"THE LIGHTHOUSE BY THE SEA"

Warner Brothers, 1924  70 minutes
Directed by Malcolm St. Clair
Adapted for the screen by Darryl F. Zanuck from a story by Owen Davis. Photographed by Lyman Greening; edited by H.P. Bretherton; Art Directors: Lewis Gelb and Edras Hartley; Ast. Directors: Clarence Bricker, Clarence Kolster; Electrical effects by T.N. Murphy; Art Titles by Victor Vane.

The Cast: Rinty (RIN TIN TIN); Bob Dorn (William Collier, Jr.); Flora Gale (Louise Fazenda); Caleb Gale (Charles R. Mailes); Joe Daggett (Mathew Betz); Crawford Simms (Douglas Gerrard); Secret Service agent (Joseph Girard); Henchman (Frank Hagney).

"HELL'S HINGES"

Triangle-Kay Bee, 1916  70 minutes
Directed by WILLIAM S. HART; presented by Thomas H. Ince; assistant director - Cliff Smith; story by C. Gardner Sullivan; photographed by Joseph August.

The Cast: Blase Tracy (WILLIAM S. HART); Faith Henley (Clara Williams); Rev. Robert Henley (Jack Standing); Silk Miller (Alfred Rollingsworth); Clergyman (Robert McKim); Zeb Taylor (J. Frank Burke); Dolly (Louise Clum); Henchman (Robert Kortman); and John Gilbert as an extra in crowd scenes.

THE Lighthouse BY THE SEA

One of the chief delights about the old Rin Tin Tin films is that, despite being designed for a set market, and of course retaining certain perennial trade marks and characteristics, they were not by any means formula pictures.

Each film had its own particular points of interest. For example, "Where the North Begins", shown by this society last year, was notable for its very real production value and Chester Franklin's handling of the animal footage. "The Right Cry", which will be shown by the society later in 1936, contains what is probably Rinty's best "acting" on the screen. And we're not not being sarcastic with that phrase either; Rinty could act with the best of them - and ham it up on occasion too!
"LIGHTHOUSE BY THE SEA" has one of its major points of interest in that it is an early film by Malcolm St. Clair, made before he hit his stride at Paramount as a director of such delightful sophisticated comedies as "Are Parents People?" and "The Grand Duchess and the Waiter". St. Clair was noted for his gentle charm and wit, and although those qualities don't get too much of a chance to shine in a melodrama of Coast Guards vs. rum-runners, he does produce some typically lovely images. The shots of the young lovers, silhouetted by the shore - or the beautifully composed scenes of the heroine walking on a waterfont saloon with the raging seas behind her - provide some indication of St. Clair's then unexploited directorial talent.

As a Rin Tin Tin vehicle, the film is a little different than most in that one could delete him from the script entirely, and still have a plot left. But if Rinty is incidental to the plot itself, he certainly takes a major part in its execution. As a Red Cross veteran suddenly up against rum-runners, taking time out to save a blind man from crashing over the cliffs (a beautifully done sequence, if a somewhat illogical one!) and finally saving the day by turning on the lighthouse beam, Rinty has a field day. How the kids must have cheered when Rinty puts the villain's savage bulldog, the Yukon Killer, to inglorious flight! How we feel like cheering today! If Rinty has a little less dramatic acting in this one (wait for "The Night Cry"!) then he more than makes up for it with the energy that he puts into his stunts. Not that he is any slouch when it comes to the dramatics even here, and he has a delightful way of running into a situation and arising it up carefully before he decides on a course of action. Since Darryl F. Zanuck worked on this script (and quite by the way, the film is a darned sight more entertaining than anything Mr. Zanuck has made in recent years) it's worth repeating this delightful anecdote recorded by Joel Sayre in a recent Colliers' article on the great Rinty: "Darryl F. Zanuck, a struggling young writer, wrote five of the scripts. When he and Mal St. Clair would call on Jack Warner to sell him an idea of theirs for another canine classic, St. Clair would tell the story and Zanuck would play Rin. "So the girl and the boy..." St. Clair might start to say, but Warner would interrupt: "What's the dog doing now?" Zanuck would drop on all fours: "Grrrr...arf, arf, arf.... owww!"

Ironically, St. Clair's last days as a director were spent under Zanuck at Fox in the mid-forties.

INTERMISSION

"HELL'S HINGES"

To many - too many - William S. Hart is merely the prototype of the "strong, silent" hero, now outdated and merely quaint. This illusion and falsehood is no doubt projected ever further by the fact that Hart's features are almost never shown these days, and later generations know him chiefly by hacked-up and gaggged-up extracts a la "Flicker Flashbacks".

In the past, this society has tried to restore some of the respect due Hart, as actor and director, by reviving "The Return of Drew Egan" and "Tumbleweeds". Neither showing was particularly successful, interest in Hart being apparently very slight. We sincerely hope that this showing will tell a different story, for "Hell's Hinges" is classic of its kind. Together with the quite different "The Narrow Trail", it is probably Hart's best picture. And to dismiss it as a western would be a mistake, for it more resembles "The Atonement of Gosta Berling" than it does "Riders of the Purple Sage".

Space is too limited to permit the detailed appraisal of Hart's background and career that we would like; instead of attempting to condense it, or to explain Hart's sincere love of the West, we refer you to George Mitchell's admirable article on Hart in "Films in Review". This piece is really the last word on Hart and his films!

"Hell's Hinges" has elements quite foreign to the traditional western -- including the systematic seduction of a minister by the town trollop, and the minister's subsequent savagery in burning down his own church. All such elements as these are being carefully deleted from a two-reel television version now being prepared, and we are fortunate indeed to have this complete copy for screening.
Hart has been accused of being too sentimental a director, which at times he undoubtedly was. But it is astounding that his tremendous talent as a director has gone unrecognized for so long. The camera placement here, the simple yet effective symbolism, and the flair for spectacle as in the brilliantly handled mob scenes where all of Incenville goes up in smoke, the real "feel" of the old, dusty, unglamorized West, all should have earned Hart a reputation as one of the great directors. After all, "Hell's Hinges" is a 1916 production. At that time Griffith was the giant among directors, with no immediate rivals. But certainly Hart, from his performance here (directorial as well as histrionic) is entitled to rate as one of the leaders among those rivals to Griffith, lower down the scale though they were.

For the most part, "Hell's Hinges" offers high-powered drama rather than traditional Western action. Apart from a single blow, there are no fisticuffs, and only one short riding sequence. Hart reserves his action for the final two reels, and then withdraws all restraints to slam over one of the most powerful and spectacular action sequences that he ever created. Fine camerawork, utilizing long panoramic shots, excellent cutting and a sure control over the masses of extras fuse this into an episode of astonishing vigor. Hart, his assistant Cliff Smith, his writer Gardner Sullivan and camera-man Joe August were one of the stewardship (and least appreciated) teams of craftsmen the cinema ever produced. Tom Ince certainly deserved none of the credit that he claimed on the Hart films; they were Bill's films all the way. However, Ince does rate a nod of approval for having the foresight to recognize Hart for the artist that he was, and for permitting him to make his films the way he wanted to make them, without outside interference. Although in the face of rapidly spiralling grosses, putting Bill's films in direct competition with those of Griffith and Douglas Fairbanks, also operating under the Triangle banner, Tom's attitude was as arsed as it was considerate.

Incidentally, an interesting aspect of the plot's construction is the contrasting of Hart's reformation ("a man wholly evil" as an early subtitle tells us) with the rapid degeneration of the minister. "Moving Picture World" of Feb. 19, 1916, had this to say of the picture: "Brilliant in subtitle, strong in treatment with occasional notes of true pathos, the marks of creative ability and sure craftsmanship are there; the cast is without rival in the art when holding close to revelations of the human mind and heart". But while referring to "the genius of direction", the reviewer goes on to criticize Hart: "Good enough actor not to require a perpetual repetition of the Western badman reformed through the sweet and humanizing influence of a pure-minded girl. Hart should try himself out in some other role... (he) fails to win with a large percentage of the modern audience. The art is a fine type and capable of picturing imperfect man as he really is and long has been, a composite being, "the middle of the world". (Unquote).

Good old Bill took no notice of the Easterners who were trying to tell him how to make his Westerns... ten years later, these same criticisms levelled at "Rumblewoods", on which he had again refused to compromise, finally put him out of business. But what a grand old actor and film-maker he had been— with twelve years of picture-making that will surely some day be acclaimed as they deserve to be!

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Committee of the film society: Dorothy Lovell, Ed Connor, Dick Kraft, W.K.
Program Notes & Enquiries: Bill Everson, Manhattan Towers Hotel, 2166 Broadway, New York City 21, NY.

RECOMMENDED READING IN CONJUNCTION WITH TODAY'S PROGRAM:
WILLIAM S. HART by George J. Mitchell: HAL ST. CLAIR by George Geltzer
Back numbers of "FILMS IN REVIEW" containing these articles will be on sale at the screening, price 50¢ each.

To the best of our knowledge, we have sent copies of the "PAINT & POWDER" notes to all members who were not at the screening. But we MAY have missed out on a few names; if we missed you, and you would like a copy for the record, please drop a postcard to Bill Everson and a copy will be mailed forthwith.

Coming attractions: THE HUNT MAN—a program headlined by "Richard Talmadge's L.T. C.O., a 1923 feature directed by William K. Howard and short sequences featuring, or directed by, Yakima Canutt, Reeves Eason, David Sharpe and others...
Next month—Tuesday February 21st. Further coming presentations—Frank Capra's THAT'S A MANSION; HIS LAST RACE; WHITE SHADOWS IN THE SOUTH SLAS (wax, impatient tool); LEWIS MILLSOME'S "HALLELUJAH I! A BUM"; LILLIAN GISH in "MAHOMED"; the TRIMCEM's THE PONY EXPRESS; 5 great Harold Lloyd two-reelers of the twenties — a real find; and, we hope, JUNIJA with Lillian and Dorothy Oish, Ronald Colman and William Powell, and D.W. Griffith's JUDITH OF BETHLEHEM. And many more!