

Start of a long life

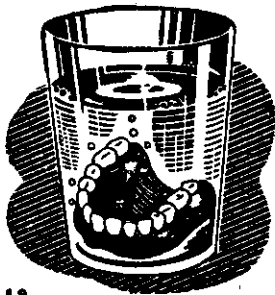
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HOWARD CORRESPONDENCE COLLEGE
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Sarah Churchill in the U.S.

HOW good an actress is this youngest daughter of Winston Churchill? Does her name affect the way she is being received? Is she making Hollywood her ultimate objective in coming to America? Is she just another competent actress, or is there something deeper behind her acting which is making for real greatness?

These were some of the questions which prompted me to attend Sarah Churchill's American debut in Princeton, New Jersey, on June 27. The theatre was the model McCarter theatre where plays and players are tried out before going to Broadway. And the play was Philip Barry's comedy *The Philadelphia Story*, well known already through the screen version.

Miss Churchill receives most of the attention. Tall, with a long face, and a shock of red hair, she is attractive, but not particularly beautiful by the Hollywood stereotype. She moves easily on the stage, and acts with polish and versatility. Her voice has an enormous range. It can be low, even harsh; yet it can also rise to a high, fluttering lilt.

The play concerns a fashionable Philadelphia family with money ("not too much, just more than enough"), blue blood, and a veneer of culture. Miss Churchill assumes with gusto the part of a moral paragon, whose perfectionism is unruffled by an unsuccessful first attempt at marriage and the imminence of a second. The plot is threadbare, the dialogue mediocre, and the whole play without even a genuine note of farce or satire; and it disturbed me that someone with Miss Churchill's training and ability should waste her opportunity over such a play. So afterwards I went backstage to see if I could get a word with her.

"What do you think of *The Philadelphia Story* as the play for your American debut?"

Written for "The Listener"
by P.R.McK.

"Oh," she said, "I think it's a lovely one. The dialogue is good; yes, it's a good play."

That disappointed me a little, but I continued, "Do you find your name an embarrassment at all?"

"Well," she said, "at first I tried to conceal it, as Sarah Smith, but C. B. Cochran, the London impresario under whom I worked, billed me as Sarah Churchill, and that was that. I don't know—it's a difficult question and one which I can't answer."

"Do you intend to make a world tour soon, perhaps taking in New Zealand?"

"I haven't planned to, but one can never tell. Laurence Olivier has been down there recently, has he not? And I have heard that New Zealand audiences can be very appreciative."

"Perhaps, then, you will be staying on here in America for some time?"

"Yes, this play will be on tour for 10 weeks at least."

"And what if, as rumour has it, Hollywood will invite you to go there, will you go?"

I watched for some sign of reluctance, but her face immediately lit up and she said fervently, "Oh, yes, I should certainly go."

"Do you prefer movies, then, or do you regard the stage as primary?"

"I have made films in England, *Spring Meeting*, *He Found a Star*, *All Over the Town*, and also two in Italy, *When in Rome*, and *Danielle Cortis*, and I loved the work. But I could never leave the stage altogether."

SARAH CHURCHILL has given a capable and a polished performance in her first American appearance. Audiences over here seem to have a little reserve when facing a British actor. Yet Miss Churchill made a decidedly agreeable impression on them.

Reviewers justly praise her appealing charm, her good looks, her sincere acting, and her ability to handle a comedy role. But, within the category of "I don't really know," let me add that she still seems to lack the final touches to technique (she tends to thump words at times and to trail off at the end of a sentence), and also a certain depth and maturity of spirit. Even a comedienne needs something of the tragic sense of life.

Two daughters of the politically great are going on tour here in America. Sarah Churchill on the stage; Margaret Truman on the concert platform. Just as the great man finds it difficult to know the truth about himself, so the daughter is similarly handicapped. It will be interesting to see whether Sarah Churchill can surmount her handicaps and work her way up to the very top.



SARAH CHURCHILL
No Hollywood stereotype

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