October 22, 1968
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"THE SANDS OF DEE" (Biograph, 1912) Dir: D.W. Griffith; Camera: G.W. Bitzer; I rew.
With Mae Marsh, Bobby Barron, Charles Mallees, Grace Henderson, Lillian Arvidson

For years, all that we knew of "The Sands of Dee" was the tantalising glimpse used at the beginning of "The Spiral Staircase" – the movie showing in the nickelodeon while we were running the reel of the movie under review, "Griffith-Biograph, and it is in its beauty showing through even this rather flickery print made from a Library of Congress negative from an old paper print. Based on the poem by Charles Kingsley, it is far more successful in capturing the poetic quality of the original than was Griffith's earlier "Enoch Arden". The seascapes, which Griffith also utilized so well that same year in "Fisher Folk", "A Mender of Nets" and "Lines of White on a Sullen Sea", are beautifully composed and shot, and the interior lighting is quite fine too. How stunning this must look in 35mm!

"THE INVADERS" (Thomas Ince-Kay Bee, 1912) Directed by Francis Ford; 2 reels
With Francis Ford, Ethel Grandin, J. Barney Sherry, Ann Little, Art Acord, William Eagleshirt.

Like so many interim films, this odd "featurette" lacks the tautness of some of the Ince one and two reelers, and doesn't really need the added length. Its story isn't strong enough to hold the only loosely related characters together, and the action sequences, so elaborately and strongly done, did seem prolonged, almost as though Ince was determined to use every foot shot. It's also a trifle disjointed and inconsistent in style, the earlier portions especially suffering from a lack of dialogue titles and a plethora of expository ones. However, like all Ince westerns, it's a rugged and realistic little film with some quite strong images (the corpses after a massacre, for instance) and finely composed panoramas of the Hollywood hills in the Santa Ynez area – entirely devoid of the hilltop houses and tv aerials that blanket them later.

"D'ARTAGNAN" (Triangle, 1915; released 1916) Directed by Thomas H. Ince
Scenario by Ince and J.G. Hawks; 5 reels
With Orrin Johnson (D'Artagnan); Dorothy Dalton (The Queen); Walt Whitman (Athos); Sheel Mitchell (Constance); Louise Claum (Lady de Winter); George Fisher (The King); Arthur Maude (De Rochefort); J.P. Lockney (Bonacieux); Harvey Clark (Duke of Buckingham); Arthur Hollingsworth (Athos)

Made in 1915, and then reissued in 1920 to try to cash in on Fairbanks' "Three Musketeers", this Ince film unavoidably has two strikes against it to begin with. Any late 1915 film inevitably has to suffer by comparison with "The Birth of a Nation", and any D'Artagnan equally inevitably falls short of Doug's. Were this a year earlier and "The Prisoner of Zenda", one might feel quite charitably disposed towards it; as it is, through no fault of its own, the competition is such that it automatically becomes rather a straightforward little work, interesting mainly from an historical point of view as an early Ince feature.

Admittedly, it doesn't display a tremendous amount of imagination. It is quite cheaply made, and one is inclined to dispute Ince's claimed budget of $15,000 since he made quite elaborate little two-reelers at this time for as little as $1500! The California locales are quite cunningly chosen for their rural resemblance to France, and standing sets - or newly constructed ones - are quite well disguised. But even there there are shortcomings and anachronisms, much as a very modern-looking brick building. True, the plot is over-familiar today - like "Flashes", it was rarely varied in any of its screen versions - so it's hardly fair to criticise it for being so straightforward and lacking in surprises. But it does seem rather too casually constructed; the three Musketeers remain shadowy figures, and there's a disappointing lack of conflict between D'Artagnan and a central villain. The titles are occasionally somewhat ungrammatical, and also inconsistent - being redone for the release, others not. But, regardless, it moves - the pace is quick, and there's quite a bit of action, even though it lacks the verve that D'Artagnan brought to it. However, 1915 audiences, not at all saturated by swashbucklers, should have been quite happy with it. Almost all of the Ince players are there (though why no Robert McKim as DeRochefort!), and the film has one real bit of dramatic novelty in that Cardinal Richelieu is lecherously on the make for his Queen, a state of affairs that Nigel de Brulier, George Arliss and the Legion of Decency would never have contemnated in later years!

William K. Everson