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Celebrating 175: Scrapbook about Marion Sanford (disbound), 1937-1948

Extracted on Mar-29-2024 02:37:13

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Warren, PA.

wrightley or wrongley
A COMMONPLACE BOOK

NEW YORK DIARY

MONDAY: All Fool's Day, 1946. The sun is shining with that special blue brilliance which is the true Manhattan cocktail. The air is balmy; the hurrying people a bit barmy. Spring in New York! At Rockefeller Center the daffodils and narcissus are blooming. The skaters whirl and pirouette, while a wreath of spring-garbed spectators watches from above. In the evening to dinner with Ernest Nathan at a Russian Tearoom on 57th Street. The borscht very good. The cocktails, made with vodka, taste like cough medicine. Ernie certainly a prize example of what brains and energy can do.

Thence to see "The Magnificent Yankee." Louis Calhern a little too broad and athletic, too much like a cowboy, for Justice Holmes, the ultimate flower of intellectual aristocracy. But he certainly does an inspiring job with the part. The colorless stage set cast a dusty shadow over the play, which is merely an episodic account of Holmes' life, beginning with his arrival in Washington at 61. For us it did not come emotionally alive until the third act; and then but tepidly. The last tableau was stirring, with the aged Justice painfully straightening his bent limbs and drawing himself up to a soldier's stature to meet his commander-in-chief, the new President, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

TUESDAY: Visit with Russell Maloney, late of the New Yorker, and Miriam Battista. Their daughter Amelia, beginning to walk, gets all mixed up with three slippery dachshunds. Maloney recently began a dramatic section for The Atlantic; is working on a novelette for magazine publication and the movies; writing the lyrics for a musical show; doing a bit of lecturing. To Scribner's in hopes of finding a copy of "The Wind in the Willows." Surprisingly, found it.

Evening, to see "Harvey." Not since "Rain" have we seen such a remarkable assortment of "characters." Strange, how a lifetime of vaudeville could fit Frank Fay for this particular part and no other conceivable one. Best bits: Dowd's remark: "I have been fighting reality for thirty years, and I finally got the better of it." The psychiatrist's dithyramb about a beautiful maple tree near Akron, Ohio; where, with Harvey's aid, he wishes to sit indefinitely, a beautiful girl and an endless supply of beer at his constant disposal. Frank Fay's lengthy curtain speech, really an epilogue to the play.

WEDNESDAY: Dinner with Gretta and Bill Pilat. To talk of the old days of our harassed but abundant youth. Bill, onetime Macy and Kimbel executive, was snared by the O.P.A and authored the shoe rationing program. Then to England to help plan the strategy of the bombing of Germany. Then to the Pacific, commuting from captured island to island to observe air warfare results. All this, as a civilian. In the evening to Larchmont, to dine with Martha and Ben Williamson. Ben gives us a little inside dope on "Time," of which he is an editor. Drove back to New York, along the Hudson, where scores of rusty and weary warships, including the flattop, Midway, loom spectrally in the starlit half-darkness.



THURSDAY: Dinner with Jane and Herbert Reed. Jane, now librarian at U.N.O headquarters. Herbert, recently returned from army years. Thence to see "Pygmalion;" a dated social essay by Mr. B. Shaw. Much conversation, little dramatic impact. Maybe the play has a moral and maybe the moral is: there is so little difference between the upper and lower classes that you can take a cockney flower-girl from the streets and, in six months, transform her into a reasonable facsimile of a duchess. This may have been a startling pronouncement in 1910, but it bores us today. Gertrude Lawrence's interpretation was mannered to the point of eccentricity. Raymond Massey showed neither subtlety nor flexibility in his too harsh portrayal of Pygmalion Henry Higgins.

FRIDAY: Met Clint Wilder and with him to the Maloney's, where good conversation about the theatre. Then an Italian dinner with overtones of garlic (undertones too). Thence, to see Maurice Evans in "Hamlet." Edwin Booth set a record of 100 performances in his day. John Barrymore flippantly bettered it at 101. Maurice Evans has been going on practically indefinitely. This is said to be a Hamlet in modern dress. Yet the costumes range all the way from 1800 knee-breeches of Polonius to contemporary Danish army uniforms. We enjoyed the stage-sets and the lighting. Evans' portrayal was competent but not inspiring; conscientious but not moving; accurate but not lyrical nor even dramatically creative. As a ritual performance of "Hamlet" the play is well enough but so are morning services at St. John the Divine's.

SATURDAY: Dinner at Le Bistro with Tommy Sanford, surely one of the most distinguished artists who have ever gone out of Warren into the halls of fame. We were delighted to find Tommy unchanged in any way. Her studio in East 38th Street once belonged to Gutzon Borglum. Examining her sculptures, one cannot help being conscious of standing in the presence of a first-rate creative talent, even without the record of prizes and distinctions she has won in recent years. With Cornelia Chapin, a fellow sculptor of great distinction, she shares the most beautiful home we've seen in New York, or almost anywhere for that matter.

Thence to see "Lute Song," a stylized "love story with music" adapted from Chinese play, "Pi-Pa-Ki." One of the most animating and satisfying spectacles in many a year, and certainly the best thing we saw excepting "Harvey." The only grating note was Mary Martin, whose night-club technique in "putting over" a song seemed out of tune with the lyric subtlety of the play.

With this, its fifty-second number, The Commonplace Book takes its regretful leave of its readers. We cannot fold our tent without a word of warm appreciation to the surprising number of people in Warren and elsewhere, who have shown their interest by letters, cards, by direct comment. Perhaps we shall meet again one day. Meanwhile we shall enjoy the memory of this year's experience.

Forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit.

Monday, April 15
William Wright

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