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THE NEW SCHOOL

FILM SERIES B, Program # 4

"THE WORLD MOVES ON" (Fox, 1934) Directed by John Ford

Produced by Winfield Sheehan; written by Reginald C. Berkeley; Camera, George Schneiderman; Art Director, William Darling; Music, Max Steiner, Hugo Friedhofer, Louis De Francesco, R.H. Bassett, David Buttolph and George Gershwin; 9 reels

With Madeleine Carroll, Franchot Tone, Reginald Denny, Louise Dresser, Lumsden Hare, Raoul Roulien, Sig Rumann, Stepin Fetchit, Dudley Digges, Frank Melton, Brenda Fowler, Russell Simpson, Walter McGrail, Marcelle Corday, Charles Bastin, Barry Norton, George Irving, Ferdinand Schumann-Heink, Georgette Rhodes, Claude King, Ivan Simpson, Francis Ford, Frank Moran, Jack Pennick, Torben Meyer, Harry Cording, Mary Gordon, Frank Reicher, Paul McVey.

In a filmed interview with BBC-TV some five years ago, John Ford mentioned a film that he had been unsympathetic to from the start. It was badly over-written, and the producer, proud of the property, insisted that Ford film it exactly as written. Ford did just that - long speeches intact - and turned the subsequently much over-length film to the producer, refusing to cut, edit, or otherwise work on it further. Without any actual proof, but knowing Ford's other films - and the mentalities of certain producers - I suspect that this is that film!

(Continued on p.2)

Apart from its concentration on a family - the underlying loyalties, separation and reunion, a favorite Ford motif - it's certainly untypical Ford material. It's something of a mating of "Cavalcade", "Showboat" and "The House of Rothschild", and its episodic story-line covering a hundred years certainly lends itself to post-production cutting without those cuts being too obvious, although the Stepin Fetchit character does seem to have suffered a bit, and was probably more prominent and better motivated originally. It also has far more technique for its own sake than was usual with Ford - a constantly moving camera for example - suggesting again that he may have adhered quite rigidly to a script instead of following his own (and normally simpler) inclinations. But while it's one of his own least favorite films, it's still an interesting and graceful work. The battle scenes, extremely well-staged and with some effective hand-held camera work, are unusually impressive, the occasional intercutting of newsreel footage is smoothly done, and there are the inevitable echoes of Griffith that seemed to be so especially prevalent in Ford's films of 1933-1936. One off-screen reunion is again (as were scenes in "Pilgrimage" and "Judge Priest") a direct throw-back to a similar scene in "The Birth of a Nation".

Ford devotees, perhaps affected by his own opinions, tend to be disappointed in "The World Moves On" while conversely, those who don't concern themselves with Ford and regard it just as an individual movie, often find it quite rewarding and a well-above-average specimen of the "family-cavalcade" saga which became a kind of cycle in itself in the Hollywood of the early 30's. A major Ford it certainly isn't, but it isn't a lesser one either, and is quite undeserving of the shunted-aside, "best-forgotten" reputation that it has gathered during all the years when it has been out of sight.

William K. Everson