Those of us who love shorts inevitably find moviegone rather frustrating today. The major companies no longer produce shorts because they are unprofitable, and the days of being unexpectedly confronted with a 2-reeler comedy or a taut 1-reeler melodrama are gone for ever. Even worse than this is the kind of short one too often encounters in the art theatre. It is a sentimental, semi-amateur home product, but not offensively dull and pretentious. The audience sits in stony silence, neither knowing nor caring whether it is good or bad. Usually there is a round of applause at the end, partly because it is over, more usually because the audience just assumes that to deserve a place on an art house bill it must have ample (if hidden) merits. Of course, not all of the short films turned out by the assembly lines of the 20's and 30's were or could hope to be good, but what an astonishing variety of them there were, what a valuable training ground they provided for directors, writers and actors, and in the majority of them, they had given us. Some day perhaps a full-scale historical study of the short film will remind us all just how much craft was involved. In the meantime, all we can do at the Huff is - once in a while - to arrange a program such as tonight's. Since shorts were never designed as more than appetizers, a too generous sampling would be a mistake, and we hope we've hit a happy medium in terms of quantity and variety. The stress is on comedy, with side journeys into melodrama, sentiment and travelogue. All are superb origional prints, many of them toned, and none of them have been shown at the Huff before. Past experience has shown us that such programs are never "boxoffice" - indeed, we even have one member so fanatically opposed to shorts that he even manages to arrive late and avoid them, when they precede a feature, although I think (and hope) that he is in a minority camp. However, after last week we hardly need to worry about "boxoffice" this evening - and we hope that all of you who are here share our enthusiasm for this rich little cache of one and two-reelers.

"THE TIN GHOST" (Educational, 1926) A Mermaid Comedy, produced by Jack White
Director: Stephen Roberts; camera: Dwight Warren; two reels
With Lige Conley, Estelle Bradley, Otto Fries, Jack Lloyd, Phil Dunham.

Lige Conley - who slightly resembles an un-made-up Chaplin - was hardly a major comic. His comedies tended to be very derivative, with gags often copied openly from Keaton. Like Larry Semon, he concentrated on speed and slapstick, and a pattern which rarely varied, including a stress on scared Negro humor and rather unfunny subtleties. But his films were fast and fairly elaborate, with more good gags than bad ones, and a maximum use of Hollywood exteriors for chase scenes involving autos, streetcars and locomotives. This film, which is a kind of re-working of Ben Turpin's "A Clever Dummy", is a typical Conley subject, directed as many of them were by Stephen Roberts, who is better remembered for "Star of Midnight" and other sophisticated films of the 30's.

"THE YOUNG PAINTER" (Triart Productions for Hodkinson release, 1922)
Directed by Herbert Blaché; Art Director, LeJaren A. Hiller; Camera, Bad Van Buren; Scenaror, Arthur W. Dreve;
With: Mary Astor, Pierre Gendron, Walter Petrul, Margaret Foster, Knox Kincaid.

This was one of a series of Mary Astor 2-reelers all purporting to deal with the creation of great works of art, and the influence of the masters on modern painters. For the most part they were naive little films, put together like paintings, often with superb lighting, composition and filtered closeups, but little real sense of drama or cinema. LeJaren A. Hiller, who worked on most of them, was reputedly disillusioned when his work wasn't fully appreciated, and when business promises were broken, and he committed suicide. "The Young Painter" has a rather pointless little story, and the one portrait that its artist-hero manages to paint is so inept and sinister that one doubts his spiritual kinship with Rembrandt, but with its charming East Coast locations, meticulous lighting and pleasing pink tint, it is visually a most appealing trifle.

"THE LION AND THE SOUSE" (Mack Sennett-Pathe, 1924) Director: Not stated
With Charlotte Mineau, Vernon Dent, Andy Clyde, Leo Suiki, Sid Smith, Numa the Lion. One reel.

Like many Sennets of its period, "The Lion and the Souse" is totally disorgan-
The exact date and production details on this utterly charming little short are unknown, which is a pity, as one would like to know a great deal more about it. It's one of the simplest and most appealing little travelogues I've ever seen, less self-conscious than the not dissimilar shorts that Robert Bruce was making in America. Somehow, the scenery seems to unfold itself lazily before one, and there is no attempt made in with information, or bowl them over with scenic and historic landmarks or highpoints. Actually it's gentle and unadorned, typical of the lovely English countryside, but shot with a taste, selection and appreciation of its beauty rare in this kind of film. Many of the images have the effortless yet classic beauty of a Griffith scene. It's difficult to place the geography involved, but the locations would seem to be the downs of Hampshire and Dorset, and the New Forest. None of this area has changed in the least, and every frame of the film could equally well have been shot last year -- hence, our hesitation about its date, although the early 20's seems a reasonable guess. The gipsies are clearly actors employed for the day, but this little deception hardly seems to matter in such a lovely little work.

TELL 'EM NOTHING (Hal Roach-Fathe, 1926) Director: Leo McCarthy; supervised by F. Richard Jones; Two reels. With Charley Chase, Vivian Oakland, Gertrude Astor, Harvey Clark.

Released late in 26, this was one of the last of the Pathé Roach comedies before he changed over to Metro. Although only an average Chase, his sprightly and debonair personality comes through as always, and he makes the very most of both situational and sight gag humor. Without him, this might well seem a rather tedious fare into the marital-misunderstanding comedy done to death in both the late 20's by Roach and Sennett, and again in the forties by Leon Errol. But with Chase, everything springs to life - the cliche seems to sparkle, and the chuckle becomes a guffaw. It's also a Chase that we've never come across before, and these days discovering a "new" Charlie Chase is almost as exciting as knocking off the odd unseen Laurel & Hardy.

ROMANY LOVE (Tiffany, 1932) Produced by Howard C. Brown and Curtis F. Nagel; Directed by Bradley Parker; story by O.F. Pratt; Camera: Palmer Miller; In Technicolor; one reel. With Duncan Renaldo, June O'Day, Bradley Parker.

As an example of early 2-color Technicolor, this reel has a certain academic interest; as a piece of film-making, it is yet another reminder of how films could go downhill with the passing years, for it is an incredibly naive and old-fashioned work compared with the Hepworth "Day with the Gipsies" of some ten years earlier! Here we're back with gipsies who romantically play the fiddle, pull knives on the slightest provocation, and kidnap babies for a few pennies! Perhaps as a talkie, it might have had some slight additional merit, but one would think that that extra dimension of realism would shatter whatever Biograph-era appeal it presently has. As a silent (titled) print of a talkie, it seems to suffer too much however. The color is admittedly sub-standard, but this is probably due to the difficulties of printing 16mm color in those days, as certainly the 2-color Technicolor system as such needs no apologies. Curiously director and villain Bradley Parker turns out to be none other than Furnell Pratt - certainly well-known under that name in the 30's - and it is not unreasonable to assume that screen-writer O.F. Pratt may also be the same gentleman! As a writer-director, Pratt was a superb character actor in films like "Five Star Final".

"THE SKY RANGER" (Educational, 1928) Directed by Harry Joe Brown; A Charles Rogers-Harry Brown production; Scenario by Thomas Burtis; Ast. Director, Bruce Mitchell; Camera: Frank H. Good; Two reels. With Reed Howes, Tom Santachi, Roy Stewart, Harjorie Daw, Henry Barrows, Bobby Dunn, Buck Black.

2-reel westerns, mysteries and actioners were extremely popular in the 20's - surprisingly so considering how the "B" market was full of 5-reelers of the
case 11k. Educational, despite its unprepossessing trade name - and its later deplorable reputation for unfunny talkie comedies - maintained a surprisingly high standard in all its silent comedies and actioners, and "The Sky Ranger" is a good example of the neat and well-done melodramas that they turned out so effortlessly. The Border Patrol, Hollywood would have you believe, was a kind of glamorous home-front Lafayette Escadrille, devoid of paper work and routine. Here they swing into action against that old menace of the 20's and 30's, the smuggling of Chinese into the States.

While this particular film is missing one of the favorite cliches of the period -- the wholesale dumping of coolies through a trap-door in the plane's floor -- it has most of the other trappings of the genre, with stunt transfers from plane to plane, and similar high-jinks. The stunt episodes are extremely well done, cunningly mixed in with the real thing, and Reed Howes managing a lot of the action without doubles. Tom Santoschi was an ideal villain for this sort of thing, of course, but some of the other "stars" are clearly along for the ride, a couple of hours before the cameras justify the use of their names. Roy Stewart, billed third, is little more than an extra in odd scenes, while Marjorie Daw - once a Fairbanks leading lady - likewise has little to do. Perhaps the film's greatest asset is the smooth and crystal-clear camerawork of Frank Good, one of the finest - and most unsung - of all Hollywood cameramen, with a record of really superb camerawork in dozens of good "B" films like "When a Man's a Man."

"SWORD POINTS" (Educational, 1928) Director: Mark Sandrich; camera: Jay Turner; Two reels
With Lupino Lane and Wallace Lupino.

I deliberately want to say almost nothing about the contents of this film - other than that it is a clever and acrobatic spoof of Fairbanks - as the gags are all so fresh that the joy of discovering them is one of the film's greatest pleasures. Lupino Lane's cherubic personality, his skilful acrobatics and the really elaborate production values he gave all of his films, all combined to make his comedies for Educational among the best and most reliable on the market. We've run several of this society in the past, "Hollywoodland" and "Monte of the Mounted" being perhaps the best. We've never yet come across a poor Lane comedy, only some that weren't quite as good as the others. "Sword Points," however, is a standout, and the best Lane we've come across, scoring not only on its own merits as a comedy, but also as one of the best of that over-worked silent school - the burlesque of a current popular movie. (What a pleasure it would be though, to have Lupino Lane and Stan Laurel with us today, burlesqueing "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?", "Suddenly Last Summer" and "Darling"!)

Post-Script: In our current Bulletin, and in last week's notes, we referred to "The Young Painter" as starring Reginald Denny with Mary Astor. This was an unfortunate slip of the type-writer; he is co-starred with Astor, however in "The Beggar Maid", another in the same series.

Wm. K. Everson