A RICHARD BARTHELMESS Program

"WAY DOWN EAST" (excerpt) D.W. Griffith-United Artists, 1920.

Enough has been written about "Way Down East" in other notes, and on other occasions, to preclude the necessity of elaborating again here. After a long period with Griffith, through such programmers as "Scarlet Days" to the superb "Broken Blossoms", "Way Down East" marked Barthelmess' final film for the old maestro, before branching out on his own with Inspiration - and "Tol'able David". Our short excerpt (from some two-thirds of the way through the film) includes some fine scenes with Lillian Gish and Lowell Sherman. In the opening scenes of the dance, you'll get a quick glimpse of Mary Hay, whom Barthelmess married in June of 1920. Others present include Burr McIntosh and Creighton Hale, while Norma Shearer and Carol Dempster can be spotted among the extras.

"THE DROP KICK" (excerpt) First National, 1927; with Dorothy Revier, Hedda Hopper, Alberta Vaughan, Barbara Kent, Brooks Benedict.

Usually erroneously credited to Alfred Santell, "The Drop Kick" was directed by Millard Webb. It was an unremarkable but nicely done college picture, with the usual rather stolid and over-age college "boys", flapper activities, some rather more serious romantic and dramatic ingredients than usual (including a suicide), all culminating in the inevitable "big game" which the hero wins dramatically with only a few seconds to play. Since we'll probably run the whole film some time, we won't spoil it for that occasion by running the big climax tonight. Instead we've taken a typical sequence from the middle of the film. Incidentally, the obnoxious fellow at the dance is Gordon Elliott -- later Wild Bill Elliott, and a popular western star of the 40's and early 50's.

"TOL'ABLE DAVID" (excerpt) Inspiration-First National, 1921. With Gladys Hulette, Ernest Torrence, Warner Richmond.

Still Henry King's best film - and Barthelmess' best role - "Tol'able David" stands up beautifully today as a fine and vivid slice of Americana -- the sort of thing that Henry King does so well that one wonders why he has to waste so much time on material like "David and Bathsheba". For our excerpt, we have taken the closing two reels - in which, as David, Barthelmess has finally achieved his life's ambition - to drive the hack carrying the mail - and finds himself fighting for his life with the murderous Hatfield clan.

= INTERMISSION =

"SHORE LEAVE" (Inspiration-First National, 1925) 77 minutes. Directed by John S. Robertson; scenario by Josephine Lovett; based on the play "Shore Leave" (1922) by Hubert Osborne, as produced by David Belasco and starring Francis Starr.

The Cast: "Bilge" Smith - Richard Barthelmess; Connie Martin - Dorothy Mackail; "Battling" Smith - Ted McNamara; Capt. Bimby Martin - Nick Long; Mrs Schuyler-Payne - Marie Shotwell; Mr. Schuyler-Payne - Arthur Metcalfe; Admiral Smith - Warren Cooke; Chief Petty Officer - Samuel Himes.

Frankly this film somewhat baffled me when I screened it for the first time a month ago. It was a tremendously popular film in its day with both critics and public, and was named on several of the "Best 10" lists for 1925. From it, evolved a 1930 remake with Jack Oakie, the somewhat re-shaped "Follow the Fleet" with Astaire and Rogers, and an even more unrecognisable
derivation in 1955's "Hit the Deck". (From Richard Barthelmess to Vic Damone -- somehow nothing seems more ominously symbolic of the movies' decline than this!) Perhaps because its basic story-line has become so familiar not only through the official "remakes" but also through the endless imitations, the film seemed to me to be rather ordinary and even empty today.

There were many valid reasons for its success and popularity in 1925. For one thing, in the snappy jazz age its "ordinary" hero and heroine were distinctly unusual types. This was several years before "The Crowd" made the best-ever and most dramatic use of such types for its leads. Too, Richard Barthelmess as the far-from-sympathetic sailor-hero was stepping way out of his usual character. Dorothy Mackail was tremendously appealing in the same way that Eleanor Boardman was so winning in "The Crowd". Even the deliberately slow pacing of the film probably seemed restful and off-beat in an era of fast and zippy movies. It is possible to recognize that the film has qualities which made it unusual in 1925, and at the same time wonder whether those qualities continue to give the film stature today. Personally I felt not; but I showed the film to several people who had quite the opposite reaction. George Patterson of the Toronto Film Society found it almost as charming as when he first saw it in the 20's, and was quite aghast at my hesitation about it. If it were only available in Canada, he assured me, he'd jump at it -- and George is the man that pondered long and hard before deciding that Griffith's "America" was worth a whirl, and who cannot be talked into the best of Bill Hart or Rin Tin Tin! Quite obviously, when there is any doubt, or difference of opinion at all, the film should be given the benefit of that doubt and afforded a screening. The film seems to be remembered warmly by all those who saw it originally. Barthelmess, and particularly Dorothy Mackail, are both fine, and their work is both interesting and pleasant to watch. To those of you who didn't see the film originally, and who have no particular fondness for the stars, it is a film that needs patience and kindness; approach it in the right spirit, not expecting too much, and you'll probably find it a most pleasing and unpretentious film.

Barthelmess himself is extremely fond of the film, and prefers it, for example, to "Soul Fire" (which I thought excellent when I saw it two years ago, but which disappointed Barthelmess so much at the time that he hasn't seen it since). However, "Shore Leave" must be the cheapest of all the Barthelmess-Inspiration pictures, or certainly gives that impression. One or two miniatures and other bits of decoration are a little too obvious, and the whole film has an economical air to it all. Much of it was filmed aboard the USS New York, and a few shots at the Battery in New York City in 1924. The scene of Barthelmess and Ted McNamara riding a camel, ostensibly in Egypt, was actually shot in Central Park -- with the camera low to avoid the decidedly non-Egyptian skyline!

Program Notes & Enquiries: Wm. K. Everson, Hotel Bradford, 210 W. 70th St., NYC Committee: Edward Gorey, Sandra Everson, Charles Shibuk, Dorothy Lovell.

COMING PROGRAMS

February will be comedy month. (The notes giving full details go out next Tuesday). Initially we had planned only one comedy show, but so much fine material turned up that it seemed a pity to disperse it all when it was on hand. We haven't yet finished screening everything either, but there's more than enough top material on hand for the two shows (and at least another 15 shorts held in abeyance for another time). Each show will have a really top-notch Harold Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chase - and there'll be fine stuff too with Patsy Arbuckle, Al St. John, Mr & Mrs Carter de Haven, films by Mal St. Clair and Mack Sennett, a couple of really choice cartoons, and so on. And over the weekend in Connecticut we're pre-screening a dozen silents which promise to make interesting shows for us for the next few months. Full details in our mailing on Tuesday.