
"The Last Gentleman" was also the last but one of Arliss's quite prolific Hollywood films, made at regular intervals for Goldwyn, Warners and 20th-Fox throughout the 20's and early 30's. On its completion he left for England to make 'The Iron Duke' (the first of a British series which would span the remainder of the 30's), returning to Hollywood for only one more film, "Cardinal Richelieu". It's a pity in a way that history can't be juggled to make 'The Last Gentleman' his last film, for it's not only an actor's dream role, but would have afforded him a marvellous and graceful vehicle as a farewell to the screen. It's a quiet, gentle film, and wisely isn't blown up to any great dramatic heights, nor expanded to undue lengths. It's enough that it provides a peg for a cast of talented thespians to trot out their wares, carefully under the shadow of the old maestro, who manages to monopolize the last reel with a neat twist that must work far better on film than it ever could have on stage.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

"REUNION IN VIENNA" ( MGM, 1933) Directed by Sidney Franklin

"Reunion in Vienna" has long been withheld for legal reasons, and is still unavailable for theatrical or television exhibition. Very often the forbidden fruits dangled for so long out of reach ripen with a classical quality which is dissolved rather rapidly - and sadly - when the film does become available again. While not quite as perfect a stage-to-screen transition as Franklin's earlier "The Guardsman" (likewise originally a stage vehicle for the Lunts, and filmed with them too), "Reunion in Vienna" holds its own rather well. The one basic difference between stage original and screen translation is that on stage Lynn Fontanne played it full of bubbling energy, rather like the Jean Arthur heroine of a Capra movie. Diana Wytryad's performance is beautifully and serenely done, but her restraint and taste emphasizes the bitter-sweet quality of the play rather than its comedy. Barrymore on the other hand, paralleling Lunt's performance, stressing bravura and even luscious-comedy rather than pathos. It is not a fault, rather than the film's that in 1972 we automatically see the parallels between Barrymore's role here and his own later faded glory in the 40's, as well as unconsciously linking this role with the more tragic ones that he played so well in "Dinner at Eight" and "Grand Hotel". Thus, we expect to be moved far more than we actually are, and the bitter-sweet quality remains wistful rather than sad. In all other ways though - in the elegance of its playing and the wit of its dialogue - the film remains a thorough delight. As always, Sidney Franklin makes no attempt to "improve" on the original by "opening it up" or taking us away from the two or three basic interior sets. Yet always there are subtleties that show that Franklin knows exactly when to use film rather than stage technique - as in the sudden cut to an overhead shot to the toast to the portrait of Emperor Franz Joseph - an angle that gives this scene a poignancy it probably lacked on stage. The music too is honest enough to be straightforward in its use of Strauss waltzes, cunning enough to use a Mickey Mouse effect to accompany one of the love scenes - a scene which, taken out of its original by "opening it up" was still considered daring enough to be cut in certain states on its original release. Skillful and totally undated, this is a piece of sensitive and adroit filmed theatre which should enchant us all today -- all, perhaps, except taxi-drivers, a minority-group that gets quite a roasting in this picture! Incidentally, "Reunion in Vienna" was the only MGM film in which Messrs. Mayer and Thalberg took a chance on John Barrymore without the boxoffice insurance of other stars - and it pays off. Apart from a brief scene at the beginning, audiences have to wait until the beginning of his grand entrance - but once he appears, everything that up quite effortlessly. Incidentally, the play has just been revived very successfully in England with Nigel Patrick and Margaret Leighton, and reportedly a New York revival is imminent too.