A NOTICE, AN APOLOGY, AND A CLASSIC GOOF!

Film society programming is always a hazardous business, and in the past we've had the inevitable non-arrival print, or last-minute substitution, although I think that on the whole we've been afflicted with these things far less than most societies, and never on a really nerve-shattering, teeth-grinding basis. Tonight however does offer a goof that is, to say the least, unique.

Programming three months ahead as we do at present, we don't always have time to screen every print before the bulletins are mailed out. But if it's a print that we don't know, or from a new source, we always make sure that it's in our hands, and given a quick spot check for title and condition. So it was with "What No Man Knows". We were told by its owner that it was a good little film, and we checked it quickly on the rewind to ensure that it was in good physical shape, with all main and end titles etc. But the actual pre-screening only took place a couple of days before the show on this occasion, and we were only momentarily taken aback to find that it made little sense, and was totally out of sequence. The ending seemed to make sense, but nothing in between did. This happens quite a bit with old film, so we set to to re-edit it only to realize with steady growing horror that the more we got sense back into the body of the film, the more it became apparent that the entire climax was missing. Hasty enquiries for that missing reel produced the information that we had all there was! Somewhere along the line, someone faced with the same problem had decided to re-shuffle the reels to give it an odd "Back Street" ending, regardless of the main part of the rest of the film. All we can do alas, is show it in sequence, but not the ending! With a major film, obviously we would not dream of it. But the interest in "What No Man Knows" is obviously largely academic; no masterpiece, nor even an important example, our judgement of it is not going to be affected one way or the other by a missing climax. It is even reasonably satisfying as is, coming to a conclusion on a note of determination, if not solution. For the record, so that you'll know how it all winds up, it's a triangle plot with a shrewish wife, long-suffering husband, and loyal and understanding girl friend. Our print comes to an end where the friend (Clara of course) has just had her adopted child taken away by reformers, while her admirer is swearing with new determination that he will get a divorce and marry her. In the missing reel, the waylaid wife, who is also a kleptomaniac, succumbs to temptation again. Husband refuses the money that will somehow allow her to beat the rap when she is caught. She gives in, he gets the divorce, and there's a happy ending.

CLARA KIMBALL YOUNG

For a complete rundown on Clara Kimball Young's career, we recommend an article and index in the August 1961 issue of "Film in Review", and several follow-up letters in the October issue. While she is certainly a handsome woman and a pleasing performer, I must admit that I never understood why she was, at one time, such a big star. But the facts indicate that she was, and while tonight's film may not be among her best (I'm especially sorry that "Trilby" doesn't exist in 16mm) nevertheless they do offer a fairly reliable cross-section of both her talents and the emotional Greer Garson-Bette Davis type vehicles that were her forte. Like Henry B. Walthall, she mismanaged her own career tragically and had she made different decisions at key moments, and listened less to opportunist advisors, she might well have rivalled Norma Shearer in terms of boxoffice prominence in the 20's.

"THE OLD GUARD" (Vitagraph, 1912) Director: James Young
With Clara Kimball Young, Teft Johnson, James Young

A simple little romantic tale, directed by Clara's then-husband, James Young, "The Old Guard", though noticeably below Biograph standards, is quite a pleasing film. Brooklyn exteriors and solid-looking sets are surprisingly well matched and photographed to suggest the French locale.
"WHAT A CHANGE OF CLOTHES DID" (Vitagraph, 1912) Director: James Young
With Clara Kimball Young, Maurice Costello.

Although a wildly implausible yarn with the kind of plot coincidence so beloved in one-reelers of the period, this little romantic drama is a good vehicle for its two stars. Costello's profile well emphasized in some scenes, plays well, and the story certainly keeps the move. Recognizable locations include the banks of the Hudson, and the Flatbush Avenue Station of the L.I. Railroad.

"STRAIGHT FROM PARIS" (Equity, 1921) Produced and directed by Harry Garson; Story by Sada Cowan; original length: 5 reels; this print, 4 reels.
With Clara Kimball Young, Bertram Grassby, William Carlton, Thomas Jefferson, Clarissa Selwynne.

Independent films of this caliber were rarely put into 16mm., so for a record of them we are dependent on rare and fast-vanishing 35mm prints, and odd 16mm. made recently from them. Although missing about a reel in local footage because of deterioration and damage through the years, this recently made 16mm. comes from an original 35mm that is missing odd bits throughout, but no complete reels. Disjointed it may be, but substantially all of the story elements are intact. "Made, like Charge It" (which we showed last year) and "What No Man Knows" by Harry Garson, with Miss Young's nemesis in the early 20's (see the FIR article), it's the kind of silent film where one is acutely aware of that silence because of the lack of any kind of technique or really solid story values. One cliche follows another, and only Miss Young herself, and the snappy "End" title give it any real class, although it is certainly interesting enough as an example of grade "B" programmers of the period.

Intermission

"WHAT NO MAN KNOWS" (Equity, 1922, rel. 1922) Directed by Harry Garson; story by Sada Cowan; Camera: Sam Levenson; art director, Floyd Mueller; Original length: 6 reels. This print: 5 reels.
With Clara Kimball Young, Lowell Sherman, Dorothy Wallace, Dulcie Cooper, Wm. P. Carleton, Edward M. Kimball, Adolphe Lestina.

Made immediately after "Straight from Paris", this one is quite a good film by comparison. At least it isn't ashamed of its own corn and cliches, and plays for them all they are worth. The result is a film not unlike DeMille's "Manslaughter", and is a good deal less ponderous to boot. The characters and the titles are rich and full, with Clara sacrificing nobly in her best tradition, as a society do-gooder subtly referred to by her character as "Our Blessed Lady". Other do-gooders in the film however are straight out of "Intolerance". Lowell Sherman, so good the year before in "May Down East", tends to overact rather readily at times -- but mainly in too-long -held close-ups, so the fault is probably director Garson's as much as his. Curiously, he gets no inkling of all, and his name is pointedly omitted from an introductory title card for his character. Must be something that the trade papers of the day speculated on. "Film Daily" dismissed it as merely more of the same from Sada Cowan, who ground out Young vehicles non-stop. They also felt that the references to drinking, drugs and wild parties took it out of the family trade market, even though Clara's charity milk-fund was something of a redeeming feature! More to the point, they criticized the lack of cohesion in the opening reel, but throughout the cutting back and forth between two story-lines is done in a jumbled and pointless fashion. However, regardless of the missing reel which doesn't seem to hurt it too much -- except in terms of our own amazement -- it's an interesting little piece of minor film history, and one that isn't likely ever to see the light of day again.

"THE RETURN OF CHANDU" (Principal, 1934) A Serial directed by Bay Taylor, with Bela Lugosi, Karla Alba, Clara Kimball Young. EXCEPT
Except for an occasional lead in an independent quickie, or a minor support in a bigger film, Miss Young in the 30's was used mainly as a graceful matron, whose name still added a little stature to a cast. In this serial -- one of the better and more elaborate ones of the early 30's -- she is actually listed third in a large cast, but had little to do throughout. Signed "Oh!" when Bela Lugosi (as the hero) told her something revolting or depressing, or a more energetic "Oh!" when she was manhandled by cat-worshipping natives. These excerpts are typical, though she does have a few lines.

"THE FRONTIERSMEN" (Paramount, 1938) Dir: Lesley Selander. EXCEPT
One of three Hopalong Cassidy westerns in which she appeared, this was her last real film role, only guest spot in Monogram's "Mr. Celebrity" of a couple of years later remaining for her. In the 72 minute film, she was on screen for five scenes, of which this was the longest. It's hardly a dramatic way to wind up our compilation -- but then it was hardly a dramatic swansong, although since she was playing the sister of another old-timer, William S. Duncan, it was a graceful and appropriate one.