Although we’ve run this before, it seemed such an ideal companion piece to Doug’s “The Three Musketeers,” and thus we offer no apologies for reviving it before our usual seven-year gap is up. Although a little too tongue-in-cheek, and inclined to ramble (somewhat critically) into the private lives of Fairbanks sr. and Errol Flynn, it is a good and enjoyable roundup of swashbuckling highlights, both silent and sound, with the emphasis properly on Doug. Errol was — and of course, Basil — Joseph Cotten’s narration sounds rather bored, and as always in this series there are bad gaps in footage and distortions in terms of film history. Some mediocre Sam Katzman footage is included at the expense of more important material, and MGM is ignored completely. Nevertheless, it is an enjoyable and well-put-together frolic. Since we are planning a show on talkie swashbucklers this Winter, we can make up then for some of the oversights — particularly one of the best (and most overlooked) of the post-40’s swashbucklers, Doug jr.’s “The O’Prym,” photographed by his dad’s favorite cameraman Arthur Edeson, and with some superb stunt sequences organized and performed by David Sharpe.

Incredibly, it is just four days short of nine years since we last ran this film, so a revival is certainly due. After the fast-paced compilation which precedes it, its turgid qualities may, I’m afraid, seem even more marked. Frankly it is a rather ponderous film. It contains plenty of action, and at eight reels there would have been no cause for complaint; at twelve, there was just too much — and stretches between the duels and chases. Furthermore, the scriptwriting is often at fault. To follow one fine duel sequence with another, almost immediately, seems very poor pacing. (This was one of the few films among Doug’s specials that he didn’t write himself; Edward Knoblock, more of the theatre than the cinema, did the screenplay with both eyes reverently on Dumas, and with too little regard either for the screen or Doug’s sense of humor.) Not that “The Three Musketeers” is either bad or uninteresting. Far from it. But, Nick, a dullish director, handles the film in a rather primitive fashion with a minimum of closeups and a penchant for the overacting of the silent era — sometimes in awe of his new-found status as impresario and too, still very much under the influence of Griffith’s cutting and structural patterns, gives us the old ingratiating Doug only in rare moments. The film is overloaded with titles, and it is two reels before Doug makes his entrance — not with a leap and a grin, but sitting on the floor listening to someone talk! And the film finishes on a title, rather than on Doug. Such ungrateful criticism can be made only because earlier — and later — Doug gave us so much more lightness and grace. This was certainly his most ponderous period. But withal, the film is extremely handsome and enjoyable. The sets are striking and elaborate. Arthur Edeson’s camerawork first-rate of the 30’s, with the meticulously miscast Walter Abel playing D’Artagnan like a divorce-court lawyer. (What a pity that the talkies never gave us Doug himself pitted against that superb Richelieu, George Arliss!) Tonight’s print is the same one that we played nine years ago, although two scenes, missing then, have since been tracked down and inserted. One of these is still missing its titles however: Richelieu has trapped D’Artagnan, and asks what would be his wish if he were about to die. D’Artagnan replies that he’d write the history of France. Otherwise the print is in good shape. Unfortunately the running time markings are in the print, but they are brief and disappear just about the time that some of you will be looking around irately at the projectionist.

--- K. Eversen ---