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Film Reviews by G.M.

THE THIRTEENTH HARDY

ANDY HARDY'S DOUBLE LIFE

(M-G-M)

PRECEDING this feature was a short item about the work being done by the Museum of Modern Art in America to preserve films of historic interest for the benefit of coming generations. Apparently celluloid perishes within 20 years even under the best conditions, so that every film on the Museum's shelves must be periodically re-copied. Thanks to this painstaking work, students of the future, said the commentator, will know far more about us from films than we have ever been able to learn about our ancestors from books.

Very true; but when we came to the feature on the programme (which presumably will one day find a place on the Museum's shelves), I couldn't help wondering what sort of an idea of 20th century behaviour social historians of 3000 A.D. will get when they sit down to a re-screening of *Andy Hardy's Double Life*—or for that matter of any others of the Hardy series. They may be impressed, for instance, that a man as aged as Judge Hardy should have a son as youthful as Andy; they may be struck by the fact that the girls with whom Andy canoodles (or should I say "necks"?) are so obviously more mature than he is; they may wonder that a Judge of an American Court should decide a case in private on his back porch and that, while a law suit is still *sub judice*, he should consider it quite in order to receive personal representations from interested parties. They will almost certainly gain the impression (not incorrectly) that the Americans of 1943 were a highly sentimental race.

And yet they might do a lot worse than study the Hardy Family. For these movies come a good deal closer to being true social documents than the average film. Therein, I believe, lies the secret of their enormous popularity: for all their faults they do present a fairly accurate picture of the life of average, ordinary people—and particularly of the average citizen of the U.S.A., or so I am assured by Americans I have questioned. Even the points that I have picked on above may be merely peculiarities of the American scene that are likely to strike a non-American observer: there is still enough of the common stuff of life in these films to make them acceptable to audiences in this country, in Great Britain, and elsewhere.

Films like this are, of course, the modern equivalents of the old-fashioned serial, in which you get continuity of character and setting instead of continuity of narrative. Lewis Stone may be friskier in the latest episode than in the previous one, or he may be more weighed down with problems; Mickey Rooney just setting off for college, may be even more precociously amorous than he was when leaving grade-school; but basically they all remain the same people, just as you can also be sure that they will all sit down to supper in the same order as they have done for six years and 13 pictures, and that the telephone will be found in the same place at the foot of the stairs.

It is said, and one can well believe it, that M-G-M maintains special employees whose job it is to note down all the

characteristics of the Hardy menage, the position of every piece of furniture in the house, and so prevent any unexplainable deviations from picture to picture. Nothing must happen to the Hardys that would be unlikely to happen to an average middle-class American family. Filmgoers, who like to be sure of something in a precarious world, have repaid this diligence by turning the Hardy pictures into some of the biggest profit-makers in screen history. How long the series can continue I wouldn't venture to predict: there are signs in the current episode that the old Judge is beginning to dither and that young Andy and his girlfriends will soon need the protection of wedding-rings.

THE GAY SISTERS

(Warner Bros.)

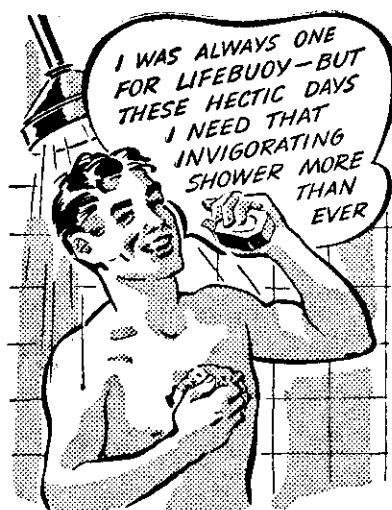
NOT so very gay, and one of them far from sisterly (traditional version) are these three young prospective heiresses who have spent 23 years fighting a lawsuit and who live in the big old house called the Gaylord house which must never never be sold—because of the Family Tradition that the Gaylords Never Sold the Land.

The Gay Sisters, the Misses Barbara Stanwyck, Geraldine FitzGerald and Nancy Coleman, are left all alone with their huge prospective fortune when their father is killed in World War 1; but unmentionable people in France trump up a second will and litigation lasts, with a series of comparatively rapid lawsuits of two to six years' duration, until 1941, when "the three little kittens who've lost their mittens" (as described by the eldest Miss Gaylord, the Head of the Family), are still in court, still (extraordinarily!) sought by the news photographers, still living in their enormous mansion, and still looking for a new three-months-butcher. In court with them is Donald Crisp as their lawyer, and George Brent as their chief adversary.

Then we go home with them: the Head of the Family, headstrong; the middle sister, flirtatious, greedy, just back from England; and the little one who is in love with a painter but can't marry him because she married a man for four hours and left him because he took his mother along on the honeymoon . . . but he won't have the marriage annulled until the Case is finished so that he can have some of the Money.

You get the idea? Oh, no, I forgot; there's also Austin. Who's he? Oh, just a little boy in the house. The eldest sister seems to take quite an interest in him. It shouldn't make you jump in your seat when you are told that he is her son. And the father? Oh, come now; that's easy. Why, it's good old George Brent; yes, he's actually the legal husband of the eldest Miss Gaylord. Of course Austin doesn't know; he thinks he's an orphan.

Now, do I need to tell you the end? If you find the problem very hard to solve I'll give you the clue; is little Austin suddenly to be given one parent (male), one parent (female), one of each (alternately, including holidays), or one of each together and all the time? There, I knew you'd guess. But maybe I made it too easy.



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