A HOUSE DIVIDED (Solax, 1913) Directed by Alice Blache (?) One reel

The A.F.I. surmises that this is directed by Alice Blache, but there is as yet no positive confirmation of it. It's an interesting little comedy of no very special distinction, and if it is by a Blache, one hopes that further films will re-emerge to solidify her reputation.

HER DEFENCE (Universal, 1916) Directed by Cleo Madison and Joe King; story by Harvey Gates; With Cleo Madison, Edward Hearn, W. Marks; 2 reels

This is quite a strong little film, covering a lot of narrative ground, well-paced and especially well photographed. For 1916 however it is hardly remarkable, and many late Biographs and early Reliance films are of a higher standard.

THE BLITZ (Lois Weber Productions, distributed by F.R. Warren Corp., 1921) 7 rls. Written, produced and directed by Lois Weber; Camera, Philip R. De Bois and Gordon Jennings; Advisory Director, Phillips Smalley; Scenario, Marion Orth; With Claire Windsor, Louis Calhern, Philip Hubbard, Margaret McWade, Marie Walcamp

Fortunately no Lois Weber cult has yet developed, partly because so few of her films are available, and perhaps too because those that are don't contain the strong feminist elements that contemporary audiences delight to find in the films of Dorothy Arzner. An interesting, capable but much over-rated director, Dorothy Arzner was recently casually referred to in the Los Angeles Times as "acknowledged as the finest director of the silent period" - which certainly puts Griffith, Chaplin, Murnau and those other upstarts in their places. Weber, like Arzner, tends to take a condescendingly tolerant view of men most of the time, and her protagonists are usually strong women. But there the overlap ends: Weber's weakness was a liking to use the screen for crusades that usually weren't needed, and in believing that she was a writer. Her narratives ramble incredibly and are often structured most implausibly. Strong directors like Hitchcock and Griffith would (and did) use her kind of coincidence and complication, but only as an excuse or a launching pad, with Weber, these complications are the plot. "The Blitz" has one of these stories that a single simple line of exposition could bring to a halt in a moment, but instead it mires itself in its own ingenuity. The tear-jerking reaches such extremes that all it really lacks is a lame little boy whose crippled and blind mother, carrying a puppy, is squashed flat by a steam-roller. Miss Weber's crusading for underpaid college professors is a nice gesture, and probably more topical now than then, but the rather spineless old sufferer in her story really isn't worth her concern, and a last-minute effort to equate the value of teachers with the more dubious value of money seems a little misplaced.

But having attacked the fabrication of the story itself, there's much that can be said in favor of the film. The people involved, manipulated or not, seem like real people, and the acting is good. Only the last-minute transformation of a meek into the soul of charity doesn't quite ring true. Above all, it's a good film to look at: nicely composed, lit and photographed, and with maximum use made of small town exteriors. Even the titles retain strong pictorial elements, and the print is a real beauty. While typical of many independent films of the 20's - a lack of plot and a meagre budget stretched too thin in order to make it long enough for an "A" film - it's well above average of its type, and a solid, well-made and very satisfying - if occasionally exasperating - movie. But shorter running times definitely helped Weber, as witness her Christian Science movie, "A Chapter in Her Life", made for Universal in a tight six reels.

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