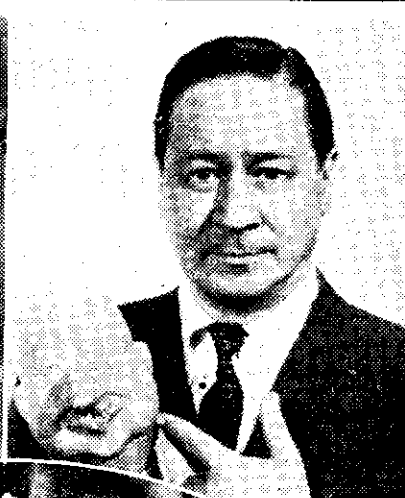


BENCHLEY IN DISNEYLAND

★ A Film Review by G.M. ★



(Above) Bewildered Benchley with his attractive guide through Disneyland, Frances Gifford. (Right) Benchley and a souvenir

(Above) "At last he reaches the chief wizard himself": Robert Benchley with Walt Disney. (In oval) Florence Gill and Clarence Nash, the "voices" of Clara Cluck and Donald Duck

THE RELUCTANT DRAGON (Disney-RKO Radio)

IN a recent letter to *The New Statesman*, David Low described his fellow-cartoonist Walt Disney as "the most significant figure in graphic art since Leonardo." He went on to say why, and now, in Disney's new full-length feature *The Reluctant Dragon*, you may in part see how. For *The Reluctant Dragon* contains not only three and a-half Disney shorts but consists also of a conducted tour by Comedian Robert Benchley through the Disney studios—a kind of Alice-in-Wonderland adventure.

Observe then Mr. Robert Benchley in a bathing garment, sprawl in a rubber boat, upon a pond. You might easily think that this was the reluctant dragon; but no, the dragon is in a book—a book from which Mrs. Benchley reads while Mr. Benchley shoots a toy gun at toy ducks, making the interesting observation that no matter where he aims the gun he always hits the same duck. Crazy? Of course; but all fairy stories are. And most true stories. Never any Hollywood stories. Well, hardly ever. Mostly they show things as we gullible plebeians would like them to be.

Mrs. Benchley—to return to the fairy story—tells her husband that the story she is reading would interest Walt Disney. Mr. Benchley demurs. He is modest. Who is he to approach the great? He protests, as Mrs. Benchley insists—and is next seen driving in a car to the Disney studios.

THEN the miracle unfolds. He receives a pass which will take him along the nowhere roads and through

the moonshine gateways of Disneyland. He is delighted, as your children will be when they realise that this ineffably childish man, one with them, has received an open sesame to the enchanted country which they all desire, themselves, to visit.

Amazed, enchanted, delighted, Mr. Benchley sees just enough of the Disney studios, not to understand how they work, but to believe that they work by magic. From the half-tones of the outside world, he strays into a wonderland of colours, where drawings move and trains talk and all the world appears in that faintly satirical caricature that is the essence of all true make-believe and that links make-believe so closely with real truth. Among Mr. Benchley's discoveries is one that all of us might have made long before now but haven't—and that is that all Disney characters have only three fingers! Disney has apparently found that he can save time with three fingers, and not displease anyone—so why bother to have four? This trivial but staggering discovery seems to me, in my present Disney-inspired mood, quite as important as the revelation that Hitler's beer-garden speech was not broadcast this year.

BUT I shan't describe the picture. I refuse to describe it. It was a dream. It wasn't a motion picture at all. It was ingenuity, and some beauty and loveliness, and skill, to be realised but not understood. There were colours, oceans of them, and pretty women with clever hands, and men who worked magic with complicated machines, strange sounds blended with extraordinary cleverness, and music so aptly conceived that a friend, who is a musician, told me afterwards that he had not noticed it. Myself, not a musician, had been delighted by it, which proves again that the essential verities are those of which we are ignorant; but of which, by some unexplained art or acumen, Disney has become aware.

In the course of his wanderings, Mr. Benchley meets the "voices" of Donald Duck and Clara Cluck, is introduced to the pretty girl who can talk like a train whistle, sees The Goof trying to ride a horse, and has a preview, magic-lantern style, of a cartoon about Baby Weems, whose other name should be Dionne. At last, with an expression of dazed happiness on his face, Mr. Benchley reaches the Chief Wizard himself.

(Continued on next page)

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