EDITORIAL COMMENT

If current plans work out as we hope, this current show will be our last at the present location. There will, however, be no closing down of the society; a new meeting place has been found, and we merely await confirmation that we can begin operations there on June 22nd.

As a society, we have had a somewhat nebulous existence ever since we began operations some three years ago. Once, appropriately perhaps, we held our sessions at a psychiatric institution! Now we hope that our final Shangri-La has been reached—a centrally located, air-conditioned screening room, with its own projection equipment and a seating capacity larger (and more comfortable) than our present one. Under such conditions, we hope to expand the social side of our group a little and get to know each other better. Too, we look forward to bringing back those "good old days" when small groups of us would retire to a suitably hospitable house after the show for a little food and a lot of talk. We'll let you know how our plans have progressed at the coming meeting.

Please note that we have, after all, reverted to a 7:30 starting time for the Summer. This is for the benefit of those members who live out of town and have to catch late trains, and because our new quarters will not present us with the problem of light streaming through a window. For our final show at 23rd St., we will of course fashion some sort of curtain, as we did last time.

The length of our last show ran a little over schedule; not only had we under-estimated running times a little, but we hadn't anticipated the added riches of an extra short, and the interesting talks by Rob Youngson and Charlie Turner. None of our members complained about the length of the show, and many in fact thought it one of our best presentations to date. Nevertheless, we'd like to go on record as saying that we aim at a well-balanced show running no more than 3 hours, and in future we'll try to stick to this.

As a footnote to our screening of "The Hawk's Nest of Notre Dame", we have to record sadly that the famous Cathedral set is now in the process of being torn down by Universal. alas, its pairing performance was not one of dignity—it appeared as the entrance to a night-club in the soon-to-be-released "So This is Paris". Symptomatic of the times perhaps, and very depressing.

Sad news too, is of the passing of two of the more honored names in German cinema history. One trade paper gave them a line apiece; the others, not a word. Joe May, director of "Homecoming" (shown by this society last year) died at 74, and here in New York, one of the writers of "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari"—Rene Jhanenau—died last week, aged 61.

COMING PRESENTATION:

We open our Summer series in our new quarters by presenting three of the screen's glories legends on one bill—DRETHER, GARNI and LAHAR! Drettcher is seen in a condensed (45 min) version of "MEN AND GODS" with Jsu de Pulu, directed by Arthur Robison with sets by Paul Lanz. The Cairo entry in another good condiment—a 45 min version of Robert's "JUINES STREET" in absolutely first-class condition. Lahrer's contribution is "EXPLODED"—as far as we knew a complete print, and since it is a French print we are looking forward to it ourselves with the greatest of anticipation! Here's a rare opportunity to see three early films that helped to establish the reputations of these three chemists.

Following this, we review one of our earlier successes—Victor Seastrom's "THE SCARLET LETTER", starring LILLIAN GISH, LARS HAMON, BENED B. WALSHALL and Karl Dane. Most of our current members had not yet joined us when we first screened this great film and of the others, all will surely agree that this will well warrant a second viewing. The fine old Summit on-reel concert will be shown in support.

SECRETARY OF THE FILM SOCIETY: Charles Turner (Chairman); Horace G. Weinberg; Richard Kraft; Warren Rothemedge; Robert G. Youngson; Dorothy Lovell (Secretary); William K. Everson (Program Notes & Enquiries).
A PROGRAM OF FRENCH AND GERMAN CLASSICS

We are happy to be able to present four unique and very rare films of a quarter of a century ago. To our knowledge, these films just don't exist in this country on either 35mm or 16mm (or at least, prints, if they exist, are not available) and thus it is a rare thing indeed to come across these European 9.5mm prints. All four films are, of course, condensed - but not lacking. In each case, the editing has been so meticulously done that a perfectly coherent plot-line is retained. One sees an intelligently shortened version of the original, not a mere parade of extracts and highlights. The prints are in flawless condition, and really a joy to behold. Our grateful thanks to Capt. George Mitchell, owner of the films, who has gone to great deal of trouble and personal inconvenience to travel up from Maryland for the sole purpose of running these films for us.

The combined running time of the four films is a little over three hours. However, running a 9.5mm machine is a tricky operation, and requires more frequent changing of reels than does 16mm, so we must expect a slightly longer session than that. Because of this, we must start on time, and members who arrive late will be missing something really special.

DEN HERILIGE WEG - DER SACRED MOUNTAIN

USA, 1927

Produced and Directed by Arnold Fanck. Photographed by Siegf Allgäuer.

The Cast: Dietrich (Leni Riefenstahl); Robert Henn ( IOC Treavor); Franz Ve (Ernst Peteresch)

Arnold Fanck, until 1927 strictly a documentary film maker, examined his first dramatic story with "The Sacred Mountain." Dr. Adolf Frey, author, writing in "From Caligari to Hitler," has a film time discovering, in the film political symbolisms which may or may not be present. (Thus, one's characteristics may account for the fact that certain film which do fit in with his particular theories are studiously ignored.) He writes, in part "... although the heroism was too anticlimactic to serve as a pattern for the people in the valleys, it was rooted in a mentality kindred to the Nazi spirit. Nationality and mountain enthusiasm were one ..., the idolatry of glaciers and rocks was symptomatic of an anti-rationalism on which the Nazi could capitalize."

Probably "The Sacred Mountain" isn't an important enough picture for us to ponder whether Frey's thought seems anything or not - but it is a fascinating film, an incredibly beautiful one visually, and a film very typical of the romantic, wild mountain film with its exhilaration and love of the open air. Since this is quite certainly a established characteristic of the German people, the film has some value as a self-commentary on a national mood.

The best thing in "The Sacred Mountain" are the thrilling stunt scenes, an interesting fantasy sequence of a crumbling temple of ice, and the breathtaking photography of Siegf Allgäuer. What more does one need of a mountain film? Allgäuer was Lina Riefenstahl's chief cameraman for her first propaganda film, "Triumph of the Will," which repeated the stunning gondola and arctic landscape shots used in "The Sacred Mountain." Later Allgäuer did the wonderful "The Sacred Satallion," and collaborated with Hans Schanzeweger on "The White Wall of the Falls," shown by this society last year. His fine Germanic mountain photography also graced "The Great Barbecue," a British film of the mid-thirties shot largely in Canada, and dealing with the building of the CPR. Under the real title of "Neill's Gateway," this film is now in release through an independent - Allgäuer's photography and other film features make this excellent but little-known film well worth a visit.

Lena Riefenstahl was, of course, a very close friend (to be discreet about it!) of Hitler, who considered her the ideal example of 1000% Aryan womanhood, and commissioned her to make "The Triumph of the Will" - she certainly the greatest propaganda film made anywhere, and a masterpiece of its type. Much of it shows up as stock in American and British films, and was used as documentary evidence against war criminals in the Nuremberg trials. (Lina herself was arrested in 1945, and found to be a major offender by the Spruchbescheuer, or denazification court.) Currently she is using the German government for return of her "Olympia" negative, claiming that it was financed by her personally and not the Nazi party. It is worth recording that perhaps Lina was born in Berlin and was a dancer (in this film bare cut) before entering films. "The Sacred Mountain" was her first film, followed by "The White Wall of the Falls," "Stumem Over Mount Etna" (one of several mountain-type films made in conjunction with Lina Lautru) and "Broken in the Early Thirties." White Films," and others. Ernst Peteresch, one of the two male leads in "The Sacred Mountain," played opposite Lina again in "The White Wall of the Falls" as her husband. Iris Trumou, born in the Austrian Tyrol in 1896, was a First Lieutenant of Engineering in World War I, and later a pilot. He broke into films by acting as a mountain guide to production units, and was soon acting and directing. One of his most interesting films was the British "The Challenge," dealing with Whayne's conquest of the Matterhorn. Currently he is active producing, directing and acting in mountain films for his own company - WHITE FILMS. Peteresch himself was a geologist from Freiburg, he lost his leg when one shoe of the Black Namasca. But he managed to do the best mountain films ever produced. He is still living, but not active in films.
The Cast: Michala Saczad (Alouard); Gondermann (Alfred Abel); Barczeski Sanderf (Brigitte Holm); Lina Hanlin (Mary Glory); Jack Hanlin (Henny Votem); Marnin (Jules Berry).

When we travelled down to Maryland recently to screen this subject, it proved to be a complete surprise. An almost unknown film, it has a peculiar plot which refuses to telegraph its punches, and sustains interest at fever pitch throughout. Because it's such a real - and unfortunately, rare - pleasure to stumble across such unusual items, we'll refrain from saying too much about it and leave our members to enjoy its surprising quality for themselves.

Its plot? Something of an earlier equivalent of the current "Executive Suite" perhaps. Its treatment? Like most late European slates, rather over-obsessed with the moving camera. But the photography here is so striking and imaginative that the obsession becomes a definite virtue.

Its cast has an odd international flavor, with none of those German artists Alfred Abel ("Dr. Mabuse", etc.) and Brigitte Holm ("Metropolis", "Menace Hoy", "Atlantic") stealing most of the honors. Jules Berry is little more than a bit player in this one.

Like most of Marcel L'Herbier's films, "L'Argent" is odd, unpredictable and thoroughly absorbing. (Apart from the quite brilliant and generally unrecognized "La Nuit Fantastique", L'Herbier's later work was less distinguished, concentrating on talkative comedies and occasional rather dull spectacles, of which the Michelle Pradel "Last Days of Pompeii" not yet shown here, is a good example).

LE TOURNOI DANS LA CITE - THE TOURNAMENT 1929
Written and directed by JEAN RENOIR

The Cast: Francois de Baynes (Alde Rasti); Catherine de Meliod (Blancho Bernis); Comtesse de Baynes (Suzanne Desprim) with Enrique de Rivero, Manuel Resavy, Jacky Monnier. (Adapted by Jean Renoir from a novel by E. Hildwein, "Le Sport"... Last year we screened...)

The Tournament" is one of those odd films that seems to have deliberately kept itself out of the reference books, making life even more exasperating for always frustrated film historians. The few references one does find to it dismiss it casually as being "a commercial film", implying that consideration of the boxoffice, if not actually obscene, is very definitely reprehensible. (Some day, writers on the film will perhaps realize that even "Greed", "More Women", "The Plague" and "Intolerance" were made in the belief and hope that they would make money! It is based on a scenario by Dupuis-Neugal, who specialized in spectacular historical intrigues that were usually more literary than cinematic. Its plot is set in the year 1562, when Charles XI, a weak boy, was king of France while the real power behind the throne was his ambitious mother, Catherine. It was a period of tension between Catholics and Protestants, tension that eventually was to erupt into the fearsome St. Bartholomew's massacre of 1572, so brilliantly staged by D.W. Griffith in "Intolerance".

We haven't yet screenved this subject, so we're reprinting some comments made by George Mitchell: "The Tournament" has a finale such as no drunken scene in a Renoir film... a most stirring sequence that has seldom been equaled, and can well be compared with the similar sequence done by stunt-director Yakima Canutt for MB's "Yankee". This great tournament scene ends with much blood and gore, with a very ironic touch provided by Renoir's... Renoir again demonstrated his flair for imagery and studied composition as employed in his earlier "Rama". Many scenes seem to have come from the paintins of the old Flemish masters... yet the stirring and beautiful scenes (do not) distract attention from the fast-moving action. There are times when it seems that Renoir has taken himself in depicting Radamis, as in the scene where Baynes wades a bloody sword on the tresses of his mistress... the film was shot in the Chateau district of the Loire among actual locations of the story - all of the caskets seen are the real thing, and not studio sets. Costuming and set decoration are handsome, and many of the props appear to be quite authentic. Although our print has been trimmed, the final tournament sequence is intact. Many French film historians (Georges Sadoul, Dardenne and Braudel-Gil) discuss the film as one of Renoir's "commercial" films (although the low-lying opinions of France the word "commercial" is obscene) but a look at "The Tournament" should dispel this notion, for it is definitely good Renoir, and a film of which the maker of "La Grande Illusion", "La Bete Humaine", "The Southerner" and so many other "greats" need not be ashamed... ".
A final word on the film from Paul Roth, who found it a "... costume romance in the best French historical manner" and "unembarrassedly accurate".

DAS BLAUE LICHT - THE BLUE LIGHT (1932) UFA release of a Leni Riefenstahl production

Directed by Leni Riefenstahl; script by Helga Balazs; photographed by Hans Schmeisser The Carin Jents (Leni Riefenstahl); Wago (Matthias Wiemann); Tico (Beate Fuehrer); Lucia (Martin Maier); Gunzi (Franz Haldemann); Irbekarp (Max Gihber).

"The Blue Light", like "Extase", was a talkie only because talkies had arrived. It told its tale visually, dialogue was kept to a minimum and it really needed neither printed titles nor spoken word to convey its meaning. Our print is a silent, and nothing is lost because of that. Again, the superb mountain photography of Schmeisser is the most striking single aspect of the film, and it is shown to fine advantage in this first-class print.

"The Blue Light" has two qualities that are rare in current cinema: beauty, which has todayalmost disappeared, and a haunting melancholy, which has completely disappeared. In the hands of Dreiser or Lang, "The Blue Light" might well have emerged as a horror tale; as it is, it is fragile, passionate and rather lovely, with supernatural elements that never approach the weird. The story is based on an old legend of the Italian Dolomites. Each night when the moon is full, goes the legend, the peak of Mount Cristallo radiates a blue light. Even though their parents try to keep them safe at home behind closed shutters, the young people of the village are drawn like sommeliers to the light, and find only death among the treacherous rocks. Because Jents, a strange, wild mountain girl, reaches the light in safety she is considered by the superstitious villagers to be a witch. A strange and rather touching little love story brings the film to a really powerful climax.

Kracauer really pulled out all the stops on this one: "Beautiful outdoor shots stress the insoluble tie between primitive people and their natural surroundings ... while the peasants are largely related to the soil, Jents is a true incarnation of elemental power... like the meteorologist in "Avalanche", this mountain girl conforms to a political regime which relies on intuition, worships nature and cultivates myths. To be sure, at the end the village rejoices in its feat and the myth seems defeated, but this rational solution is treated in such a summary way that it enhances rather than reduces Jents's significance, that remains inscrutable for her realm and endows her with an enchanted world in which the miraculous becomes merchandise."

Easier to accept are these additional statements by Kracauer: "The statues of saints are carved in a rock by the road; the wide Dolomites partake of the life in the village. Close-ups of genuine present faces thread through the whole of the film; these faces resemble landscapes marked by nature herself, and in rendering them, the camera achieves a fascinating study in social folklore."

Apart from the other, greater, merit, "The Blue Light" has interest in being perhaps the only one of her films that could really be called a Leni Riefenstahl vehicle. Being both director and star, she not unreasonably builds the film around herself as much as possible, and seems to delight in bringing a near-altogether quality to many of her scenes. Matthias Wiemann, her own lead, subsequently made many Nazi propaganda films, and also the more recent and quite notable "Innere Welt", in which he played Robert Schumann.

"The Blue Light" comes today as a reminder of a cult of mountain films that is no more -- the cycle continues with variations, it's true, in Germany and Austria, but there's a difference. Much of the glorification, enchantment and anti-worship have gone, and have been supplanted by outright exploitation. However, "The Blue Light" did inspire at least one post-war imitation of sorts -- the 1949 British film "The Blue Mountain" included a complete opera by Max Rheinhard based on a mystic legend of the Dolomites, and remarkably similar to the Legend of the Blue Light.

Notes: We plan to bring along a number of stills, books and other objects relating to Tracker, the German mountain film and an on for personal at this meeting. Any interested people are advised to come along early (our doors will be open from 8.45 onwards) as it is unlikely that there will be sufficient time to pass this sort of material around during or after the show.