

Ray started with Ince in two-real westerns, actioners and melodramas, quite a few of which have already been shown by this society ("The Gangsters and the Girl", "The Quakers", "In The Tennessee Hills" etc.) and by 1917 was well established in his country-hick "All American Boy" -- a rural and less energetic counterpart to city boy-o Dob Fairbanks. Ray's tendency to manliness and the lack of backbone in some of his characters marred many of his films, but not "The Finch Hitter" which is one of the more pleasing of his early features. Its plot is filmy almost to the point of not being there -- it seems like the bare bones of a story which Harold Lloyd was later to hang "The Freshman" - but it does have a certain charm, the rural and small town background is pleasing, and Ray's personality is really quite winning. And if the plot is slight, then it certainly moves along quickly enough so that one hardly notices the lack of substance. Ray's final "triumph", as it was so often, seems rather nebulous and not indicative of any real talent - all he does is hit a ball, once, in a game that no normal person would take seriously anyway. But it's rather nice to see again a film in which the crises, problems and triumphs are small and therefore a little more logical and realistic. The film is nicely played, well mounted, dressed up with some of G. Gardner Sullivan's classiest subtitles, and in this fine toned print, is altogether a most pleasant (and certainly relaxing) little diversion.

"VANITY" (DeMille-Pathe, 1927) Directed by Donald Crisp; written by G. Gardner Sullivan; starring Beatrice Joy, with Charles Ray, Alan Hale, Noble Johnson. EXCEPT

Ray's country-boy roles lasted until the mid-20's (among those that we have played are "The Busher", "The G hoog and "Sweet Adeline" when his refusal to vary what had become a stereotype, and his business obstinacy and egocentricities, led to his downfall, along with the ill-fated "The Courtship of Miles Standish". Curiously, he made a comeback in sophisticated playboy roles, of which "Vanity" is typical. It was actually a much guttier piece of red meat than this rather light-hearted excerpt indicates.

"THE GARDEN OF EDEN" (UA, 1928) Directed by Lewis Milestone; production designed by William Cameron Menzies; starring Corinne Griffith, with Charles Ray, Lowell Sherman, Louise Dresser, Maude George. CONDEMNATION; 29 reels.

Another of Ray's playboy roles. The film itself (which we played in its entirety a few years ago) was a lush, playful romp in the Lubitsch manner. Ray looked rather ill at ease as a sophisticate; the natural innocence of youth had gone out but had been replaced by real maturity. He looked in fact like an aging has-been, trying to look both younger and worldly-wise. It didn't work, especially in the comedy situations requiring debonair playing. It was a pity, because Ray was still a good actor in his way, and still retained good features.

-- INTERMISSION --

"TICKET TO A CRIME" (Deacon-Max Alexander, 1934) Directed by Lewis D. Collins; starring Ralph Graves and Lola Lane, with Lois Wilson, Edward Earle, Charles Ray. EXCEPT

Like so many other top-liners of the silents (and he was surrounded by them in this picture) Ray quickly descended to supporting roles in "F" quickies in the early 30's. He was still playing the man-about-town here, and had but little footage; hardly more than six minutes in the entire film. However, he was the second romantic lead, and wound up marrying Lois Wilson - who likewise went into a sudden and depressing decline in the 30's.

"JUST MY LUCK" (Corona Pictures, 1935) Produced and directed by Ray Heins; Assistant Director, Bert Carre; written by Wallace Sullivan; photographed by Arthur Martinelli. 7 reels.

"Just My Luck" was hardly Ray's last film appearance -- he continued playing bit and extra roles, mainly at Universal ("A Little Bit of Heaven", "Van Who Lost Himself") until the early 40's. But it was his last important role, and it makes an especially satisfying swan song to his career.

Take no mistake about it, it's an independent "B" film all the way, and was never intended otherwise -- although as such films go, it's rather well done and distinctly above average. But what makes it so pleasing, is Ray himself, who after ten years of a steadily declining career, has managed to recapture his old self again. It was too late to put him back on top again -- his kind of fare was considered passe anyway -- but that hardly seems to matter. What does matter is that Ray successfully recaptured the old flair and spirit. His character rang true again. Somehow, he looked younger for being back at the kind of thing he knew best. His voice fitted his screen character well too. And best of all, there was a development in that character -- this Charlie Ray has all the old virtues, but more determination and get-up-and-go as well. Had Ray brought about this change in the 20's, he might have stayed up there on top -- as Pickford managed to do. So few stars do manage to regain this initial freshness; it's nice that Ray did, even in an unimportant film that could hardly have set boxoffice aflame. (Although it probably made a better profit, in comparison, than many of 1935's more highly touted specials).

"Just My Luck" has a curious plot for a "B", and an even more curious tendency to borrow from silent classics. At one point, when Ray and Snub Pollard go into a restaurant, they rework Chaplin's old routine from "The Immigrant" -- the meal, the lost coin, the terrifying bouncers, the discovered coin that turns out to be a dud, the shrewdly manipulated tip. It was a good routine nearly 20 years earlier, and it was still good here -- albeit performed with a little less finesse than Charlie had given it. Later on, in some mob and strike scenes, the camera placement is exactly the same as for a similar scene in "Intolerance" -- and even the same gate is used! (Both films were shot in the Fine Arts Studio, which was taken over by Columbia in the 20's. Columbia obviously rented the studio for this film and made the most of it; even studio walls and exteriors are utilized to represent Eddie Nugent's factory!) Although this is conjecture, these links with the cinematic past may be partly due to the omnipresence of Bert Carre as the assistant director. A production manager and assistant director from 'way back, he has worked on films as diverse as Doug's "Mark of Zorro" and Arthur Ripley's "Voice in the Wind".

The print has one or two rough spots, but on the whole is in good shape, and seems to be complete except for one scene. Ray carries with him a list of all the "virtues" he must acquire, and ticks them off periodically, but a scene motivating this, which we assume must have been there, just isn't. However, it affects the continuity hardly at all.

All told, "Just My Luck" (especially with its nostalgic musical scoring and old agitatoes and romantic themes) is a charming little period piece that makes rather an interesting comparison with "The Finest Hour" of 18 years earlier.

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William K. Everson ---

Next programs:

Sunday Next, New Yorker Theatre, 9:30 a.m. 35mm show

THE THOROGBRED, 1926, with Theodore Van Eltz, Carter de Haven, Gladys Hulette; ep. 3 of THE BLUE FOX; MGM's screen-tests for TOBACCO ROAD with Henry Hull and the original stage cast; trailers from the 30's, including THE FRONT PAGE, LADY FOR A DAY, THE ROVER, THEY GAVE HIM A GUN etc., and odd reels of early hand-colored material.

Friday May 4th., room 10-C, Adelphi Hall. KELODRAMAS FROM THE 20's "THE TRAP" (Universal, 1922) with LON CHANEY; "THE BLOOD SHIP" (Columbia, 1927) with HOBART BOSWORTH, RICHARD ARLEN

Tuesday, May 15th., 10-C, Adelphi Hall THE MAN WHO PLAYED GOD (1931) with George Arliss, Bebe Davis, Donald Cook, Ray Milland and shorts including BUZZING AROUND with Fatty Arbuckle and Al St. John; one of Fatty's early sound, Brooklyn-filmed, two-reelers -- and a good one.