EDITORIAL COMMENT

First of all, we feel we owe our members an apology for the rather hectic atmosphere prevailing at our last meeting, and especially for the fact that some members were unable to gain admittance to the show. Actually, those hopeful members who weren’t dismayed by all the outward appearances and who waited around optimistically were ultimately found seats. But we felt very badly about the few who left immediately, and also the late arrivals who likewise could not be accommodated. Even the projection booth strongly resembled the Black Hole of Calcutta, and additional guests just couldn’t have been squeezed in. We made mental notes of all those members who couldn’t gain admittance—or at least, all those that we saw—and arranged one or two later semi-private screenings of the whole show for their benefit, thus easing our consciences to a great extent.

However, we feel pretty sure that this large turnout was pretty much of a freak. Never in our history have we had such a large audience, and quite obviously the Garbo-Dietrich-Lanauz combination was responsible for bringing out not only a large proportion of our membership, but many of their friends as guests as well. It’s extremely unlikely (unfortunately!) that such an attendance will be duplicated, but nevertheless we’re taking no chances, and have made arrangements to seat much larger audiences in future. We’ve ordered an additional number of chairs—and from now on we’ll be using a much larger screen, thus enabling us to place it right at the back of the room, and giving us considerably more space for seating.

Our current show is a fine one but a pretty specialized one, and we don’t anticipate an output turnout; nevertheless, we’re preparing for a full- scale attendance, so nobody need have any qualms about the confusion of our last meeting being duplicated.

---

Last Friday, June 25th, the Theodore Huff Room was officially opened at the George Eastman House in Rochester. Charles Turner, our chairman, attended the ceremonies as a representative of this society, and reported that they were conducted with a sincerity and dignity befitting the occasion. A special screening was held to inaugurate the Memorial Room, the films selected being a fine toned 35mm print of "Way Down East" (one of Ted’s favorite films), and also one of Ted’s own prints, Ted’s fabulous collection of stills, books, letters, notes and other rare and valuable material is now housed in Rochester, where, as Ted would have wished, it is available to researchers and film students. Our thanks to James Card, curator of the film section of George Eastman House, for the considerable work he has put into this project.

---

THE SEVENTH AGE -- SKYLARKING -- THE SCARLET LETTER

THE SEVENTH AGE (Denmark, 1947) Two reels. Written by Carl Th. Dreyer, and directed by Torben Anton Svendsen.

Tonight’s program offers interesting examples of the work of two famous Scandinavian directors. The Seventh Age is one of a series of documentaries Carl Dreyer made for the Danish government in the mid-1940s. Some, like "They Came to a Ferry," he directed—others, like this one, he wrote. It deals with the care of the aged in Denmark, and has that same very real pity and compassion that marked Dreyer’s earlier, more famous films. Beautifully photographed and slick without seeming facile, it is a moving and pleasing little subject which never once belabor its propaganda point. Incidentally, the grand old lady from "Day of Wrath" is seen quite briefly.

SKYLARKING (USA, 1923) One reel. Directed by Hank Sennett, with Harry Oribban (an inventor); Lila Leslie (his wife); Kaydie Morgan (a neighbor); Alberta Vaughn (his wife); Josephine Adair and Jackie Lucas (the children).

In a predominantly serious evening, this wonderfully crazy Sennett comedy is especially welcome. Here one has all the Sennett gags running riot—chases, impossible inventions, marital misunderstandings, horribly obnoxious children and lions on the loose! It also has a hilarious and somewhat cruel gag at the expense of a blind man. This introduction of mild cruelty into comedy is something that the American movie-makers worked up to a fine art. Bad taste was always avoided by the simple formula of never making the afflicted person the butt
of the gag (except, occasionally, with Chaplin). Some of the most cruel gags of all came from Laurel and Hardy - gags involving insanity, disease, blindness and other afflictions - and they were also some of the funniest. Always however, it was Laurel and Hardy who suffered, unwittingly, at the hands of the oppressed or afflicted, and thus no bad taste was ever left in the mouth.

**THE SCARLET LETTER**

M.G.M.
presents

**LILLIAN GISH**

in

Nathaniel Hawthorne's

"THE SCARLET LETTER"

A Victor Seastrom Production

With

**LARS HANSON**

Karl Dane, Henry B. Walthall;Marcelle Corday

Mary Hames, William H. Tookie and Joyce Coad

Adapted by Frances Marion

A Metro Goldwyn Mayer Picture

---

For the benefit of historians in our midst, the above is the original contractual billing for this remarkable picture. These credits of course overlook one of the most important contributors to the film - the photographer, Hendrik Sarto. Below we reproduce the full cast and, as a matter of interest, we list in brackets the names of the players in the talkie remake.

- **Mester Frye**
- **Rev. Dimmick**
- **Roger Frye**
- **Giles**
- **Governor Billings**
- **Mistress Hibbins**
- **Suddle**
- **Jailer**
- **Patience**
- **Pearl**
- **French Sun Captain**
- **Indian**

When Hawthorne wrote "The Scarlet Letter" in 1850, he doubted that it would achieve any popular success, and commented at the time: "Some portions of the book are powerfully written, but my writings do not, nor ever will, appeal to the broadest class of sympathies and therefore will not obtain a wide popularity. The main narrative ... lacks sunshine." Yet the book was a success, and the first edition (5000 copies) was sold within two weeks. Later the story was adapted to the theatre and proved a successful vehicle for Richard Mansfield and other stars. No less than two film versions were made in 1917, one by Fox and the other by Selznick; a talkie was made (by Robert Vignola) for an independent company in the early thirties, and the tale is still frequently dramatised on television. Certainly the best of all the film versions was the one put out by MGM in 1926, a time when literary adaptations for the screen were in full-scale vogue.

The film was made by the noted Swedish director Victor Seastrom, and is perhaps the most un-American film ever put out by Metro (using the term "un-Americans" in its literal, not political, sense!) Paul Roth, writing in "The Film till Now", considers it for and away Seastrom's best American film, dismissing "The Tower of Lies", "Confession of a Queen" and others as "full", and commenting "He Who Gets Slapped" only for its magical woodland sequence. ("The Wind" was superb certainly, but this was a much later Seastrom-Gish effort). Roth comments on "The Scarlet Letter": "... it was a film made in one key, for even the humorous relief of the stocks and the ducking-pool were fitted into the pattern of sorrow, Seastrom's sweeping sense of landscape, so evident in his earlier Swedish pictures, was expanded and gave an enchanting atmosphere to the first love scene between Mias Gish and Lars Hanson". Seastrom, Roth notes, also made "a Griffith-like use of the elements".
From A.B. Paine's "Life and Lillian Gish", one finds the following statements by Lillian: "Costa Berling" was screened for Miss Gish to observe Lars Hanson. "The moment Lars Hanson appeared on the screen, I knew he was the man we wanted. And I knew we must have a Swedish director. The Swedish people are closer to what our Pilgrims were, or what we consider them to have been, than our present day Americans. Irving Thalberg selected Victor Sjöström.... he got the spirit of the story exactly and was himself a film actor, the kind that I liked better than Sjöström. He was a Scandinavian, thoroughly convinced that this one was led to assume that Lillian's was the final word on the production and, and that Mr. Sjöström was being singularly, honorably. In fairness to Messrs. Sjöström and Thalberg, one should remember that Miss Gish's theories on film technique (and her memory of film history) are often laughable. This same book, "Life and Lillian Gish", practically says outright that Griffith made "intolerance" mainly so that Lillian could play the role of the woman "endlessly rocking the cradle". Her latest insane pronouncements about D.W. (his forgetting to pay her for "The White Sister", which he didn't even make, his last films including "The Greatest Thing in Life"), made well before he had his biggest production stride in the twenties, make one suspect the sanity of everything she has ever committed to print. But, seeing "The Scarlet Letter", one cannot remain annoyed at Lillian for too long - the shots of her in the stocks, a flattering eye and a weak smile trying to hide her tears - soon melt the hardest hearts. There is certainly no doubt that Lillian was one of the finest actresses that ever graced the screen, and her remarkable performance in "The Scarlet Letter" is probably the best of her entire career. As the New York Sun put it, when the film opened at the Central Theatre in August of 1926, "Miss Gish, for the first time in the memory of the oldest inhabitant of the cinema palaces, plays a mature woman, a woman of depth and feeling, of wisdom and noble spirit".

The conception of the film differs in several ways from that of Hawthorne's novel. Hawthorne, on the contrary, for example, a distinct mystical element - and too, built an atmosphere of witchcraft and superstition, completely absent from the film. The love story of Hester and Dimmesdale occupies far less prominent a position in the novel, for in that it is not until near the story's conclusion that it is revealed that the pastor is the father of Hester's child. Other major differences include the character of Hester herself, who is described by Hawthorne as "a young woman... tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale... dark and abundant hair...". Too, she is essentially a Puritan, not the emotional miasma of the film. Incidentally, it is worth noting that if Dimmesdale overpowering remorse in the film seems a little too sudden, it is because a whole chunk was deleted from the original script before the film went into production. In this sequence, Hester's little daughter runs wild-made through the streets on the Sabbath, shocking the townspeople, and bringing forth the accusation "Child of sin - child of the devil!". It is this episode, primarily, which brings on Dimmesdale's self-punishment.

Notes at random: the remake in the thirties differed in several interesting aspects. It brought in the character of the husband much earlier, and unlike the Gish version, which hints that Hester may soon die, it achieved a mildly happy ending by having the townspeople look on Hester and her child with understanding and tolerance.

Gish's only printed comment on her re-union with Henry B. Walthall, her co-star from "The Birth of a Nation", was: "When we played in "The Birth of a Nation", I just came to Mr. Walthall's ear, and now I am actually taller than he is!" (Lillian had grown some seven inches in the eleven years separating the films; she had been only 15 when "Birth" was made. Or so it is claimed.) Incidentally, Lillian was one of the few stars of her period with sufficient stature to get her own way with cameramen. (Mary Pickford was another.) In later days of course, when Davis and Crawford were holding sway at Warners, the star-cameraman combination was an established routine. But so in the twenties, Gish asked for, and got, Hendrik Sartov, a former professor of physics at the University of Rotterdam, and photographer of "Way Down East" and many of the other Griffith films. Gish had none at all for "Essex", perhaps because he took his orders only from D.W. In any event, Sartov was one of the top cameramen in the business, and certainly nobody succeeded better in capturing Lillian's fragile beauty for the screen.

While Gish and Hanson naturally hold most of the limelight, the cast of "The Scarlet Letter" offers some fine supporting cameos. Henry B. Walthall strides in and out of the film as dramatically as one would expect, like a writh from the past. Another Scandinavian, Karl Davis, provides his usual brand of comedy, and there is some interesting work from Marshall Corder, previously seen in lesser roles in "The Phantom of the Opera" and others.

-3-
One of the stories put out by MGM's publicity department at the time was that Seastrom borrowed a church choir from Los Angeles to sing during the shooting, feeling that his players would not be in an appropriate mood without it ... a story that Cecil B., DeMille still utilizes, with variations, on his Biblical endeavors!!

The film is a surprisingly spectacular one, considering its intimate theme. Many of the crowd scenes are staged on an enormous scale. These exterior scenes were lit with an artificial sun, which generated a candlepower of 325,000,000.

"The Scarlet Letter" was Gish's second vehicle for Metro, having been preceded by King Vidor's "La Boheme". The third was the financially disastrous "Annie Laurie". In his book "A Tree is a Tree", Vidor has some interesting comments to make on his battles with Gish, and her own ideas on direction. Quite incidentally, Lillian did direct a film herself - the now-forgotten "Remodelling her Husband", starring sister Dorothy.

Seastrom, who was acting in and directing Swedish films in 1912, still makes an occasional film, although only in an acting capacity. Following his big American star-vehicles in the late twenties (including "Divine Woman" with Garbo and Hanson) his directorial activity slackened. His last film as a director was in England in the mid-thirties - the odd, stylized but quite interesting "Under the Red Robe". His later Swedish acting chores included a remake of "The Tower of Lies", in which he essayed the Cheney role. Under one of those curious arrangements that seem to exist only in the movie business, MGM, who owned the rights to the Selma Lagerlof story, permitted it to be remade so long as distribution was limited solely to the Scandinavian territories. Later (this information from Charles Turner, who met him at the time) he was awarded the title "Artistic Leader" and placed in a studio supervisory capacity, a status he no longer holds.

Lars Hanson, who made his American debut in "The Scarlet Letter", is still active in Swedish films. Older now, yet still possessed of striking features and those incredibly piercing eyes, he sometimes appears in films with Seastrom. One of Hanson's most interesting recent films (vintage, late forties) was the brilliant "Ride Tonight", directed by Gustav Molander, and unfortunately never released in the U.S.

COMMITTEE OF THE FILM SOCIETY: Charles Turner (Chairman); Warren G. Rothenberger; Robert G. Youngson; Herman C. Weinberg; Dorothy Lovell (Secretary); Richard Kraft; William K. Everson (Program Notes & Enquiries)