THE RADIO RAY - episode six of our serial, "Officer H'Id", starring Ben Wilson.

"BIG MOMENTS FROM LITTLE PICTURES" (Hal Roach, 1924, 25 minutes)
One of a series of films in which he kidded, rather mercilessly, Hollywood movies - and favorite stars of the twenties. "Big Moments from Little Pictures" has Will Rogers delivering a delicious lampoon of Fairbanks and "Robin Hood" (Having recently re-seen "Robin Hood", the satire seems all the more pointed). Whether maliciously or not, will also kids Douglas's use of doubles! Further spoofs in the real include "Over the Hill" (with Johnnie Walker), "Blood and Sand", and the Keystone Kops - with Will putting over an almost cruelly accurate caricature of Ford Sterling. This is a fast, funny and always enjoyable comedy.

"HIS LAST RACE" (Phil Goldstone Productions, 1923, 65 mins)
Directed by B. Reeves Eason; photographed by Jackson Rose; art direction by Gustav Fohl.
The Cast: Gladys Brockwell (Mary Stewart); Rex (Snowy) Baker (Richard Carleton); Will Scott (Harold Stewart); Robert McKim (Tim Brennan); Noah Beery (Peachy Sloan); Pauline Starke (Jane Denny); Harry Depp (Ted Denny); Alec B. Francis (Dr. Rand); Tully Marshall (John Stokes); Dick Sutherland (gang leader); Mackiller (Exmoor's, the wonder horse).

"His Last Race" is a thoroughly pleasing example of the good quality "little" pictures (far far better than the "little" sound pictures of PDC and Monogram) that brought home the bacon, along with Tom Mix and Rin Tin Tin, for small town theaters in the twenties. Barracuda, Stroheim and "Hare Nastus" might not stand a chance in Chicago Falls or River Bend - but "His Last Race", together with a Harry Langdon and the latest installment of a George B. Seitz serial, would fill the theater and send the customers home happy. Literally everything is packed into it - romance, humor, sentiment, drama, fast action - and the all-important final race on which everything depends. None of it is terribly subtle - nor does it try to be. Certainly the jovial villainy of Noah Beery suggests that it isn't taking itself any too seriously. The final race and a half is literally a marathon of action, with the wonder horse really living up to that description - kept on the gallop semingly for hours, tearing back across rough country to the race track, and still winning that race on which so many destinies depend.

"His Last Race" was directed by B. Reeves Eason, later also referred to as Breezy Eason. (For the record, Breezy Eason was Reeves's son, and a child star who, tragically, was killed in an auto accident. In later years, Reeves also adopted the name Breezy at times). Eason was an expert director of small westerns, serials ("The Galloping Ghost" being an especially lively example) and anything with action. He was also a top-notch second unit director, staging action sequences for much bigger pictures - i.e., "The Charge of the Light Brigade", the chariot race in "Ben Hur", the gathering of the ranchers in "Duel in the Sun", the battle of Saragossa in "Man of Conquest". His forte was essentially action, and his talent for straight dramatic material was at best, fair. The non-action scenes of "His Last Race" do lag a trifle, but once Eason gets back to his fights and chases, the pace soon livens up.

Although it is a cheap production, it has real style and a certain polish. The photography is exceptionally good, and the sets substantial enough (although once an open door reveals a glimpse of props and other equipment piled up outside!) The cast, however, is misleadingly strong. Such old reliables as Tully Marshall and Alec B. Francis actually have comparatively little to do. Producers of cheapies would hire these "prestige" names for one day only, shoot their scenes quickly for a minimum salary, and then carefully distribute them throughout the film so that there was always some well-known name on hand. In the official cast, star Snowy Baker (an Australian athlete) is actually in 7th place! Mr. Goldstone, the producer of this opus, apparently fancied himself as a minor league Griffith. Note the Griffithian titles - especially an opening salvo to the glory of womanhood - and the stilted little RI monograms on each title, the two letters intertwining themselves just as D and G did on the Griffith titles.

All in all, "His Last Race" is a very entertaining minor item, and the sort of film, alas, that never seems to be considered worthy of revival, by film study institutions somewhat larger than this one. And the print - a fine toned original - is in perfect shape.

INTERMISSION

"JUDITH OF BETHULIA" (American Biograph-D. W. Griffith, 1913; one hour)
The distinction of being the "first American feature" is one that has been claimed by several films. It's perhaps a difficult thing to be dogmatic about; for example, Herbert Brenon's "Trilby", though a feature, and American financed and produced, was actually shot in England. But, certainly, DeMille's much touted "first feature", "The Squawman",...
came after "Judith of Bethulia", which is generally overlooked by film historians. So little does the film seem to be known that when the old Biograph Studios in upper NY went to work on television films recently, a lavish press release to the trade papers informed us that "Judith the Petunia" (11) had been filmed there, thus giving out a double error.

"Judith" was very much of a turning point in Griffith's career. It was his first feature, his first "spectacle" in the cinematic sense of the word (although earlier Civil War one-reel subjects had been on an equally lavish scale), and his last film for the rather staid and unimaginative Biograph Company, which had been a comparative monomaniac until Griffith's arrival put then on the map, and which went into a steady downward spiral (The Bert Williams films excepted) following his departure. In 1923, following the completion of "Judith", Griffith went to Mutual, and supervised the output of the Reliance-Majestic companies. (We have already shown several films from this period: "Old Heidelberg", "Ghosts", "Doll House Mystery", "Ae Damn" etc.) Features like "The Escape" paved the way to his full maturity only a year or so later in "The Birth of a Nation" and "Intolerance".

"Judith of Bethulia" is a curious film, both disappointing and fascinating. Disappointing because it is frankly not as well organized as his early short films. In films like "The Battls", Griffith displayed a remarkable talent for staging name action, and directing the eye to the important detail. Always one knew exactly what was going on. In "Judith", one doesn't. The battle scenes are lavish and well-staged, but they are confusing in the extreme. At times it is difficult to tell just who is fighting who, and personalities become lost and almost forgotten in the rush of events. Too, while the cutting is more than competent, it is hardly as inspired as it had been in, for example, "Fighting Blood" or "A Girl and Her Trust". And yet, at the same time, the film is so superior to the staggy Italian spectacles of the same time that such criticism seems almost unfair. From a director other than Griffith, the film probably wouldn't be criticized at all.

Quite apart from its spectacle, the film offers an interesting glimpse of things to come from Griffith. His concern with historical accuracy, as demonstrated in frequent explanatory titles, for example - and at the same time, the determination that accuracy should not overshadow showmanship. An opening title, explaining that the film is based on the Apocrypha and poetical tragedy of Judith of Bethulia by Thomas B. Aldrich, also explains that while incidents and characters have been thus taken, "...our efforts have been confined expressly to the dramatic". There is a hint too, of "insolence", in the introduction of the parallel love stories - one tragic, one happy - even though not too much is made of this. Has Mary Pickford Era to be forgotten for long stretches at a time. The climax too, is rather sudden in coming, and though developed in the traditional Griffith manner, with a last-minute rescue from death for Ras Marsh, is again not as well organized as one would like.

Griffith shot the film entirely in Chatsworth, a location some 30 miles outside Hollywood, where he had also filmed "Man's Genesis" and "Brute Forces", his prehistoric allegories. It was rough, rocky scrub-land - and still is - not unduly photogenic, and rather drab in its appearance. Apparently both Griffith and Ince realized this, for they shot none of their westerns or civil war stories there. Of course, they had no need to - Hollywood was then undeveloped, and there was much lushier scenery in their own back yard. Ince's, especially. The location, now divided principally into two locations (Iversom's Ranch, and Corrigan's Ranch) is still used extensively by Hollywood, especially by the cheaper production units that cannot afford lengthy location jaunts. Even the big studios use it for convenient pick-up shots however - Ford used it for a couple of scenes in "Stagecoach" and for a good deal of "For'ʐ Apache", and even "Around the World in 80 Days" utilizes a couple of Chatsworth locations. In recent years it has seen service as England, Burma, Indochina, Africa, Mars, the Moon, earth in prehistoric days, earth in the 25th century, and practically every state in the Union. Actually it has been used far too much and comes off in a rather unappreciating fashion unless photographed in color. Devotees of tv westerns (if we have any) will doubtless recognize much of the scenery, which hasn't changed a jot since Griffith shot the film there over 40 years ago.

The cast, which we're re-printing below, and which appears on the main titles of the film, was of course a much later addition, no such cast appearing on the initial release prints. Lillian Gish, billed fifth, actually has little more than a bit role, and Dorothy Gish is a more extra. You'll spot most of the Biograph "family" beneath the beards - Charles West et al, and of course, Kate Bruce, Biograph's perennial mother-maid—older sister-grandmother (if we have any) will doubtless recognize much of the scenery, which has been shown in many years, and we are glad to be able to revive it today.

The Cast: Judith of Bethulia (BLANCHE SUGO); Hofermee (HERSE B. WALTHER); Nacov (RAS MARSH); Nathan (ROBERT HARROW) Young mother (LILLIAN GISH); Crippled beggar (DOROTHY GISH); Judith's maid (KATE BRUCE); Chief Easum (AMIRI BENAUKER)

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