"Why Daddy?" (MGM, 1944) Directed by Will Jason; written by Robert Benchley; with Robert Benchley, Fred Brady, Richard Hall. One reel.

None of the later MGM or Paramount Benchley comedies quite matched his really early (1926-29) shorts for Fox; too often they were so subdued in their satires of a dull and boring personality that they almost became dull themselves. But Benchley's delightful playing always came to the rescue; his parody of the dull introvert, trying - unsuccessfully - to appear important, was so completely the opposite of Oliver Hardy's grandiose extrovert, creating the impression of almost royal importance with superb aplomb, that it is really a pity that Benchley and Hardy never got together for a screen comedy. "Why Daddy?", an effective curtain-raiser for this comedy show, is an amusing spoof of radio quiz shows, is one of the better later Benchley shorts.


These further adventures of Tweety and Sylvester continue pretty much as before, but with the pace, invention and savoir-faire never flagging. The climax is as grisly a predicament as we've come across since Laughton's sticky end in "Island of Lost Souls".

"Another Fine Mess" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1930) Directed by James Parrott; starring Laurel & Hardy, with Thelma Todd, James Finlayson. 3 reels.

One of the legs of the Laurel & Hardy sound shorts, "Another Fine Mess" turns out to be a refreshingly bright re-discovery. Next to the classic "The Music Box", it is certainly the best of their three-reelers. Most of these were awkwardly padded, and would have been infinitely better at two reels. That "Another Fine Mess" shows no signs of such padding is all the more surprising in that it really has even less story than most of them; basically it is no more than a single situation, and at that one covering only the time-span of the film's 30-minute running time. There are moments of wild and violent slapstick, and a bizarre climax, but for the most part the comedy is situational. Hardy is given full scope for his grandiloquent posturings, and Laurel has a field-day masquerading as the butler ("Hives") and his frizzied-haired sister. Pert Thelma Todd enters into the double-entendre situations in fine spirit, and to round off the over-all attractiveness of the film, there are some delightful sung credits, presented by Hal Roach chorus girls!

"A Kittie's Kitty" (Warner Brothers, 1955) Dir: I. Freling; one reel.

Sylvester the cat, minus Tweety, finds himself betwixt the inevitable vixid bulldog and a terrifying little girl in this unabashed essay in nadism. It has story as well as gags, and is altogether one of the better second-echelon Warner cartoons.

-Intermission-


With "it's a Gift" now pretty much established as the classic and definitive Fields vehicle, any other Fields film automatically suffers a little by comparison. "The Old Fashioned Way" starts a little mechanically and doesn't seem too promising; Fields' braying and strutting seems a little too standardized, his famous expletive "Godfrey Daniel" almost thrown away. But as it turns out, Fields is merely holding off for a reel while the necessary plot mechanics are set in motion. The rears are shifted with a delightful sequence wherein Fields, in a "morning ablutions" scene on a train, is cruelly, inconsiderately of a poor passenger from whom he has already filched an upper berth. Not long after comes an encounter with Baby Le Roy; and as Fields' prized watch sinks tragically into a bowl of molasses, we know that the old master has no intention of letting us down. This isn't classic, creative comedy in the manner of "it's a Gift" -- but it's a marvellous Fields comedy, and as a showcase for him, it's one of his best pictures. The story (?), not unlike that of the later Fields film "You Can't Cheat an Honest Man", really
amounts to nothing at all. Even those not aware that screenwriter Charles Bogle is really Fields could soon come to no other conclusion from the rambling collection of incidents, and from the introduction of such characters as Sheriff Prettywilly, played by Clarence Wilson. Although Fields himself isn't quite as despicable as one would like, perhaps because he has a pretty daughter, he is nevertheless pleasantly dishonest, violent and corrupt. And all his little tricks are trotted out again for our enjoyable re-viewing — the hat that is forever getting lost on his cane, the ugly little phoney moustache, the article on his foot, and the unseen but evidently quite nauseating "obstacle" in the road that he stumbles with obvious distaste. Although Revel and Warren wrote it, one feels that Fields must have "suggested" that wonderful parody of "Mother" songs called "A Little Bit of Heaven Known as Mother", accompanied by displays of filial affection towards sinister mothers in the audience. In view of Fields' lampooning of such sentiment, and the fact that his "plot" is composed of deliberate romantic and dramatic cliches which, in mood, parallel the old barnstormer "The Drunkard" (which features prominently in the film, and occupies about a third of the footage), it is surprising to find Fields turning — seriously — to pathos for his climax. Actually it is well done, and Fields is surprisingly touching, but one hates to see the old maestro giving way to nobler sentiments. He was much more laudable in "You Can't Cheat an Honest Man" wherein he soundly deflated the aristocratic family of Belgoodes. However, one can readily forgive Fields for this minor lapse — especially since, for no other reason than there's sufficient footage for it, and he felt like doing it, he gives us a long and amazing display of his juggling dexterity, just before the rather sentimental (though briefly so) climax.

Even though this is so much of a one-man show, it would be a pity to overlook the work of that so often overlooked director, William Beaudine, with Fields' help — or perhaps in spite of it — he keeps the film rattling along at a nice pace, keeps Fields reasonably under control, and creates a pleasantly nostalgic if not too realistic picture of a small-town barnstorming troupe. It's too often forgotten (in lieu of so many later "B" films and Bowery Boys epics) what a fine director Beaudine was. He made some of Pickford's very best silents, and also directed British comedian Will Hay's best picture — "Windbag the Sailor" — a wonderful echo of both Fields and Keaton that I hope will become known over here one of these days.

---

**COMING PROGRAMS**

Friday of this week the FILM GROUP will meet in 10-0 at 7:00 p.m. The program will include a rare Technicolor print (recent reissues were all b/w) of the Flynn "Robin Hood", and, for comparison, the last 2 reels of the silent Fairbanks version. We try to keep the emphasis on film rather than talk, but some time during the evening I'll give a quick rundown on some of the points of interest of my recent Hollywood foray. Some interesting film and people seen ... a 35mm print of King Vidor's 3-LIGHTED MAN found for a Huff showing in November ... a report on the Hollywood Museum's "reconstituted" version of "The Birth of a Nation" etc., etc.

One of the more concrete outcomes of the trip; an extra showing, set for Friday November 2nd, in room 10-0, at 7:30, of these two films:

**AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY** (1931) — Von Sternberg's version of the Dreiser classic, with Phillips Holmes, Sylvia Sidney, Frances Dee, Irving Pichel

**PROFESSOR BEWARE** (1938) — directed by Elliot Nugent, with Harold Lloyd.

Next Tuesday — Oct. 23rd — room 10-0


**THE VIRTUOUS SIN** (1930) Dir: George Cukor, Louis Calhern, with Ray Francis and Walter Huston.