"THE BUSHER" (Thomas Ince, 1919, Paramount release); Directed by Jerry Storm; photographed by Chester Lyons; art director, C. Tracy Hoag; starring CHARLES RAY with Colleen Moore, Jack (John) Gilbert, Otto Hoffman. 5 reels.

Made when Charlie Ray (whose screen personality we discussed at some length in our notes for "Sweet Adeline" a year or so ago) was at the height of his popularity, "The Busher" gave audiences what they wanted in a Ray picture with not too many surprises in terms of plot, but some departure from formula in the character of Ray himself. For once his small-town-boy isn't non-aggressive to a point in near-infantilism, and his pleasant bashfulness is agreeably restrained. Since he "proves himself" early in the proceedings (usually it was a last-minute matter in most Ray vehicles), the raison-d'être this time is to become a conceited boor, and redeem himself. It gives added depth to the Ray character, and helps to keep the plot a little more consistently on the move than were those of "The Glod-Hopper" and "The Finch-Hitter". On the whole, it stacks up as one of the better Ray pictures, and despite its baseball background, it is still elements of rural romance and comedy that predominate. Photographically it is quite lovely, with some really charmingly composed scenes. The backdrops, being so obviously the real thing, have a great deal of interest too, with their authentic advertisements in the baseball park, and in streets, drug-stores etc. There is some occasional slight animation in the titles which warrants a mention too. Nobody has too much to do apart from Ray, but Colleen Moore makes a thoroughly pleasing heroine, and John Gilbert plays well as the flashy hick Beau Brummel who is Ray's rival for Colleen's hand.

Incidentally, slight essays in Americana like this one - films with no dominating themes, and more by-play than sustained scenes, are particularly troublesome to score, and I apologise in advance for a score which I know does not recapture the spirit of the original score. Surprisingly however, Mendelssohn does pay off in the least likely place! The print is a lovely toned original, and appears to be quite complete.

"THE FORBIDDEN CITY" (Selznick-Select, 1918) Produced by the Norma Talmadge Film Corporation; directed by Sidney Franklin; scenario by Mary Murillo from a story by George Scarborough; 5 reels. Starring NORMA TALLMADGE with Thomas Meighan, Reed Hamilton, E. A. Warren, Rogers Lytton, Charles Fang.

Early Norma Talmadge vehicles are scarce these days, and "The Forbidden City" is one of the better of her earlier ones - though of course lacking the more sumptuous production values of her much bigger films of the 20's. While it is easy to understand the popularity of Talmadge's films -- films of strong emotional content which had their parallel in such talkies as Garbo's "Camille", Bette Davis' "Dark Victory" and Greer Garson's "Random Harvest" - it is a little difficult today to understand the tremendous popularity of Norma Talmadge herself. To me at least, neither her personality nor her acting capabilities survive the years half as well as those of her sister Constance -- even admitting that comparison is a trifle difficult because of their completely different fields. (Along with Dorothy Gish, Constance Talmadge was one of the most accomplished silent screen comedienne). Nevertheless, what Davis and Stanwyck were to tear-jerkers...
(and I don't use that term in a derogatory sense) of the thirties and forties, so was Norma Talmadge to the equivalent films of the 20's—but in a much wider sense, both in her concentration on that type of film, and in the enormous following she attracted. Since I must admit being most familiar with the beginning and the end of her career, and to have seen comparatively little of her work from her peak period, possibly it is unjust of me to generalise in such a critical fashion.

In any event, "The Forbidden City" is a slight but stylish essay into "Madame Butterfly" territory. The plot is straightforward in the extreme, but the whole production is nicely mounted, with some extremely good lighting and camerawork, and handsome sets. Norma Talmadge has a dual role, although her makeup in the second role (she plays both mother and daughter) is often not flattering. Although playing an 18-year-old, she actually looks a good deal older than she had as the mother! Incidentally, in this second role, she has one classic subtitle; taunted by a Chinese girl for having no ancestors, she retorts with fire and spirit—"I American—I no need ancestors!"

In its issue of January 1919, "Photoplay" commented favorably on the picture's physical mountings, and considered that "as a thing of beauty" it was far superior to most of Miss Talmadge's recent pictures, though somewhat below their standard dramatically. It also noted the film's successful attempts to spotlight Miss Talmadge's beauty via some really first-class close-ups. Most interesting of all, however, was the blatant and unwitting racism of one of its criticisms. At one point in the story, a Chinese guard fights another guard in order to help the heroine escape. Condemning the barroom brawl technique as being completely unlikely, "Photoplay" went on to say:

"Your Oriental moves more subtly and certainly... an overturned flower-pot, the plunge of a knife, slowly strangling fingers—and the outward course of events flow so serenely that even passers-by cannot tell murder has been done!"

-------------------------------

**LYSTERY ITEM!**

At the end of the program, we intend to run a very short piece of film which we hope someone in the audience can identify for us. It looks German. The players look German. It seems to indicate a post-DER GESANG production. Other than that, we know nothing. It runs but a few minutes, and looks fascinating... if it turns out to be something of importance, we'll try to trace it back to its source and see if the other 14½ reels are lying around waiting re-discovery too!

-------------------------------

Next program—this Friday, April 24th, room 9-D—HAROLD LLOYD in Freeston Sturges' MAD WEDNESDAY; TOM MIX, Mickey Rooney, Stuart Holmes and James Kirkwood in "MY PAL THE KING" (1932)

-------------------------------

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