"RAILROAD RAIDERS OF '62" (Kalem, 1911) Dir: Sidney Olcott. One reel.

It's a pity that so few of the vintage Kalem films seem to be available today; the odd ones that have turned up -- the Hazards of Helen episodes, Olcott's feature "From The Manger to the Cross", that fine little Civil War adventure "The Confederate Ironclad" -- all seem to substantially above the average standards of their period, especially in photographic mobility. (In fairness to their competitors, perhaps it should be added that Kalem owned a spur of railroad in picturesque surroundings, and used it for any number of western, Civil War, and lumbering melodramas. Speed, action and a certain camera mobility were inevitable every time they steamed up their locomotives. However, this isn't to minimise their very worthy efforts -- and especially those of their ace director, Sidney Olcott, who strangely seemed to turn more and more pedestrian in later years, although always turning out stylish work). "Railroad Raiders of '62" is the first screen account of the now-famous Andrews Raid, depicted also by Keaton and by Disney. It's a vigorous and well done little tale, and if one doesn't always know the why and the wherefore of it all, it's probably due to missing footage. No cast list is available, but it seems safe to assume that Robert Vignola is mixed up in it somewhere.

"THE DOLL HOUSE MYSTERY" (Reliance, 1915) Dir: Chester and Sidney Franklin; with Marguerite Marsh, Charles Gorman, George Stone, Carmen de Rue, Jack Hull, Ben Lewis. Two reels.

Directed by the Franklins, under the overall (but probably not personal) supervision of Griffith, "The Doll House Mystery", even more than Sennett's "Farnley Oldfield's Race for Life", is probably the prime example of Griffith influence on the work of other directors. But influence alone doesn't of course make good film, and the often under-rated Franklin brothers deserve a tremendous amount of credit for this 30 minutes of top-notch cinema, a truly remarkable film for that period. In its construction, its editing, its photographic mobility and in its lighting, it is really a first-class job, and so much more polished and truly cinematic than scores of other two reels that were to be turned out until well into the 20's. Some of the locations are familiar from Griffith's Biograph, and two scenes in the final locomotive-auto chase are identical with those in "Intolerance" -- both in set-up and location. Were it not for the use of a different automobile, one might even suspect a little duplication. Since "The Mother and the Law" was in work at the time, it's possible that the Franklins may have seen some of D.W.'s footage as he shot it -- and copied some shots to the letter. And it's equally feasible that D.W., impressed by the work of his protege, himself did the borrowing. Style and technique certainly overshadow personalities in this film, but Charles Gorman, whom we saw a week or two ago as the hero of the Biograph "A Temporary Truce", gives a striking performance, and Marguerite Marsh, Mac's sister, and a player that we see all too rarely these days, underplays with all the effectiveness, serenity and charm of her more famous sister.

"APRIL FOOL" (Hal Roach-Pathes, 1924) Starring Charlie Chase. One reel.

After some 45 minutes of chase and suspense, it's a good idea to relax a little with Charlie Chase (no pun intended) -- not that the tempo lets up to any marked degree. It's a fast, wild little comedy, with dapper Charlie on top form.

-- Intermission --

From its "B" western title to its stark climax, "Mountain Justice" is a curious picture indeed, with something for everybody, or at least so the Brothers Warner probably hoped. With a reputation for social consciousness to live up to, the studio attacks prejudice in various guises, KKK type mob tyranny and preaches social reform. At the other end of the scale, it offers a welter of absurd Ladies Home Journal brand of soap opera. No one element predominates, save that the sillier elements disappear before the end, so that one remembers the fine style of the closing reels above all else. But the overall impression is both mystifying and uneven -- was this an "A" picture, a companion piece to "They Won't Forget", that went all awry -- or was it a "B" (like "White Bondage" and so many other Warner programmers of the period) that came off with far more style than anyone expected? This latter is the more likely, and if nothing else the film is a welcome reminder of what an extraordinarily versatile and accomplished director Michael Curtiz was in the 30's (and undoubtedly earlier too, but we know little of his prior work other than "Noah's Ark", "Moon of Israel" and his collaboration on the early Danish "Atlantis".) In the 30's, he'd turn from a Flynn spectacular to a Karloff thriller, turn out a comedy, a Perry Mason mystery, a "Black Fury" or an epic western. Because he turned out so many films, and because so many were unavoidably slick programmers, he tends to be dismissed far too casually as just another contract director. But look at "The Breaking Point", and realise what a craftsman -- what a sensitive and creative craftsman -- he can be. And look at "Mountain Justice" to see what style, power and seeming importance he can bring to trivia. (Alas, he has lost the touch now -- his latest films have been dull and vapid.) "Mountain Justice" really isn't film society fare. It's the sort of thing that 42nd Street should bring back on a dual bill with an old Carney. But 42nd Street has let it down. The Museum would look askance at it. TV, if it has given it a NY run, shunted it off like a routine "B". No, it's not traditional film society fare -- but then we've never claimed to be a traditional film society either, and we feel that for a reappraisal of one of Curtiz' lesser works, we are quite justified in reviving it. (And to those who disagree -- well, we can promise you three rarely real and important silent classics within a couple of months as compensation; right now we don't want to kill the deal by listing them!) Ernie Haller's fine photography is another big asset, and the cast (and untitled bit players) runs the gamut of Warners stock company of hillbillies and hoodlums. Robert Barrat is in fine fettle, and once again good old Ed Pawley is a lecherous moonshiner with a yen for an eleven year old, pigtailed barefoot girl! George Brent and Josephine Hutchinson, in unlikely roles, spouting novelettish dialogue, don't stand much of a chance against these veterans!

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** Note: scripter Norman Reilly should read Norman Reilly Raine.**