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Film Reviews, by Jno.

The Days Before Yesterday

LIFE WITH FATHER

(Warner Bros.)

IT is said that when *Life With Father* was running as a Broadway show (and it ran for a record 3,213 performances) the audience used to begin laughing as soon as the curtain went up. I went along to see the film in much the same spirit. Admittedly, it is not the frame of mind in which a conscientious critic should approach his weekly chores. To be "prepared to be amused," as the phrase has it, generally means that one is armed with certain preconceived notions as to what one wants in the form of amusement, and one's reaction tends to be more strongly for or against as the film succeeds or fails in meeting these specifications. For me, *Life With Father* did, on the whole, come up to expectations, but certain minor divergences from the original text served a useful purpose in keeping the critical faculty awake.

The spurious morality of the Johnston Office, for example, makes its presence felt early in the picture. As in the stage-play (which it follows fairly closely) the opening scenes of the film build up to the first explosive offstage utterance which precedes the entry of the irascible Mr. Day at breakfast. And the suspense is built up well. The camera presents a delightful picture of the Madison Avenue household apprehensively facing the prospect of another round with Father. Mother is fussing about explaining to a nervous new maid just how Mr. Day likes things done; in the kitchen Margaret the cook is making sure that the muffins are at just the right temperature, while the boys are hurriedly looking at the baseball results in Father's paper. The atmosphere is, in a word, charged. Then Father (still upstairs in his bedroom) gives tongue.

This is a moment of considerable consequence, for it introduces us not only to Father, but to one of Father's most characteristic and amusing foibles—his hearty and frequent use of the word damn. "Oh, damn!" delivered in a tone which is a subtle blend of rage and anguish is Mr. Day's brief but telling opening line—or it would be if the word were not on the Johnston *codex expurgatorius*. What one does hear is "Oh, gad!" and oh, gad it remains, whether Father is damning the Democratic Party or the morning coffee. I could hardly have been more flabbergasted had I heard Eliza Doolittle say "Not blooming likely." And I had a fleeting impression that William Powell was not altogether easy about it. His first "Oh, gad!" had almost an experimental sound, as if he were testing the expression with caution in case the ghost of Clarence Day Junr. should Bah loudly at him from a corner of the landing, and though his later objurgations were full-throated enough, they lacked the explosive quality which the original oath would have provided.

But the bowdlerization of his vocabulary does not prevent William Powell having the time of his life as Father.

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "Life With Father."
DULL: "Living in a Big Way."

It is a part which requires nice judgment if it is not to be overplayed, particularly at such close range as the film camera makes possible, but I do not think anyone in Hollywood could have made a better job of it. As his wife Vinnie, Irene Dunne is just the right blend of nervousness and determination and I found it pleasant to see Zasu Pitts again (as the visiting Cousin Cora) and to watch the expressive movements of her hands.

The appearance of Elizabeth Taylor was not, in my opinion, so necessary to the action. She arrives with Cousin Cora to spend a week in New York (they camp in the Day household, to Father's intense disgust) and has a calf-love affair with Clarence Junr.—a passage for which there is no precedent in the sketches, being simply Lindsay-and-Crouse slapstick. And though Father's skirmishes with the church—and his late entry into it—figure largely in both sketches and play I still found it somewhat surprising to hear the benediction pronounced in the middle of a comedy scene.

But on the whole the film succeeds to a remarkable degree not only in recapturing the spirit of the stories, but in recalling so many of them. Even Mother's rubber-plant, and her 15-dollar china pug-dog have been remembered.

The technicolour photography is uniformly good throughout the picture—particularly when the camera is turned on the red heads of the Day household—in fact, I am sure that those who have enjoyed the books or the play will not be disappointed in the film, and those who have yet to make the acquaintance of Mr. Day will find the experience a delightful one.

LIVING IN A BIG WAY

(M.-G.-M.)

THIS story, of how four out of New York's Four Hundred go slumming among the city's ex-servicemen, is remarkable mainly for its social unconsciousness. Gene Kelly, who is most deeply involved in the plot, can't act, but he might prove himself the poor man's Fred Astaire if his choreographer knew his job. The occasional dance-routines, however, are painfully humdrum, with the exception of one in which a shaggy dog takes part. If you are a dog-lover you will enjoy this independent animal's performance—and as it comes fairly early in the picture you can still escape with your love of humanity more or less unimpaired.

Truth and Propaganda

To the Editor—

Sir,—We were rather disappointed in reading Jno.'s review of *Kameradschaft*. Surely it was most necessary to preach the gospel of international co-operation to the defeated Germans, as past history has so amply proved. And because the film was produced for German audiences, the accident had to happen on

(continued on next page)