Monday next, August 2nd: "DICK TURPIN" (Fox, 1925, dir: John Elystone) - Tom Mix preceded by "WILD COMPANY" (Fox, 1930, dir: Leo McCarey) with H.B. Warner, Frank Albertson, Joyce Compton, Sharon Lynne, Bela Lugosi.

July 26 1971

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

*BULDOG DRUMMOND* (Sam Goldwyn-United Artists, 1929) Directed by F. Richard Jones, assisted by Lesley Pearce; Screenplay by Sidney Howard from the play by H.C. Sapper McNeile; Camera, George Barnes, Gregg Toland; sets by William Cameron Menzies; 10 reels With Ronald Colman, Joan Bennett, Lilian Tashman, Montague Love, Lawrence Grant, Claude Allister, Wilson Benge, Charles Sellon, Adolphe Milar, Tetsu Komai, Gertrude Short, Donald Novis.

"Bulldog Drummond" was unanimously considered the best pictue of 1929, even by critics who had seen "Applause" and "Hallelujah" and while today it is quite obviously less important than its two films, at the same time the critical enthusiasm is easy to understand. Its smooth line of action and beautifully spoken dialogue with the impressive visual style and a fast-paced (for 1929 at least) plot-line made it seem far slicker, modern and more polished than the average transitional film of that period. Its tongue in cheek villainy is still delightful, and the jovially lecherous master criminal of Lawrence Grant is still one of the best things that actor has ever done. If we may mix our metaphors, the tongue in cheek does get a little heavy-handed at times, aware of its cleverness in kidding a genre that hadn't yet been developed to a stage where such a spoof was really in order. But this minor flaw may be flown for the elegance and subtlety of Colman's follow-up film, "Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back". Colman here is utterly delightful, setting a debonair pattern for all subsequent Bulldog Drummonds, quite at variance with the rather thuggish character of the novels. It's a matter of record by the way that Harry D'Arrast actually directed a major portion of the film, which probably accounts for him being handed "Raffles" as well. What happened to F. Richard Jones, the official director, is something of a mystery. The film does have the old name, "Fraunces Drake, Gail Patrick, Rod La Rocque (as Nick), George Barbier, Conway Tearle, Thomas Jackson, Jack Raymond, Eddie Dunn, Bryant Washburn, Lee Shumway, Chester Conklin, Jack Fullum, Henry Kleinmohr (Bramcon).

We have waxed so enthusiastic in the past about Florey's imaginative "*The" pictures that there is no need to repeat ourselves here. While this isn't one of those films with any remarkable styles or techniques (as were, in differing ways, "The Outcast" and "King of Alcatraz"), it is most rewarding in that (like Florey's "Hollywood Boulevard") it makes the very most of its locale locations and general background detail. So many Hollywood mysteries - like "The Studio Murder Mystery" - cash in on the background only nominally and fail to use it, but Florey, somewhat of a buff himself before that phrase became commonplace, really exploits his background to a point where it somewhat overshadows in interest the not too mysterious mystery. So with so much going on, and such a good cast of old favorites and old-timers, it's a thoroughly enjoyable second-feature.


Paramount took over the Drummond series with "Bulldog Drummond Escapes", made with some oomph, and with Ray Milland trying hard to emulate Colman's earlier performances. Therefore the series was immediately turned into decided "B" fodder, cheaply made (many interior sets, and most exteriors at night to avoid detailed London or English street sets) surprisingly short, and with an annoyingly unfunny "interrupted wedding" running gag. "Bulldog Drummond Comes Back" scored on its action and because it allowed John Howard (as Nick) to dominate most of the footage, but the others could boast only slickness of speech and at least above-average casts. "Secret Police", last but one in the series has little special to recommend it in the earlier stages, but makes up for everything with a first-rate and prolonged climax in which a really good set and some excellent atmospheric photography turn it into a real thriller of the old school, and incidentally one far more exciting than Fox's early talkie version of the same Sapper novel, "Temple Tower".

-- Wm. K. Everson --