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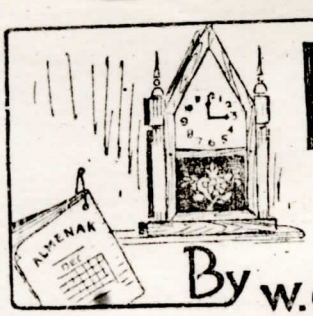

RICHARDS' ALMENAK

By W.C.R.

JOHN FARRAR editor of the Bookman, charged the other night that Sherwood Anderson and his particular group of bookmen do not dramatize life.

Many of us do not. For a great number life is nothing but day and night, the office, a good dinner, a round of golf which doesn't shock the record-makers. For other it consists of what I sez to him and he sez to me. But not for Quincy Kilby.

Fred Black, of the staff of the Dearborn Independent, Henry Ford's publication, has spent the greater part of the last four years in a research revolving around what are called the John Wilkes Booth myths, a set of bed-time stories intended by their raconteurs to show that history was and is an arch deceiver and that Booth, far from dying by a soldier's bullet a few weeks after Abraham Lincoln's assassination at the actor Booth's hands, escaped and died in Oklahoma in 1903.

Kilby, who lives in Brookline, Mass., read the stories that grew out of Black's investigations. Kilby is a lecturer on Dickens, a contributor to "Life" and other magazines, and was in earlier years manager of the Bijou theater, Boston; Bertha Kalich and Hanlon's "Superba."

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THE past week he wrote a letter to Black which reveals the dramatic sense at work, the dramatic sense which quickens the pulse and gives verve to the monotone canvas which the iconoclast names "Life" in his pessimistic catalog.

The letter reads:

"My friend Houdini tells me that it is you who have been sending me your articles about John Wilkes Booth, and I wish to sincerely thank you, as I am deeply interested in the subject and find your articles very interesting and accurate. Only a year ago, on the anniversary of Lincoln's death, I lectured on the assassination in the Old State house, Boston, in the very room where our country's independence was born several years before the Revolution.

"And now let me tell you of some coincidences. My friend Rachel Noah France was playing Ophelia to Edwin Booth's Hamlet the evening of April 5, 1865, and as she was standing in the wings awaiting her cue who should come along but John Wilkes Booth, who said: 'Hullo, little girl. They tell me you've been getting married since I saw you.' They chatted till her cue came and she went on the stage. She never saw him again, and the next thing she heard of him was the assassination. Well, I was reading the first of your articles when the doorbell rang and a boy brought me a telegram telling me that Rachel had died.

"I telephoned the news to the Boston Herald, and told them if they sent up a man I would give him a story on the subject. I thought I might have an old card photograph of her and went to look for it. The first picture I found was one of John Wilkes Booth. The next was one of Clara Morris and I already had it in mind to tell the newspaper man a story which concerned John Booth, Clara Morris and Rachel Noah, when in Pittsburg Rachel was playing Juliet to John's Romeo, and Clara Morris was a ballet girl in the company. I soon found the photograph of Rachel, but it wasn't the next one I came to, as it should have been to make the story complete.

"Thursday, April 6 1865, John Booth met his friend Orlando Tompkins, one of the proprietors of the Boston theater, and said to him, 'Here, Lando, I never gave you anything,' and took him into Jones, Ball and Poor's jewelry store and bought a bloodstone ring, inside of which he had engraved 'J.W.B. to O.T.' When Orlando Tompkins' died the ring descended to his son, Eugene, whose secretary I was, and when Eugene died his widow gave it to me. And while I was reading your story of Booth's suffering and death I was wearing on my finger the ring he had bought a fortnight before he died.

"On two occasions my friend Harry Hawk told me his experiences at the time of the assassination and how as he was standing alone on the stage he recognized Booth as he ran by him. I have met all six people who were in the company that night and I own two programs, one of which is the true one and the other the one better known that says the occasion will be honored by the presence of President Lincoln, but which was not printed till the next day.

"I myself am descended from Thomas Lincoln, the cooper of Hingham, Mass., from whom also was descended Abraham Lincoln, he of the sixth generation and I of the seventh, and perhaps we inherited our height from the same man, as Lincoln was 6 feet 4 and I am 6, 5.

"In October 1904, I was in Springfield, Ill., and went to visit the Lincoln homestead, then in charge of Mrs. Lincoln's sister and niece. As I was talking to the mother the daughter came up and said, 'Mother, you'll have to see Booth, I can't do anything with him.' I said to myself: 'Booth! and in the Lincoln house. I wonder if it is a savage dog or something.' Finally curiosity got the better of me and I said to the daughter: 'I heard you mention the name of Booth. Will you please tell me what that means?' 'Oh, that's our grocer,' she said."