

That Droll Fellow—W. C. Fields

The Juggler Who Turned Out to Be an Actor

(Continued from page one.)
the cast after the tryout performance. He claims that his twenty-nine days of travel for one night's performance gives him a world's championship for misfortune in theatrical life.

Nevertheless this rebuff was the luckiest event of his life. Gene Buck, song writer and first lieutenant of Florenz Ziegfeld, saw that performance as a scout for the great revue producer, and immediately engaged Fields for the next "Ziegfeld Follies." He recognized in this parody juggler, who concealed great skill in the art of legerdemain under a pretense of pathetic clumsiness, a performer of striking novelty. The laughter Fields evoked at the "Follies" Broadway premiere proved that a new star had been discovered by the resourceful Flo.

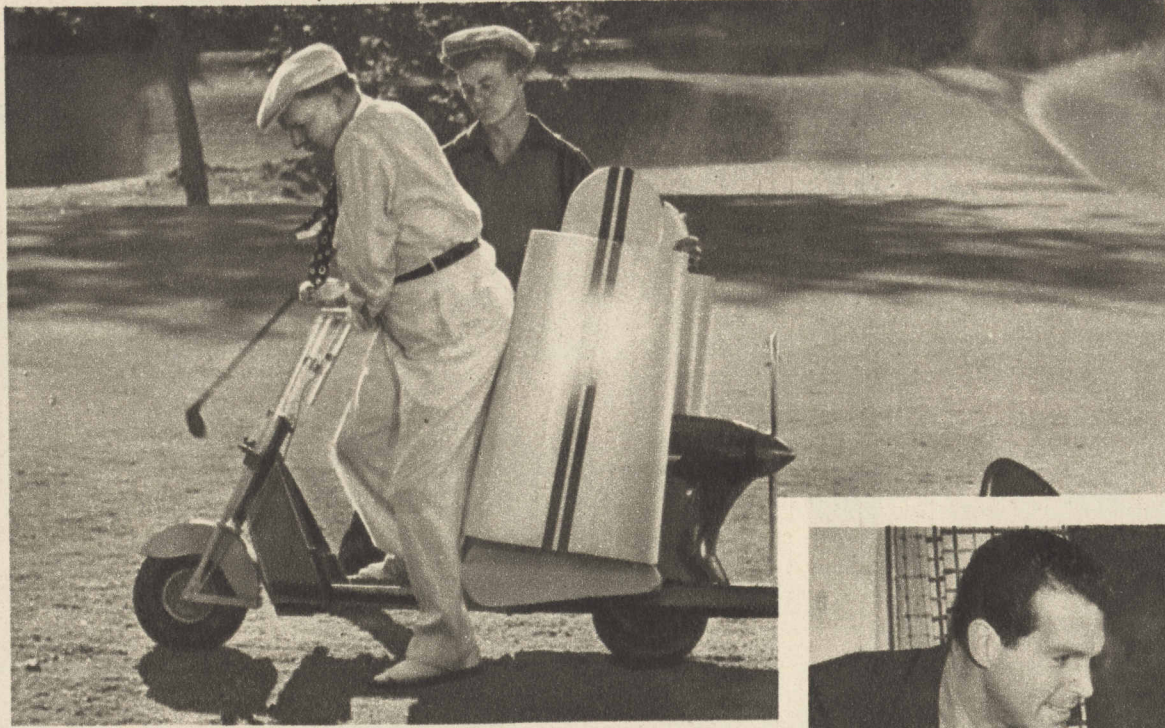
Fields was prominent in seven productions of the "Ziegfeld Follies" series; he became a standard personality of these famous entertainments. He began as a dumb-play performer, in comic sketches developed from mishaps with billiard balls, golf clubs, and other paraphernalia, without changing his characterization, which was that of a shabby-genteel fellow on a silent jag. After a few years he began to speak a word now and then, and it was discovered that the Fields voice also could make the customers laugh—perhaps because it was so weak and plaintive. It was like the bleat of a disconsolate lamb. And thus Fields became a talking comedian as well as a pantomimist. No other comedian in history has had such a feeble pipe; the wags of the stage are normally shouters and bellowers.

The "Ziegfeld Follies" productions in which Fields ap-

peared were: In 1915, with Leon Errol, Ed Wynn, Ann Pennington, Bert Williams, and Bernard Granville; 1916, with Ina Claire, Bernard Granville, Ann Pennington, Bert Williams, Fanny Brice, and Carl Randall; 1917, with Fanny Brice, Bert Williams, Will Rogers, and Peggy Hopkins; 1918, with Eddie Cantor, Harry Kelly, Ann Pennington, Will Rogers, and Marilyn Miller; 1920, with Bernard Granville, Ray Dooley, Marilyn Miller, Bert Williams, Eddie Cantor, and the Fairbanks twins; 1921, with Fanny Brice, Van and Schenck, Ray Dooley, and Raymond Hitchcock; and 1925, with Ray Dooley, Will Rogers, Peggy Fears, and Ethel Shutta.

Dunkenfield was his birth-right name; it suggests a Pennsylvania Dutch ancestry. After attending the public schools of Philadelphia long enough to get all the formal education that a future movie star might need he went out into the world in search of adventure in a way that was characteristic of American boyhood in the 1880s. He ran away from home and became a juvenile tramp. His vagrancy, however, was fired with an ambition; he wanted to become a juggler, and he practiced the art diligently during two migratory years, earning a meager livelihood meanwhile at odd jobs. At the age of 18 he became a professional in a summer park at Norristown, Pa., on a salary of \$5 a week, from which the management deducted \$1.50 as a commission for its kindness in employing such a young and inexperienced performer.

A burlesque show comedian named Watson, himself destined to rise in the profession until he became known all over the



As something of a glamor boy, W. C. Fields rides a motor scooter between golf shots in a recent picture. (Paramount photo.)

country as "Sliding Billy," soon found a better job for young Fields at Fortescue's Pier in Atlantic City, where he earned \$10 and "cakes," i. e., his board. He had to serve as a "drowner" as well as a juggler; he would put on a bathing suit, wade out into the surf, and then yell for help. When rescued he would be brought into Fortescue's resort to be drained out over a barrel; and there the curious bystanders would assemble to watch the resuscitation and perhaps buy beer and sandwiches.

When the drowning season closed he went to New York, of course, and promptly found employment with a small touring company that had a program of vaudeville acts and dramatic sketches. Fields juggled, and also acted, according to his own vague ideas about that aspect of the show business. His salary was \$18 a week, and he asserts that he never saw a cent of it for three seasons. The manager would pay for his

troupe's board, lodging, and transportation as long as box office conditions permitted; then he would abscond, leaving the players stranded. Then Fields' tramping experience would become useful and he would beat his way back to New York in true hobo style, and would do it all over again the next year. This sounds like bitter experience, but Fields was grateful for it. Under the auspices of this fraudulent manager he ate regularly, slept in good beds, and became a master juggler.

After this apprenticeship Fields rolled along the gypsy trail of the vaudeville circuits in great comfort. He was adept in a style of entertainment that was always in demand; he secured good bookings; he was never out of work. A juggler is a true internationalist, at home wherever he can find a hall to exhibit his tricks. His first New York engagement was at the London theater on the Bowery in 1898, soon after which he went



Fields and Shirley Ross in "The Big Broadcast."

This great victory for the old school ended Wynn's flycatching forever.

In the "Ziegfeld Follies of 1918" there was a rough comedian named Harry Kelly, then better known than Fields, who also thought that this upstart should be suppressed. Kelly had been assigned by the librettists to the rôle of Fields' caddy in his golfing travesty. His behavior in that capacity took the form of flagrant and willful interference with Fields' delicately adjusted system for arousing laughter; "flycatching" again, always a fighting issue between comedians. This time Fields waited until he met his annoyances after the show; then he smote him, suddenly and furiously. When the fight (probably a draw) had ended, Kelly resigned as Fields' stooge.

"Anybody will be better than Kelly," proclaimed the enraged juggler. "Give me that stage-hand!"

The mechanic to whom he pointed was a dwarflike creature with a huge head. He accepted the job, handled it perfectly, and became Fields' best-known helper. That's how stooges are born.

Fields' movie career began soon after his first season with the "Ziegfeld Follies," in 1915, when he appeared in slapstick comedies produced by the Gaumont firm in Long Island City. Thus he descends from the obsolete silent films, to which his pantomime was perfectly adapted, and Hollywood of the talkies regards him, with his background of twenty-four years before the camera, as a veritable Rip Van Winkle. In recent years his deftness in characterizing pompous old duffers and amiable frauds has won him recognition as a creative actor with an unusual style. He may use the slapstick freely (the directors clamor for new versions of his familiar tricks), but he deserves to be called an artist. From the juggling of billiard balls he has risen to a mellow interpretation of the immortal Mr. Micawber in "David Copperfield."



Fields with Fred MacMurray (standing), Leslie Howard, left, and George Arliss, right, at celebration honoring Fields. (Acme photo.)

to Europe and kept on moving around the world. He appeared at Johannesburg, South Africa, before the Boer war had ended, by slipping through the British military lines. He turned up at Pago Pago, Samoa, long before Somerset Maugham wrote the story about Sadie Thompson that was dramatized as "Rain." He made his London debut in 1901.

At the Winter Garden in Berlin he made a discovery that has served to guide jugglers and pantomimists ever since. It ought to be called "Fields' law." His act failed there, and he did not know why. He returned to the same theater later and succeeded. Then it dawned upon him that on his first engagement he had been preceded by a troupe of trained horses. Hence Fields' law: Never follow a horse act; never follow any kind of act that makes considerable noise. After such a racket an audience is not prepared to give its attention to silent play.

Fields' technique all through his stage career, and to a large extent in the movies, is based upon the manipulation of various objects with split-second timing of movements. In the shop talk of the amusement profession, he is a "prop" comedian. This is a more ancient and possibly more honorable branch of the trade than that practiced by the dialog comedians—the wags who chatter wittily or make strange noises with their mouths. There is a feud between these two branches of the funny-man business that runs back, no doubt, to the mummings of ancient Greece and Rome.

Ed Wynn may be selected as a representative of the chatterboxes who regard performers like Fields as old-fashioned and who stigmatize their offerings as "dumb acts." Therefore let us recall what Wynn did to Fields in the latter's first year with the "Ziegfeld Follies," and also what Fields did to Wynn. The story is a sprightly illustration of the difference between the two schools of comic thought—the wise-cracker and the slapstick.

In that revue Fields was giving his billiard table act, now to be found in his movies; laughter from the audience was frequent and regular. One night the customers began laughing off schedule, so to speak, and in a derisive way. He was puzzled for several minutes; then he discovered

that Ed Wynn was lurking under the billiard table, making comic faces and behaving generally like a "flycatcher." (This is a bit of stage slang which designates a performer who interferes with a colleague's performance by making gestures, unseen by the latter, such as pretending to capture an imaginary fly.)

"If he does it again I'll kill him," was the ultimatum issued by the usually mild-mannered juggler to the management that night after the performance. Wynn was informed; he laughed it off.

A few weeks later Fields again found Wynn under the billiard table catching flies. Without an apparent break in his routine of tricks he worked into a favorable position and then, reversing his cue, he swiftly dropped the butt of it down on Wynn's head. It was no love tap; the stroke was hard enough to drive a nail. Wynn gave one deep groan and rolled over on his back, "out" for a count of ten or longer. The audience laughed in high glee, for it looked like good, clean fun. The stage manager wanted to ring down the curtain, but Fields nodded him out of the impulse and calmly went on with his billiard ball tricks, while Wynn, after recovery, augmented the laughter with occasional lamentations.

It's How, Not What, You Serve

By MARY MEADE

IT ISN'T so much what you serve as how you serve it that builds your reputation as a good or poor hostess, an excellent or mediocre cook.

Baked chicken isn't so much of itself—but baked young chicken in mushroom cream, served as it is pictured on this page, really is something! Jelly roll is a good old-fashioned des-

sert which might possibly be taken indifferently were it just jelly roll. This one is more—it's filled with strawberries, fresh ones, and the topping is whipped cream cheese. Try both these good foods for the next company meal if you're one of the army of women who are always seeking "some different way to fix it."

YOUNG CHICKEN IN MUSHROOM CREAM (Serves five)

- 1 young roasting chicken, about 3½ pounds
- ¼ cup flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup fat
- ¼ to ½ pound fresh mushrooms
- 2 cups cream or thin white sauce
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- Grated rind of 1 lemon
- 1½ tablespoons sherry
- Seasonings

Disjoint chicken, dip in seasoned flour, and fry in fat until golden brown. Place in casserole. Sauté the mushrooms in the same skillet about five minutes. Add cream and seasonings, lemon juice and rind, and sherry and pour over the chicken. Bake covered until tender, 1 to 1½ hours. The sauce should be thickened by



This is no ordinary jelly roll. It's been filled with fresh strawberries, and the topping isn't whipped cream, but whipped cream cheese.

that time. Good news: Roasting chickens are from 20 to 25 per cent less in price than they were last year.

STRAWBERRY JELLY ROLL

Use your favorite jelly roll recipe, which I hope will be the one printed not so very long ago in this column. You'll need besides a quart of fresh strawberries, ¾ cup sugar, and 2

packages (3 ounces each) cream cheese. After baking the cake and cutting off the crisp edges, spread thickly with the strawberries, which have been cut fine and mixed with the sugar. Roll, wrap in wax paper, and allow to cool. Slice and top each portion with a spoonful of cream cheese which has been softened with milk and whipped with an egg beater.



Here's an attractive way to serve young chicken in mushroom cream. Add frills to the drumsticks and let them adorn the top of the casserole.

KITCHEN FRESH IS THE BEST!



A FEW CENTS BUYS A BANQUET WHEN CHOP SUEY or CHOW MEIN IS MADE AT HOME

Two things you'll learn when you make CHOP SUEY or CHOW MEIN at home. First, it tops everything for taste. Second, its surprisingly inexpensive.

CHOP SUEY

- 1 No. 2 can FUJI BEAN SPROUTS (well drained)
- 1 lb. diced pork or beef
- 1 cup celery, shredded (onions, if desired)
- 3 tbsp. FUJI SAUCE
- 2 tsp. COOK'S MAGIC
- 1 tsp. sugar

In greased pan over medium flame cook meat, celery (and onions) until nearly done. Season with sugar, salt, pepper. Add meat stock or water thickened with cornstarch and Cook's Magic. Fold in Bean Sprouts. Serve with hot rice.



Ask Your Friend The Grocer

NEVER A DULL MEAL WITH FUJI CHOP SUEY FOODS

Voice of the Movie Fan

Letters published in this department should be written on one side of the paper. If you wish a personal reply please inclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Dear Miss Tiné: Please inform me who played the part of Susie in "Boy Meets Girl" on the stage. Was it Marie Wilson, who played it on the screen? I am under the impression it was somebody else and would be glad to know who it was. Thank you.

MISS JOSEPHINE ROSS.

Editor's note: Polly Walters played the rôle of Susie on the stage, and Marie Wilson played the same part in the screen version. You're welcome.

Dear Miss Tiné: Again I highly praise Bette Davis; her supporting cast in "The Sisters" also deserves much commendation.

I think Miss Davis shows she is a truly great actress in this production, and her outstanding ability is repeatedly being recognized as quite miraculous.

Therefore I believe "The Sisters" should be put on that "must see" list, and soon every one will agree with me in saying three cheers for three sisters who make this unforgettable story possible.

Sincerely, ROSLYN NEWMAN.

Editor's note: I like your stationery.

Dear Miss Tiné: I saw "Submarine Patrol" recently. I think Richard Greene is tops. He not only has the right kind of looks, but he has a taking personality as well. I prophesy that in a year or so he will be stepping in line with the first row. He really should be there now. It takes a star to act the part of a rich man's son—fraternize with the hard-working gobs and be the "lover-iest" lover a girl ever wanted, and all in one breath, too. All hail to Richard Greene, the movie king of 1940.

Thank you. I like your column.

MYRTLE DE LINE.

Editor's note: Richard and I thank YOU.

Dear Miss Tiné: I would like to know who it was that played the part of Deanna Durbin's mother in "That Certain Age." My sister said it was Irene Dunne, and I said it was Irene Rich. Could you please tell me who is right? Thanks a lot.

LOUISE YARGER.

Editor's note: You are right, Louise, for it was Irene Rich who played the rôle of Deanna's mother in "That Certain Age."

● LOOKING AT HOLLYWOOD WITH ED SULLIVAN will be resumed in an early issue of the Graphic Section.