EAST IS EAST (Turner Films, released through Butcher’s Film Service, 1916) was released in the U.S. through the Mutual Corporation. Story and production by Herman Robert; play by Philip Hubbard and Gwenda Logan; 70 mins. approx. (Reissued in Britain in 1919) 

With Florence Turner (Victoria Vickers); Henry Edwards (Bert Grummett); Ruth Mackay (Mrs. Carrington); W.G. Saunders (Dawson); Edith Evans (Aunt). 

We’ll be saying a little more about the overall history of the silent British film in the introductory comments this evening, but tonight’s two films do represent two kinds of highpoints. Although not too many features survive from the early (1913-16) period for one to make entirely reliable generalisations, “East Is East” is given some distinctive observation – one of the most typical of the early British features. It was made at a time when, due to the war, Britain had already lost what little momentum it had in the pre-war years. Most European countries were tending to stand still, in the sense of artistic development and experimentation, in those war-years films, leaving Hollywood a free field in which to expand and dominate. Florence Turner, the American star formerly known as the Vitagraph Girl, made a number of films in England at this period for her own company, most of them securing U.S. release on the strength of her name. It’s a charming trifle, relatively sophisticated in film-making terms, perhaps a parallel to the films that Maurice Tourneur was making in Fort Lee, though on a somewhat lesser plane. Henry Edwards, who wrote, directed and starred, was a pleasant and natural actor, the kind of “dependable” rather than “dashing” type that English audiences seemed to prefer. He retained highbrow looks and received admirable roles, yet never quite got into the swing of the fast-paced. He died in 1952, his last film, made that year, being “Trent’s Last Case”. Never an outstanding director, he was nevertheless a very good one, and on the basis of this film, a much better one than more famous contemporaries such as Thomas Bentley or Maurice Elvey. Though the title actually refers to the East end of London, the Kipling derivation is deliberate and appropriate, and it’s one of the endless essays in class-distinction that permeates all of British film, with “Tygmony” a prime example. The theme was common in American films too, but usually with the difference that the “low-bred” protagonist usually wins out, winning over or defeating a usually somewhat shallow high society. In British films however, a kind of neutrality was maintained – the poor were not treated with condescension, nor the rich with hostility, and “winning out” usually meant that the two worlds couldn’t mix and that there was no shame in recognising the small, wholesome pleasures of life. Against this our usual enjoyable location work in the hop-field areas of Kent, and an added bonus in the second of only two silent film appearances by Edith Evans, who then returned to the stage and would not make another film until “The Queen of Spades” in ’48.

10 Minute Intermission

Piano Score for both films arranged and played by STUART OGDEN.