Next program: Nov. 29th: Two musicals: THE MUSIC GOES ROUND (1935, dir: Victor Schertzinger) with Harry Richman, Rochelle Hudson; and MOONLIGHT AND PRETZELS (1933, dir: Karl Freund) with Roger Pryor, Mary Brian, Leo Carrillo.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society November 8 1976

FOR IRELAND'S SAKE (Written, produced and directed by Sidney Olcott, 1912) With Gene Gauntier, Jack J. Clark, Madam Norina and Sidney Olcott (as Father Flannigan). 3 reels

Given Sidney Olcott's imposing position as a pioneer director both of feature length films and of extensive location shooting, it's a pity that his career as a whole is so uninteresting. His best film was probably "From the Manger to the Cross", the still quite remarkable full-length feature made in the Holy Land in 1912; his "biggest" period, in the twenties, is notable mainly for films that are civilised and gentle and rather dull, the best being "Not So Long Ago" and "Monseigneur Beaucarne". But academically, his most interesting period is the early one at Kale; for more background detail on Olcott, we refer you to an excellent article by George Mitchell that appeared in "Films in Review" some 20 years ago. Olcott made several films in Ireland en route to "From the Manger to The Cross", and today's film is typical. It was shot in County Kerry, and perhaps goes too much out of its way to utilise local landmarks and beauty-spots; nevertheless, landscape is well used, and it is more impressive for its pictorialism than for its dramatics. The camerawork, often shooting from inside a cave to provide a natural, Tournier-like framing, is often most impressive, and in original 35mm prints, this must have been a very handsome film indeed. It's an extremely rare, only recently rediscovered item, found by the Pacific Film Archives in Berkeley, to whom we are most grateful for this print.

RASKOLNIKOV (Germany, 1923) Produced and directed by Robert Wiene for the Neumann Company; Camera, Willy Goldberger; Sets and design, Andrei Andreyev; Based on "Crime and Punishment" by Dostoevsky; U.S. release in 1927 by Michael T. Gourland Distribution; 8 reels

With the Moscow Art Theatre Players, headed by: Gregory Khmara (Raskolnikov); Michael Takanov (Marmeladov); Maria Guermancova (His wife); Maria Kryjanovskaya (Sonia); Pavol Pavlov (The Coroner, Porfiris); Vara Tama (Aliena, the Pawnbroker); Ivan Berseniev (a neighbour)

At this stage of the game, with "Crime and Punishment" having been made all over the world - even in modernised form at Monogram - we can be forgiven for being a bit biased about the plot. Which is just as well, for this version is much more interesting as (a) a filmic record of the Moscow Art Theatre Players, and (b) a spectacular extension by the same director of Caligari's expressionistic sets, this time with the sets done on a larger and far more three-dimensional level, and with cubist design added as a bonus. The experiment isn't by any means a total success; the traditional and rather stolid acting styles don't mate well with the free-wheeling art direction. Nor is there any logical reason for the expressionistic approach, as there was in "Caligari"; and what logic there might be is minimised by inconsistency. In "Caligari", everything was distorted - from streets and buildings to clothes and chairs. Here, the everyday props of life seem normal, and it is only the world at large that is distorted. In any event, successful or not, the visual style quite swallows the acting styles. Wiene tries too hard sometimes to force extensions of "Caligari"; the character of the Coroner for example - played by a jaunty little Russian with an Irish leprechaun flavor - is pictorially forced into Caligari-esque poses, and almost becomes a figure of evil at times. Sitting in front of a symbolic spider-web motif may suggest the tenacity of the law and the inevitability of Raskolnikov's final entrapment, but at the same time it is rather too sinister a metaphor.

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Nevertheless, especially considering the basic familiarity of the material, and the rather unpromising collaboration between the Moscow Art Theatre Players and Robert Wiene—a generally unexciting director who would have remained in obscurity but for "Caligari"—"Raskolnikov" is a surprisingly engrossing film, and in many ways one of the most interesting of the many adaptations of the story. Quite incidentally, a proposed remake in the late 40's by Dmitri Kirsanoff never got off the ground, but it was fully scripted and that script seemed to be full of influences from this film.

Surprisingly, "Raskolnikov" is a very rare film in this country at the moment; "surprisingly" because it was released here, and because at one time the Museum of Modern Art owned a print. The Library of Congress owns fragments of the film, but otherwise it seems to have vanished, and tonight's print—though of the U.S. release version—came from Europe. One assumes that there was some re-editing for the U.S. release in '27. A long opening title giving Raskolnikov's background suggests that establishing material at the beginning may have been cut, and also the double-murder at the pawnbroker's appears to have been cut somewhat awkwardly. This may have been due to censorship, or equally likely, it was a fairly futile attempt to retain audience sympathy for Raskolnikov on the theory that an audience might buy the murder of the unsympathetic pawnbroker, but couldn't accept the more cold-blooded "cover-up" murder of the innocent bystander.

Despite the limited celebration of "Caligari" in 1921, it seems to have stirred no immediate interest in Wiene's work, but there is a flurry of sudden importation of his films in 1927/28, probably because silent films were then in their last days, and unreleased European films were being sold very cheaply before their value was gone for ever. "Hands of Orlac", one of Wiene's better films, was finally released at that time, and another collaboration with the Moscow Art Theatre Players—Tolstoy's "The Power of Darkness"—followed "Raskolnikov" into release by only a couple of weeks. (Tolstoy made it to the 55th St. Playhouse, Dostoevsky appropriately was given his first-run downtown, at the 5th Avenue Cinema). "The Power of Darkness" got the better of the two reviews, although the Times commented on the heavy censoral cutting. Both films were reviewed as monuments to gloom and depression, and oddly enough, there was merely a casual reference to the expressionistic sets in "Raskolnikov", almost as though they were something to be taken for granted! Rothen wrote quite a lot about Andreyev's set design for German films in a 1920 article; otherwise this interesting designer has been somewhat overlooked. He did some stylish, if more traditional, set design on British films of the sound period.

William K. Everson