For those of you who may be here as guests and thus haven't read our earlier notes - and to those who gave them only a cursory reading - we'd like to stress at the outset that both of tonight's features are being presented in heavily cut versions. We're not happy about it of course, but for the time being at least this seems to be the only way they are available, and "representative" versions seem to be a good deal better than no versions at all. We've deliberately double-billed these two shortened versions so that those to whom cut prints are just unbearable can give us a wide berth and miss only one program instead of two.

UNSEEN ENEMY (Biograph, 1912) Directed by D.W. Griffith; photographed by G.W. Bitzer; with Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Elmer Booth, Harry Carey, Bobby Harron, Walter Miller, Alfred Paget. One reel.

It seemed for a while that this little gem might remain permanently "unseen". The Museum of Modern Art made up a print a year or so ago, but found it incomplete, out of sequence, and minus titles, which is presumably why it hasn't been shown there as yet. This print, brought over from the British Film Institute, is generally good, though a little harsh, and certainly seems quite complete. One of the best of D.W.'s little suspense melodramas, it is a re-working of his 1909 "The Lonely Villa" - with added polish and finesse. The cutting is faster, there is a wonderful use of closeups, and real imagination behind the various little gimmicks to lengthen the suspense. Dorothy Gish excepted, the cast is also that of "The Musketeers of Pig Alley". The film marks the first time that Lillian and Dorothy appeared together on the screen, and for that matter it also marks the first "starring" appearance of either of them at Biograph.

SHE GOES TO WAR (Inspiration-UA, 1928/29) Produced and directed by Henry King, in association with Victor and Edward Halperin; photographed by Tony Gaudio and John Fulton; scenario by Howard Estabrook; adaptation by Fred de Greer; from the novel by Rupert Hughes; starring Eleanor Boardman and John Holland, with Margaret Seddon, Edmund Burns, Eulalie Jensen, Alma Rubens, Yola D'Avril, Al St. John, Edward Chandler, Jack Stauffacher. Musical score; modest Altschuler; original length, 10 reels; length of this print 5 reels.

Following the success of "The Big Parade", an expected cycle of war films developed - some of them, like the interesting little " Corporal Kate", being little more than outright steals, but with the story-line focused on the heroine rather than the hero. ("Corporal Kate", as played by Vera Reynolds, lost an arm, as opposed to John Gilbert's leg.) "She Goes to War" is a more serious, more ambitious production, and in its original form probably came closest to being a very secondary but nevertheless worthwhile follow-up to the Vitex picture. Like "The Big Parade", it started out in civilian life, with the war glimpsed, glamorously, from afar, and it proceeded to show war as a great leveller. Not too surprisingly the poor but honest guys turned out troops, and the rich pampered playboys went to pieces under the strain. How well done all this was it is now hard to tell - it impressed me when I last saw it (some 28 years ago) - but that was long before I'd seen "The Big Parade" or even knew much about what a good film was. Reception by the press was fair, and by the public indifferent -- but that today is meaningless. Its very virtues may well have made it seem old-fashioned and quaint in that era when the all-talkie
was all that mattered. This proemblé is necessary because little of the film's original intent or shape remains. It has been de-personalized, cut down to a point where motivations and characters are meaningless. Visually, much of what remains is some of the film's best. But it was more than just a war-action show. We get a glimpse here of some of the film's emotional power in its good, honest sentiment - scenes that were dramatically "big" and were played that way; the sturdy sets and elaborate studio "exteriors" indicate the care with which it was made; and the big-scale battle scenes, which have been preserved largely intact, are still exciting. But it is exasperating to get only glimmerings of Eleanor Boardman's performance; to see that sensitive face and those haunting eyes in situations which, because of their hacking, now make her look silly rather than dramatic. With all the good stuff that was chopped out, undoubtedly many bad spots were removed too. King was a sporadic director, capable of turning out a masterwork like "ToL'able David," or a monument of mediocrity like "The White Sister." Here, certainly, he seems to have had - to say the least - some surprising lapses of taste. The introduction of some midst comedy at the height of the battle scenes - "comedy" accentuated by the musical score - is not only unfunny, but downright illogical and stupid, and as annoying in its context as Greigton Hale's buffoonery in the mob scenes in reel nine of "Orphans of the Storm". However, enough of "She Goes to War" remains to be interesting - both as a Henry King film, and as an example of film-making in that uneasy transitional period of 1926-29. How much better it is, as a film, with its retained silent technique, than, for example, the all-talkie "Lights of New York" which most of you probably saw at the Museum last week.

INTERMISSION

"THE BLUE LIGHT" (Leni Riefenstahl, 1931) Dir: Leni Riefenstahl; written by Bala Balazs; photographed by Hans Schneeberger; with Leni Riefenstahl, Mathias Wiessmann, Ernst Ruml, Martha Reis, Franz Maldacce, Max Ophüls. Original length: 3 reels; this print: 5 reels.

"The Blue Light" is one of those legendary films which was showing everywhere in the '30's, that is referred to with nostalgic sighs as "a lovely film", but that no-one seems to have taken seriously enough to have written much about. To be sure, good old Siegfried Kracauer devotes a couple of pages to it and naturally finds that "the mountain girl conforms to a political regime which relies on intuition, worships nature and cultivates myths". Without devoting a very great amount of space to it, the current issue of FILM QUARTERLY, in an excellent article on Leni Riefenstahl, does an excellent job of summing up the film, placing it in perspective as regards her other films, and listing the influences in it - and from it. It's an article very well worth reading. It also points out that the film was spoken in rather bad Italian by the German stars. In point of fact, the sound-track - as also in "Extase" - was largely unimportant. This version is silent, and tells its story perfectly visually, with the aid of a few titles here and there. Of course, the scoring, heroic, mystical German mountain music was at (emotional) help --- but the film really didn't need it. It was - and is - good enough to get by on its pictorial aspects. Unlike "She Goes to War", "The Blue Light" has not been seriously hurt in this shortened version. It was slow and disjointed; it is now merely disjointed; the full "feel" of the original has been retained, plus a story-line that corresponds to the original. The editing-down was done - carefully and conscientiously - by David Lean. Even though the duped picture quality (this print has been blown up from a British 9.5mm print) makes one yearn for a sparkling 35mm print from the original negative, the pictorial splendour does come through. The compositions, and the camerawork are still
exceptional -- lovely, Dreyer-like closeups of peasants, mystical shots in the early dawn that remind one of the great German fantasies of the 20's, and of course, the landscapes and breathtaking mountaineering shots. This was one of the last of the "vintage" mountain films -- and in many ways, it's still one of the best.

"THE CHIMP" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1932) Dir: James Parrott; starring Laurel and Hardy with Jimmy Finlayson, Billy Gilbert. 3 reels.

Of all the Laurel and Hardy 3-reelers, only "The Music Box" really justified its extra length. "Another Fine Mess" and "Chickens Come Home" would both have been infinitely better at 2 reels, and "The Private Life of Oliver the 8th", surely one of their all-time weakest, would at least have had a little pep if 10 minutes shorter. "The Chimp" is no exception; although one of their better 3-reelers, it doesn't have the get-up-and-go it should have. The opening is labored; Laurel and Hardy are funny because they couldn't be otherwise, but their alapatchick falls in the circus ring are unworthy of them, and they look as though they know it. Then, the "padding" over, they are alone with the chimp -- and the film progresses as it should. It never becomes one of their best, but it does succeed in being one of their most bizarre, and once it gets off the ground, has a lot of good comedy material. It's one of the least-known of all their early films, and is seldom revived. That fact alone of course makes it a "must" for buffs, as there are now only a scant handful of I&H talkies that we haven't run.

Program Notes & Enquiries: Wm. K. Everson, Schwab House, 11 Riverside Drive, NYC.

Next Program -- Tuesday next, November 22nd, room 9-G

THE LOST SQUADRON ------- 1932 ------- THE DOOMED BATTALLION

with Erich von Stroheim
Richard Dix
Mary Astor
Joel McCrea
Ralph Ince
Hugh Herbert

with Luis Trenker
Tala Birell
Victor Varconi
Gibson Gowland
Gustav von Seyffertitz
Herman Bing