Tuesday next, May 6th: "THE GIRL IN THE PULLMAN" (DeMille Corp-1927, directed by Eric C. Kenton, with Marie Prevost, Harrison Ford, Franklin Pangborn; and a group of silent comedy shorts new to the Huff: Monte Bank's, Ralph Dixon; 7 reels.)

April 29, 1969

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"I MARRIED ADVENTURE" (Columbia, 1940) Producer: Osa Johnson Camera: Martin & Osa Johnson; narration by Don Clark and Albert Dryfus, spoken by Jim Bannon; editor, Ralph Dixon. 7 reels.

This compilation of the best Martin and Osa Johnson travel and exploration footage, put together from their silent and sound films over a 20-year period, is excellent and fascinating stuff, though also typical of the over-melodramatic and hokkied-up approach to this kind of fare so prevalent in the 30's. In the manner of Paul Hoeffler's earlier films ("Leopard Men of Africa" etc.) it re-stages many moments of orisain (Martin's bout with jungle fever during a tropical rainstorm), intercuts new studio reaction shots with authentic old footage (causing Osa to age 20 years from shot to shot at times), introduces well-known public figures (but has them played by unbilled bit players) and uses now-obvious back projection to build thrill sequences. The studio shots are quite obvious, the hokey narration almost serial-like; and yet in the 30's, audiences were more trusting, and most of them fell for it. Not that it is a "fake" film; most of the footage is obviously the real thing, and some moments, such as Osa dropping a charging rhino, have real thrills. It's just a pity that with 90% of the footage so genuine and authentic, it's a pity that the other 10% is there at all, to raise any doubts. Also, Osa seems to have stowed most of her late husband's glory, just as Irene Castle did with Vormac, and it isn't always a pleasant sight to watch her usurp so much of the limelight. But when all these things are taken into consideration, that great footage still remains, and even a much of it is now familiar, it's among the best such footage ever shot. We're not likely to see many more of these films; I notice that even the current "African Expedition" is taken to task in the last Sunday Times for its "racist" overtones!

--- intermission ---

"THE TURN OF THE TIDE" (British National Films-Gaumont British release, 1935) Directed by Norman Walker; screenplay by J. Dugdale Peach from the novel "Three Weeks" by Peploe; Leo Walsmey; Camera: Franz Planer; Music by Arthur Benjamin; 8 reels.

Together with Michael Powell's "The Edge of the World", "The Turn of the Tide" was one of the best of a small group of British movies of the 30's that took rugged land and sea scapes, simple fish folk, uneventful stories, and came up with results far superior to the often less acclaimed) Flaherty's in "Man of Aran".

"The Turn of the Tide" is probably the best film of its director, Norman Walker, who made a number of other interesting "little" pictures, some very bad big ones, graduated to producer status, and finally became an executive. It also marked J. Arthur Rank's entry into the movie business; he financed it (with money from his flour mills and the Methodist church) although taking no production credit. It's a charming, simple, often quite lyrical film, relatively unknown in this country where it had no theatrical distribution, but did get some limited exposure on tv. Its main asset is its very real sense of place and people; there is one basic fishing village set, done in the studio, but everything else is done on location. There isn't a process plate in the entire film, and while there are occasionally non-catching inserts (as in the storm scenes), there's nothing phoney about any of it. Even the closeups in dialogue and romantic scenes are done on the spot, while Franz Planer - Opuls' favorite cameraman - gives the film a flair for light that is quite unexpected. Considering the obvious cheesiness of the budget, I'm sure that the powers in charge couldn't have been aware of his intention to place camera tracks all along the beach and through the woods; but the fluidity of movement and lyricism of style more than justifies the expense. All the film really lacks is showmanship; the ending is satisfying but mild, and one wonders why a little poetic license wasn't used in moving the stunning storm sequence from the beginning of the film, to its end. Geraldine Fitzgerald is quite lovely as the heroine, and Niall MacGinnis - well before the effective villainy of his "Curse of the Demon" days - is good too in his then standard "simple fisherman" role.

Relatively unknown in America, and it opened in London at the Studio, Cowan ran counter with the Amabella-Bayer "Eye of the Battle" and Disney's "Three Little Kittens" - a marvellous bill that I saw in 1935 at a tender age, and have never forgotten. A totally unimportant aside: having been impressed by the film, I tried to borrow its source novel ("Three Fevers" from the public library. But a helpful Irene Handley-type Cockney librarian (only a temporary replacement I hope) told me I'd mixed the titles up, and what I really wanted was "The Four Fevers" by A.E.W. Mason!

Wm. K. Everson