Monday next, April 13th: "FIRST LOVE" (1939) with Deanna Durbin, Robert Stack, Eugene Palette, Leatrice Joy; preceded by "YOU WILL REMEMBER" (1940) with Robert Horley, Emlyn Williams, Dorothy Hyson.

April 6 1970
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"YOUNG MOTHER HUBBARD" (Essanay, 1917) Directed by Arthur Berthelet
Story by Charles Mortimer Peck; 5 reels
With Mary McAllister (Mona); William Clifford (John Bonning); Carolyn Train (Mrs Howard); Granville Bates (James); Virginia Holme (Louise); Russell McDermott (Frank); Baby Peck (The Baby).

It must be admitted that "Young Mother Hubbard" doesn't quite live up to the glowing enthusiasm of the A.I. spokesman who very kindly made it available to us - not that we wouldn't have been delighted to play such a rare and interesting piece of Americana even if we had been able to pre-screen it. Moreover, the film is often extremely pleasing and well-composed visually, and an original 35mm toned print could make all the difference, doubtless having a great deal to do with that enthusiasm.

In any case, if for no other reason "Young Mother Hubbard" would be a valuable re-discovery as a scarce example of the product from the last days of the once-powerful Essanay Studios, now in its final two years of decline. Their big money-makers - the Charlie Chaplins, the early Charlie Chan, the Mack Sennach Billy shorts - were well behind them, Chaplin having moved on to Mutual, and the Anderson westerns having been displaced by the superior work of William S. Hart. Essanay still had a few good stars - Nalthai, Rod in Rocque, Taylor Holmes - but no really good directors, and no sense of showmanship. Tonight's film would appear to be an outgrowth from a series of two-reelers bearing the collective title of "Do Children Count?"; Mary McAllister starred in them, the same writer (Charles Mortimer Peck) scripted them, and, with a stress on whimsy, they showed children tempered by the discipline of a "play department," psychology, etc. The same kind of story, expanded to a feature, doesn't really work with a strong director at the helm; it has the "look" of a Biograph one-reeler, but without its tight construction. It is difficult to keep track of some of the characters, and there is too little motivation. Nevertheless, it's a pleasing work; as a place of Americana it is certainly superior to the same year's "Tom Sawyer" from William Desmond Taylor, though it is also somewhat below the prevailing Essanay Pickford standards. The extensive use of exteriors helps a great deal, and presumably most of the "extras" are non-actors - as witness the train conductor who is so hypnotized by the camera that he quite forgets his duties! Granville Bates is perhaps the only actor well-known to us all, and even here he is already playing his standard manic role! Hopefully, one day one of Max Linder's Essanays from this period may come to light; in the meantime, "Young Mother Hubbard" has to serve, and probably quite well, as a typical example of Essanay in its final days. Incidentally, the children of the story and the print itself seem to have been saved from death (or worse) at precisely the same time; just as the children were rescued in the last few minutes of film, the print itself is saved from a process of hipo deterioration, of such an advanced stage that it certainly couldn't have survived the heat of the coming Summer.

"THE BLUE EAGLE" (Fox, 1926) Directed by John Ford
Scenario by P. Biggy from "The Lord's Referee" by Gerald Beaumont;
Camera, George Schmerdick; this print, 5 reels; originally, 6 reels
With George O'Brien, Janet Gaynor, William Russell, Robert Edeson, David Butler, Philip Ford, Ralph Morgan, Margaret Livingston, Jerry Madden, Harry Tombrook, Lew Short, Jack Pennick

One of Ford's three 1926 productions, "The Blue Eagle" was made before but released after "Three Bad Men". It's probably the slighestest of all the Ford silents from the mid-20's on, but "slight" only in comparison with films such as "Three Bad Men" and particularly "Hangmen's House". It's a rodly, fast, think-car film, actually more like a "B" with "A" trimmings, and so mundane that the last reels have been very much into the background - even heroine Janet Gaynor only has a few minutes of footage. The print, badly deteriorated in spots, was salvaged only just in time, but even so, a number of scenes are missing. The narrative is in the 2nd reel, where a grudge fight aboard ship between Russell & O'Brien is interrupted by an enemy sub-attack; the attack is out, and suddenly we're back to America and a post-war world of crime and dope peddling. However, even allowing for the missing footage, the film seems a bit careless about its transitions and exclamations, and even verbose. Perhaps O'Brien is in fine muscular form, having his chest on every provocation, and wearing shorts several sizes too small in the boxing scenes! A minor Ford perhaps, but a typical one, and an enjoyably unpretentious one from a period when he was already enjoying considerable prestige.

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