HOT WATER (Harold Lloyd Corp.) - Fathe, 1924) Directed by Sam Taylor and Fred Newmeyer, Story by Sam Taylor, Tim Whelan, Tommy Gray, John Grey; Camera: Walter Lundin. Additional credits are extended to the Time-Life Corp. for permission to show this film.
With Harold Lloyd, Jobyna Ralston, Josephine Crowell, Charles Stevenson, Mickey NoBann.

A relaxed, brisk, "minor" Lloyd - coming between two big and more ambitious films, "Girl Shy" of earlier in 1924, and "The Freshman" in 1925, "Hot Water" is "minor" only in a comparative sense. The first half of the film consists of two brilliantly constructed and prolonged sight-gag sequences which are up to the very top Lloyd standards. The second half, accidentally quite appropriate for Halloween, is much blacker comedy, which is potentially less promising. Lloyd believes that he has accidentally killed his mother-in-law (played by the formidable ex-Griffith player Josephine Crowell) and is being hunted by her. Essentially, this sequence betrays the weaker element of Lloyd; it is very well-constructed, but each gag depends on the obvious planting of information earlier on. Seen alone, it appears heavy-handed and uninspired. But Lloyd knew his audiences and the anticipated reactions, and with an audience, even the most transparent of his gags usually works exactly as it is supposed to. So how can one really criticise a comic method when it is so clearly working well, and probably getting far louder laughs than perhaps much more brilliantly conceived material by Keaton? Obviously one can't, and shouldn't, especially as Lloyd later showed in "Kid Brother" (which we showed last year) that he could supposedly do even lyrical where others close, ("Speedy" is our next Lloyd, due on March 5th with Lon Chaney's "Mob}).

-- -- 10 Minute Intermission -- --

PIANO SCORES FOR BOTH FILMS ARRANGED AND PLAYED BY STUART OCHERMAN

TELL IT TO THE MARINES (MGM, 1926) Directed by George Hill; Scenario by Richard Schayer; titles, Joe Farnham; Camera, Ira Morgan; Sets, Cedric Gibbons and Arnold Gillespie; Editor, Blanche Sewell; 9 reels. With Lon Chaney, William Haines, Eleanor Boardman, Eddie Gribbon, Carmel Myers, Warner Oland, Mitchell Lewis, Frank Currier, Maurice Keene, Tiny Sanford, Willie Fung.

Although the film has never been lost, and there have been many opportunities, this film has never been revived in New York - possibly on the theory that a "straight" role for Chaney would disappoint. Ironically, it is one of his best performances and the film as a whole, though conventional, disappoints not at all, unlike his bizarre chillers, none of which live up to their reputations. "Tell It To The Marines" is perhaps a little too determined to be a "BIG" picture when its basic material is good honest Saturday afternoon fare that should be on and off within 75 minutes. Its size and length prevent it from taking off as quickly as it should - especially with the Philippines and China as lengthy props of all - and there is perhaps too much bungling comic and romantic by-play in the first half. On the other hand, the length does allow time for leisurely character development, and for the inclusion of a certain amount of quasi-documentary footage which adds a good deal of stature. In any event, one need complain of length with three such stars to focus attention on. While there are perhaps a shade too many closeups of Chaney - as though to prove he could act without makeup - his is an excellent performance, both pantomimic and subtle, yet also realistic. The Marine Corps was absolutely delighted, and regarded him as both the ideal and definitive marine. The personable William Haines, too little seen these days - the most successful silent forerunner of such breezy sound-period heroes as Pat O'Brien, Lee Tracy and James Cagney - holds his own quite well against the Chaney competition, although his role suffers a little from obvious whitewashing. And Eleanor Boardman performs her usual magic of seeming quite ordinary at the beginning of the film, and somehow transforming herself - as we and the hero get to know her - into a woman of radiance, warmth, and a Gish-like beauty without the ethereal, untouchable Gish aura. Carmel Myers isn't very convincing as a jungle tart, but manages and manages beautifully as a Chinese bandit! Those of you who are New Yorkers are aware that the Chinatown atmosphere is quite appropriate and related dialogue, although it is often at odds with the subtitles provided, which in many cases opt for snappy, semi-gag substitutions. It's a big production, but an economical one. Those (then) clean Culver City streets, so familiar from the Laurel & Hardy comedies, are pressed into service again, and a few bits of Oriental decor plonked down in the wastes of Chatsworth, just a few miles out of Hollywood (William S. Hart's ranch was located there) transform that rather drab location into a serviceable Chinese battleground. The original camera speed was at a transitional stage; occasionally (as in drill scenes) it is just a shade too fast at sound speed, but would have been much too slow at silent speed.

-- William K. Everson --