

# W C FIELDS

## QUOTES

Compiled by

Campbell M Gold

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### Introduction

## William Claude Dukenfield

(W C Fields)



**Born:** 29 January 1880

**Birthplace:** Darby, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Died:** 25 December 1946

**Place of Death:** Pasadena, California

**Resting Place:** Cremated, Great Mausoleum,  
Forest Lawn Cemetery,  
Glendale, California

**Vocation:** Actor, Humorist

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## W C Fields Quotes

"What a gorgeous day. What effulgent sunshine. It was a day of this sort the McGillicuddy brothers murdered their mother with an axe."  
(W C Fields)

"I don't have to attend every argument I'm invited to."  
(W C Fields)

"Start every day off with a smile and get it over with."  
(W C Fields)

"A thing worth having is a thing worth cheating for."  
(W C Fields)

"A rich man is nothing but a poor man with money."  
(W C Fields)

"When doctors and undertakers meet, they wink at each other."  
(W C Fields)

"A plumber's idea of Cleopatra."  
(W C Fields - on Mae West)

"Ah, the patter of little feet around the house. There's nothing like having a midget for a butler."  
(W C Fields)

"All the men in my family were bearded, and most of the women."  
(W C Fields)

"Always carry a flagon of whiskey in case of snakebite and furthermore always carry a small snake."  
(W C Fields)

"Anyone who hates children and animals can't be all bad."  
(W C Fields)

"Attitude is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than what people do or say. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill."  
(W C Fields)

"Don't worry about your heart, it will last you as long as you live."  
(W C Fields)

"Hell, I never vote for anybody, I always vote against."  
(W C Fields)

(Unsubstantiated Tomb-stone inscription desired by W C Fields) "Here lies W C Fields. I would rather be living in Philadelphia."  
(W C Fields)

"Horse sense is the thing a horse has which keeps it from betting on people."  
(W C Fields)

"I am an expert of electricity. My father occupied the chair of applied electricity at the state prison."  
(W C Fields)

"I am free of all prejudices. I hate everyone equally."  
(W C Fields)

"I never met a kid I liked."

(W C Fields)

"Children should neither be seen or heard from - ever again."  
(W C Fields)

"I like children - fried."  
(W C Fields)

"Madam, there's no such thing as a tough child - if you parboil them first for seven hours, they always come out tender."  
(W C Fields)

"Hell, I never vote for anybody, I always vote against."  
(W C Fields)

"I once spent a year in Philadelphia, I think it was on a Sunday."  
(W C Fields)

"I've never struck a woman in my life, not even my own mother."  
(W C Fields)

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Then quit. There's no point in being a damn fool about it."  
(W C Fields)

"If there's a will, prosperity can't be far behind."  
(W C Fields)

"If you can't dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bull."  
(W C Fields)

"It ain't what they call you, it's what you answer to."  
(W C Fields)

"It's morally wrong to allow a sucker to keep his money."  
(W C Fields)

"Last week, I went to Philadelphia, but it was closed."  
(W C Fields in Richard J. Anobile - "Godfrey Daniels")

"Marry an outdoors woman. Then if you throw her out into the yard on a cold night, she can still survive."  
(W C Fields)

"Never give a sucker an even break."  
(W C Fields)

"Never try to impress a woman. Because if you do she'll expect you to keep up to the standard for the rest of your life. And the pace, my friends, is devastating."  
(W C Fields)

"No doubt exists that all women are crazy; it's only a question of degree."  
(W C Fields)

"On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."  
(W C Fields)

"Remember, a dead fish can float downstream, but it takes a live one to swim upstream."  
(W C Fields)

"Show me a great actor and I'll show you a lousy husband. Show me a great actress, and you've seen the devil."  
(W C Fields)

"Some things are better than sex, and some are worse, but there's nothing exactly like it."  
(W C Fields)

"The best cure for insomnia is to get a lot of sleep."  
(W C Fields)

"The clever cat eats cheese and breathes down rat holes with baited breath."  
(W C Fields)

"The laziest man I ever met put popcorn in his pancakes so they would turn over by themselves."  
(W C Fields)

"The world is getting to be such a dangerous place, a man is lucky to get out of it alive."  
(W C Fields)

"There comes a time in the affairs of man when he must take the bull by the tail and face the situation."  
(W C Fields)

"When we have lost everything, including hope, life becomes a disgrace, and death a duty."  
(W C Fields)

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

"I like children. Properly cooked."  
(W C Fields)

"After two days in hospital I took a turn for the nurse."  
(W C Fields)

"The only thing a lawyer won't question is the legitimacy of his mother."  
(W C Fields)

"A man without a woman is like a neck without a pain."  
(W C Fields)

"Few things in life are more embarrassing than the necessity of having to inform an old friend that you have just got engaged to his fiancée."  
(W C Fields)

"I have spent a lot of time searching through the Bible . . . for loopholes."  
(W C Fields)

"I hear the tusks are looser in Alabama."  
(W C Fields)

"I was in love with a beautiful blonde once, dear. She drove me to drink. That's the one thing I'm indebted to her for."  
(W C Fields)

"I'll be sober tomorrow, but you'll be crazy for the rest of your life."  
(W C Fields)

"Secretary: It must be hard to lose your mother-in-law."  
"W C Fields: Yes it is, very hard. It's almost impossible."

(W C Fields)

"Lady Godiva put everything she had on a horse."  
(W C Fields)

"...more people are driven insane through religious hysteria than by drinking alcohol."  
(W C Fields)

"Wouldn't it be terrible if I quoted some reliable statistics which prove that more people are driven insane through religious hysteria than by drinking alcohol?"  
(W C Fields)

"Room service, Room service, don't send up any more ice."  
(W C Fields)

"There's not a man in America who at one time or another hasn't had a secret desire to boot a child in the ass."  
(W C Fields)

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

"Never mind what I told you - you do as I tell you."  
(W C Fields)

"Prayers never bring anything . . . They may bring solace to the sap, the bigot, the ignorant, the aboriginal, and the lazy - but to the enlightened it is the same as asking Santa Claus to bring you something for Xmas."  
(W C Fields)

"No man is boss in his own home, but he can make up for it, by making a dog play dead."  
(W C Fields)

When asked to borrow money: "I'll see what my lawyer says. . . . And if he says yes, I'll get another lawyer."  
(W C Fields)

"Happiness means quiet nerves."  
(W C Fields)

"I certainly do not drink all the time. I have to sleep you know."  
(W C Fields)

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house unless they have a well-stocked bar."  
(W C Fields)

"I believe in tying the marriage knot, as long as it's around the woman's neck."  
(W C Fields)

"(In a restaurant 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.""  
(W C Fields)

"My father...one of the great immoral, er, immortals, of our time."  
(W C Fields)

"My heart is a bargain today. Will you take it?"  
(W C Fields)

"Hollywood is the gold cap on a tooth that should have been pulled out years ago."  
(W C Fields)

"I gargle with whiskey several times a day, and I haven't had a cold in years."  
(W C Fields)

"On Chaplin: "He's the best ballet dancer in the World.""  
(W C Fields)

(About comedian Bert Williams) "He was the funniest man I ever saw, and the saddest man I ever knew."  
(W C Fields)

"I remember Shakespeare's words because he was a great writer. I can't remember Hollywood lines; just as I may well recall a wonderful meal at Delmonico's many years ago, but not the contents of the garbage pail last Tuesday at Joe's Fountain Grill."  
(W C Fields)

(Looking back on his life) "You know, I'd like to see how I would've made out without liquor."  
(W C Fields)

"I like, in an audience, the fellow who roars continuously at the troubles of the character I am portraying on the stage, but he probably has a mean streak in him and, if I needed ten dollars, he'd be the last person I'd call upon. I'd go first to the old lady and old gentleman back in Row S who keep wondering what there is to laugh at."  
(W C Fields)

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."  
(W C Fields)

(Asked if he believed in clubs for women, Fields responded:) "Yes, if every other form of persuasion fails."  
(W C Fields)

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

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."  
(W C Fields)

"Comedy is a serious business. A serious business with only one purpose--to make people laugh."  
(W C Fields)

"Fields reloading!" (Fields' retort from his dressing room after a director had shouted, "Camera reloading!")  
(W C Fields)

Hangman: "Have you any last wish?"  
WC: "Yes, I'd like to see Paris before I die." (pause) "Philadelphia will do."  
(W C Fields)

"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."  
(W C Fields)

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

(W C Fields)

(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."

(W C Fields)

"What rascal has been putting pineapple juice in my pineapple juice?"

(W C Fields)

"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."

(W C Fields)

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

(W C Fields)

"Thou shalt not commit adultery ... unless in the mood."

(W C Fields)

"You can't cheat an honest man. He has to have larceny in his heart in the first place."

(W C Fields)

"Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen."

(W C Fields)

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## **Drinking**

"I drink therefore I am."

(W C Fields)

"Reality is an illusion that occurs due to the lack of alcohol."

(W C Fields)

"I've been drunk only once in my life. But that lasted for twenty-three years."

(W C Fields)

"I must have a drink of breakfast."

(W C Fields)

"I only drink to steady my nerves. Sometimes I'm so steady I don't move for months."

(W C Fields)

"A woman drove me to drink and I didn't even have the decency to thank her."

(W C Fields)

"It was a woman who drove me to drink, and I never had the courtesy to thank her for it."

(W C Fields)

"A man's got to believe in something. I believe I'll have another drink."

(W C Fields)

"The cost of living has gone up another dollar a quart."

(W C Fields)

"How is the human race going to survive now that the cost of living has gone up two dollars a quart?"

(W C Fields)

"We frequently hear of people dying from too much drinking. That this happens is a matter of record. But the blame almost always is placed on whisky. Why this should be I never could understand. You can die from drinking too much of anything - coffee, water, milk, soft drinks and all such stuff as that. And so long as the presence of death lurks with anyone who goes through the simple act of swallowing, I will make mine whisky."

(W C Fields)

"There are only two real ways to get ahead today - sell liquor or drink it."

(W C Fields)

"Abstaining is favourable both to the head and the pocket."

(W C Fields)

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

(W C Fields)

"Once, during Prohibition, I was forced to live for days on nothing but food and water."

(W C Fields)

"Reminds me of my safari in Africa. Somebody forgot the corkscrew and for several days we had to live on nothing but food and water."

(W C Fields)

"Whilst travelling through the Andes Mountains, we lost our corkscrew. Had to live on food and water for several days!"

(W C Fields, Mississippi)

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

(W C Fields)

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

(W C Fields)

"I always keep a supply of stimulant handy in case I see a snake, which I also keep handy."

(W C Fields)

"Drown in a cold vat of whiskey? Death, where is thy sting?"

(W C Fields)

"I cook with wine, sometimes I even add it to the food."

(W C Fields)

"I like to keep a bottle of stimulant handy in case I see a snake, which I also keep handy."

(W C Fields)

"I must have a drink of breakfast."

(W C Fields)

"I never drink water because of the disgusting things that fish do in it."

(W C Fields)

"I never drink water; that is the stuff that rusts pipes."

(W C Fields)

"I never drink water. I'm afraid it will become habit-forming."

(W C Fields)

"If I had to live my life over, I'd live over a saloon."

(W C Fields)

"Set up another case bartender! The best thing for a case of nerves is a case of Scotch."  
(W C Fields)

"I never worry about being driven to drink; I just worry about being driven home."  
(W C Fields)

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

"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."  
(W C Fields)

"You can't trust water: Even a straight stick turns crooked in it."  
(W C Fields)

"Never cry over spilt milk, because it may have been poisoned."  
(W C Fields)

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## **Appendix**

### **W C Fields Biography**

W. C. Fields was an American comedian and actor. Fields created one of the great American comic personas of the first half of the 20th century - a misanthrope who teetered on the edge of buffoonery but never quite fell in, an egotist blind to his own failings, a charming drunk; and a man who hated children, dogs, and women, unless they were the wrong sort of women.

This characterization was so strong that it was generally identified with Fields himself as well as the characters he portrayed in films and radio. It was maintained by the then-typical movie-studio publicity departments at Fields' studios (Paramount and Universal), and further established by Robert Lewis Taylor's 1949 biography "W C Fields, His Follies and Fortunes". Beginning in 1973, with the publication of Fields' letters, photos, and personal notes in grandson Ronald Fields' book "W.C. Fields By Himself", it has been shown that Fields was married (and subsequently estranged from his wife), financially supported their son, and loved his grandchildren.

Born William Claude Dukenfield, in Darby, Pennsylvania. His father, Jim Dukenfield, came from an English-Irish family of noble origins (being descendants of Lord Dukenfield of Cheshire), and his mother, Kate Spangler Felton, was also of British descent. However, Jim Dukenfield was of the working class in England, and in the United States sold vegetables from a cart, an enterprise in which the young William assisted.

Fields left home at age 11 and entered vaudeville. By age 21 he was travelling as a comedy juggling act, becoming a headliner in both North America and Europe. In 1906 he made his Broadway debut in the musical comedy "The Ham Tree", signing with impresario Florenz Ziegfeld.

Fields was well-known for embellishing stories of his youth, but despite the legends he encouraged, the truth is that his home seems to have been a relatively happy one and his family supported his ambitions for the stage -- his parents saw him off on the train for his first real stage tour as a teenager and his father visited him in England while Fields was enjoying success in the Music Halls there.

He married a fellow Vaudevillian, chorus girl, Harriet "Hattie" Hughes, on April 8, 1900. Their son, Claude, was born on July 28, 1904, while Fields was away from Hattie on tour in England. By 1907, however, W C and Hattie were separated, and until his death Fields would keep up both correspondence and the sending of voluntary child-support payments to Hattie.

Though known for his comic acting, Fields started as an "eccentric juggler," appearing in the make-up of a genteel "bum" -- scruffy beard and shabby tuxedo, for instance. He juggled cigar boxes, hats, and a variety of other objects in what seems to have been a unique and fresh act, parts of which are reproduced in some of his films. His trademark mumbling patter was developed during this time, and he toured with Irwin's Burlesquers and other vaudeville troupes in the United States, Europe and Australia before making it to Ziegfeld's show. There he delighted audiences with a wild pool skit, complete with bizarrely shaped cues and a custom-built table used for a number of hilarious gags and surprising stunts. His pool game is also reproduced, at least in part, in some of his films.

Like many vaudevillians, Fields worked in silent films and one-reelers, but he first hit theatrical-fame in 1923 in the Broadway musical "Poppy", where he perfected his persona as an oily, failed confidence man. Fields later appeared in talking feature films and short subjects, including the 1934 classic "It's a Gift", which included a version of his stage sketch of trying to sleep on the back porch as a result of nagging family and being bedevilled by noisy neighbours and travelling salesmen. ("You're drunk!" "Yeah, and you're crazy! But I'll be sober tomorrow, and you'll be crazy for the rest of your life!")

As he was often also a writer on his films, the credits often include quite unusual names substituting for his own, such as "Otis Criblecoblis", which contains an embedded homophone for "scribble". Another, "Mahatma Kane Jeeves", is a pun on mahatma and a phrase of an aristocrat walking out: "My hat, my cane, Jeeves". He also used the ordinary-sounding "Charles Bogle" several times.

Fields wore a scruffy looking clip-on moustache in virtually all of his silent films, discarding it only after his first sound feature film ("Her Majesty Love").

In his films he often played hustlers such as carnival barkers and card sharps, spinning yarns and distracting his marks, as with this gem from Mississippi: "Whilst travelling through the Andes Mountains, we lost our corkscrew. Had to live on food and water for several days!" Another notable quotation regarding his love of alcohol is this: "I can't stand water because of the things fish do in it."

Although lacking formal education, he was well-read, and was a lifelong fan of author Charles Dickens. He achieved one of his career ambitions by playing the character Mr. Micawber, in MGM's David Copperfield in 1935. In 1936, Fields recreated his signature stage role in Poppy for Paramount Pictures. ("If we should ever separate, my little plum, I want to give you just one bit of fatherly advice." "Yes, Pop?" "Never give a sucker an even break!"). He had previously transferred his famous role onto the silent screen in Sally of the Sawdust (1925) directed by the legendary D W Griffith. That effort was not a success.

Fields's ego sometimes got in the way of important roles. He turned down the role of the Wizard in The Wizard of Oz fearing the role would be "too small".

Illness, worsened by his heavy drinking, stopped Fields' film work for a time, but he made a comeback trading insults with Edgar Bergen's dummy Charlie McCarthy on radio in 1938. Fields would twit Charlie about his being made of wood, while Charlie would fire back at Fields about his drinking (Fields: "Is it true your father was a gate-leg table?" McCarthy: "If it is, your father was under it!"). This 'rivalry' between the two carried onto film in Fields' first feature for Universal, You Can't Cheat an Honest Man (1939). In 1940 he made My Little Chickadee with Mae West, as well as The Bank Dick, which perhaps might be his most well-known film, speaking to bartender Shemp Howard, ("Was I in here last night, and did I spend a \$20 bill?" "Yeah!" "Boy, is that a load off my mind... I thought I'd lost it!").

He was known to his friends as "Bill" - a fact evidenced in Never Give a Sucker an Even Break, in which he played himself. Edgar Bergen also called him "Bill" in the radio shows. (Charlie McCarthy, of course, called him by other names.) In films in which he was portrayed as having a son, he sometimes named the character "Claude", after his own son. In England he was sometimes billed as "Wm. C. Fields", presumably to avoid controversy due to "W.C." being the British abbreviation/euphemism for "Water Closet", although it might be safely assumed that the earthy Fields was amused by the coincidence.

Fields spent his last weeks in a hospital, where a friend stopped by for a visit and caught Fields reading the Bible. When asked why, Fields replied, "I'm checking for loopholes." In a final irony, W. C.

Fields died in 1946 (from a stomach haemorrhage) on the holiday he claimed to despise: Christmas Day. As documented in *W.C. Fields and Me* (published in 1971, the book was made into a film of the same name, starring Rod Steiger in 1976), he died at Las Encinas Sanatorium, Pasadena, California, a bungalow-type sanitarium where, as he lay in bed dying, his long-time and final love, Carlotta Monti, went outside and turned the hose onto the roof, so as to allow Fields to hear for one last time his favourite sound of falling rain. According to the documentary *W.C. Fields Straight Up*, his death occurred in this way: he winked and smiled at a nurse, put a finger to his lips, and died. Fields was 66, and had been a patient for 14 months.

He was interred in the Forest Lawn Memorial Park Cemetery, in Glendale, California. There have been stories that he wanted his grave marker to read "On the whole, I would rather be in Philadelphia," his home town, which is similar to a line he used in *My Little Chickadee*: "I'd like to see Paris before I die... Philadelphia would do!" (In one of his film bits, he made a point of referencing "Philadelphia Cream Cheese." Given his fondness for words, maybe he just liked the sound of his home town's name.) This rumour has also morphed into "I would rather be here than in Philadelphia." The anecdote that Fields often remarked, "Philadelphia, wonderful town, spent a week there one night" is unsubstantiated. It is also said that Fields wanted "I'd rather be in Philadelphia" on his gravestone because of the old vaudeville joke among comedians that "I would rather be dead than play Philadelphia." Whatever his wishes might have been, his interment marker merely has his name and birth and death years. W.C. Fields famously left the money in his will to build the "W.C. Fields orphanage for white boys and girls. Not surprisingly, the orphanage was never built.

(This Biography is Courtesy of <http://www.basicfamouspeople.com/index.php?aid=130>)

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## Appendix

### W C Fields Filmography

#### Features

Janice Meredith (1924)  
Sally of the Sawdust (1925)  
That Royle Girl (1925)  
It's the Old Army Game (1926)  
So's Your Old Man (1926)  
The Potters (1927)  
Running Wild (1927)  
Two Flaming Youths (1927)  
Tillie's Punctured Romance (1928)  
Fools for Luck (1928)  
Her Majesty, Love (1931)  
Million Dollar Legs (1932)  
If I Had a Million (1932)  
International House (1933)  
Tillie and Gus (1933)  
Fatal Glass of Beer (1933)  
Alice in Wonderland (1933)  
Six of a Kind (1934)  
You're Telling Me! (1934)  
The Old Fashioned Way (1934)  
Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch (1934)  
It's a Gift (1934)

David Copperfield (1935)  
Mississippi (1935)  
Man on the Flying Trapeze (1935)  
Poppy (1936)  
The Big Broadcast of 1938 (1938)  
You Can't Cheat an Honest Man (1939)  
My Little Chickadee (1940)  
The Bank Dick (1940)  
Never Give a Sucker an Even Break (1941) Last starring film.  
Tales of Manhattan (1942) (scenes deleted, later restored for home video) Guest appearance.  
Follow the Boys (1944) Guest appearance.  
Song of the Open Road (1944) Guest appearance.  
Sensations of 1945 (1944) Guest appearance.

### **Short Subjects**

Pool Sharks (1915)  
His Lordship's Dilemma (1915)  
A Trip Through the Paramount Studio (1927)  
The Golf Specialist (1930)  
The Dentist (1932)  
The Fatal Glass of Beer (1933)  
Hollywood on Parade No. A-9 (1933)  
The Pharmacist (1933)  
How to Break 90 #3: Hip Action (1933) (guest appearance in a Bobby Jones golf lesson)  
The Barber Shop (1933)  
Show Business at War (1943)

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