

Quotes From (and About) W.C. Fields



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Quotes compiled by Kevin Rayburn

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Most people think of W.C. Fields as a film star, known for his eccentric outlook and distinctive speaking style. Yet, Fields was not just a brilliant practitioner of the verbal and physical gag, he has also been revered as a general humorist--a commentator/sage of the American scene.

With that kind of reputation, you might expect that it would be easy to fill volumes full of Fields' spoken wit and wisdom. Alas, this is not the case. In fact, there are precious few stand-alone quips extant from the mouth or pen of W. C. Fields. The ones that do exist on paper are often of suspect origin, or are second- and third-hand accounts

passed from acquaintances--often through the distorted lens of memory.

For someone making the case that Fields was as important or as prolific a commentator as, say, Mark Twain or Will Rogers, this presents a complication--you have to have evidence to make the assertion. The usual benchmark of such as legacy--and the easiest evidence to cite, of course, is the pithy aphorism. Fields didn't leave behind many of these, or many were simply lost to history by lazy scribes. Fields himself is certainly partly to blame: for years he promised publishers of a forthcoming autobiography that never materialized.* Such a book surely would have been a treasure trove of witticism on a variety of topics.

As it stands, the evidence that Fields was a great humorist won't be found in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* or other bound repositories of the quip. Such books devote pages to figures such as Dorothy Parker, Twain, and Rogers, while only granting a few lines to Fields.

Clearly, Fields' stature as a humorist must be seen in his complete work--on stage, screen, and radio. Fields' humor was a humor "in context"--not always easily pulled out of that context. His comments

about society came from how he reacted to others in films: in his devastating comments or reactions to bankers, children, wives, etc.

His "quotes" were often the results of these encounters--on screen and in real life. Often, his most famous quotes--"Parboiled," for instance, in response to the question of how he liked children--were succinct responses to others' inquiries or observations. It is a reactive sort of humor--the same kind most Americans use in coping with the absurdities of the moment. As a result, quoting Fields is a challenge. Often, explanations of his quotes are longer than the quotes themselves.

With his massive vocabulary, masterly speaking skills, and unique outlook, Fields was certainly articulate. Yet, he left behind few one-liners. At the opposite extreme of his reactive quips, Fields would often ramble on into flighty tall tales, laced with arcane words and irony. Again, not the stuff that makes it into the quotation books.

Fields was indeed a great humorist; something quite obvious to those who've studied his life and enjoyed his films. It is perhaps fitting and ironic that Fields--the loner of inexplicable contradictions--should be the one major American humorist without many attributable quotations.

The following list of quotations is culled from a large number of sources, so I can't vouch for their accuracy other than to remark that they are certainly all in character. The quotes are sorted by subject matter. On the subject of alcohol, for instance, Fields' mental tap was always flowing.

This list of quotes--to my knowledge the most comprehensive of its kind--is the result of a painstaking search of much of the available literature on Fields. Perhaps it will contribute toward correcting the deficient entries on Fields found in other quotation books.

(*Fields' grandson, Ronald, cobbled together selected existing letters and previously unpublished script material by the star and published it in 1973 as *W.C. Fields by Himself: His Intended Autobiography*. In the strictest sense, it isn't really an autobiography, but as a source of insight into Fields' private life, it is invaluable, and is an enlightening supplement to the many other fine biographies. The book is especially good at showing Fields' perplexing complexities--as an alternately gracious and petty man.)

THE QUOTES

FIRST, a DISCLAIMER: (Sometimes being adult doesn't mean we're all "grown up." Being able to tolerate some of W.C. Fields' more outrageous statements is a good measure of one's maturity. Like Monty Python today, Fields was an equal-opportunity offender; nothing to him was sacred. He was equally disdainful of right-wing and left-wing views. Like most people, he could be hypocritical in his own life and conduct, even while he skewered the hypocrisies of others. Often, it was the *way* Fields said things that made them funny, not the content of what he said. This page is meant to show Fields' capacity for wit, not necessarily to judge or critique his world view.)

(-Kevin Rayburn)

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(NOTE: Each entry is attributed to its source, either directly, or with asterisks indicating footnotes at the bottom of this document.)

ALCOHOL and DRINKING

"Now don't say you can't swear off drinking; it's easy. I've done it a thousand times."

(From "The Temperance Lecture")

"How well I remember my first encounter with The Devil's Brew. I happened to stumble across a case of bourbon--and went right on stumbling for several days thereafter."

(Ibid)

"Back in my rummy days, I would tremble and shake for hours upon arising. It was the only exercise I got."

(Ibid)

"Thou shalt not kill anything less than a fifth."

(*** page 62)

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house unless they have a well-stocked bar."

(*** page 63)

"Somebody's been putting pineapple juice in my pineapple juice!"

(Fields' response after someone "spiked" his drink with fruit juice.)

(* page 242)

(Also quoted as:) **"What rascal has been putting pineapple juice in my pineapple juice?"**

(Quoted in *Hollywood Anecdotes* by Paul F. Boller; Morrow; New York, 1987.)

Charlie McCarthy: "Say, Mr. Fields, I read in the paper where you consumed two quarts of liquor a day. What would your father think about that?"

WC: "He'd think I was a sissy."

(From the radio sketch, "Father's Day")

"I exercise extreme self control. I never drink anything stronger than gin before breakfast."

(* page 243)

"I don't believe in dining on an empty stomach."

(* page 243)

"Say anything that you like about me except that I drink water."

(*Life* magazine, Jan. 6, 1947.)

"Of course, now I touch nothing stronger than buttermilk: 90-proof buttermilk."

("The Temperance Lecture")

"Some weasel took the cork out of my lunch..."

(From the film, *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man*.)

"I never drank anything stronger than beer before I was twelve."

(* pages 22-23)

"I seldom took a drink on the set before 9 a.m."

(From a 1942 letter, in **** page 415)

(Fields gave this rationale for not drinking water:)

"Fish f*ck in it."

(Source? Posted on the Internet Movie Database under Fields biographical information.)

(Fields, who never got falling-down drunk, explained why:)

"When you woo a wet goddess, there's no use falling at her feet."

(*** page 84)

"Sorry my fine public servants, but I haven't enough of this nectar to pass about willy

nilly."

**(Fields' comment to policemen who'd pulled him over on suspicion of drunk driving)
(* page 299)**

"Fields reloading!"

**(Fields' retort from his dressing room after a director had shouted, "Camera reloading!")
(** page 151)**

(After a Universal executive wondered aloud if Fields drank all the time, the enraged comedian retorted:)

**"I certainly do not drink all the time. I have to sleep you know."
(*** page 132)**

(In response to a waiter who'd offered him a "Bromo Seltzer" for a hangover, Fields said:)

"Ye Gods, no! I couldn't stand the noise."

**(Quoted in *2,500 Anecdotes for all Occasions* edited by Edmund Fuller, 1980, Avenel Books, NY.)
(This also turned up in *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* in this exchange:)**

Flight attendant: "Should I get you a bromo?"

WC: "No. I couldn't stand the noise."

"A woman drove me to drink, and I'll be a son-of-a-gun but I never even wrote to thank her."

(Quoted in: *Hollywood Merry-Go-Round* by Andrew Hecht, 1947, Grosset & Dunlap, NY.)

(NOTE: There are countless variations of this quote in numerous publications. Another one goes:

"Twas a woman who drove me to drink. I never had the courtesy to thank her."

(Also:)

"I was in love with a beautiful blonde once. She drove me to drink; that's the one thing I'm indebted to her for."

(*Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*)

"I take inordinate pride in my nose. Indeed, I have treatment done on it every day" (At this point, Fields is handed a glass and lifts it.) "My daily treatment."

(page 147.)**

"I've been on a 46-year diet of olives and alcohol. The latter I consume. The former I save and use over again in more alcohol. In my lifetime, I imagine, I have consumed at least \$200,000 worth of whisky."

(Note: Adjusted for inflation, that's probably about \$1 million, not to mention that Fields consumed vastly more gin in his favorite drink, the martini.)

(*Newsweek*, Jan. 6, 1947.)

"My illness is due to my doctor's insistence that I drink milk, a whitish fluid they force down helpless babies."

(Sources: various)

**"I like to keep a bottle of stimulant handy in case I see a snake, which I also keep handy."
(In Corey Ford's *Time of Laughter*)**

"It's a wonderful thing, the D.T.'s. You can travel the world in a couple of hours. You see

some mighty funny and curious things that come in assorted colors."

(* page 187.)

"Sleep...the most beautiful experience in life--except drink."

(My Little Chickadee.)

(Fields overhears a secretary talking to a friend over the phone:)

Secretary: "Someday you'll drown in a vat of whiskey."

WC (an aside): "Drown in a vat of whiskey? Oh death, where is thy sting?"

(Never Give a Sucker an Even Break)

"During one of my treks through Afghanistan, we lost our corkscrew. We were compelled to live on food and water for several days."

(My Little Chickadee)

"I feel like a midget with muddy feet had been walking over my tongue all night."

(Fields on "the morning after" in My Little Chickadee)

(Fields with a hangover:) "The two-headed boy in the circus never had such a headache..."

(He sits up in his pajamas, stretches, and continues:)

"...the art of arising, the morning after."

(My Little Chickadee)

"Christmas at my house is always at least six or seven times more pleasant than anywhere else. We start drinking early. And while everyone else is seeing only one Santa Claus, we'll be seeing six or seven."

(Newsweek, January 6, 1947)

(Fields picked up a hitchhiker, who preceded to give his "number four" lecture on the evils of drink. Fields kicked his hide into a ditch, and tossed a bottle of gin at him.)

WC: "There's my Number Three, called, 'How to Keep Warm in a Ditch.'"

(* page 164.)

(When informed that plaster from his dilapidated ceiling had fallen into his martini, Fields panicked:)

"Don't just stand there. Phone the plasterer. Tell him to get right over here--and to hurry, so we can avoid another horrendous tragedy."

(* page 86)**

Water, Fields said, "rusts pipes."

(Newsweek, Jan. 6, 1947.)

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PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE, etc.

"If at first you don't succeed, try again. Then quit. There's no use being a damn fool about it."

(Quoted in *The Executive's Book of Quotations* compiled by Julia Vitullo-Martin and Robert J. Moskin, page 111, as found in "Movie Talk".)

"Never give a sucker an even break."

(Fields' famous line from the play *Poppy*, later used as the title of his last major film.)

"A man who overindulges lives in a dream. He becomes conceited. He thinks the whole world revolves around him; and it usually does."

(From: *A Treasury of Humorous Quotations* by Herbert V. Prochnow and Herbert V. Prochnow Jr.; Harper & Row, New York, 1969, page 200.)

(Fields' proposed epitaph:) **"All things considered, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."**

(Also quoted as:)

"On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."

(Sources: various)

"I am free of all prejudices. I hate everyone equally."

(As quoted in Prochnow, page 271)

(Also quoted in this slight variation, as:)

"I am free of all prejudice. I hate everyone equally."

"A rich man is nothing but a poor man with money."

(Quoted in Prochnow, page 351)

"Never cry over spilt milk, because it may have been poisoned."

(*** page 186)

"Never mind what I told you--you do as I tell you."

(Line used in several Fields films. Also cited in Prochnow, page 8)

"Don't worry about your heart, it will last you as long as you live."

(****, page 178)

"Horse sense is the thing a horse has which keeps it from betting on people."

(sources: various)

"I can do anything I want to do!"

(Fields' angry affirmation of independence, as he throws his caddy in the lake in *The Dentist*.)

"It's what you do that counts and not what you say; therefore I fired my press agent."

(Quoted in *Famous Personalities and their Philosophies*, 1940, The Millimore Press, page 52.)

(When a studio executive tried to collect from Fields for a charity, the comic had what he thought was good reason not to give:)

WC: "You see, I am a member of the F.E.B.F."

Exec: "The what?"

WC: "F*ck everybody but Fields."

(Bob Hope's recollection, as told in ** page 193) (NOTE: Ronald Fields does not spell out the "F" word in his book, rather printing it as: F--.)

(Additional Note: In an interview in the December 1973 edition of *Playboy*, Bob Hope's recollection was slightly "cleaner,"--oddly enough, considering the venue--and the quote was "S.E.B.F...Screw Everybody But Fields.")

"Speakin' of the city, it ain't no place for women, gal, but perty men go thar."

(*The Fatal Glass of Beer*)

"And it ain't a fit night out for man or beast."

(*The Fatal Glass of Beer*, and *The Old Fashioned Way*; often attributed to Fields, the actual origin of this term is vague. But he did popularize it.)

"I've been barbecued, stewed, screwed, tattooed, and fried by people claiming to be my friends. The human race has gone backward, not forward, since the days we were apes swinging through the trees."

(*** page 129)

"There comes a time in the affairs of a man when he has to take the bull by the tail and face the situation." (*Tille and Gus*)

"Bloom, damn you! Bloom!"

(A cane-brandishing Fields, chewing out the flowers in his garden for "refusing" to open their buds for a visiting friend. Quoted in numerous books.)

"California is the only state in the union where you can fall asleep under a rose bush in full bloom and freeze to death." ("Borrowed" from Kim Bruno's W.C. Fields quotes website.)

"I hate you."

(Fields made this matter-of-fact declaration to rivals in several films. His unique drawl made it funny.)

(Fields, writing to a creditor, explained that pressing needs necessitated his collection of the money:)

"There is Kleenex to buy for both the seven-passenger and coupe Cadillacs. One does not regurgitate and let fly a hock-tuey out of the car window and expect to hold the respect of his public. One cannot forget their Noblesse Oblige."

(In a letter, in **** page 454.)

"By god, I was born lonely!"

(From: "Sleighbells Give Me Double Nausea," by Will Fowler, *Life*, Dec. 15, 1972)

"Everything I do is either illegal, immoral, or fattening."

(Fields evidently stole this line from humorist/critic Alexander Woolcott. Quoted in *Who's Who in Comedy* by Ronald L. Smith, page 162).

"What a gorgeous day. What effulgent sunshine. It was a day of this sort the McGillicuddy brothers murdered their mother with an ax."

(Movie line, quoted in *Who's Who in Comedy* by Ronald L. Smith, page 161.)

"In the ten years since I had run away from home...I had gone through more strange experiences than the average person crowds into a whole lifetime."

(*American Magazine*, January 1926.)

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COMEDY and SHOW BUSINESS

"It's hard to tell where Hollywood ends and the D.T.'s begin."

(Quoted in *Hollywood Wits*, edited by K. Madsen Roth; Avon Books, New York, 1995)

(Also: *Newsweek*, Jan. 6, 1947.)

"The funniest thing a comedian can do is not do it."

(In *Modern Quotations* by Arthur Richmond, 1947, Dover Publications, Inc.)

(FYI, a perfect example of this adage in action can be found in Fields' short film *The Pharmacist*. After washing his face and hands, a closed-eyed Fields gropes around for a towel and unknowingly heads straight for the fur hanging 'round his wife's neck. Just as he's about to grab it, she moves, and he in fact does grab the towel on the wall in front of her. The obvious gag, of course, would have been to grab the fur, but the scene is funnier because he doesn't.)

"I like my films to influence the audience. Even if it means tripping their aged grandparents with a cane when they get home."

(*** page 42)

"They are the igloos of the theatrical world. Even the managers in those communities never know whether to give their patrons Sarah Bernhardt or trained seals."

(Fields' assessment of Washington D.C., Kansas City, and St. Louis--in his judgment the burgs with the most finicky stage audiences)

(* page 131. FYI, Bernhardt was considered one of the great dramatic actresses at the turn of the century. She was also a Fields fan.)

"In every big city there is always one surefire laugh, and that lies in hanging some piece of idiocy upon the people of a nearby city or town."

(Fields, with a truth known by comedians today) (* page 132.)

"Thou shalt not steal--only from other comedians."

(*** page 62)

(Fields once described the ironic touches of his comedy by giving this example of a gag idea he invented:)

"My daughter wants to throw a stone at a bad man. I stop her from throwing, shaking my head and giving her a little slap. My disapproval is complete. You think: 'That's right, she shouldn't throw a stone even at a villain.' Then I hand her a brick to throw."

(Quoted in *The Literary Digest*, Feb. 20, 1926. There's a variation on this gag in the film *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*.)

"Mice!"

(Fields' ad-libbed response when heavy props unexpectedly fell backstage during his performance in "Earl Carroll's Vanities" in New York)

(* page 209)

"The movie people would have nothing to do with me until they heard me speak in a Broadway play, then they all wanted to sign me for the silent movies."

(page 19)**

"Hollywood is the gold cap on a tooth that should have been pulled out years ago."

(Quoted by Will Fowler in *Life*, "Sleigh Bells Give Me Double Nausea," Dec. 15, 1972.)

"No one likes the fellow who is all rogue, but we'll forgive him almost anything if there is warmth of human sympathy underneath his rogueries. The immortal types of comedy are just such men."

(page 30)**

(After explaining that bending props is funnier than breaking them, Fields qualified:)

"The best thing to break is a contract."

(*)(Also quoted in *Famous Actors and Actresses of the American Stage*)**

"The work I'm doing on the screen differs from that of anyone else. My comedy is of a peculiar nature. . .no writers have been developed along the lines of my type of comedy and this is why I sometimes have differences with writers, supervisors and directors alike."

(A revealing studio memo excerpt from Fields.)

(page 208; **** page 354.)**

"I still carry scars on my legs from these early attempts at juggling. I'd balance a stick on my toe, toss it into the air, and try to catch it again on my toe. Hour after hour the damned thing would bang against my shinbones. I'd work until tears were streaming down my face. But I kept on practicing, and bleeding, until I perfected the trick. I don't believe that Mozart, Liszt, Paderewski, or Kreisler ever worked any harder than I did."

(* page 30)

"I was almost put out of business by a well-meaning corpse."

(After reading a deceased critic's pretentious overanalysis of the mathematics and mechanics of juggling, Fields became so intimidated and self-conscious of what he was doing that his skills briefly suffered.)

(* page 30.)

(Invited to play golf by someone he didn't like, Fields responded:)

"When I want to play with a prick, I'll play with my own."

(* page 88)**

(Fields, commenting on a dreadful early draft of the script for *My Little Chickadee*:)

"It's headed for the brambles and we are all in our bare feet."

(** page 357)**

"I'll be down in the front row with a basket of last month's eggs."

(Fields' response to a film comedy idea suggested by a director)

(* 200)

"A comic should suffer as much over a single line as a man with a hernia would in picking up a heavy barbell."

(* page 66)**

"I always made up my own acts; built them out of my knowledge and observation of real life. I'd had wonderful opportunities to study people; and every time I went out on the stage I tried to show the audience some bit of true human nature."

(*American Magazine*, January 1926.)

"Comedy is a serious business. A serious business with only one purpose--to make people laugh."

(* page 65)**

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BANKERS, DOCTORS, LAWYERS

"Dentists, lawyers, doctors are all a bunch of thieving bastards."

(* page 208)**

"I like thieves. Some of my best friends are thieves. Why, just last week we had the president of the bank over for dinner."

(*The Barber Shop*)

Of one detested doctor, Fields said he was: "a servant of humanity. . .who had done really brilliant work in isolating fees."

(* page 143)

"The only thing a lawyer won't question is the legitimacy of his mother."

(* page 179)**

"There are seven natural openings in the head and body. A lawyer is the only human being with eight. The extra one is a slot to store money in, should his bank be unable to hold all of it."

(* page 46)**

"The income tax was devised to give lawyers and certified public accountants business. Few persons can make head, tail, or middle out of it. Einstein admitted he couldn't."

(* page 47) (Note: It is true that Einstein once said the income tax was one of the hardest things to understand.)**

RELIGION and POLITICS

(NOTE: Fields' view of Christianity is best revealed in his devastating critique of the Bible, which comprises the whole of chapter five of Carlotta Monti's book *W.C. Fields & Me.*)

**"...more people are driven insane through religious hysteria than by drinking alcohol."
(** page 235, **** page 414.)**

**"To me, these biblical stories are just so many fish stories, and I'm not specifically referring to Jonah and the whale. I need indisputable proof of anything I'm asked to believe."
(*** page 52)**

**"Just looking for loopholes."
(Fields, reading the Bible on his deathbed.)
(** page 253.)**

**"If I ever found a church that didn't believe in knocking all the other churches, I might consider joining it."
(Edgar Bergen, quoting Fields, in *** page 220)**

**"I think of the church often. Not because religion was closing in on me, but because for a long time my ass was sore from that hard, unupholstered pew."
(*** page 52)**

**"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain unless you've used up all the other four-letter words."
(*** page 62)**

**"Oh she said/'Heaven bless you'/and placed a mark upon his brow/with a kick she'd learned/before she had been saved."
(The story of a "Salvation Army girl" who didn't turn the other cheek, in Fields' ballad in *The Fatal Glass of Beer.*)**

(Fields, on reading the Bible:)

**"I admit I scanned it once, searching for some movie plots..." (but found) "only a pack of wild lies."
(*** page 53)**

(Upon hearing a Christmas carol on the radio, Fields shouted:)

**"Turn it off! Cease! Give me an ax, a heavy tomahawk! The royal mace of England! I'll smash the thing and its illegitimate fugue!"
(Will Fowler, "Sleigh Bells Give Me Double Nausea," *Life*, Dec. 15, 1972)**

"I never vote for anyone. I always vote against."

(Quoted in *Hollywood Wits*)

(After doing a radio guest spot, Fields complained that the government--specifically the president's wife and cat--conspired to heavily tax his check:) **"It would have been a lucrative adventure hadn't Whiskers taken such a bite out of my check due, I imagine, to the high cost of Mrs. Roosevelt's travel expenses."**

(Letter to a friend, **** page 425.)

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SEX

"Sex isn't necessary. You don't die without it--but you can die having it."

(Fields, in the age of V.D. but well before the age of AIDS, in *** page 72)

"I'd rather have two girls at 21 each than one girl at 42."

(A line Fields evidently stole from British author Douglas Jerrold; quoted in *Who's Who in Comedy* by Ronald L. Smith, page 162.)

"The low-ceiling price bazaar for sexual relief was a street called Middie Alley. You could barely get a pushcart through this avenue. Top price--twenty-five cents."

(Fields' reminiscence of the Philly of his youth) (* page 12.)

"I had this Melanesian belle, a comely looking lass, and I was headed for the shrubbery, which grows very lush in those parts. Well, her husband was following behind holding a forefinger up in the air and crying, 'One dollah, one dollah!'"

(World traveler Fields--with a barely veiled genital reference, ". . .the shrubbery, which grows very lush in those parts")

(* page 21.)

Lady: "I tell you I'm sitting on something. Something's under me. What is it?"

WC: "Ah, a pussy."

(Exchange in the film *International House*. Although a cat is lifted from the seat, the gag doesn't make sense other than as a risqué' reference.)

"I have some very definite pear-shaped ideas that I'd like to discuss with thee."

(A suggestive reference, vague enough to confound the very strict Hollywood censors in 1940, in *My Little Chickadee*.)

"He secured a position on an ice wagon/Where his collateral was soon frozen. . ."

(From Fields' ballad, *Tales of Michael Finn*.)

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WOMEN and MARRIAGE

(NOTE: Fields was a misogynist bitter all his life from his failed marriage).

**"No doubt exists that all women are crazy; it's only a question of degree."
(*** page 95)**

**"(A woman) drove me to drink. It is the one thing I'm indebted to her for."
(Another variation on an oft-used quote.)**

**"Women are like elephants to me. I like to look at 'em, but I wouldn't want to own one."
(Mississippi, 1935.)**

**"Marry an outdoors woman. Then if you throw her out into the yard for the night, she
can still survive."
(*** page 50)**

**"Marriage is better than leprosy because it's easier to get rid of."
(*** page 50)**

**"Ah yes, she's a fine figure of a woman, isn't she? A handsome lass if there ever was one--
and exceptionally well-preserved too."
(and)**

**"A plumber's idea of Cleopatra."
(Fields' insults about Mae West on the set of *My Little Chickadee*, 1940)
(** page 211)**

**"All the men in my family were bearded, and most of the women."
(Fields' offhand remark, after asked about a fake moustache he wore on stage)
(* page 222.)**

(Asked if he believed in clubs for women, Fields responded:)

"Yes, if every other form of persuasion fails."

(From: *Humorous Anecdotes About Famous People* by Lewis C. Henly, 1948, Halcyon House, NY.)

**"Thou shalt not covet they neighbor's wife unless she's a beauty."
(*** page 63)**

**"I was married once--in San Francisco. I haven't seen her for many years. The great
earthquake and fire in 1906 destroyed the marriage certificate. There's no legal proof.
Which proves that earthquakes aren't all bad." (Original source? "Borrowed" from "A Tribute
to W.C. Fields" website.)**

(To the question: Do married people live longer?--Fields responded:)

"No, it just *seems* longer."

(Attributed to *The Bank Dick*, yet the line doesn't appear in the film .)

"I believe in tying the marriage knot, as long as it's around the woman's neck."

(*** page 50)

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MONEY and LARCENY

"Anything worth having is worth cheating for."

(*My Little Chickadee*)

"Business is an establishment that gives you the legal, even though unethical, right to screw the naive--right, left, and in the middle."

(*** page 134)

"They never got me for the right offense."

(Fields claimed to have been jailed often as a street-wise youth, and he always pleaded innocent--of the charge at hand, anyway. Quote is in *, page 23.)

"I could only teach him how to juggle his books."

(Fields speaking of an ice vendor boss, whom Fields tried to teach to juggle.)

(* page 29.)

(His opposite take on this was:)

"I could juggle anything in my day. Balls, cigar boxes, knives...But there was one thing I could never juggle. My income tax."

(*** page 212)

"I could be stranded in any town in the United States with ten cents and within an hour make \$20 with the shell game."

(* page 182)

(W.C., after winning several hands at cards:)

"Beginner's luck, gentlemen...although I have devoted some time to the game."

(*My Little Chickadee*)

[Charles Dickens was] "the bravest man who ever lived. He fathered ten children before they became tax deductions."

(*** page 42)

(An interviewer asked Fields the secret of ensuring a person wealth:)

"Yes, when the little beggar is only 10 years old, have him castrated and his taste buds destroyed. He'll grow up never needing a woman, a steak, or a cigarette. Think of the money saved."

(*** page 49)

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AD LIBBING and CENSORSHIP

"I write my scripts short and they develop on the set, which I have found a far better premise both economically and practically."

(Fields, in a letter to a studio exec)

(** page 219, **** page 376.)

"I ad lib most of my dialogue. If I did remember my lines, it would be too bad for me."

(* page 251.)

"Godfrey Daniel!"

(The only version of "Goddamn!" that Fields could slip by the censors. Used in most of his films.)

"Why those guys won't let me do anything. They find double meaning in commas and semicolons in my scripts."

(Fields' complaint to the press after run-ins with censors)

(** page 231)

"They also won't let me look at a girl's legs. I'm just looking (and) not saying anything and they censor me."

(Fields' ironically prescient comment--on committing an act that would get him sued and fired today--regarding censorship)

(** page 231.)

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CHILDREN

(NOTE: Fields' public attitude toward children, needless to say, was atrocious. It is probably the least laudable aspect of his screen personae. Like the later Monty Python however, it was part of the Fields mystique that he held and expressed unpopular or controversial attitudes. Fields' own persecution complex is said by some to have resulted from his own mistreatment as a youth. As an adult, he was separated from his own child, whom he deemed a "mother's boy" and "sissy.")

(Someone asked Fields: "How do you like children?")

(He responded:) **"Parboiled!"**

(Quoted in numerous books). (Variations included, "Fried!" and "well done.")

(Also:)

"They are very good with mustard."

(**** page 163)

(When he was a 14-year-old starstruck lad, the future science fiction writer Ray Bradbury spotted Fields on the sidewalk in front of the Paramount studios and whipped out his autograph book. After

signing it and handing it back to Bradbury, Fields said:)

"There you are, you little son of a bitch."

(From *The Hollywood Reporter* as related in ** page 137.)

(Fields raises his hand, ready to hit his movie daughter.)

Mother: "Don't you hit her!"

WC: "Well, she's not going to say I don't love her!"

(*The Bank Dick*. This same situation and line, with slight variation, shows up in several other Fields films.)

"There is not a man in America who has not had a secret ambition to boot an infant."

(*Saturday Evening Post* August 6, 1938) (This quote has turned up in numerous variations, ie: "There isn't a man alive who hasn't wanted to boot a kid.")

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RACISM and BIGOTRY

One of W.C. Fields' most famous quotes was: **"I am free of all prejudice. I hate everyone equally."** Yet, in many ways, he held progressive views in regard to some minority groups. He

deplored society's treatment of black Americans, and said he admired Jewish people (in a time when such an admission was taboo). In 1919, Fields lobbied for the inclusion of black comedian Bert Williams into the Actor's Equity union, but he was denied entry because of his race.

At the same time, Fields harbored irrational dislikes for other minorities: Indians/Native Americans, and people of Asian descent.

"Liberty and Freedom and Worship---there is a super-abundance of all three in this U.S.

A under the law. The only people who are not being meted out full portions are the colored folks."

(Fields, writing in the early 1940s, excerpted in ****, page 185)

"I have been in the entertainment business some forty-three years, and I have never said anything detrimental or anything that might be construed as belittling any race or religion. I would be a sucker to do so because you can't insult the customers."

(Letter to the censor, in **** page 377)

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SELECTED COMEDY BITS

Wife: "(Uncle Bean) choked to death eating an orange. His heart couldn't stand it."

WC: "I didn't know oranges were bad for the heart."

Wife: "(It was) the excitement."

WC: "Oh, sure, the excitement."

(It's a Gift)

"Shades of Bacchus!"

(Fields' response after a mischievous child drops grapes on his face while he's trying to sleep in *It's a Gift*.)

(After the reported death of Fields' character's mother-in-law, his secretary offers condolences:)

Secretary: "It must be hard to lose your mother-in-law."

WC: "Yes it is, very hard. It's almost impossible."

*(From *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*.)*

(A young greenhorn wants to play cards with sharpie Fields:)

Sucker: "Is this a game of chance?"

WC: "Not the way I play it, no."

(My Little Chickadee)

(Cuthbert J. Twillie (Fields) is about to be hanged by mistake:)

Hangman: "Have you any last wish?"

WC: "Yes, I'd like to see Paris before I die."

(pause)

"Philadelphia will do."

(My Little Chickadee)

"I just returned from a masquerade; I impersonated a Ubangi!"

(Fields' protest after a vengeful mob accuses him of being a masked bandit in *My Little Chickadee*.)

(WC to bartender:)

WC: "Was I in here last night and did I spend a 20-dollar bill?"

Barkeep: "Yeah."

WC: "Oh boy, what a load that is off my mind. I thought I'd lost it."

(The Bank Dick)

(Fields, as the town good-for-nothing, Egbert, finds himself directing a film with a dashing leading man in a tuxedo. With cameras ready to roll, Egbert says he's changed the script, and tells leading man

Francois he'll now play a football star:)

WC: "It's Saturday afternoon; you make touchdown after touchdown; you kick goals, you make passes; you make the longest run with the ball that was ever made on the field!"

Francois: "In these clothes?"

WC: "Uhm. . .you can change your hat."

(The Bank Dick)

"Don't be a luddy duddy. Don't be a moon calf. Don't be a jabbernowl. You're not those, are you?"

(WC calling his future son-in-law names because he refuses to embezzle money from the bank where WC is guard, in *The Bank Dick*.)

Customer: "What have you in the way of steaks?"

WC: "(I have) nothing in the way of steaks. I can get right to them."

(It's a Gift)

(In a restaurant:)

WC (to waitress): "I didn't squawk about the steak, dear. I merely said I didn't see that old horse that used to be tethered outside here."

(Never Give a Sucker an Even Break)

WC: "You know, if anyone ever comes in here and gives you a \$10 tip, scrutinize it carefully; there's a lot of counterfeit money going around."

Waitress: "If I get any counterfeit nickels or pennies, I'll *know* where *they* came from."

(Never Give a Sucker an Even Break)

"It's like carrying. . .(pause). . .something or other, . . .(pause) somewhere or other . . . as the case may be."

(Fields' most-generic spin on the old cliché: "It's like carrying coals to Newcastle," beautifully timed in *The Golf Specialist*.)

(WC and wife are in bed. The phone rings, he picks it up:)

WC: "Hello, hello. No, no this isn't the maternity hospital." (He hangs up and crawls back into bed.)

Wife: "Who was it?"

WC: "Somebody called up and wanted to know if this was the maternity hospital."

Wife: "What did you tell them?"

WC: "I told them, no, it wasn't the maternity hospital."

Wife (suddenly alert): "Funny thing they should call *you* up *here* at this hour of the night-- from the *maternity* hospital."

WC: "They didn't call *me* up, here, from the maternity hospital; they wanted to know if this *was* the maternity hospital."

Wife: "Oh, now you *change* it!"

WC: "No, I didn't change it, dear. I told you, they asked me if this was the maternity hospital..."(cut off)

Wife: "Don't, oh don't make it any worse."

*(A conversation we've all had, from: *It's a Gift*)*

Wife: "For 20 years I've struggled to make a home for you and the children. . .slaving to make ends meet. Sometimes I don't know which way to turn."

WC: "Uh, turn over on your right side, dear. Sleeping on your left side's bad for the heart."

(It's a Gift)

(Fields encounters a young woman who has never seen a man:)

Lady: "Are you really a man?"

WC: "Well, I've been called other things."

(Never Give a Sucker an Even Break)

Wife: "Why don't you go to bed?"

WC: "I thought I'd take a nap first."

(It's a Gift. The same line is used in The Fatal Glass of Beer.)

(Keeping a haggard Fields awake, a mother and daughter are loudly discussing where the daughter "should go" to get cough medicine.)

"I'd love to tell you both where to go."

(It's a Gift)

(WC, picnicking, pulls the sharp part of a can opener out of his rear, causing his wife to exclaim:)

"Oh, there's the can opener!"

(Great play on the word "can" in *It's a Gift*)

Man (to WC): "You're drunk!"

WC: "Yeah, and you're crazy. And I'll be sober tomorrow and you'll be crazy for the rest of your life."

(It's a Gift)

(WC and old buddy "Squawk Mulligan" are tending bar together, telling tall tales to a customer:)

WC: "I'm tending bar one time down in the lower east side in New York. A tough paloma comes in there by the name of Chicago Molly. I cautioned her, 'None of your peccadilloes in here.' There was some hot lunch on the bar, comprising of succotash, Philadelphia Cream Cheese, and asparagus with mayonnaise. She dips her mitt down into this melange. I'm yawning at the time, and she hits me right in the mug with it. I jumps over and I knocks her down."

Squawk: "You knocked her down? *I* was the one that knocked her down!"

WC: "Oh yes, that's right. He knocked her down...but I was the one who started kicking her. I starts kicking her in the midriff. Did you ever kick a woman in the midriff that had a pair of corsets on?"

Customer: "No, I just can't recall any such incident right now."

WC: "Well, I almost broke my great toe; I never had such a painful experience."

Customer: "Did she ever come back again?"

Squawk: "I'll say she came back. She came back a week later and beat the both of us up."

WC: "Yeh, but she had another woman with her--an elderly woman with gray hair."

(My Little Chickadee)

(Fields damages an electric motor:)

Man: "Do you know anything about electricity?"

WC: "My father occupied the chair of applied electricity at state prison."

(The Big Broadcast of 1938)

(While following the barkeep into the "Black Pussy Cat Cafe," Fields runs into a tight squeeze between a post and a wall:)

WC: "Say...you have to either Vaseline this place in here or move the post over."

(The Bank Dick)

(Fields, frustrated by his unconsummated marriage to Flower Belle Lee, is asked by an Indian sidekick about his new bride:)

Indian: "Big Chief got a new squaw?"

WC: "New is right; she hasn't been unwrapped yet."

(Fields doing his best to get by the censors in *My Little Chickadee*)

(Fields is playing pool with an Englishman. In a corner of the room, a Middle Eastern man wearing a type of turban sits sleeping:)

WC: "Imagine a man wearing a roller towel for a hat."

(an aside to the sleeping man:)

"Got a little soap in your pocket? Maybe you don't use soap."

(WC being quite Un-P.C. in *The Big Broadcast of 1938*)

Waitress: "You know, there's something awfully big about you."

WC: "Thank you, dear."

Waitress: "Your nose."

(Waitress turns around and Fields eyes her rotund bottom.)

WC: "There's something awfully big about you, too."

(*Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*)

(Fields tells his wife he'll answer the phone:)

"Hello, Elmer...Yes, Elmer...Is that so, Elmer?...Of course, Elmer...Goodbye Elmer."

(Fields hangs up the phone.)

"That was Elmer."

(Fields' description of a stage gag, described in *American* magazine, September 1934.)

Girl: The only game I ever played was beanbag.

WC: Beanbag? Ah, very good; it becomes very exciting at times. I saw the championship played in Paris. Many people were killed.

(*Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*)

W.C. (as an office boss): "Good morning, Miss Crud, what brings you to the office so early this supposed A.M.?"

Secretary (Miss Crud): "Well, I couldn't sleep. I'm living in a dormitory and I went to bed last night between 8 and 9."

W.C.: "No wonder you couldn't sleep--with a crowd like that in your bed."

(From the radio skit, "Promotions Unlimited")

(A cleaning lady inadvertently sticks a black-bristled push broom in Fields' face:)

WC: "Take that Groucho Marx out of here please."

(*Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*)

"My father...one of the great immoral, er, immortals, of our time."

(*The Big Broadcast of 1938*)

Man: "I have no sympathy for a man who is intoxicated all the time."

WC: "A man who's intoxicated all the time doesn't need sympathy."

(From the radio sketch, "The Golf Game")

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What Others Said About W.C. Fields

(Note the paradoxes of many of the comments by different people)

"His main purpose seemed to be to break as many rules as possible and cause the maximum amount of trouble for everybody."

(A studio executive about Fields)

(* page 4.)

"Thank God he's a comic. Had he been a statesman he'd have plunged the world into total war."

(Humorist Will Rogers, quoted in * page 45)**

"...Bill was the greatest comic that ever lived, in my book. He was amazing and unique, the strangest guy I ever knew in my lifetime. He was all by himself. He was so damned different, original and talented. He never was a happy guy."

(From a letter by Fields' acquaintance, Gene Buck)<

(* page 2.)

"I hate his guts, but he's the greatest comedian who ever lived."

(Fields' friend, director Gregory LaCava, in a quote from the 1920s. LaCava mellowed toward Fields in later years.)

(* page 195.)

"They have said he was crochety, castigating, had a jaundiced eye, was larcenous, suspicious, shifty, erratic, frugal, and mercenary. I can only confirm these accusations. But he was also loveable, kind, sweet, generous, thoughtful, and gentlemanly. Combining all these characteristics, you get a very mixed bag of a man."

(Carlotta Monti, Fields' longtime companion, in the introduction of her book.)

(*, introduction)**

"His whole manner suggested fakery in its most flagrant form."

(Robert Lewis Taylor, Fields biographer.)

(* page 187.)

"When things were going smoothly, Bill was unhappy. He had to have somebody or something to pit his wits against."

(Fields' personal fitness trainer Bob Howard)

(* page 182.)

"His associates say he is the only man who can wield a poison pen orally."

(Alva Johnston, writing in *The Saturday Evening Post*, Aug. 6, 1938)

"W.C. Fields was one of the nicest men I ever worked for."

(Actress Una Merkel)

(** page 220)

"He was the most obstinate, ornery son-of-a-bitch I ever tried to work with."

(Director Mitchell Leisen)

(** page 194)

"He was one of the meanest men I ever knew."

(Director George Marshall)

(** page 203)

"He was charming to work with."

(Director George Cukor, after filming *David Copperfield*)

(** page 164)

"What's so unusual about him is that he's a *likeable* nasty man. . ."

(Comic/ventriloquist Edgar Bergen, quoted in *** page 169)

"We suspect him to be the funniest man in town since Will Rogers went away."

(News columnist Heywood Broun reviewing Fields' performance in the play *Poppy* in the 1920s)

(* page 186)

"Santa Claus with a stiletto."

(A phrase reputedly used by Paramount executives to refer to Fields)

(* page 232)

"I've never met a more charming and gracious man and one so easy to work with."

(Director Andrew L. Stone, quoted in *** page 214)

"Nearly everything Bill tried to get into his movies was something that lashed out at the world..."

(Director and acquaintance Gregory LaCava)

(* page 199)

"I had the notion that he had settled several old scores known only to himself."

(Producer Mack Sennett, on some of Fields' routines in *The Pharmacist*)

(* page 221)

"The great man is recognized as one of the original antiheroes so currently in vogue with today's 'let it all hang out' generation. Despite the possible repercussions Fields uses his humor to kick society in the groin."

(Michael M. Taylor, writing in the 1971 reprinting of *Fields for President*, Dodd, Mead, NY.)

"Fields is not only a funny man with a fair bag of tricks; he creates a type. Nature's nobleman, let us say, considerably beery and with a strong touch of the sideshow barker. A blend of Jiggs the impertinent household man, and a promoter of itinerant shell games."

(Otis Ferguson, in *The Film Criticism of Otis Ferguson*)

"Fields was much more than just a comedian. He was one of the great creators of theatre humour, as Mark Twain was of literary humour. His use of his voice was masterful. The

wheezy twang he developed is unforgettable, as is the mixture of back alley and drawing room in his whole approach to acting."

(Norman bel Geddes, *Miracle in the Evening*)

"He doesn't slip on a banana peel, throw a custard pie or hang by his knees out of an airplane. He is funny because you and I, and our relatives, the rest of the human race, are funny. He slightly caricatures us in our intimate troublous moments, most especially when we want so much to be strong and brave and courageous, and can't quite make it."

(Journalist Harold Cary, quoted in *The Literary Digest* Feb. 20, 1926.)

"I am of the opinion that in this diversion the man falls little short of genius. You may protest that juggling does not belong among the major arts. Such an opinion will be held only by those who have witnessed merely the proficient practitioners. Fields is, as far as I know, the only one who is able to introduce the tragic note in the handling of a dozen cigar boxes. When they are pyramided, only to crash because of a sudden off-stage noise, my heart goes out to the protagonist as it seldom does to Lear or Macbeth."

(Critic Heywood Broun's view of Fields' juggling in the stage show *Ballyhoo* (1930) as written in "W.C. Fields and the Cosmos" in the *Nation* magazine, Jan. 7, 1931.)

"Fields' pictures were scratchy and patchy, but I do not think that anyone has been so funny since."

(Arthur Schlesinger Jr., in an article in *Show*, April 1963.)

"I think that under the grotesque ruin of a clown Bill Fields was tragically aware of the wreck he had made of himself."

(Mae West in her autobiography, *Goodness Had Nothing to Do With It*.)

"W.C. Fields, a great performer. My only doubts about him come in bottles."

(Mae West, quoted in *The Wit and Wisdom of Mae West* by Joseph Weintraub, page 48, G.P. Putnam's Sons, NY.)

"If I was king of Hollywood I would make W.C. my court jester."

(Comic actor Jack Oakie)

(page 85)**

"I'm crazy about him. He has a sweet sadness, a gentility, a subtlety. Something about his acting I can't just put into words. He is a great actor and artist. I have the greatest admiration for him."

(D.W. Griffith, who directed Fields in two films in the 1920s)

(page 31.)**

"He was the closest man with a dollar I ever met."

(Billy Grady, Fields' agent)

(* page 157.)

"Bill was full of paradoxes."

(Agent Billy Grady)

(* page 160.)

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FOOTNOTES:

****W.C. Fields: His Follies and Fortunes* by Robert Lewis Taylor; (this title has been printed by several publishers, beginning with the 1949 version published by Doubleday & Co., Inc.); St. Martin's Press, New York, 1949, 1967. Also: New American Library, Signet Books, New York, 1967, 286 p.**

*****W.C. Fields: A Life on Film* by Ronald J. Fields; St. Martin's Press; New York, 1984, 256 p.**

******W.C. Fields & Me* by Carlotta Monti with Cy Rice; Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971.**

*******W.C. Fields By Himself*, edited by Ronald J. Fields, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1973.**

For a full list of materials consulted in compiling these quotations, go to the [Bibliography/Suggested Reading](#) page.