

This unethical conduct is at least partly justified by the fact that the young man is in grave danger of being annexed by a merry widow, very blonde, very rich, and very lonely. No member of the audience will need to be clairvoyant to foretell how this contest will ultimately end, but certain impediments to matrimony arise when the heroine's crystal-gazing activities cause the hero (a lawyer) to be put officially on the mat. This is the cue for the heroine to confess everything, including her Love, and the cue also for you to reach for your hat. But you may do so with some regret that it will probably be another few weeks before you can see the charming Miss Goddard again.

## FLESH AND FANTASY

(Universal)



IT might have been more appropriate, I think, to label this "Flesh and Flapdoodle." The flesh is represented by Charles Boyer, Robert Benchley, Edward G. Robinson, Thomas Mitchell, and Robert Cummings, and (on the distaff side) by Barbara Stanwyck, Betty Field, Dame May Whitty, and Anna Lee. The flapdoodle consists of three separate short stories, hung together by a most tenuous thread.

Now where have you heard about a film like that before? Two guesses. *Tales of Manhattan*? Right. *Un Carnet du Bal*? Right again. This, in fact, is Universal's attempt to make M. Julien Duvivier do the hat-trick. He doesn't. For one thing, the separate episodes of *Flesh and Fantasy* have an even less substantial connecting link than the ubiquitous dress-suit in the *Tales* or the dance programme in *Un Carnet du Bal*, and they lack almost entirely the directorial genius which made the latter such a great French film. All we have here as a bridge between the parts are the efforts of a friend to convince the befuddled Mr. Benchley that superstition is a lot of hooley.

Now I'll admit there is a germ of an idea for a picture there, but it never gets a chance to grow. In the first of the three stories recounted to ease Mr. Benchley's mind, a plain young girl (Betty Field) disguises herself as a beauty at a New Orleans *Mardi Gras* festival to win a lover, and awaits with trepidation the moment when she must unmask. All this might be rather more convincing if Miss Field were really ugly in the first place. The second story, allegedly written by one Oscar Wilde, is rather better: it is about a lawyer (Robinson) who is told by a palmist that he will commit a murder, and who proves the correctness of the prophecy by murdering the palmist. In the third episode Charles Boyer dreams that he falls off a tight-rope in a circus and wakes up to find that he has fallen in love.

*Flesh and Fantasy* represents the defeat, on a pretentious scale, of Hollywood by Hollywood, and particularly by its most peculiar manifestation, the Star System. The same thing happens as happened in *Tales of Manhattan*: there are brief moments of genuine brilliance, but most of the time Julien Duvivier is out of his depth, trying vainly to cope with scenic effects that have been dragged in for their own sake and not for that of the story, and with a host of stars who are there for the same reason.



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