Not only is it "Grand Canary" yet another rediscovered Warner Baxter vehicle - he must surely have been the most over-worked actor of the 30's - but it's also still another film in which he plays a doctor, a role he essayed so often that those films almost provide a sub-genre in themselves! 1934 marks Hollywood's first tentative tilting at the medical novels of A.J. Cronin, "Grand Canary" having been preceded by a few months by Columbia's "Once to Every Woman". However, "Beggars in the Night" as a notable exception, Hollywood left the major Cronin adaptations - "The Stars Look Down", "The Citadel", "Dr. kranst" - to Britain. "Grand Canary" seems to have been a slightly belated attempt to duplicate the success of "Aronvest", which it resembles a good deal, but the film seems to be aware of its limitations and is never too ambitious. It takes its time getting into the story, and then, the dramatic material established, winds it up in rather too much of a hurry. I haven't read the original story, but the screen adaptation seems to suffer from too many compromises with the Production Code, causing it to pull its punches. However, it's an interesting example of how Hollywood felt that Doctors and Medicine were the most suitable and salutory heroes and causes in the depression. The writer and explorer heroes of 1928-32, following in the wake of Lindbergh and Byrd, were now being supplanted by a hero who was more practical and more needed: the upcoming novels of Lloyd C. Douglas, blending religion with medicine, also provided fodder for a quartet of movies in the later thirties, and had Frank Slaughter been writing then, he would doubtless have been welcomed into the fold too. The doctors Kilgore and Gillespie were spot-on, the only slightly less absurd than Dr. Baxter's "Doctors" - at that, it has more in literary flourishes, is splendidly photographed by Bert Glennon, and gives us another opportunity to admire and enjoy the grace and elegance of Maude Evans. I am not aware of any preservation work having been undertaken on this film, so this may well be the only print extant. On that basis alone, this abandoned filmic orphan is certainly entitled to 76 minutes of renewed life via our cinematic iron lung.

- TEN MINUTE INTRODUCTION -

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY (Ealing Studios, 1949) Directed by Alberto Cavalcanti; Assoc. Producer, John Craggion; Screenplay by John Bright from the novel by Charles Dickens; Camera, Gordon Dines; Art Direction, Michael Ralph; Music, Lord Berners; 108 mins.

With: Derek Bond (Nicholas Nickleby); Sir Cedric Hardwicke (Ralph Nickleby); Stanley Holloway (Vincent Crummles); Alfred Drayton (Jackford Scrooge); Cyril Fletcher (Alfred Mantalini); Bernard Miles (Newman Noggs); Sally Ann Howes (Kate Nickleby); Mary Merrill (Mrs Nickleby); Sybil Thorndike (Mrs Squeers); Vera Pearce (Mrs Crummles); Cathleen Nesbitt (Miss Knapp); Athena Seyler (Miss la Crewey); Cecil Ramage (Sir Mulberry Hawke); George Ralph (Mr. Bray); Berry Jones (Frank Cheeryble); Fay Compton (Mrs. Mantalini); Jill Balcon (Vedaline Bray); Aubrey Woods (Smike); Patricia Hayes (Frooch); Una Furt (Trotwood Phanttom); John Elvin (Mrs Swallowdell); Darryl Mills (Mrs Crummles); Richard Shapley (Mr. Gryegby, M.P.); John Sale (Mr. Lillyvick); Dandy Nichols (Mantalini's employee); John Chardos (employment agent).

First perhaps a word or two about why we are showing "Nicholas Nickleby". Although, unlike the other films in this series, a "big" film, it was malignied by the British critics (somewhat unfairly regarded it only as an attempt to cash in on the new trend that was then going on) and subsequently rejected by the public (who might have been drawn to it more had it offered bigger romantic star names). When the marathon play version opened last year, many of you asked that we play it. It was an obvious suggestion - so obvious that we assumed that theatres all over the country would play it too. When, after a lengthy wait, that appeared to be not the case, we scheduled it. Then, after our program was finalised and publicised, the theatre bookings showed up delayed apparently until a rather worn 35mm print could be shipped from England. We dislike duplicates or unnecessary bookings, but frankly to have cancelled those who decided to skip the theatrical screenings and catch it here tonight. So here it is, and incidentally the print is first-class. It's a difficult Dickens, so full of plot, incident, coincidence and characters that even the extended stage version remained confusing. That may well be why even the British didn't film it before, even as a silent. This film certainly tries to cram in a little of everything and it isn't as coherent as it might be. (Cyril Fletcher, for instance, had a plethora of characters, but there were treatments. The cast is a marvellous showcase for well-known talent, and some (like Cyril Fletcher, from radio and the music halls, and Alfred Drayton, normally an Aldwych star) who may not be as well known here. Bear in mind too that in 1937 was literally the peak year of the film noir school, and Alberto Cavalcanti ("Dead of Night", "They Made me a Fugitive", "For Them That Trespass", "Want the Day Well?" was Britain's foremost noir specialist. The design and styling of much of the film - particularly the melodramatic highlights involving Drayton and Hardwicke - have all the noir characteristics of Hollywood films of the period. It's a mixed bag all right, but a lively and invigorating one, and Ealing's one and only foray into Dickens. And its musical score is excellent.

- WILLIAM K. EVANS

Program Ends 11.00 p.m.