Announcements:

Our showing of the Biograph one-reeler "The Lesser Evil" seems to be cursed; it's announced showing a few weeks back had to be cancelled because of the non-return of the print from England; now it has been returned, but is tied up in customs with other material, and delivery will still take a little time. We did show it once before, some eight years ago, so old-timers among you know it exists! Our apologies for another delay, and we'll get to it shortly. For today, we've added a Semnnett in its place.

The showing of "The Cruise of the Jasper B" on February 28th has had to be postponed by one week, and will now take place on March 7th. There will be a new 3-month schedule mailed well before that, however, so there will be official notification of the change. Incidentally, despite its reputation, we know from experience that this kind of silent does but a small crowd, and the rental is sufficiently high that we know that particular show will lose money. This doesn't bother us, as other shows will carry it. We mention it only because it's the kind of show it would be a luxury to repeat in another five years, so if you have any interest at all in the film, we urge that you catch it on the 7th.

Finally, a "warning" that next week's program is primarily of academic interest. "Thank" is a museum piece, though often very funny; this may well be its American premiere, and it may also be your introduction to the very popular British stage and screen team of Tom Walls, Robertson Hare and Ralph Lynn. But its appeal is more historic than hilarious. Despite being and in many ways, "Atoll K" is an under-rated film; the initial theatrical release was quite cut, and who knows what kind of version you saw on tv. At 10 reels, this print is clearly complete, and should be seen by Laurel and Hardy admirers.

Good friends of Gerald MacDonald will be sorry to hear that he is in hospital for surgery that is apparently not major, but is nevertheless irksome. Hopefully he has a doctor like Jean Negulesco in those Dionne Quins films, and not like Charles Coburn in 'King's Row'. Well-wishers who would like to send him cards, or purchases of hard-boiled eggs and nuts, can write him c/o University Hospital, 560 First Avenue, New York City.

"DAYS OF '49" (Thomas Ince-Kay Bee, 1913) Director: Not stated; scenario by Richard Spencer; one reel

With Tom Chatterton, Mildred Harris.

One of the smaller-scale Ince frontier dramas, "Days of '49" is nevertheless quite a powerful little film, though more straightforward and predictable in its plotting than usual with Ince. The exteriors are very well used, and the framing often quite lovely — especially one shot of an Indian spying on a wagon train from the top of a hill.

"QUILL'S BACKWARD WAY" (Keystone, 1915) Produced by Mack Sennett; one reel

With Syd Chaplin, Phyllis Allen. (This reissue print from the 20's retitled "Syd's Backward Ways").

The fifth of six "Quills" concludes that Syd Chaplin made for Sennett between December of '14 and May of '15, this is definitely a notch above the average early Sennetts. It moves less frenetically, and more time is devoted to individual gags than usual. Syd Chaplin's costume and makeup seems a deliberate attempt to keep him as far away as possible from any comparison with half-brother Charlie, but in many scenes particularly the flirtatious episodes, and Syd's by-play with a walking stick — the echoes intrude anyway.

- Intermission -

"MERRY GO ROUND" (Universal, 1928) Directed by Ernst von Stroheim and Rupert Julian; original story and screenplay by Stroheim; settings by Richard Day and Stroheim; camera: William Daniels and Ben Reynolds; 9 reels

The Cast: Norman Kerry (Count Franz Maximillian von Hohensegg); Mary Philbin (Agnes Urban); Cesare Daniava (Sylvester Urban); Edith Yorke (Ursula Urban); George Hackathorne (Bartholomew Graber); George Siegmann (Schatzi Huber); Dale Fuller (Mariska Huber); Billiam Sylvester (Aurora Rosarelli); Scottimoode Aitken (Minister of War); Dorothy Wallace (Kontessa Gizella von Steinbueuck); Al Mundson (Neposuck Narvil); Albert Conti (Rudy, Baron von Leichtsim); Charles King (Mick, Baron von Deborwart); Panwick Oliver (Prince Eitel Hochgebut); Sidney Bracey (Gizella's groom); Anton Vaverka (Emperor Franz Josef); Mande George (Madame Elvire); Helen Bronneau (Jane); Jane Sherman (Marie);
and Betty Morrissy in a bit role.

MERRY GO ROUND was the first of von Stroheim's loosely-related Austrian "trilogy", its successors being THE MERRY WIDOW (MG M) and THE WEDDING MARCH (Paramount). It was also the first film on which he encountered serious front-office opposition, to the extent of being fired from its production. Initially, von Stroheim's concept was that of a costume opus, but it had certainly created a storm of controversy and was subject to heavy post-production cutting and censorship; but its production course ran relatively smoothly and since it returned a handsome profit to Universal, Stroheim's much touted extravagance on that occasion had been readily forgiven, and even exploited. Stroheim himself repudiated the released version of MERRY GO ROUND and claimed that but a fraction of it was actually directed by him. However, it should be remembered that Stroheim regarded any tempering as "mutilation", and his understanding of the boundaries of his art was usually far more acute than his censors. For example, "The Groom", usually assumed to be "Greed" yet it is a matter of record that it was screamed for at least twice in the last ten years of his life, so his denunciations can never be taken too seriously. All right, one asks, how much of the film did he direct? It's easy enough to point to a powerful bit of cinema or a key scene and exclaim "Aha! Stroheim"; just as easy (if unfair) to point to a dull scene and blame Julian. Julian was much like Stroheim in temperament, arrogant and an extrovert - but considerably unlike him in talent. Most of his films, both silent and sound, were but routine, competent programmers. His biggest hit, "The Phantom of the Opera", could hardly miss with Chaney, that story and those sets. Together those elements successfully hid the lack of a directorial style, and made us forget what a Tourneur or a Whale could have done with it. Julian's one really interesting film, "Walking Back", denied him a director's credit - and one suspects that it may have been subject to the same kind of doctoring as "Merry Go Round". Just as Stroheim was quit of repudiating the film, so was Julian quick to claim most of the credit. Their stories fit together neatly and yet... Perhaps it's only academic anyway. Conceived by the concept was Stroheim's, the story was his (overlapping not only into his other films but also into his later novel "Peppirle") and the fantastically sumptuous sets and overall production design were his. Anything that Julian did must automatically have been influenced by Stroheim's groundwork. However, while Stroheim's material was often trite and dull, his filmic handling of it never was; I don't think there can be much argument against "padding" those long and tedious garden love scenes to Mr. Julian.

If less exotic, "Merry Go Round" is still probably a better picture than the superficially dull "The Merry Widow", but in retrospect, and with the NY Film Festival's revival of "The Wedding March" now gratefully under our belts, it can be seen to have been but a dry-run for that superlative. Perhaps in a way we can thank Irving Thalberg for his cavalier treatment of Stroheim; had he been given the freedom to make "Merry Go Round" the way he wanted to he'd have had no reason to want to make "The Wedding March". And that film, half-a-decade later, in probably the finest and most sophisticated work that Stroheim ever made, "Greed" notwithstanding.

Much of "Merry Go Round" is hard to take seriously, least of all the successive disasters befalling Cesare Gravina; after a couple of false ones, his final real death is the least convincing of all! Indeed, not all of it was intended to be taken too seriously, and many of the character names suggest allusions for W.C. Fields. Yet with its Cinderellas and Princes, it seems far more old-fashioned than any of the films of Griffith, who was forever being attacked for his "Victorianism" and "sentimentality"; while Stroheim's name was held aloft as the weaver of fairy-tales, "Merry Go Round", for all of its lack of discipline has some touching moments and many extremely powerful dramatic and melodramatic ones. This particular print has substantially more of the bordello orgy than 1922 audiences got to see, but otherwise corresponds to the original release prints - which means that very little of the illusit love affair between the Countess and her groom remains, and certainly none of the seduction in the stables. When we last rumbled the film some eight or nine years ago we had the benefit of a fine and handsome original print; now alas much shrunk and cut to replace the home of old prints. Today's print however (the same one that we leased to the New Yorker for showing in 1951, the occasion of its last local showing) is an excellent-quality copy of that original print. One final note in passing: old favorite Albert Conti, whose first film this was, died last week. In recent years, no longer an actor, he had been with the costume dept. at MGM.

- William K. Everson -