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"ARE PARENTS PEOPLE?" (Paramount, 1925) Director: Malcolm St. Clair  
Scenario by Frances Agnew from the Saturday Evening Post story by  
Alice Duer Miller; Camera: Bert Glennon; 5 reels  
With Betty Bronson, Adolphe Menjou, Florence Vidor, Andre Beranger,  
Lawrence Gray, Emily Fitzroy, Mary Beth Milford, William Courtwright.

"Are Parents People?" is a fine example of the light, charming, social comedy that has completely disappeared from the screen today. With a plot that is admittedly no more than pleasant trivia, it sparkles from the first scene to the last, wagging an admonishing yet friendly figure at the audience throughout for being possessed of the same human foibles that motivate the story.

After years as a Sennett director, and then on Rin Tin Tin and other melodramas, "Are Parents People?" marked St. Clair's directorial debut at Paramount - and on the film's success hung his future there. It was a success, both critically and at the boxoffice, and like all future St. Clair films was brought in quickly - and economically. The following year he made no less than six top-liners for Paramount, and newspaper film critics voted him one of the top directors of the year, with only Ernst Lubitsch and Von Stroheim ahead of him. The film also helped consolidate the career of Betty Bronson, who had been such an overnight sensation in her first major film, "Peter Pan". Scheduled to do "The Little French Girl" with Brenon (who used Mary Brian instead), Bronson was sidetracked into St. Clair's film, thus proving that she was as adept at modern comedy as at pathos and whimsy, although it was in another Barrie-Brenon film, "A Kiss for Cinderella", that she was to give her finest performance.

Together with Pola Negri's "A Woman of the World", "Are Parents People?" is probably the St. Clair film that holds up best. Its absence of moving camera shots and apparently "straightforward" technique is misleading, for via intelligent cutting and pacing, and the very sparse use of titles, St. Clair tells an essentially talkie story in completely visual terms. An appealing little sequence has Betty Bronson passing through several stages of determination and indecision merely by a closeup of her ankles in differing attitudes. And the anguished parental questionings concerning an innocent night spent in the hero's apartment are likewise told purely in casually underplayed pantomime. One of St. Clair's greatest gifts was his ability to build minor incidents into riotous comedy sequences, and the episode here with Andre Beranger as a satirised Barrymore (from "Beau Brummel") is typical. (For more of a career run-down on St. Clair, we refer you to our notes on "Crack Up" and "Grand Duchess And the Waiter"). But notwithstanding the smoothness of St. Clair's direction, the slick and clean photography of Bert Glennon ("The Ten Commandments", "Wagonmaster") with its well-lit interiors and sharp Pasadena exteriors, and the polished playing of Menjou and Vidor, a good deal of the film's wholly engaging appeal is due to the warm and delightful performance of Betty Bronson. A unique product of her period, she was in her late-teens when the film was made, and was on the threshold of a brilliant career that, due to studio mishandling, never really materialised after the two Barrie films. Her seemingly perpetual gaiety attaches itself to every scene in which she appears, and yet, with the slightest alteration of a facial expression, she switches effortlessly to a mood of abject pathos. It is a pleasure to record that Miss Bronson, now making occasional movies again (she retired officially in 1932, made one film in 1937, retired again, but has recently been back on television, on the Hollywood little-theatre stage, and in such movies as "A Pocketful of Miracles" and "The Naked Kiss") has retained all of her charm and sparkle, and a little less than two weeks ago had an invited Eastman House audience eating out of the palm of her hand when she made a moving and gracious little speech following a screening of "Peter Pan".

Incidentally, collectors of unimportant movie trivia may care to note that the hat and dress used by Betty Bronson in the last reel of the film were subsequently re-used by Clara Bow in the last reel of "Mantrap".

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