

The Admirable Belvedere

SITTING PRETTY
(20th Century-Fox)

ONCE upon a time there was a young couple called Mr. and Mrs. Harry King, who lived with their three lovely little boys and a large dog called Henry in a typical American home (Audubon prints in the sitting-room and chromium and white enamel in the kitchen), in the typical American suburb of Hummingbird Hill.

Now if this were a story by J. M. Barrie, Mr. and Mrs. King would no doubt live happily ever after, going out once a week to the pictures and taking in an occasional party at a neighbour's while Henry bathed the kids and put them to bed. But Henry apparently never heard of Barrie and in any case his I.Q. is in the vicinity of Absolute Zero, so that when the film opens the Kings aren't living too happily at all.

Most young New Zealand couples will sympathise with them. The almost complete absence, in this utilitarian age, of supernumerary female relatives who can be counted on to act as sitters is one of

life's minor tragedies. But apparently in the United States it is something more than that. What burns up Mr. and Mrs. King is not the prospect of missing an occasional movie, but the possibility that they might have to refuse an invitation to dinner with the boss. And as anyone familiar with the remorseless drive of American business will tell you, this amounts to commercial suicide.

To Mrs. King (as befits the wife of a rising young attorney) this would be a fate worse than death, and to avoid it she decides on the desperate step of advertising for the services of a permanent companion-help and sitter in return for free board and lodging. When a certain Lynn Belvedere replies in satisfactory terms she can scarcely wire back her acceptance quickly enough, but when the Belvedere arrives on the doorstep and proves to be not a compliant female but a middle-aged man of determined character and monumental self-assurance the comedy (which has been fast enough up to this point) gets properly into high gear.

It would spoil a delightful little film to carry the synopsis beyond this point,

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "Sitting Pretty."
MAINLY FAIR: "Out of the Past."

but for those who like their humour on the dry side *Sitting Pretty* can be recommended without misgivings. In many ways it is reminiscent of *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, though it is by no means so pretentious an affair. The dialogue is good. Sometimes quietly humorous, often acidly satirical, it is almost always lively and worth listening to. Clifton Webb, as Mr. Belvedere, provides the piquant combination of a face which reminds me strongly of Thomas Mann's with, on this occasion, an acidulated egocentricity which at times out-woolcotts Woolcott. Robert Young and Maureen O'Hara as young Mr. and Mrs. King are pleasantly competent, but of purely secondary importance. This is Mr. Webb's picture and he walks off with the honours easily. But he is not the sole source of comedy. Richard Haydon, complete with adenoids, gives a deftly comical performance as Clarence Appleton who breeds irises when he is not spying on his neighbours or gossiping about them, and for those who take their humour more simply there are several minor characters to provide comedy of a broader or less intellectual flavour.

All in all I thought that *Sitting Pretty* was a rather shrewd and clever production. It could have cost little more than the salaries of the stars and the technicians, it has a script good enough to entertain more exacting film-goers, and quite enough simple fun to please the rest. I am only sorry that those who might enjoy it most are least likely to see it—unless some good samaritan offers to act as a sitter.

OUT OF THE PAST (RKO-Radio)

I HAVE a friend whose trains of thought (so far as her conversation reveals them) have an annoying habit of popping into tunnels, and then emerging in quite unexpected places. In consequence I am always losing the train, and occasionally lose my patience along with it. *Out of the Past* reminded me, in places, of her. The dialogue at times requires some effort on the part of the non-American filmgoer if one is to penetrate to the thought behind it, and the Past out of which the story comes, though filled in to some extent by flashback, makes a rather untidy junction with the present. Once or twice I got confused between two of the female characters, and looking back I am not now sure who-all killed whom, and why, but in spite of this moiety of confusion *Out of the Past* manages to rise noticeably above average.



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