A MOTHER’S INFLUENCE (Reliance-Majestic, 1914) One reel, Supervised by D.W. Griffith; director: not stated; with Wallace Reid, Billie West, Al Pilson, Andre Her anger, Tom Milian.

An unusually neat and well-put-together little film, "A Mother's Influence" shows quite clearly how the Reliance-Majestic directors under Griffith's overall supervision (Chester and Sidney Franklin, etc.) were assiduously following the filmic grammar he had developed at Biograph. At its frequent closeups, cross-cutting, and use of genuine exteriors wherever possible (machine-shop, grocery store, etc.) it provides an interesting glimpse of the Griffith method between the Biograph days and the several features that were climaxed by "The Birth of a Nation". The plot is quite similar to that of an older Biograph, "In The Street of the Night", though less grim, and here built more around its star, Wallace Reid, who displays real acting ability along with abundant good looks and charm.

IN THE TENNESSEE HILLS (Raybus, 1915) Two reels; produced by Thomas H. Ince; directed by Reginald Barker; with Charles Ray and Enid Markey.

Made just before Charles Ray got into his "Country Boy" characterization, "In The Tennessee Hills" is hardly typical Ince material — but we'll get a good sampling of that next month, when we're devoting a whole program to Ray's career. Nor is it really representative of the vigorous little actioners that Ince was turning out at the time; there's far less story than usual with Ince, and more reliance on the suspense to be milked from a single basic situation. Actually, it's more like a Griffith Biograph in its plot, but without the "full treatment" in editing that Griffith would have given it. However, it's an interesting and decidedly off-beat little subject, nicely photographed in the hills around the Santa Fe river, and with the usual Ince "cuts" in its action.

THE SPIRIT OF THE USA (FBO, 1924) 5 reels. Directed by Emory Johnson; story by Emilia Johnson; photographed by Ross Fisher, starring Johnnie Walker and Mary Carr, with Carl Stockdale, Gloria Trey, Guyler Supplee, Richard Norris, Dicky Brandon, Newton House, Mark Penton, David Kirby, Rosemary Cooper.

Johnnie Walker (whom the Huff Society has also seen recently in "Certain Fly By Night" and "Transcontinental Limited") was a good-looking fellow, small but rugged, somewhat in the Richard Barthelmess vein, who never quite made it to front-rank stardom. He was popular enough so that he never landed in chowder or really bad films; most of his pictures were programmers, but like this one, programmers of a generally high standard. There were just too many "All-American-Boys" on the market in the 20's; Johnnie always kept several notches above Reed Howes, Kenneth McDonald and Donald Keith, but never quite got on to a footing approaching Barthelmess, Reginald Denny or Richard Dix. He was one of director William K. Howard's best friends and favorite stars, and later wound up as a production assistant with Howard in the sound period. Even though never a top name, Walker is well and fondly remembered; his pictures — and his own very likeable personality — stand up well.

"Spirit of the USA", if it weren't done so well, is the kind of movie that the unthinking and the unknowing might brand as epitomizing "old-time" movies — a horrible phrase, and a meaningless one really. There have really never been such movies; there have only been bad movies and good movies, and an excess of maudlin sentimentality was as objectionable in the 20's as an excess of sex and brutality is today. "Spirit of the USA" has the kind of situations that suggest that kind of sentimentality, but never quite attain it. Mary Carr, that most lovely and noble of all mothers, being forced to go through the pillage of a Pork Farm in Ford's "Tobacco Road" seemed out-dated. "Spirit of the USA" is well played, well directed by the always under-rated Emory Johnson, neatly mounted and backed by some beautifully florid examples of the art of title-writing; if taken in the spirit in which it was made, it is an impressive and always enjoyable film. Certainly it packs in enough plot for three ordinary movies; the father-son-other brother conflict alone would have been (and often was) enough in itself for any Charlie Ray vehicle. But in addition, FBO offer...
some interesting sub-plots, some spectacular war-scenes, and even an exploding dam for the climax? There's some interesting writing too: the hero is all good, in the old tradition, the villains unscarcely wretched, but some of the in-between characters, the weak brother for example, are more realistically etched, and the whole production has a nice "feel" to it; the locations look right, the costumes remarkably accurate (so many pre-1918 stories filmed in the 20's fall down on this), the farm prosaically obvious and the settings both nostalgic and appropriate. Like most FBO films, it is a careful production in every way; it may have been inexpensive, but it never looks cheap. Adding most of all to the production sheen is the camerawork of Ross Fisher, who achieves some compositions and effects that Serow wouldn't have been ashamed of in a much bigger Griffith production. And incidentally, Fisher photographed eight other films for FBO that same year, including some Fred Thomson westerns.

INTERMISSION

"His Picture in the Papers" (Triangle-Fine Arts) Released: Feb. 13 1916; 5 reels; written by John Emerson and Anita Loos; directed by John Emerson; with Douglas Fairbanks, Loretta Blake, Erich von Stroheim, Homer Hunt, Clarence Handsides, Charles Butler.

"His Picture in the Papers" was the third of Fairbanks' 38 Triangle features; a tremendous improvement over the first two. It is one of the best of the entire group, and it is really quite astounding that the true Fairbanks personality and spirit should break through, so fully formed, after such an uncertain beginning. The story-line, and its cynical satire on the American craze for publicity, is so diverting that it is rather a pity that Doug didn't remake it a few years later, when his production unit had acquired more polish. But for all its occasional production shortcomings, it has a built-in head of steam in Doug's breezy and bouncy personality. The acrobatics are there in full measure - and some of the stunts are corny - but so is the enthusiasm, the pep, the grin, the refusal to take anything seriously. At one point Doug gets off a wonderful bit of comedy business built around the defiled stump of a man who, in the world could get away with such a routine today without being vilified for "sick humor"? (The silents of course, were full of basically sick humor - but it was humor propagated by far from "sick" comedians. The laughter of outrage that resulted was always healthy laughter, with no offense intended - or taken). "With Doug at the helm, "His Picture in the Papers" bounces along like dressed lightning. Most of it was shot here in New York, and there are some lovely and nostalgic views of old New York. There's some villainy of course - a secret society known as the Masulls -- and watch good old Erich von Stroheim pulling every dimwitted to grab attention. Outrageous sneers and grimaces aren't enough; he also utilizes a grim blank eye-patch, and one arm mysteriously encased in blank silk - presumably to hide some implied and hideous deformity!

The print is processed from an old 35mm original; the difficulties involved were considerable, and the results are not always of top quality. However, it is such a pleasure to be able to see it again that one can forgive much.

We'll be projecting it at the standard silent speed of 16 frames per second; even this seems a trifle fast at times. Heaven protect the poor audiences that are forced to see this one at sound speed.

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Our News Bulletin for April/May will be going out later this week. In the meantime, an urgent warning not to miss BLESSED EVENT at the New Yorker next Tuesday and Wednesday. We have been trying to get this film for the HIFF Society for the past eight years; without success. It's an absolute delight, a completely forgotten gem from '32 that is one of the very best fast-talking screwball satires the movies ever made. It's violent, sadistic and quite marvellous - with enough racial and other "dubious" humor to warrant its being severely hacked should it ever show up on tv. We looked at the New Yorker print, and can guarantee its completeness - even to Emma Dunn's demise. "Well, I'll be damned!"

Glad to report that GEORGE CANNON is both out of danger and out of hospital. He's back home, and hopes to be in circulation again soon. He sends his thanks to all the HIFF members who wrote him, sent cards, or visited him. His home address is 38 Fairview Road, Jersey City, for those who'd like to keep in touch.