In a sense we have a dual reason to be grateful to tonight's "A Village Tale"; not only is it a very good film deserving of rediscovery, but it also makes it possible for us to show the less good but extremely interesting "The Man Who Came Back". Sometimes films need a reason - or at least a framework - for their showings. Despite the inherent interest in any film directed by Walsh and starring Geynor and Farrell, "The Man Who Came Back" really needs to be juxtaposed with a similar film which can throw its achievements, or shortcomings, into relief. Both of tonight's films are strong dramatic meat built around rather sordid plot-lines. Such an approach was not at all uncommon in 1930, the year of the Walsh film; it was most uncommon in 1935, when a production-code-dominated Hollywood was gearing itself mainly to harmless escapism. If such a lesson were needed (and perhaps these days it is needed more than ever) this coupling tonight shows that with good taste and restraint one can often achieve more than with the conventional formulas. Walsh's film is relaxed and the screen images are free and uninhibited. This is not so much a plea for censorship as it is a heart-felt plea for good taste.

John Cromwell, director of "A Village Tale" (and of "Algiers"); "The Prisoner of Zenda" and other films that have been presented in prior series, is expected to be present tonight to introduce "A Village Tale".

THE MAN WHO CAME BACK (Fox, 1930) Directed by Raoul Walsh; scenario by Edwin Burke from a play by Jules Eckert Goodman and John Fleming Wilson; photographed by Harold Schuster; 8 reels

It was too early in the sound careers of Geynor and Farrell for Fox to be deliberately trying to sabotage them, in order to be in a position to cancel their contracts or reduce their salaries. Had it come later, one might have suspected such motivation in putting them into a picture like this. As it is one must blame (or credit) some Fox genius who had tired of the purity of the studio's classic young lovers, and decided to mix some raw meat into the light pastry. It must have been quite a jolt for the fans to see Farrell drunk most of the film, and Janet Geynor as a drug addict who dons a kimono to strut around in a Shanghai brothel. Drugs and drink become convenient barriers in the path to reform and social acceptance, and the rather facile "cures" aren't easy to accept today. However, as a piece of old-fashioned theatrical hokum it is quite entertaining and unpredictable. Walsh does surprisingly well in the for-her unfamiliar role, and is both touching and dramatic. Farrell's character is as weak and lack-lustre as always, but if he seems a little stronger than usual (in his talkies) it is because Leslie Fenton's voice was dubbed in for him. By the way, if you've never seen this or the silent George O'Brien version yet still find one highlight (Geynor's big renunciation scene) familiar, it's probably because this scene was used for Alice Faye's introduction early in "Hollywood Cavalcade" - with Alice looking an even healthier and plumper Technicolor addict than Janet!

A VILLAGE TALE (Rko Radio, 1935) Directed by John Cromwell; produced by David Horsley; screenplay by Scott from a novel by Phil Stong; Camera, Nicholas Musuraca; Music, Al Coleman; editor, William Morgan; 8 reels
With Randolph Scott, Kay Johnson, Arthur Kohl, Robert Barrat, Janet Beecher, Edward Ellis, Dorothy Burgess, Andy Clyde, Guinn Williams, Ray Layter, T.Roy Barnes, Donald Meek, DeWitt Jennings.

Few companies made as many studio-bound, talkative and ultimately obscure films as Rko Radio in the early 30's; and few films deserved their obscurity as richly as "Where Sinners Meet", "Captain Fury" and "A Girl of the Pioneers". One of the more gaudily titled. All the more surprise then that "A Village Tale", virtually unmentioned among John Cromwell's distinguished credits, and not given a first-run in New York, should turn out so well. It's something of a 1935 "Feyton Place", but is more effective by far since it creates its shocks not by dramatised sensation, but by casual and tasteful understatement. One hopes that this is a specific tale and not a general cross-section of American rural depravity in the sense that the same author's "State Fair" was a generalised lark at farming environs. Herein, it's powerful and honest; the unsympathetic characters are bitchy and narrow rather than evil, and the "good" characters often act with weakness and stupidity. Melodrama may rather take over towards the end, but we seem to be finding increasingly that life is full of melodrama. There's a whole of a fight scene - doubly notable in a non-action film from a prosaic studio like Rko - and of course the expected performance of grace and distinction by Kay Johnson.

The schedule of films for our Spring series will be available at next week's program, the last in the current series.