It is over two years since we last ran "Man to Man" so it is due for a repeat anyway, but it seems particularly apropos right now since it was eliminated from the recent Alan Dean cycle at the MFA. (And not by oversight; both Dean and Bogdanovich screened this print and disliked the film intensely!) It is a curious kind of film for a major company to have made in 1930, when the stress was on fast talk, transcribed theatrical works, noise - musical and otherwise, and hard-bitten melodramas. It is a quiet, unsensational film with deliberately underplayed drama, and in fact, is almost a throwback to the Charles boy vehicles. One can well imagine the same story being filmed 15 years earlier by Ince with Ray and Frank Keough writing and Reginald Rice - directing. Phillips Holmes has very much of a Ray role - sensitive, docent, a little weak - although his problem has slightly more psychological depth than usually was presented to Ray. The film created little stir at the time, but reviews were good, and its "colitti" values were praised. Certainly its mood and faithful recreation of period and locale are more notable and valuable today than they would have been at the time. Despite his current apathy to the film, Dean seems to have taken far more of a personal interest in this than he did in some others - this is not to say that "Man to Man" is not a classic of small-town life - main street, barber shop, picnic grounds - are handled with both conviction and affection. Many of the compositions are quite lovely, and there is one really beautiful shot of two lovers sitting in their roadster at dusk, while a locomotive roars by in the background, somehow suggestive of an outside world that they know nothing of and are better off without. And the long sequence of the father's homecoming is a most sensitively handled episode. Coincidentally, one of the best sequentials Dean directed in his later years was of similar content: the nonsense of "Millie Le Grand", an otherwise mediocre Republic pot-boiler, showing a somewhat soiled Vera Ralston returning after many years to her home in the town. It was a beautiful sequence, played in silence and with long tracking shots. Is in Charles Ray's "The Clock-Stopper", small-town crises are centered in the bank, and it's quite refreshing to find a film from the 30's being realistic enough to admit that a couple of thousand dollars is still a substantial enough sum to cause serious problems.

Even though a short film, "Ben to Man" slows down towards the end - mainly because of the film's appeal to the audience long before it is to the protagonists. But even more, nothing much is happening, there is plenty to watch in terms of acting; grand old Otis Harlan with his waddling walk, old-timers Marion Haig and Russell Simpson, Dwight Frye, on leave from Universal's crypts and graveyards, and most of all Grant Mitchell, giving a really moving and sensitive performance, in marked contrast to the pompous tight-wad roles in which he was typecast in later years.

"A Village Tale" (RKO Radio, 1935) Directed by John Cromwell; produced by David Hempstead; screenplay by Allen Scott from a novel by Phil Stong; camerav, Nicholas Mavrocassino; music, Al Colombo; editor, William Morgan; 8 reels.

With Randolph Scott, Ray Johnson, Arthur Hohl, Robert Barrat, Janet Beecher, Edward Ellis, Dorothy Burgess, Andy Clyde, Quinn Williams, Ray Mayer, T. Roy Barnes, Donald Meek, DeWitt Jennings.

Few companies made as many studio-bound, talkative and ultimately obscure films as RKO Radio for the early and mid-30's; and few films deserved their obscurity more than "A Village Tale". Its plot -"Girl of the Fort" and "Hot Tip" to quote a very few of the more gaudy titles: All the more surprise than that "A Village Tale", virtually unmentioned among John Cromwell's distinguished if uninspired credits, and unfavored by a first run in New York, should turn out so well. It's something of a 1935 "Peyton Place", but is more effective by far since it creates its shocks not by dramatized sensation, but by casual and even tasteful understatement. One hopes that this is a genuine village tale and not a general cross-section of American rural ignorance. The author's "State Fair" was a generalized look at farming and its environs. Regardless, it is a film with style: the unsympathetic characters are bitchy and narrow rather than evil, and the "heroic" characters often act with weakness and even stupidity. Maladroit may rather take over characters toward the end, but we seem to be finding increasingly that life is full of melodrama. Incidentally, there's a whole of fight scene - doubly notable in a non-action film from a prosaic studio like RKO - and of course the inevitable and non-falling performance of distinction and grace from Ray Johnson. I think you will find "A Village Tale", if not a rediscovered classic, at least a discovery of interest and importance.