

Tuesday Next: February 2nd: A Program of comedy and melodrama:
"LET 'ER GO CALLECHER" (1927) Dir: Elmer Clifton, with Harrison Ford,
Elinor Fair; Junior Coghlan; and a 90-minute survey of the career of
Charlie Chase, from Sennett (1914) through Roach and up to his final series
for Columbia in the late 30's.

January 26, 1965

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Soc.

Two Comedies From the 30's

LITTLE GIANT (1933) with Edward G. Robinson, Mary Astor
BONNIE SCOTLAND (1935) with Laurel and Hardy

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After a minor mishap a couple of weeks ago, when we crowed about our lack of major mishaps, we really haven't got much of a leg to stand on tonight -- other than the fact that this is only the second time in some dozen years of operation that we have had to alter a program without advance warning. The reason is that the print of "LAST OF THE PAGANS" has simply failed to arrive, although shipped from Hollywood some 2 1/2 weeks ago in ample time. Had we been at all worried about its non-delivery, we would of course have mailed out a change-of-program announcement last week, but there seemed absolutely no reason to assume that it would fail to arrive. Even now, as these notes are written, there is time for it to arrive, and accordingly rather sketchy notes have been prepared for the original program, just in case. The shipment was of course insured, and tracers have been put on it both at this end and in Hollywood, so it should show up momentarily. "The Viking" has been on hand for some time, but since the films supplement one another so well, we thought it best to hold the whole program over. In order to avoid too much confusion, we have left the rest of the scheduled shows for February as they are, and have brought forward two films from our backlog for March. Thus, THE LAST OF THE PAGANS and THE VIKING will put in a delayed appearance some time in March. Schedules for March through May will be mailed in about two weeks. While it doesn't minimize our great chagrin, "Last of the Pagans" is not likely to be a subject that will have caused undue expectations, so we hope you'll bear with us, accept our apologies, and enjoy tonight's substitute program.

"LITTLE GIANT" (First National, 1933) Directed by Roy Del Ruth; 8 reels
Scenario: Robert Lord and Wilson Mizner; Camera: Sid Hickox
With Edward G. Robinson, Helen Vinson, Mary Astor, Kenneth Thompson,
Russell Hopton, Shirley Gray, Donald Dillaway, Louise Mackintosh, James
Doyle, Berton Churchill, Frank Moran, Dewey Robinson, Sidney Bracey, Adrian
Morris, Robert Ellis, Rolfe Sedan, Bill Elliott, Larry Steers, Guy Usher,
Hal Price, Joe Cairns, Al Hill.

It's surprising how soon after his success as "Little Caesar" Robinson was already kidding his own genre; and perhaps more surprising, when one takes time to consider how relatively few gangster roles Robinson actually played. There are a handful at most, with most of them concentrated in the 40's and 50's ("Key Largo", "Hell on Frisco Bay", "Black Tuesday"). "Little Giant", which bears no relation to the same titled property filmed by Universal two or three times, is very much in the Damon Runyon mould, and actually far more "authentic" Runyon than many of the films officially based on Runyon tales. The theme of the tough guy in society has never been a particularly productive one, either for drama or comedy, and too often the plotting is heavy-handed and obvious, and the gagging labored. Certainly some of this criticism can be levelled at "Little Giant" too, and it is never quite as smart as it thinks it is, but it has so much going for it that it does manage to remain good and sprightly fun. For one thing of course, there's the cast: Robinson delivering his lines with fine aplomb.

Mary Astor serenely lovely, Helen Vinson as enjoyably bitchy as always, and Burton Churchill thundering and ranting and enjoling in his time-honored manner. The gangster elements are both exciting and amusing, and even quite touching in the sequence where Robinson ditches his long-time mistress. Being a pre-Code movie of course, there are the usual cracks about racial minorities (in this case, Greeks!), homosexuals and dope addicts, with modern art appropriately added to the list of things to be kidded and debunked. There's a whale of a wild party, a couple of inside gags (relating to "The Public Enemy") which show that this sort of thing was good fun long before the New Wave was ever heard of, and the old Vitaphone orchestra is in there sawing away at recognisable themes from "Blessed Event", "One Way Passage" and other contemporary Warner films. It's a thoroughly typical and representative early 30's movie, snappy, loud and fast-paced, and while it's certainly neither a major Del Ruth nor a major Robinson, it's one that neither of them need hang their heads over.

----- Intermission -----

"**BONNIE SCOTLAND**" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1935) Director: James W. Horne
 Scenario: Frank Butler, Jeff Moffitt, Camera: Art Lloyd and
 Walzer Lundin; 8 reels
 With Laurel and Hardy, June Lang, William Janney, David Torrence, James
 Finlayson, Anne Grey, Vernon Steel, Maurice Black, Daphne Pollard, Mary
 Gordon, Lionel Belmore, Barlow Boreland, Olaf Hytten, Claude King,
 Brandon East.

There is a small but vocal trend of thought that holds this to be the very best Laurel & Hardy. In the face of "Way Out West", "Sons of the Desert" and even "Blockheads" it's difficult to give such a claim really serious consideration, but it is a good L&H feature, one that we haven't shown before, and one that is now never revived, so it's more important to show it than to argue about it.

Even admitting that the romantic sub-plot is not intended to be taken too seriously, it still gets too much in the way. And the whole film rather suggests the modus operandi of many of the boys' shorts: they start out with a simple story-line, and then spend so much time (profitably) on detail that they wind up with actually only about a third of the original story completed. In shorts, the system often worked beautifully; in features it's a different matter. Here they suddenly seem to run out of time, so that the expected big climax is rather a fizzle, and done in a cheap fashion that disappoints after the carefully done earlier sequences, and especially the excellent atmospheric establishing shots of "Bonnie" Scotland. However, there are marvellous moments, and if it disappoints, it certainly also entertains. Hardy's underwater sneezing gag is fine, as is the garbage collecting routine so patently borrowed from "The Music Box". (The sequence was badly damaged in the recent "Big Parade of Comedy" through the elimination of most of the original music incidentally). There's a neat twist in the initial introduction of their theme music, "The Idlers", and a glorious moment when the evil Khan finds out that L&H are not, after all, high-ranking officers. "Who are you?" he shouts, and the anticipated but still quite wonderful reply, accompanied by the inevitable tie-twiddle, is the time-honored, "Boy, I'm Mr. Hardy, and this is my friend, Mr. Laurel!". Daphne Pollard, with her haughty "Well, toss me over the 'urdles!" is seen too briefly, but Anne Grey - stooge villainess or not - is as appealing as always. Economy watchers will have fun spotting the old Roach props and sets -- e.g., that clock that invariably falls on Mr. Hardy's head, and the mansion and pool set (from "Midnight Patrol" etc.) here disguised as an Indian palace! Some of the dialogue genially spoofes "Gunga Din" traditions, and all told it is certainly a diverting and amusing 80 minutes, if rarely hilarious.

 # Available format title is "The Cuckoos" ----- Wm. K. Everson -----