

Sweetness and light in M.R.A. comedy

By PERCY BANESHIK

ALEXANDER THEATRE: "Through the Garden Wall."

MORAL Re-Armament's own special paraphrasis of the Golden Rule ("Do Unto Others . . ."—remember?) gets the full glossy treatment once again in this play from the pen of the late Peter Howard.

And he has had a great variety of sources to draw from in creating the situation on which he hangs his didactic hat—such things as Pyramis and Thisbe, the Montagu-Capulet conflict, and even a more recent one: the off-Broadway success that Leon Gluckman brought to Johannesburg a few years back called "The Fantasticks."

For, literally, there is a garden wall in the play, dividing two households, each peopled by families of strikingly contrasted temperaments, who are finally reconciled through the youthful love of the son and daughter, respectively, of the warring factions.

Supernatural

But there is a third factor—a figure who pierces the veils of prejudice with a phrase and sets things to rights about him with a supernatural omniscience.

If this figure isn't direct from "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," then coincidence is as uncanny as the light that seems to shine from behind this character's head.

Howard bent all these time-worn conventions to his purpose, however, and has furnished us with a play not so consciously persuasive as it might have been. It comes up, in fact, as a fairly flip comedy.

In spite of their utterly polar dispositions, the two families repeat a pattern in

their structures. Each has a dominant figure who has ruled the roost for too long, and each is stirred to rebellion against its petty tyrant, so that all is sweetness and light by the end of the evening's argument.

Perceptive

It is written with wit and some charm, and played by a selectively recruited cast. Louis Iff as Dr. Gold, the strangely perceptive physician who needs no stethoscope to diagnose all human ills, has one of the most rewarding roles of his career, and develops it intelligently and impressively.

Margaret Inglis, henpecking her husband (Robert Langford) until the Golden dawn breaks, has a sharp edge she has seldom shown us heretofore.

But Kenneth Baker, as the easy-going brother-in-law about the house, was less boozy than he might have been.

George Korelin's accent as the neighbour vaguely from beyond the Iron Curtain was curiously identifiable as something closer to home, though Anthony James's, as his brother, was alarmingly non-descript.

Susan Nellist and Gordon Wales, portraying the star-crossed (but M.R.A.-straightened) lovers, rose decently to their roles.

Production, jointly by Nora Caulfield and Mr. Langford, showed a sense of dedication.