1914-1918, where she played not only all of the most exacting female roles but could also be seen as Prince Hall, Puck,

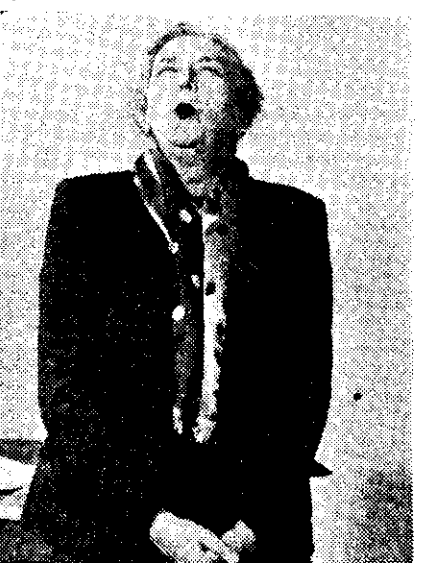
★ "Ah, what a death hath found thee, little one."—*The Trojan Women*. ★

LEFT: "One sees an exquisite intimacy in their performance"

Launcelot Gobbo, the Fool in *Lear*, and Ferdinand in *The Tempest*, joined her husband in seasons of Greek Tragedy and Grand Guignol, was the first Saint Joan and the first Miss Moffatt of *The Corn is Green*, and thus to plays like *The Linden Tree*, *Waters of the Moon*, and *A Day By the Sea*.

All this gives a pleasant and seemingly inevitable shape to their lives. Apprenticeship, maturity, full flowering into the great classical roles, then a slow decline into the skilled but less exacting convention of domestic comedy, the autumn of a vivid and spectacularly successful life. It would be a delightful picture if there were a word of truth in it. But both Dame Sybil and Sir Lewis are as busy as they have ever been, and when one asks just what they are bringing us from their packed careers, the answer is that they are bringing it all. You may see Sir Lewis as the messenger burdened with the awful tidings of Medea's revenge, as Henry V. as Macbeth, as Benedick, as Wolsey, as an Elizabethan statesman, or the rueful deliverer of the ballad "Carcassonne"; Dame Sybil as Medea, Beatrice, Lady Macbeth, Queen Katherine, Princess Katherine, an old Cockney woman: they do them all, and they do them at the top of their bent. From a lifetime of study, practice and great success, they run for us nothing less than the entire gamut of their art.

How is it, one asks, that a woman of Dame Sybil's age can be so beautiful? Is it just? Is it reasonable? Is it possible? Go and see her then: judge for yourself. For beautiful she is, and how much more, before us, than any photograph can reveal. For a photograph misses Dame Sybil's wonderful animation, and if you don't see that, you may miss her altogether. For she is all animation, all life, and all grace. Exquisitely dressed, with no properties to aid her except a light coloured stole, her smallest movement has about it an irresistible eloquence. That curtsy, how regal, yet how benign! Those fine, fluent hands: what delicious arabesques they can describe, yet how inflexibly can they



"Oh, to be in England"
—Browning

"I will come back to you I swear I will"
—Edna St. Vincent Millay

"Oh, you'll be sorry for that word!"
—Edna St. Vincent Millay