As we forewarned last week might happen, the print of "Alexander Hamilton" has failed to arrive, doubtless delayed in the big buildup of mail caused by the big stoppage of mail activities due to the recent storm. This is a problem that is affecting schools all over the country at the moment, and we are lucky in the sense that we are able to substitute another Arliss, "The Iron Duke" that we had planned to run in an upcoming series anyway. It's annoying, since the original program was, we thought, a rather nice balance of Americana and American history — and for all of his influence, the Duke of Wellington hardly qualifies as having a significant stake in the American scene. Doubtless worse calamities — personal, if not artistic — came out of the recent storm, so we must roll with the punches. "Alexander Hamilton" will of course be re-scheduled for the upcoming season.

THE IRON DUKE (Gainsborough, 1924) Directed by Victor Saville Screenplay by H.M. Harwood; Camera, Curt Courant; Art Director, Alfred Junge; Music, Louis Levy. 80 mins.

With George Arliss, Ellaline Terriss, Gladys Cooper, Emlyn Williams, A.E. Matthews, Allan Ayresworth, Peter Gawthorne, Lesley Wareing, Edmund Willard, Norma Varden, Felix Aylmer, Gerald Lawrence, Gibb McLaughlin, Campbell Gullan, Paddie Nalmyth, Farren Bouter, Frederick Lancaster, Gyles Isham.

Arliss' first British film, after a prolific career in the silent and sound American film, coasted along on his Hollywood prestige sufficiently well to gain itself a Rain City Music Hall opening, and received fair distribution throughout the U.S. However, it was — and is — a somewhat cold production, extremely handsomely mounted, obviously designed as a prestige vehicle for a major star, yet lacking in pace and humor, and a letdown from his high Hollywood standards. One would have thought that Victor Saville, with his overall taste and his ability to turn theatrical material into films of flair and style, would have been a natural choice as director for Arliss. But actually, Arliss selected it to work with lesser directors that he could control and guide absolutely. Saville never imposed his own personality on his films, but he was always strong enough to prevent his stars from dictating the style of the film. "The Iron Duke" is halfway between being a historical pageant and an Arliss vehicle, and while it is entertaining and impressive on both counts, it is not wholly successful on either.

Despite the lengthy and aristocratic credits for technical advisers, the film's military and historic detail is somewhat suspect — the more so since Arliss' "The House of Rothschild" the same year (shown in a recent series) made Rothschild the power behind the throne in guiding the Napoleonic wars, while C. Aubrey Smith was a benign and grandfatherly Wellington. Here, the Rothschilds are squeezed out and Arliss/Westminister takes over, apparently with the destiny of all Europe in the palm of his hand. It is a highly romanticised treatment, and despite Arliss' careful researching of Wellington, often at variance with the truth. At the time of the story, Wellington was in his 40's and probably closer to Christopher Plummer's interpretation in "Waterloo". Moreover, Wellington — like Montgomery in the last war — was respected, but universally disliked by his men. The witty, folksy camaraderie propagated by Arliss was absent, replaced by pure fiction, and a far cry from the real spirit of English chivalry. The battle scenes, apart from lacking real showmanship and expertise in staging, are given a montlage-like presentation, doubtless to cover up the fact that most of the bigger action scenes are lifted from the earlier (1928) "Balasclava", dealing of course with the Charge of the Light Brigade.

Arliss doesn't seem as relaxed as in his Hollywood films, and in fact probably wasn't, since for the first time he was working under real pressure. He had already made two films in Hollywood earlier the year — "The House of Rothschild" and "The Last Gentleman", and had to come back after "The Iron Duke" to do "Cardinal Richelieu". Moreover, he had thought that his first British film was going to be "Rhodes of Africa", so the old gentleman's head must have been crammed with homework on French, British and African history. Too, he found Gainsborough's studio space cramped and makeshift after the largesse and luxury of his Hollywood years, and must have been feeling a little lost without his total control, and minus his usual crew of stock-company players. Nevertheless, given these problems and limitations, "The Iron Duke" is a stately and enjoyable work in its own way, still in the theatrical manner even though not based on a stage property. Not the least interesting aspect is the work of Ellaline Terriss as the Duchess of Wellington. A musical comedy star of the 90's, she was played by Dorothy Hyson in the 1940 biography-film of composer Leslie Stuart, "You Will Remember", and died in mid-1954, aged 73. Incidentally, the title implies that the film, though a dramatic one, is very much of a misnomer since Wellington was never known by that nickname. Actually, "The Iron Duke" was the affectionate Naval name for a battleship named in Wellington's honor.

-- 10 minute Intermission --
SILVER DOLLAR (Warner Brothers-First National, 1952) Directed by Alfred E. Green; Screenplay by Carl Erickson and Harvey Thew from the book by David Karsner; Camera, James Van Trees; 84 mins.


(Note: David Landau and Berton Churchill appear in some trade cast lists, but were either replaced by other players, or edited out of the final film).

Although Warners' "The Match King" went into release the same month, indicating that there might be something of an assembly-line quality to the Warner biographies, reviews for "Silver Dollar" were surprisingly good. It was considered an intelligent and literary film, and a model from which future filmic biographies might learn.

Based on the biography of H.A.W. (Haw) Tabor, a man probably far more complex than appears via Robinson's rather straightforward performance, "Silver Dollar" is a good film, but suffers now from later and more sophisticated works. One can't help but make comparisons with "Citizen Kane", since there are undeniable parallels and similarities, and of course any film judged by that yardstick is bound to be found wanting.

Perhaps the assembly-line system at Warners, productive of so many good things, is to blame for "Silver Dollar" not being as impressive now as it was then. At Warners, even the "big" specials were pushed through production and despite a huge cast, a huge script, and big scenes and big sets, "Silver Dollar" seems to reflect this. Director Alfred E. Green made six films in 1932 - "Union Depot", "It's Tough to Be Famous" (coming up in April), "The Rich Are Always With Us", "The Dark Horse", "Parachute Jumper" and "Silver Dollar". Robinson was only slightly less prolific, with "Two Seconds", "The Hatchet Man" and "Tiger Shark" to back up "Silver Dollar". Obviously neither star nor director was given much time to regard this as much more than just another assignment. The script too, at pains to cram in as much incident as possible, tends to forget people. Despite a large cast, and the many historic figures represented, only Robinson, MacMahon and Daniels are really prominent, and Daniels doesn't appear until the second half. (Jobyna Howland is fourth in the official cast, yet only has a bit in the opening reel). Making the obvious comparison to "Kane", what made that film so dramatically satisfying (or at least, one of the many reasons) was the constant interplay between characters. Here everybody exists only to carry the narrative forward, and Robinson's performance (and the writing of his role) aren't sufficiently subtle to make the man as absorbing as he should be. And subtlety is needed, when the film is essentially a study in ultimate defeat -- a problem that afflicted Edward Arnold and "Gutter's Gold" too.

But it's certainly unfair to judge a "Silver Dollar" by a "Citizen Kane", and it's certainly an interesting film -- perhaps mainly because of the fascinating story of that now largely forgotten figure of "Haw" Tabor.

William K. Everson

Program Ends approx. 11.00. A brief discussion session will follow.

Note: In the printed brochures for the New School's film program this season, "Bobbins Up" is somehow referred to as one of Spencer Tracy's "long-long Fox films". In case this is a deterrent, let this correction note that the reference should be to a "long-lost" film!

"Alexander Hamilton" should be the only casualty of the current postal delays, and the next two programs are already on hand.