
Long unavailable because of (still in force) legal complications, this "Sherlock Holmes" owes rather more to director Howard than to Doyle's plotting - or what remains of it. It's by no means a remake of the silent John Barrymore version, even though both were based (somewhat) on the Gillette play -- which incidentally has been given a very handsome and never campy revival in London, and is very much to be recommended if it's New York opening this fall retains the same serious and respectful approach. Apparently this 1932 film underwent many changes prior to, or during, its production since its story-line in no way resembles the official Fox synopsis for the picture! It starts magnificently, with Ernest Torrence's Moriarty dominating the dramatic, and the stylish camerawork and German-influenced design even dominating Torrence! Then it settles down for a while to being a civilized melodrama, frequently bearing the Doyle imprint, and returns to Howard's control again for a visually exciting climax, Doyle purists at the time objected to the modernisation, but the 40-odd years that have elapsed since have returned it to at least a form of period melodrama. It is hardly the very best movie Holmes, but considering how badly Holmes has been treated by the movies through the years, it is probably among the top half-dozen regardless. It's always a pleasure to watch and listen to Clive Brook (his third appearance as Holmes) but he does rather "do" the Master in the priggish manner of his British officer in the same year's "Shanghai Express" of the declassating of the German officer, is surprisingly subdued, and his exchanges with Holmes at a minimum, but he made up for it by playing Holmes himself shortly afterwards in "A Study in Scarlet".

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---


Undoubtedly the most entertaining of many "lost" films, it is appalling that this film, a model of what a good comedy-thriller should be, is unavailable for theatrical or tv reissue merely because 25 years lapsed, and nobody bought the negative, negatives and other printing materials anyway. 1929's "Bulldog Drummond" (which we ran recently) was an enormous artistic and commercial success, easily one of that year's best pictures, and it transformed Colman from a modestly popular silent star into a talkie star of the first magnitude, at the same time establishing a dazzling and debonair screen image for Drummond quite at odds with the Mike Hammer blueprint created for the novels. This sequel, done in much the same tongue-in-cheek vein, is in many ways even better. As a post-Production Code movie, it must deny both hero and heroine the freedom in cheerfully amoral behaviour that they enjoyed in the earlier film, though its sexual comedy, tasteful as it is, is a little surprising. But its full-blooded self-satire is more restrained and witty, and Colman's performance - including one Oliver Hardy-like gesture directly to the audience - is a delight. The plot is an offshoot of an actual occurrence that provided fodder for many a movie and novel ("So Long at the Fair" and "The Lady Vanishes" among them), and as such doesn't follow the standard mystery pattern. The writing of comedy, menace and mystery, with no one element dominant, is brisk and smooth, and the sets, camerawork and art direction all exude tremendous polish and panache. Colman became so typified as romanticists and idealistic Empire-builders that one tends to forget how perfect he was in light froth such as this. The film is also one of the very best of its director, Roy del Ruth, who fitted very smoothly into the crackling Warner Brothers machine of the early 30's, and did his best work there. Obviously he was still working under that impetus here, and of course was backed up by a marvellous collection of artisans. But for the rest of the 30's and 40's, working at Fox, United Artists and Allied Artists he was never again to recapture the sparkle and zip that was at its peak in "Blessed Event" of 1932 and this gem from 1934.

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