Tuesday next, May 20th: Two rare late-'20's British silents, in what is probably their final. And last and only U.S. exposure: "VERY NEARLY A LADY", an off-beat jazz-age romance with Mabel Poulsen; and "THE KOLLING ROAD", a sea melodrama with Carlyle Blackwell and A.V. Brabbee.

Note: last week's unidentified Sennett silent, titled only "Racing Hearts & Chasing Cops", has been tracked down by Andy McKay; it's "The Iron Mag" (1925).

May 11 1969

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"ALL THAT MONEY CAN BUY" (Rko Radio, 1941) (Produced and previewed under the title "Here Is a Man"; later reissued as "The Devil and Daniel Webster") Produced and directed by William Dieterle; Associate Producer, Charles L. Clett; Screenplay by Dan Totheroh and Stephen Vincent Benét from Benét's original short story "The Devil and Daniel Webster"; Camera: Joseph August; Music: Bernard Herrmann; Special Effects, Van Nest Polglase; editor, Robert Wise; 6 reels.

With Edward Arnold, Walter Huston, James Craig, Anne Shirley, Simone Simon, Gene Lockhart, John Qualen, Jeff Corey, Tom Padden, H.B. Warner, Frank Conlan, Lindy Wade, George Cleveland.

As most of you (I hope) know from our warnings over the past three weeks, our print of this film tonight is of the edited version. Our original, complete print suffered a unique (and I pray not widespread) form of decomposition, in that the sound track area has undergone some form of internal hypo, and the track is now too low to be heard. This print, at one time in fine condition, had become in quality, and I was given it a preliminary check through, subsequent to the printing of the last Huff schedule, that this state of affairs was discovered. Attempts to uncover another complete print proved unsuccessful, and it seemed better to show the shorter print than to just cancel the program. I've asked Ed Connor, who is especially familiar with the film, to outline the cuts, and his remarks are appended below. Any cuts in such an outstanding film are to be deplored of course, but if the film had to be cut, then it has been done well and with no obvious gaps in continuity. The real tragedy of this film is that it was passed out by the audience. It is astonishing, since they are inured to that, but that the original negative (now owned by independent producer W.R. Frank) has been cut, so all new prints from now on will be of this shortened version. It's to be hoped that the archives are taking good care of their complete copies.

"All that Money Can Buy" is that rare creation, a film that deliberately sets out to be a prestige "Art" production, and succeeds not only in that aim, but in being a warm, human and exciting film as well. Too many such efforts turn out like Ford's "The Fugitive" to be sold, aloof, technically and stylistically interesting, but no more. Perhaps only "Sunrise" and "Citizen Kane" pulled the trick off totally, but "All That Money Can Buy" is a worthy runner-up. True to tradition of course, it was a critical success (although a surprising choice for the Radio City Music Hall) but a financial failure. In England, where the three major circuits (and two or three smaller ones) were, then at least, often willing to take a chance on off-beat material, it had no circuit release at all, despite rave reviews, and was a very difficult film to catch. Its last commercial exhibition in this country was in 1951 or 52, when the now extinct Beverly Theatre on 3rd Avenue gave it a brief run.

Without minimising his biographical films at Warners, or the astonishingly varied and often quite excellent films that he made in such profusion in his early talkie days at Warners and Fox, "All That Money Can Buy" is probably Dieterle's best American film, and certainly his most ambitious. Clearly he was hoping that it would follow up, the far more commercial "Syncopation", would establish him in a position of artistic autonomy at Rko paralleling that of Orson Welles. Alas, disappointing boxoffice returns from both producer-directors soon shattered that dream. Thereafter Dieterle was to concentrate on big, "safe" potlucks - star vehicles, comedies, melodramas, thrillers - many of them quite interesting, but none of them fulfilling the potential he suggested in his films of 1931-1942. The permanent values of "All That..."/"The Devil..." can readily be appreciated by comparing it with the not altogether dis-similar and roughly contemporary British film, "Stairway to Heaven" - which created much more of which today's critics, if more fascinated by Powell-Pressburger cinematic self-indulgences, Dieterle's film however insists that story and style come first, and the personalities of crew and stars are all successfully subordinated; indeed, originally, the credits came at the end of the film, and consisted merely of a list of personnel - stars and technicians - without any indication as to what they did, and merely the overall wrap-up credit "All collaborated on the picture". Dieterle obviously remembered a great deal from his German films of the 20's, and the film does contain much of the best of the silent German fantasies - but it also contains pace and sardonic wit; two qualities usually rather spectacularly absent from its German predecessors. It is superbly photographed by Joseph August, one of the favorite cameramen of Bill Hart and John Ford, and who rarely had the opportunity to work on bizarre fantasy like this.
prologue, establishing the troubled family (poverty, the father going off to war, an ill neighbor) and Shirley's mildly bad-tempered and selfish nature -- plus of course the mother's reference to the Blue Bird of Happiness, a phrase that Shirley doesn't understand. The film now starts with its dream sequence -- originally about 7 minutes in - and apart from seeming rather abrupt, with no establishment of the children, seems to make sense. The rest of the film has not been tampered with, but the closing scenes contain lines of dialogue which obviously refer back to the cut prologue.

The cut was presumably made to avoid the complication of making up 16mm tv prints in black-and-white and color, to preclude having to explain to audiences why a color film starts off in b/w, and probably also because Shirley's less-than-admirable qualities in the opening reel might tempt disillusioned parents or children to switch to another channel -- and another sponsor. While the cut obviously upsets the dramatic balance of the film, it was primarily establishing material; as long as one knows that it was there, one can enjoy the rest of the film, which is uncut, without any problems.

Quite incidentally, the film is beautifully cast, though one might quibble at the rather sexy Goldwyn-Girl type Good Fairy. But then Hollywood has always felt that it had to cater to Daddy as well as Junior when presenting fairies and "good" ghosts — witness also the bosomy Christmas ghost in MGM's "A Christmas Carol"!

Wm. K. Everson