"MARY BURNS, FUGITIVE" (Paramount, 1925) Directed by William K. Howard
Produced by Walter Wanger; Screenplay by Gene Towne, Graham Baker
and Louis Stevens; Camera, Leon Shamroy; 9 reels
With: Sylvia Sidney, Melvyn Douglas, Pert Kelton, Alan Baxter, Brian
Donlevy, Wallace Ford, Frank Sully, Frances Gregg, Charles Waldron,
William Ingersoll, Boothe Howard, Norman "Willy" Joe Twerp, William
Pawlcy, Kerman Cripps, Ivan Miller, Charles Wilson, Henry Hall, Ann
Doran, Morgan Wallace, George Chandler, Jack Hower, Fuzzy Knight.

Coming towards the end of director Howard's peak period (1929-35) of
really top-flight thrillers, "Mary Burns, Fugitive" is in some ways one
of his best. Admittedly, it's a fairly routine kind of story, and
logic is not always a strongpoint; Mary Burns almost deserves her fate
for the witless way she conducts herself during her court trial! But
the intensity of its limited action sequences, and the style and
variety of its camerawork, with its predominantly German angles and
lighting, plus the many off-beat characterisations, make it all seem
more important than it really is. Certainly it moves well, and is
constructed so efficiently that it survives a relatively static climax
that could have seemed anti-climactic after such a powerful buildup.
As often with Howard (and also Fritz Lang), it is the villains that
are the most colorful and interesting characters, and even at times
the most sympathetic, thanks to the Gestapo-like tactics followed
by the F.B.I. Alan Baxter is particularly good; he was rarely used
anywhere near as effectively again, except perhaps by Hitchcock in
"Notorious" and "Sylvia Sidney, as in "Street Scene", "You and
"Screams", "You Only Live Once" and "Deed of Dow", is suitably haunted and hunted—but this was after, all comparatively early in her career and the role
had not yet become a cliche with her. Melvyn Douglas, arriving at the
half-way mark and remaining a blind-folded invalid for the bulk of the
remaining footage, has surely the least taxing role of his career.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

"BULLDOG DRUMMOND STRIKES BACK" (20th Century-United Artists, 1934)
Directed by Roy del Ruth; Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck; Screenplay
by Nunnally Johnson and Henry Lehrman from the novel by H.C. McNeil;
Music: Alfred Newman; Camera, Peverell Marley; Associate Producers,
William Goetz and Raymond Griffith; 8 reels
With: Ronald Colman, Loretta Young, Charles Butterworth, C.Aubrey
Hohl, Kathleen Burke, Georges Regas, Ethel Griffies, Mischa Auer,
Charles Gerard, Creighton Hale, George Irwin, Olaf Hytten, Billy
Bewan, Robert Kortman.

1929's "Bulldog Drummond" was an enormous commercial and artistic
success, easily one of that year's best pictures, and, largely by
virtue of Ronald Colman's dashing manner and debonair dictum,
transformed him instantly from a modestly popular silent star to a
talkie star of the first magnitude. This follow-up, done in much the
same tongue-in-cheek vein, is in some ways even better than its
predecessor. As a post-Production Code picture, it has to deny both
its villains and its hero the leeway in cheerfully amoral behaviour
that they enjoyed in the earlier film. But its full-blooded self
satire is more restrained, and wittier, and all the better for it.
The plot is actually an offshoot of that famous actual occurrence at
the Paris Exposition at the end of the last century that has since
provided fodder for many a novel and movie -- both in its original
form in "So Long at the Fair", and in sundry derivations such as
"The Great Wave". As such, it doesn't follow the standard mystery
pattern, and provides some extra surprises as result. The
welding of mystery, menace and light-hearted comedy is superbly
smooth, with no one element dominating the other: the racing is
brisk, and the dialogue and performances a delight. Colman became so
typed as idealistic Empire-builders ("Lost Horizon", "Clive of India")
that one tends to forget how perfect he was in light froth such as
this. Sets, camerawork, art direction, all exude a production gloss
and expertise that are a constant delight to watch, and above all
else, the film is an "entertainment" -- a word that it is becoming
increasingly hard to apply to contemporary movies, which seem to
prefer to regard themselves as "experiences". Which they certainly
are, although perhaps not in the way that their promoters intended.

--- William K. Everson ---