Monday next, Dec. 22nd: "Dante's Inferno" (1935) with Spencer Tracy, Claire Trevor, Henry B. Walthall, Rita Hayworth; and "Jimmy and Sally" (1933) with Claire Trevor, James Dunn.

December 15 1969

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

A Program of Schoolboy Adventure

"The Country Beyond" (20th Century Fox, 1935) Directed by Eugene Forde
Producer: Sol Wurtzel; screenplay by Lamar Trotti and Adele Commandini from the novel by James Oliver Curwood; Camera, Barney McGill; 7 reels
With Rochelle Hudson, Paul Kelly, Robert Kent, Alan Hale, Alan Dinehart, Andrew Tomes, Claudia Coleman, Matt McHugh, Paul McVey, Holmes Herbert, Jack Mulhall, Creighton Hale, Pat O'Malley, Harry Stubbins, Charles Stevens, Miles Welch and the dogs Buck and Wolf.

"The Country Beyond" is one of those curios that Hiffmans are occasionally afflicted with -- a film which I enjoyed as a child, find still exercises much the same appeal, and promptly feel inspired to share with others. While such nostalgia-motivated booking can sometimes run amok in the case of obscure little British movies, I don't think anybody will find genuine cause for complaint with this film! Obviously it is no classic, nor even as good an actor as I remember -- but Rochelle Hudson looks even better now than she did then. She holds up extremely well. It's easy to see why it exercised such great child appeal: The Mountains and the extensive location work in the snow country make it colorful to look at, the story line is simple yet quite strong, and the menace is presented in rather more human terms than usual, yet with a downplaying of actual violence. It could be a lot gutsier than it is; there's relatively little action, and the final savage encounter between "good" and "bad" dogs, though involving some effective shadow work on the walls of a cabin, is allowed to peter out without either dog being badly mauled. But it keeps moving, has enough action and comic typeplot to keep a young boy's interest quietly, and really holds a good schoolboy adventure film to look at. Buck, the dog from "Call of the Wild" is somewhat of a minor star in his own right then, and had his own following. In England, the film was released as a double-bill with Shirley Temple's "Captain January". Children of Shirley's own age usually had little interest in seeing her films, but adults and well-meaning neighbors, wanting an excuse to see Shirley themselves, were always packing off to see her latest releases as a special "treat". "The Country Beyond" gave us all something to get our teeth into after Shirley's sentimentality and I still prefer staying round to see "The Country Beyond" a second time! Now of course, in middle-aged senility, "Captain January" exercises its own kind of charm, and you may well be seeing it at the Huff before too long!

"Treasure Island" (MGM, 1934) Directed by Victor Fleming; produced by Hunt Stromberg, Screenplay by John Lee Mahin from the novel by Robert Louis Stevenson; Camera: Ray June, Clyde deVine, Harold Rosson; 10 reels

Although in many ways "Treasure Island" is ideal children's fodder, especially as a holiday attraction, it's a pity that it doesn't have the taste and intelligent scriptwriting to make it - like "David Copperfield" - an excellent film for adults too. It's a curiously codendingwork from a masculine director like Victor Fleming, played strictly on a child's level, with dialogue and music emphasizing the theatrical pantomime (in the British stage sense of the word) aura of it all. It's well-mounted, shot by three top cameramen, yet withal it's a cheap production - some nice Catalina locations, but also a lot of cheap sets and back projection. It moves quickly, but suffers from little action (the chase up the rigging is its only real highlight) and literally no ollinax. Its entertainment values therefore are largely vested in the cast, and luckily they are its salvation. Lionel Barrymore is superbly in character in the opening reels (which is the bright and most atmospheric portion of the film), gritting out his lines with both verve and style. It's to be hoped that he is kept off before he has a chance to match bravura with Wallace Beery - that might really have been the battle of the century, Beery hams and mug beautifully, a fine Long John Silver, though also a reminder of what a forlorn circumstance it was when plans to have him star as Captain Bligh in "Mutiny on the Bounty" were abandoned. Lewis Stone refuses to cater to the juvenile audience and plays his stuff straight - his little speech about the English flag is a gem! Cooper, pouting aggressively as was his wont in that period, is quite overshadowed by a magnificent cast of character actors, most of them so exquisitely made-up and using strange (for them) brogues that it is often quite difficult to recognize them, this especially including "Chis" Sale who, as Ben Gunn, looks and behaves like some of the less attractive breed of Hiffmans.

--- William K. Everson ---