Monday next, December 30th the Samuel Vomel’s “THE MAN WHO CAME BACK” (1931), a rare old stage melodrama, also made as a silent, here dusted off as a major change of pace for Janet Gaynor and Charlie Farrell, preceded by an edited (but carefully-edited) remake version of Ronald Walsh’s interesting 1937 British melodrama, “JUKE FOR GLORY” (“When Thief Meets Thief”) with Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Allan Hale, Valerie Hobson, last shown at the Huff some eight years ago.

Dec. 13, 1971
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Two contrasting comedies-of-manners

"HIS LORDSHIP" (Gaumont-British, 1935) Directed by Herbert Mason Screenplay by L. Duarte De Pach From the play "The Nelson Touch" by Neil Grant; Camera, Gunther Krampf. Released in the U.S. in 1937 under the title "A Man of Affairs"; 7 reels.


Arliss' British films in the mid and late 30's all tended to be light-weight affairs, more than a little derivative of his earlier and better Hollywood films. But at least they were all solidly Arliss vehicles, built around his personality, and since nobody want to see Arliss films except devout Arliss fanatics, nobody had much cause for complaint. Indeed, with "His Lordship" they had cause for singular rejoicing, since there are two Arlisses for the price of one - a dual role in which the twins look exactly alike and sound exactly alike, but in order to exploit Arliss' perhaps somewhat exaggerated versatility, behave like opposite poles. The one that behaves more like a silly-ann roll for Bulldog Drummond is admittedly a rather unlikely choice (even by British political standards) for high government office, but that's a minor quibble. It's quite an elaborately mounted comedy melodrama, with a good little story that holds attention on its own. Incidentally, its working title was also that of the play on which it was based - "The Nelson Touch". Gaumont, never one to waste a property, kept the title in mind even though it wasn't used here. Years later, in the 40's, it was finally pressed into service as a more British-oriented title for Howard Hawks' war film "Corvette K-225".

"THOMAS GRAAL'S BEST CHILD" (Swedish Biograph, 1913) Directed by Mauritz Stiller Story: Harald B. Harald; Camera: Henrik Jaksson; 5 reels.


"Thomas Graal's Best Child" (the date is 1918, not 1917 as erroneously given on the print) was the best of a trio of social comedies centred around Thomas Graal, a kind of composite of Skinner, Mr. Balot and Charley Chase. This film had been preceded by "Thomas Graal’s Best Film" (1917), with the same director and the same four leading stars) and would be followed - much later, in 1922 - by a third film directed by Gustaf Molander, with a different cast and for a different company. It's a major delight not in that it is a great film, but in that it is a refreshing discovery and proves again how wrong it is to have preconceived notions about any aspects of film history. Even at this late date, there are still surprises awaiting us! Apart from proving that the Swedes are in fact not dour and humorless, "Thomas Graal's Best Child" in fact shows that they may well have been leaders in sophisticated screen comedy. This is exactly the kind of film that didn't become fashionable (and for the most part, didn't get made) until the mid-20's. It recalls - but pre-dates - the best of Lubitsch, St. Clair and Rene Clair in "Lady Windermere's Fan", "Are Parents People?" and "The Italian Straw Hat". There are drawbacks of course; Seastrom doesn't have the debonair polish of Menjou or Charley Chase, and the film's flat lighting and camerawork doesn't have the sparkle that such a comedy of manners needs. But it's gentle and charming, its surprises and its taste quite outweighing the lack of standards which we can only (unfairly) apply by post-judging it in comparison with much later and slicker works.

--- W.I. Averou ---