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The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"THE MAN WHO CHANGED HIS NAME" (Julius Hagen-Twickenham Productions, 1924)
Directed by Henry Edwards; Screenplay by F. Fowler Mears from the original story by Edgar Wallace; Camera, Sydney Blythe; English release by Universal, USA release by DuWorld Distributors; 7 reels
With Lyn Harding, Betty Stockfield, Leslie Perrins, Ben Weldon, Aubrey Mather, Richard Dolman, Stanley Vine.

Made to fulfill Universal's legal British quota production requirements, "The Man Who Changed His Name" is a much cheaper production than usually emerged from the independent but quite imaginative Twickenham Studios. It is very stately, and utilises but two or three ordinary sets, telling almost all of its story by dialogue. Yet it doesn't seem to matter: it's a good solid mystery yarn, even though aficionados of the genre will probably be ahead of most of its ramifications. But most of all it benefits from the tremendous presence of Lyn Harding, the best of the British Moriartys, in what might almost be his definitive role. A good actor in straight character parts (such as the first headmaster in "Goodbye Mr. Chips"), he was nevertheless most in his element in roles of jovial villainy. Somewhat of a combination of Noah Beery and Tod Slaughter, though a little subtler (just a little!), he has the time of his life here with some marvellous dialogue and a unique kind of bravura underplaying. The plot is slim and perhaps because of that is a little slow getting under way, but once it builds to a full head of steam and lets Harding loose, it's grand fun. Hardly representative of the better directorial work of Henry Edwards, it is nevertheless a good and robust suspender, with a line like "The Great Goddess", never less you be too positive as to when the tongue is in the cheek and when not. Leslie Perrins, Britain's own Monroe Oswey, is his traditionally despicable petty villain, and the much over-worked Betty Stockfield, busy in French films in the 30's too, is always pleasant to watch. Expect a rather stately and talkative melodrama and you won't be disappointed - but you may rather be surprised at the entertainment values it ultimately delivers.

"UNCLE SILAS" (Rank-General Film Distributors, 1947) U.S. release in 1951 as "The Inheritance"; Directed by Charles Frank; Produced by Josef Scarfo and Laurence Irving; Screenplay by Ben Travers from the novel by J. Sheridan LeFanu; Production Design, Laurence Irving; Camera: Robert Krasker; Music, Alan Rawsthorne; 9 reels

With Jean Simmons, Katina Paxinou, Derrick de Marney, Derek Bond, Sophia Stewart, Manning Whitley, Essmond Knight, Reginald Tate, Marjorie Rhodes, John Laurie, Frederick Burtwell, George Curzon, O.B. Clarence.

Curiously, the great Gothic writers - Bram Stoker, Le Fanu, Wilkie Collins - have been utilised but little by the screen. Usually it has been a case of taking their cornerstone novels ("Dracula", "Carmilla", "The Woman in White"), turning them into standardised Hollywood versions, and remaking them periodically. Currently Le Fanu's "Carmilla" (never done very accurately, but a superb inspiration for Dreyer's "Vampyr" and Vadim's "Blood and Roses") has been re-approached via two almost identical back-to-back nude/horror chillers, "Just for a Vampire" and "The Vampire Lovers". But "Uncle Silas", the most faithful version of a LeFanu work, has been oddly overlooked and ill-regarded, even though with its fallable characters, its belligerent sets, lighting and camerawork, it is something of a classic of filmic Grand Guignol. As the numerous artistic credits attest, it was designed as a "prestige" feature in every sense of the world, and also as the first solo starring vehicle of one of the most important of the new Rank stars, Jean Simmons. Moreover, in England at least, it had a marvellously chilling trailer which couldn't fail to excite interest. Yet reviews were quite tepid, most critics seeing it almost as an eye-rolling burlesque, as an overdone piece of claptrap. Doubtless, in the wake of the Robin Hood Dickens adaptations, it is a lack of restraint may have seemed pronounced - but its manipulation of audience fears, its reliance on shock, and its first-rate use of the camera and the cut for thrill effects, could hardly countenance a "restrained" approach. It gained no reputation in England at all, was soon forgotten, and its US release delayed by many years and not even handled by Rank's normal (Universal) outlet. Those of you who don't know the film at all are in for a real treat; those who do will obviously know what to expect and will enjoy it anew.

A reminder: those who were unable to get in to the "Bulldog Drummond" show (the most of our regulars heeded our warning and arrived early) - please write me (at 118 W. 79th St., NYC 10024) - and be sure to include your addresses.

Depending on response, we'll either re-schedule the show, or bring the films separately to short Huff shows. Whatever the solution, interested parties will certainly be advised. We'll repeat this notice over the next two weeks, which time we should have covered just about everybody.