



D. W. Griffith directing *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). G. W. Bitzer the camera, Lillian Gish and Wallace Reid seated. (CULVER SERVICE)

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The History of
MOTION
PICTURES

by
MAURICE BARDÈCHE
and
ROBERT BRASILLACH

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY IRIS BARRY

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

AUDIENCES nowadays streaming into sumptuous movie theaters to see Greta Garbo or the Marx Brothers have quite forgotten, if they ever knew, the "heroic age" of the cinema. They seem to think that films came into existence with the cowboys, with Fairbanks and Tom Mix or with the old serials and *The Clutching Hand*. As children, they used to see Fatty Arbuckle, imperturbable Buster Keaton and the little man in oversized trousers whom no one at that date yet spoke of as Mr. Chaplin. Consequently, they regard the films of these men as the "primitives" of what was once known as the silent art, and continues to be the seventh art.

Everyone probably knows, nevertheless, that the origins of the film lie much further back, and that movies date from the era of President Faure and President Cleveland and of Bourget's first novels. They date, in fact, from a time when the boy Proust used to admire Mme. Swann in the Bois de Boulogne, and woo Gilberte in the Champs Elysées. A Jewish army captain was arrested and tried then, but nobody foresaw that a year or two later the name of Dreyfus would convulse the whole French nation. The bicycle was still a velocipede. The automobile had just appeared, but older people insisted that it would never be as much use as the horse. Boldini was the fashionable painter. It was at such a moment that the film appeared.

THE FIRST STEPS

It is one of the peculiarities of this particular art that we can set the date of its birth.

The history of those discoveries which finally led to the invention of cinematography has given rise to many disputes, into which there is little point in entering. Animated pictures of one kind or another are very ancient and, for a while, the magic lantern had attempted to cater to the public liking for them. The law of the persistence of images, on which the film is based, was known in antiquity and utilized ever since the eighteenth century

in toys such as the Dazzling Top of Abbé Nollet. Magic lanterns, optical toys, Chinese shadow shows and the whole repertory of the conjurer and the illusionist are all common sources of inspiration which culminated finally in the film.

As soon as the principles of photography had been discovered by Niépce and Daguerre, there were various attempts to add movement to these new and wonderfully accurate pictures. In 1882, Etienne Marey invented a photographic gun with which to record the flight of birds. In 1888, Emile Reynaud patented his praxinoscope, which attempted to give the illusion of movement; he also perfected the perforation of film. He organized a *Théâtre Optique* which for many years gave shows at the *Musée Grévin*. It is worth noting that, at first, the pictures which he animated were paintings, and that it was only later that he used photographs. Then, in 1893, Demeny invented *chronophotography*, while in America Edison, following Muybridge, applied himself to similar problems and produced the *kinetoscope* or *peep show*.

The task of co-ordinating all these different experiments (Marey's was especially important) fell upon the brothers Louis and Auguste Lumière. On February 13, 1895* they patented their first projection machine. On March 28, 1895 the first film—*Lunch Hour at the Lumière Factory*—was shown before the *Société d'Encouragement de L'Industrie Nationale*. It was fifty feet long. Nine months later, the cinema came into existence.

The first public or paying performance was given, actually, on December 28, 1895 at the *Grand Café*, *Boulevard des Capucines*, in a basement christened the *Salon Indien*. Here the film was born, in distinctly humble circumstances. The proprietor of the *Grand Café*, somewhat skeptical, had preferred to charge a rental of thirty francs a day in lieu of the customary twenty

*For the sake of convenience, it is customary to regard the first public exhibition of motion pictures projected on a screen (in contradistinction to Edison's motion pictures shown in a peep show box or kinetoscope) as the beginning of the film's history. Lumière's exhibition at the *Grand Café* in this sense followed Latham's exhibition in New York in April and May 1895 and Armat's exhibition in Atlanta in September 1895, but preceded Paul's exhibition in London in February 1896.

per cent of the takings. Admission was one franc. For this sum, audiences saw ten films, each fifty feet long and lasting one or two minutes. The first day's takings were thirty-five francs. The organizers were rather discouraged. Three weeks later, without a single line of advertising, the profits had risen to two thousand francs a day. Of what did this famous initial show consist? First, *Lunch Hour at the Lumière Factory* with its crowd of respectably dressed working girls in ample blouses and ornate hats like characters from a novel by Zola. There was also the famous *Arrival of a Train at the Station*, whose engine is said to have terrified the spectators; the *Rue de la République* in Lyons; a shot of *Blacksmiths*; and, last of all, a *Bathing Beach*. This delighted everybody by the "marvelous realism of an unmistakably genuine ocean in all its immensity and restlessness," as the paper *Le Radical* wrote next day in reporting on the new invention, to which, it added, "has been given the somewhat harsh name of cinematograph." *Teasing the Gardener*, which afterwards became famous as the first comic film, was not made until later. It was on topical and scenic films that the first success of the cinema was established.

The films shown at the *Grand Café* then and later were much like those which amateur cinematographers still turn out today. The Lumière family's factory and house provided backgrounds for many brief pictures of domestic life. In one, a little girl sits on Mme. Lumière's lap, somewhat messily eating cereal; they called that one *Baby's Breakfast*. Beside a pool in the garden, Mme. Lumière, in a tussore dress with a polka dot bodice and a sailor hat tilted over her forehead, fishes for goldfish with a roguish air. Under an arbor at the end of the garden, Auguste Lumière and his friend Mr. Tréwey play piquet and drink their beer.

Such were the masterpieces shown in the basement of the *Grand Café*, in the salon of the *Café de la Paix*, in the arcade of the *Opéra* where Edison's films were given, in the *Musée Grévin's* rival establishment, the *Porte-Saint-Martin Museum*, at the *Petit Journal*, at Dufayel's. Admission was fifty centimes and entitled one to from twenty to thirty minutes of entertainment.

There was a piano to accompany the films, and outside barkers yelled at the top of their lungs. Such were the first movie theaters.

On May 4, 1897 so many people * lost their lives in the disastrous fire which broke out at the Bazar de la Charité that the career of the infant industry was almost cut short forever. The calamity was laid—incorrectly, as it seems—to the celluloid film's catching fire. For years afterwards, the hazard of fire bulked largest among all the worries of producers and of exhibitors alike. Early film journals almost invariably carried a regular feature on the fire problem.

Meanwhile, it was time to do something more ambitious than filming one's most recent grandchild. Photography may be a domestic art, like charades and embroidery, but it is also a public art; and it can furnish material for a magazine just as well as for the family album. Thus, many of the first efforts at production were directed towards providing animated pictures similar to the still pictures in *L'Illustration*. The Lumières were all prepared. Their principal agent, Promio, while traveling through Europe to exploit their invention, also took along a camera with which to furnish the firm with new pictures. He photographed artillerymen in Spain and, in London, filmed the funeral of Queen Victoria from a balcony. As film in those days was manufactured in very short lengths, in order to be able to shoot uninterruptedly he now provided himself with two cameras, so that one could be reloaded while he was using the other.

His work was not without its difficulties. Once at Bremen, as all the photographic shops were closed, he only managed to reload his camera by persuading an undertaker to lend him a coffin which he could use as a darkroom. In Geneva it was an empty beer barrel which served the same purpose. This free-and-easy production method was not to last. The first serious difficulty was encountered when Edison, after a vigorous fight, succeeded in closing the American market to the Lumière product and the Lumière representatives left New York secretly in a

* One hundred and eighty dead, of whom 130 were members of the nobility or persons of eminence.

small boat, and hung about in the Bay waiting for a liner to pick them up and take them back home. This picaresque incident might almost have been invented for use in some future film.

It was natural enough that the cinema should start with scenic views, since scenic views are really a logical development from picture postcards, just as films of domestic life are a logical step from the family photograph album. Each producing firm turned out a series much like one another's. To Lumière's *Lunch Hour at the Lumière Factory*, Gaumont retorted with a *Lunch Hour at the Panhard and Levassor Factories*. Promio had photographed policemen, but Charles Pathé came back with a *Troop of Hussars*. Gaumont filmed *The Fountains of Versailles*, Méliès filmed *the Boulevard des Italiens*, Pathé had *The Czar's Arrival in Paris*. In addition, there were also such picturesque items as *Masons at Work*, *Divers*, *A Canoe Trip*, *At the Barber's*, *A Cabinet-maker at His Bench*. All of these were about fifty feet in length and could be obtained either in black and white or in color. They were sold outright to the exhibitors, most of whom were traveling showmen. The average price was twelve cents a foot for black-and-white films, and from twenty-four to thirty cents for colored films.

All the big producers of the time began by making much the same subjects: they turned out ten different versions of *Teasing the Gardener*, twenty of a *Policeman's Patrol* and then attempted simple fairground farces like Gaumont's first film, with Alice Guy, *The Misadventures of a Piece of Veal*. The actress thought it would be a good idea to play the scene against an artificial instead of a real background. A journeyman-painter consequently prepared a backdrop representing the Rue de Belleville with its funicular railway, an employee and an apprentice were pressed into service as actors and the first narrative film of Léon Gaumont was created.

Abroad it was much the same story. But it is interesting, today, to see one of the first films made in Germany, about 1898. It is an *Excursion*, with young men and girls bicycling along a road. On the face of it, nothing could be more similar to the material

being turned out in France and in America at the same date. Yet there is one great difference. The scene opens in longshot, then in a much closer shot we are shown the long line of bicycles snaking along the road, then the faces of the young people, then their legs (that famous shot of legs which was to become one of the standbys of the cinema!). We see these legs, encased in button boots, going up and down; then we again see the cyclists full length. In this simple little film the whole pictorial sense of the Germans, their attention to detail, their propensity for using the camera's eye to show us things our own eyes would never seek out, are already to be detected. There is also a rudiment of sex appeal. In how many films made before 1900 can one detect an ethnic and national* character? Otherwise, everywhere else the films being made were scenic views of no great interest, or records of current political and social events.

Denmark was one of the first countries to adopt the new invention. The first Danish film, a documentary, was made as early as 1898 by a court photographer, P. Elfelt, who had a camera similar to that of the Lumières constructed by the village carpenter. During the summer of 1898, instead of photographing the Royal Family he filmed them. It is delightful and even touching to recognize in this black-clad group, with their ill-fitting coats and countrified felt hats, Queen Alexandra of England, the Danish princes and the Czar of all the Russias with the Czarina holding the pale Czarevitch in her arms. In front of them, seated on the ground, are four little boys in sailor suits and five little girls in white frocks, obediently motionless as they wait for the "birdie to come out of the black box." The whole group is surrounded by potted fuchsias adorning a terrace much like any terrace in a middle-class garden anywhere.

Alas, this prehistoric period of the cinema was shortly to draw to a close. The Lumières were soon to cease exploiting their discovery. "After 1900," Louis Lumière says, "films turned more and more towards the theater and towards the use of staged

* The authors do not realize how beautifully French are the Lumière films like *Pastime in the Family Circle!*

scenes, compelling us to abandon production since we were not equipped to do this kind of thing."

The cinema was through with exclusively straightforward photography. Other men were appearing who foresaw what else the film could do: men like Léon Gaumont and, still more important, Charles Pathé.

Charles Pathé at the age of thirty possessed a thousand francs. He bought a phonograph and a light van, and began traveling to fairs. Customers paid two sous to hear one record, or ten to hear six. Often enough, they left without paying. Yet, by night-fall, the takings would be as high as two hundred francs. After a few months of this arduous work, Pathé set up shop in the square at Vincennes, discovered the cinema through Edison's films, went into partnership with the inventor Joly, and manufactured a camera to go into competition with Lumière. His first film was *Arrival of a Train at Vincennes Station*. Quite a number of trains arrived and departed in the early films, but Pathé's train was to carry him far.

Shortly afterwards, Pathé built a studio, went into partnership with his brothers but afterwards parted with two of them, and (when he managed to obtain a million francs from M. Grivolas) launched the firm on an ambitious venture which was to turn out very fortunately for him. Without ever having had one really original idea, yet gifted with much perspicacity and remarkable intuition, well able to take advantage of the public's changing taste, Charles Pathé is one of the real pioneers of the film, of its good and bad qualities alike. Yet the title of creator belongs properly to another man, a genuine inventor, Georges Méliès.

AN EARLY MASTER

There is no knowing how long the film might have continued to be pure reportage and newsreel had it not been for the one man who brought to this new technical invention an immense number of really original ideas, and who finally made of the film

something other than a mere offshoot of photography. Georges Méliès, born in 1861, was thirty-four years old when the Lumières produced their invention. To him, their first film show seemed a sort of miracle. "Long before it was over," he relates, "I rushed up to Auguste Lumière and offered to buy his invention. I offered ten thousand, twenty thousand, fifty thousand francs. I would gladly have given him my fortune, my house, my family in exchange for it. Lumière would not listen to me. 'Young man,' said he, 'you should be grateful, since although my invention is not for sale, it would undoubtedly ruin you. It can be exploited for a certain time as a scientific curiosity but, apart from that, it has no commercial future whatsoever.'"

Lumière was perfectly sincere in saying this. But Méliès would not listen to him. This young man had been a manufacturer, a mechanic, a cabinetmaker, a draughtsman, a painter, a caricaturist on *La Griffes*, which he ran and illustrated almost entirely himself throughout the Boulangist period. For the last eight years he had been the manager and proprietor of the Théâtre Robert-Houdin at 16, Passage de l'Opéra, where he gave shows of magic and prestidigitation, produced puppet shows and devised various pieces of electrical apparatus by means of which to present tableaux and transformations like *The Marvelous Wreath*. Even at school at Louis-le-Grand he had constructed a Punch-and-Judy show in his desk.

He brought to the films wide experience and interests, and the resourcefulness of a Jack-of-all-trades which enabled him to make anything he wanted at lightning speed, a robust and unspoiled talent much like that of the early painters, an imagination as rich and all-embracing as that of a child. He had a curious Protean quality in a world which is both changeable and deceptive. "I was at one and the same time," he said one day in his delightfully simple way, "an intellectual worker and a manual worker. That explains why I loved the cinema so passionately."

This prestidigitator was just what the cinema needed. As he knew how to do everything, how to make anything, how to devise all sorts of tricks, the Lumières' invention gave him a chance to unleash all his gifts. He began by showing Edison's films on

the Boulevard des Italiens, then, realizing the possibilities of this new medium, soon became a producer and made a first *Trip to the Moon* at Montreuil. Films of marching regiments and of trains puffing into stations were not enough to satisfy him.

Almost immediately he attempted to apply to the new invention what he had learned in the Théâtre Robert-Houdin. *The Vanishing Lady* was his first tentative attempt in this direction. Success gave him confidence. He produced *The Bewitched Inn*, then in 1896 *The Devil's Castle*, a film nearly a reel long, and *The Laboratory of Mephistopheles*.

Chance played its usual jocular role in his development. One day when he was filming the traffic on the Place de l'Opéra, his camera jammed. It took him all of a minute to readjust it. He continued to crank and finished his picture, but when he came to develop it he perceived that while his camera had been out of gear the scene had undergone a change, and that a passing omnibus had suddenly been metamorphosed into a hearse—as unexpectedly as, twenty years later, another hearse also surprisingly appeared in *Entr'acte*. From this mishap, Méliès learned something extremely important—that in the realm of the cinema there is no such thing as fair play, that the hand of the director can control everything in a film and that, above all, the film's chief purpose is to entertain the public by tricks like this one which accident had just fortuitously discovered for him.

Méliès soon afterwards produced his *One Man Band* in which he, as the one and only actor, appeared in numerous roles simultaneously. Besides multiple exposure, he also introduced stop-motion photography, taken frame by frame, so that inanimate objects appear to move on the screen as, in 1925, we saw the furniture scuttling from the house in René Clair's *Italian Straw Hat*.

To these innovations another important one was shortly to be added. Early in 1897, the singer Paulus came to Méliès and asked him to make movies of him singing his songs.* At the last moment Paulus, made up as for the stage, refused to perform in the daylight. Faced with this problem, Méliès hurriedly painted

* To be shown with phonograph accompaniment.

some scenery, fixed up adequate illumination, and made the films indoors. The results were satisfactory, and thus the idea of a studio was born.*

MAKING A FILM IN 1900

The success of such novelties as these gave the improvised or manufactured film an advantage over the straightforward photography of everyday events. It was now that Méliès' gifts really came into play: he became the general factotum of the new art and turned out a fresh film each week (though of course the longest of them was at first only two hundred feet). The work entailed in production was huge. First, scenery had to be prepared as a background in the form of a large painted canvas hung at the end of the studio, like a back cloth in an old-fashioned photographic studio. The desired scenery was depicted in grays and blacks, for if colors were used they created false photographic values. Once the background was ready, the producer then manufactured whatever furniture or stage properties he thought fit to introduce. This was the work that Méliès loved best. He has preserved to this day enormous portfolios full of his sketches. "Film production is interesting because it is first and foremost manual work," he declared some years later. At times quite complicated sets were used. For instance, if a factory were to be shown in the distance, this had to be constructed in miniature (much as a child might laboriously make one out of toy bricks, rather than in the highly scientific manner used by Fritz Lang in *Metropolis*). All these contrivances were executed in a workmanlike studio, "the first in the world," which Méliès had built to his own design behind his house at Montreuil. "In a word," he said, "it is a combination of an immense photographic studio and the stage of a theater." This gigantic building was all of fifty feet long by thirty feet wide. The backdrops hung at one end as in the theater. Often there

* The Edison "studio," the Black Maria, existed from 1893, but many Edison films, such as *The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots*, were made in the open air outside the Black Maria.

were also wings and set pieces in the foreground as well. Light came in through the glass roof and sides, and the actual filming had to be done promptly, since "if time were wasted, the daylight began to fade and made it impossible to shoot." The really original thing about the place was the number of trap doors, holes, chutes, ropes, capstans, revolving drums and winches used for making characters appear or vanish, and for creating "apparitions." Actually the building looked much more like a torture chamber than like a modern studio, though it retained the glass panes of the old-fashioned photographer.

When the setting was all ready, two strings were attached to the foot of the camera, carried thence to the extreme right and left edges of the background and there secured. These marked the limits of the photographic field of vision. Next the cameraman fixed another string across, parallel to the back cloth, to delimit the area beyond which a player must not advance if he were to appear full length. Now, closer to the camera, he fixed yet another string parallel to the first to mark the point at which an actor would be photographed down to the knees and yet another at the point where he would be visible only to the waist. One director, Robert Péguy, has related how once, when he wanted to use these medium shots, his producer objected. "Are you crazy?" he cried. "What are all these individuals of whom one sees only the upper half? Audiences are going to think that we have hired a lot of cripples!" *

In all of Léon Gaumont's first films the star, Alice Guy, was supported by two leading men, one of whom was a studio mechanic and the other an apprentice at the factory. Carpenters, electricians and engineers working in the studio frequently played starring roles. Everybody took part. Zecca, Pathé's collaborator, acted drunks, and just before the war Léonce Perret was more often occupied as a comedian than as a director, particularly in the series of *Léonce* comedies. When an attempt was made to employ professional actors, unexpected difficulties arose. They opened their mouths wide, threw back their heads and thumped

* A similar anecdote is told of D. W. Griffith's earliest films using medium shots and close-ups.

their chests but failed to register anything comprehensible in this unfamiliar medium. Besides, they heartily despised the cinema, which they regarded as a proper field only for jugglers and acrobats. Rather than struggle with such artists, the producers preferred to do their own acting or to employ their relatives and friends. This is what Méliès did, and so did Pathé.

After the film had been photographed, it had to be edited and often colored, too. Editing was a complicated job at first because it was necessary to cut up the film into six-foot lengths in order to develop it. Coloring was carried out in two special workrooms in Paris, run by a Mme. Thuilier and Mlle. Chaumont, both employing about fifty colorists, each of whom was entrusted with a single color, like the rabbits in Walt Disney's *Funny Little Bunnies*. The work was done entirely by hand, which accounts for the freshness, the naïveté and accuracy of the color in the early films. A few years later, Pathé invented stencil coloring: this put an end to hand coloring but it also shortly put an end to colored film.

MUSÉE GRÉVIN

From now on, films became more diversified. It would be impossible to understand the real nature of this radically *popular* art without considering certain very important influences* which it absorbed. The film originally derived much of its character from the picture postcard, from the Musée Grévin † and from the colored pages of the *Petit Journal*. Thirty years ago in any little village you could find (and sometimes still find today) one of those small stores smelling of licorice, flypapers, barley sugar and coffee. Inside, a little old woman as placid as a cabbage sits among reels of thread and jars of candy. At her right on a re-

* Dr. Erwin Panofsky has illuminatingly defined the three principal ingredients of the motion picture in his article "Style and Medium in the Motion Picture," *Transition*, No. 26, 1937, pp. 121-133. They are "Melodramatic incidents, preferably of a sanguinary kind . . . crudely comical incidents as illustrated in the cheapest kind of funny cartoons . . . mildly pornographic postcards . . ." This important article deserves close study.

† Similar to the Eden Musée and Mme. Tussaud's.

volving stand are displayed faded picture postcards, of Czar Nicholas with President Loubet, a train puffing into a station and sweethearts gazing at each other across a pink fence. On her left hang illustrations from the *Petit Journal*, such as have excited the dramatic instincts of the local rustics by their melodramatic style and violent colors in presenting the Assassination of President Carnot, the Fire at the Bazar de la Charité or the Execution of Bolo Pacha. Such were the models on which the film based itself, as it became self-conscious and realized its power to deceive the eye.

One of Méliès' earliest successes, late in 1898, was a series of films in which he reconstructed (in little incidents barely sixty feet long) the principal events in the Dreyfus case. Among them were "Dreyfus' Court-Martial—Arrest of Dreyfus," "Devil's Island—Within the Palisade," "Suicide of Colonel Henry," "Dreyfus Meets His Wife at Rennes" and "The Degradation of Dreyfus."

This admirable series of primitives, a sort of animated wax-works, somehow reminds one of the character in Pabst's *Dreigroschenoper* who sings of the various adventures of Mackie Messer to the music of a hand organ.*

A prototype of Mackie himself was about to appear in Zecca's *Story of a Crime*, issued by Pathé and one of that firm's biggest successes. It showed an apache with peaked cap and sinister forelock, engaged upon nefarious tasks in a dark street; then the night patrol and the discovery of the crime; magistrates in frock coats, and the medical officer with his precise gestures; witnesses giving evidence; the arrest in a wretched bar; and, finally, an early-morning scene at the guillotine. It was thought necessary to ban this final tableau. Censorship came into action almost before the film was out of its cradle.

A few months later, Pathé produced a series of *Capital Punishments in Various European Countries*—by the ax, by hanging,

* Actually the Dreyfus film "reminds" one much more appropriately of the magic lantern slides which were so popular before the invention of the motion picture: there is a definite relationship between them and primitive films of this sort.

garroting, etc., each thirty feet long. Simultaneously, the magazine *Lectures Pour Tous* ran some copiously illustrated articles on the same topic: public taste at the time ran very much in this direction. A similar source of inspiration gave us the film *Underworld of Paris* in 1906 and *The Exploits of Elaine* in 1915. For films of this type any current event might furnish a fresh subject.

An *Assassination of President McKinley* was re-enacted in one studio and followed suitably enough by *The Execution of His Murderer*, by *The Death of Pope Leo XIII*, *The Assassination of the Serbian Royal Family* and *The Eruption of Mont-Péle*. Foremost among reconstructed events, however, was the film of *Edward VII's Coronation* which Méliès made for the English firm, Warwick Trading Company. It was produced at Montreuil and provided the monarch himself with considerable amusement when he eventually saw it.

"ART" FILMS

There was yet another traditional source upon which the films were to draw, and here too the influence of the picture postcard is to be traced, though with a difference, for they were a rather special type of postcard. They were those which in catalogues are rather prettily described as "piquant." These "piquant scenes" had been popularized by Piron, the famous Parisian photographer, known as the "Royal Photographer," who conceived the idea of producing an album of "art" photographs; they included some very seductive studies of Mlle. Louise Milly. One of his friends thought the cinema might as well profit by his success in this direction and, under his supervision and that of Léar, the album was translated to the screen in a film christened *Bedtime for the Bride*. Two new halls had to be opened to cope with the demand for this. Today most films of this type appeal to us, if at all, by their ridiculous coyness, but at that time they struck the public imagination in quite another way. There is no more astonishing document for us today on the morals of the era of the Paris Exposition than the films like *The Indiscreet Maid*, or a childish

and reticent *Flirting on the Train*, in which gentlemen in morning coats with immensely high starched collars sway amorously towards ladies in satin waists and button boots, all nonchalance and prudery. There is, for instance, a *Judgment of Paris* of this period in which the roles are enacted by acrobats with carefully curled hair, in flesh-colored tights from the ends of which toes and fingers of a darker tone protrude; the whole thing takes place in a grotto straight out of comic opera. An *Awakening of Chrysis* is lyrically described in a catalogue of the time: "Chrysis wakes in an atmosphere redolent of Oriental perfumes. A negress tends her respectfully, as languorously she raises from her couch her slumbrous body." This film cost forty francs outright.

If you had the price, you could see Mlle. Milly smoking a cigarette in the sumptuous boudoir of a demimondaine, or vainly hunting for a flea in her tussore petticoat. A *Fashionable Lady at Her Bath* was shown receiving visitors in a bathroom decked in silken draperies and a Japanese screen on which exotic birds sported among bamboos. But let us draw a veil here. It is an exaggeration to say, as some have, that the film was born in questionable surroundings. That it obtained some of its education there cannot be denied.

COMEDIES AND ANIMATED CARTOONS

The era of the short film persisted for a long time. We must remember that most of the first exhibitors were fairground people. In their eyes, a film had to provide a substitute for an acrobatic turn or a parade, and the films they liked best were comedies from sixty to a hundred and twenty feet long. The comedian Dranem in his first films appeared now as a baker's man, now as an old soldier, an elderly hag or a man smitten with the colic. The elderly dude, the policeman, the detective, the lady's maid, the pastry cook, the drunk and the porter were the principal characters in these comedies, which varied very little and were all based on the inexhaustible material drawn from circuses and pantomimes. Trick photography added ludicrous novelties—garments disappeared or flung themselves onto human torsos

with unbelievable rapidity, beefsteaks vanished, pots of paint flew about, furniture executed a wild dance.

Then animated cartoons made their appearance. The first cartoon-on-film was made by Emile Cohl in 1908 with the appropriate title of *Phantasmagoria*. It was composed of two thousand drawings and was one hundred feet long. The essential technique of animated cartoons was exhibited in it, though the drawings themselves were crude. *Le Fétard* of 1908, for instance, is little more than schoolboy scribbling. Curiously enough, when the Russians began making animated cartoons in 1934* they used the same rather infantile fashion of drawing faces and bodies, just as if thirty years of technical improvement had not elapsed. Emile Cohl made many cartoons—such as *When Matches Struck*, *Merry Microbes* and his parody on *Chantecler*—but later on turned to the production of popular-scientific films.

FAIRY TALES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

The contribution of all these early producers cannot be overlooked. Despite the founding of American or Italian firms, the film throughout its first years was predominantly French—Gauumont, Pathé, Léar. Also, one must not overlook the part played by Mesguich †—one of Lumière's first projectionists and cameramen, who opened movie shows in the United States and all over the world. He traveled as far afield as Tibet and China, was the first man to photograph Lhasa and explored the country of the Tuaregs and the Far West. It was he who suggested having *A Trip to the Moon* accompanied by appropriate music. But the greatest creative worker was still Méliès.

His earliest fantastic films, such as *The Devil's Castle*, were much to the liking of the youthful audiences at the Théâtre Robert-Houdin. Partly out of a desire to please them, partly

* An error, perhaps a misprint for 1914. The first Russian animated cartoons were made by Starevich in 1913. After the Revolution, production was resumed in 1923.

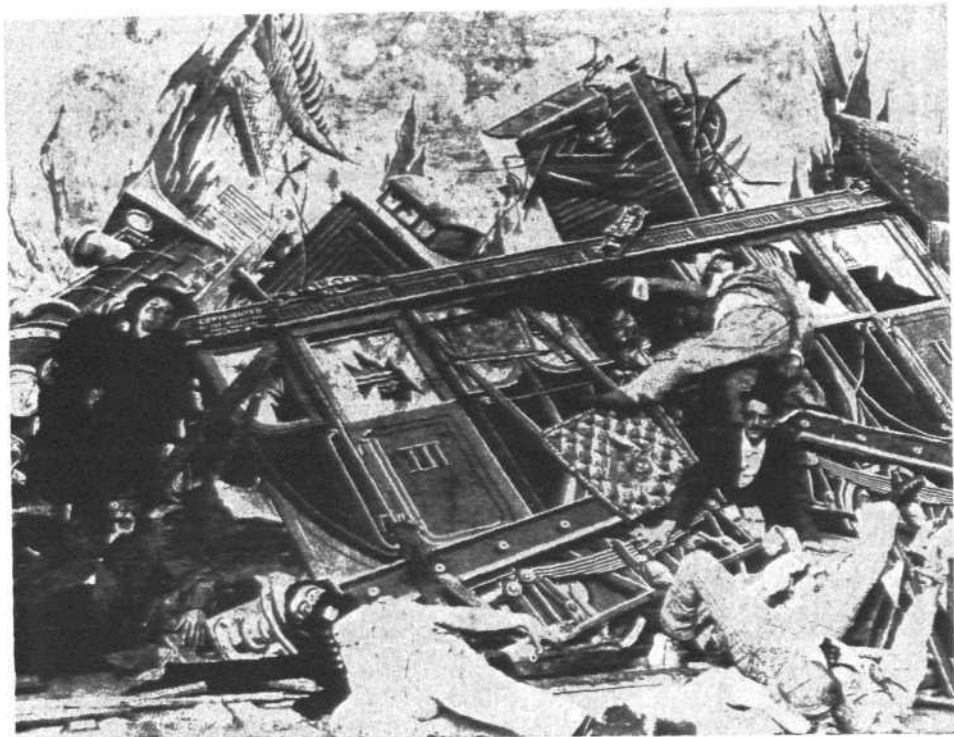
† Mesguich has recounted his experiences in *Tours de Manivelle*, Grasset, Paris, 1933.



An early French film, Louis Lumière's Pastime in the Family Circle (1896).

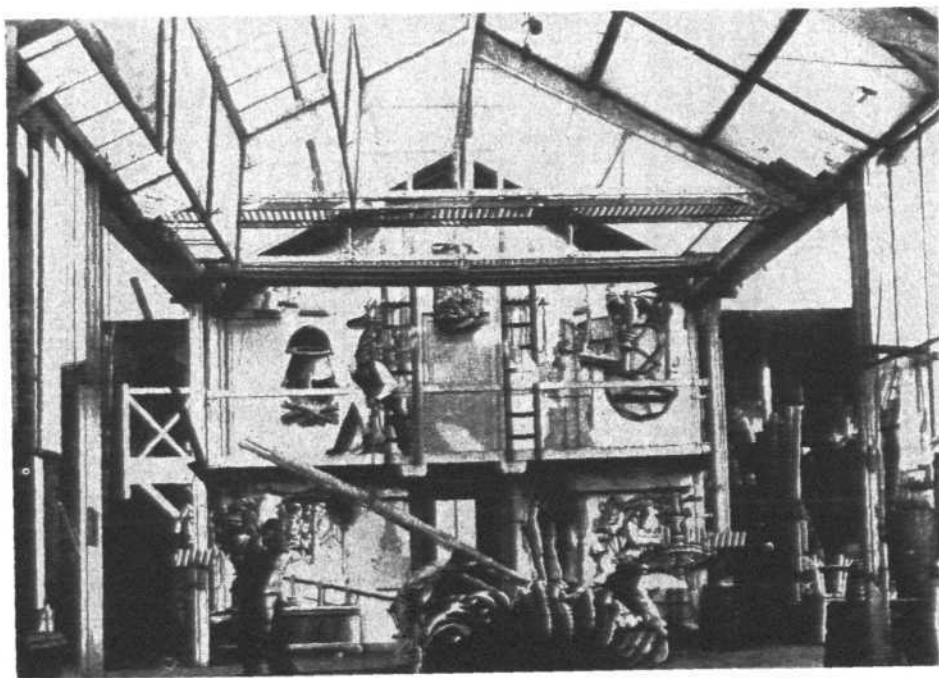
The May Irwin-John C. Rice Kiss, a popular American film of 1896.





An Impossible Voyage (1904), one of the many trick-films produced, designed and directed by Georges Méliès.

The studio in which Georges Méliès made his films.



out of a personal predilection for the sumptuous settings, the diverse and fairylike flora of imaginary worlds, Méliès made films of adventures such as a child might dream. During the Exposition of 1900 he began work on his first superfilms, all nearly a whole reel long—*Cinderella*, *Red Riding Hood*, *Bluebeard*. The first one, *Cinderella*, set the type for them all. It was distributed by Pathé, and Méliès was vexed when Zecca cut it down from two thousand to nine hundred feet, thus sacrificing many of the trick scenes. After this, Méliès broke with Pathé. Among these lizards that turn into lackeys, rats that turn into coachmen without sacrificing their long whiskers, amid all this complicated and childish fairyland, Méliès had hit upon something. Out of his past experience, he discovered how to produce trick scenes and thus become quite independent of "reality." He was to turn all the fairy tales into films: and even they were not enough. The miracles of science, of speed, must be drawn upon, too. He concocted this new recipe for entertainment out of a droll and delightful combination in which monstrous machines from *La Science et la Vie* were allied to Jules Verne's plots. It was as though, in 1900, Méliès himself had been a twelve-year-old boy.

He turned out *A Trip to the Moon*, *An Adventurous Automobile Trip*, *Under the Sea*, *Rip Van Winkle*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *An Impossible Voyage*, *The Merry Frolics of Satan*. These films defied both technical limitations and current fashion. They were made for a public such as filled the Théâtre du Châtelet and were probably none the worse for that. With their good-humored air, their rough-and-ready cutting, their stilted acting, their settings which put one in mind of the opera at its worst, and their restricted movement, they display all the faults of the infant film. Yet from many points of view they are exceedingly rich and suggestive. A technical audacity which grew constantly bolder, an unflinching inventiveness and the virtuosity of an intellectual juggler earned for his work a special place and led him to open new paths for the motion picture. His prodigious fertility, his habit of disregarding obstacles and even of inviting them, and the ability of this Paganini of the film to juggle with décor, was

what particularly struck his contemporaries and gave him a front place in their ranks. But his films as a whole would seem to us little better than ingenious mechanical contrivances today were they not redeemed by more important elements. What we love in Méliès is a poetical quality, somewhat painstaking and clumsily archaic, but full of unexpected and sincere loveliness.

Castles copied from old missals, landscapes such as only fairy-land knows, meticulous and primitive perspectives, a rather acid color, settings and characters straight out of Mme. Tussaud's, all surge up in the thick of incredible adventures, reminding us sometimes of a valentine and sometimes of the little Tuscan villages in Lorenzetti's paintings—and all in bad taste so ingenuous that it is transformed in some strange way into the most elegant poetry. It is elements like these which combine to make his early masterpieces so precious.

This Jules Verne of the screen was not merely a gifted prestidigitator: he happened also to be the first poet of the cinema. There have not been many of them since. The nearest thing to these laboriously tinted films, with their deliberately unreal settings and infinite repertory of tricks, is the animated cartoons of today. The heir to Méliès is Walt Disney. But others, too, learned much from him. Otherwise, should we ever have had that ascension scene in *Liliom*, where Lang so charmingly created a paradise out of fairgrounds and merry-go-rounds? When we look at one of Méliès' exquisite scenes—some little seaport with its dainty fleet straight out of Gozzoli—we can readily forgive the heavy make-up and frenzied gesturing of the actors (who are the weakest part of his films). He has only to show us a gilded coach drawn by one old skeleton of a horse to put us in the frame of mind to set forth too, in fancy, with this quixotic steed, to realize that the Milky Way is a pretty girl in a 1900 costume, that the stars know how to play the lyre, or to accept the existence of a whole miraculous cosmogony such as we see at the end of *The Merry Frolics of Satan*. It seems quite natural that men should walk upside down on the ceiling, evil spirits spring out of clocks, Aurora and the Great Bear engage in a swimming contest, an umbrella turn into a giant mushroom, Saturn appear

in the midst of his own rings and ten women come tumbling out of a parasol.

A BUSINESS ANECDOTE OF 1898

Méliès was going full blast. His firm, Star-Films, was pre-eminent in the French market and his product was widely circulated abroad. His competitors—Charles Pathé and Léon Gaumont in France, Urban and Warwick Trading Company in England, Ambrosio and Cines in Italy—followed his recipes and imitated his methods. In 1904, despite Edison's opposition, he opened a branch in the United States. In 1908, Méliès presided over the International Congress of Film Producers, at which all the most important film makers gathered. It was on this occasion that he succeeded, despite opposition, in getting a standard perforation of film stock adopted, a step which finally made possible a really international motion-picture industry. President of the *Chambre Syndicale du Cinéma* which he had founded in 1897, he was the undisputed leader of the new industry. At the same time he was its most creative technician. To the innumerable trick effects he invented, which his fellow producers sought unavailingly to imitate, he had just added the "dissolve" which rendered unnecessary abrupt cuts between scenes. Here again a lucky accident helped him.

In his studio it had become customary gradually to diminish the aperture of the lens while shooting the last few feet of each scene, in order not to fog the film. When the work of editing followed, this portion was eliminated as being no part of the footage proper. One day someone forgot to cut it, and, when the film was projected, Méliès realized that a much smoother transition from one scene to the next could thus be achieved. He experimented with repeating the process inversely, commencing each new scene with the diaphragm almost closed, then opening the aperture gradually as the new scene started. By doing this at the beginning and end of each scene he effected a rough dissolve. Méliès also discovered the use of masking, double-exposure, slow-motion and rapid-motion photography.

His prosperity concealed one serious weakness, which was the financial organization of his firm, Star-Films. At the beginning of 1898, when Méliès' business was beginning to expand, an agent came to him to propose putting him in touch with important silent partners. Méliès agreed. A few days later, the agent called again with a Mr. W., who introduced himself as director of the Société d'Etudes Industrielles et Commerciales. Méliès explained how his business operated: they listened with interest. Next came an expert, then an engineer, then another expert. Each of them declared that the firm seemed extremely sound and that the Société d'Etudes would willingly undertake to find capital to invest in it. Only, there were certain steps to be taken first, they would probably have to sound out various parties and, in short, they asked Méliès to pay down twenty-five thousand francs. Méliès paid. Several months passed: Méliès waited. The Société d'Etudes gave no sign of life. Méliès became worried and finally reached the point where he should have started: he began investigations. They were sadly conclusive. The Société d'Etudes had engaged in various financial operations about which numerous firms in the entertainment business had little to report that was pleasant. Méliès wanted to bring suit. He was asked to lay out sixty thousand francs before he could appear against Mr. W. He felt disinclined to do so and left Mr. W. to pursue his course untroubled. This incident gave Méliès little liking for investments or for partners.

Some time later another man came to see Méliès. "I am M. Grivolos. I am in the electrical supply business and the films interest me." "I see," said Méliès. "Are you doing well?" "Not badly," said he. "And are you breaking into the foreign markets?" "Here and there," said Méliès. "M. Méliès," continued M. Grivolos, "it has occurred to me that the capital at my disposal (here Méliès pricked up his ears) might be of considerable service to some sound firm in the motion-picture business able to offer me suitable inducements to invest in it." Méliès had now reared up in alarming fashion, but the unsuspecting M. Grivolos continued: "If you are willing to let my experts come and see you and also to give me security, I am willing to invest the

sum of . . ." M. Grivolos was unable to complete his sentence. Méliès had risen and in silent fury showed him the door.

M. Grivolos was much mystified but little disposed to argue. He went to see M. Pathé instead and enabled him to form a limited liability company with a capital of 2,600,000 francs. When Grivolos meets Méliès he never fails to say: "If you had listened to me, today you would own the firm of Méliès-Natan." When Méliès tells the anecdote, he sighs.

The situation generally was about to undergo a change. At first, producers sold their films outright to the exhibitors, a system which made it possible for independents like Méliès to compete with more extensively financed producers. In 1904, however, three of Méliès' assistants, Michaux, Astaix and Lallement, opened a film-renting agency. This enterprise, after initial difficulties, was so successful that in 1907 Pathé decided to abandon the sale of films and to organize instead a chain of renting offices all over France. Méliès, feeling that he was ill-equipped for this method of operation, stuck to outright sales. From that time on his position became that of a lively and colorful pioneer, more interesting by reason of the variety and originality of his output than any of his competitors, but destined to defeat at their hands in the field of commerce. Thenceforward he specialized. He made a domain of the fantastic and trick film, in which his superiority remained incontestable, but he stood aside from the main avenues along which the motion picture was now to progress.

NARRATIVE FILMS

The chief of these avenues, as was inevitable once the first superfilms of six hundred to twelve hundred feet had appeared, was that of the narrative film. There was at first a sort of instinctive repugnance to the construction of motion pictures around a unified and set plot. The idea of a scenario developed slowly. Méliès himself regarded his own films as a series of gags and of diverting trick effects: each single incident or scene which of-

ferred him the opportunity to create a startling or comical pictorial effect interested him far more than the main plot of his films.

Again it was the Musée Grévin, that repository of undeviating tradition, which inspired the coming change. The first ambitious films had consisted of a series of *tableaux vivants* rather than of coherent plots. Someone had the idea of translating famous paintings to the screen—Millet's "Angelus," for instance, or "Les Dernières Cartouches" and "La Défense du Drapeau." * Next, a whole sequence of illustrations was used as the basis for an early *Life of Christ*, a sort of photographic Stations of the Cross which bore more resemblance to cheap religious chromos than to the famous paintings they affected to represent.

A long lineage of films was founded by Zecca's *Story of a Crime*, a picture of real importance. Here for the first time was tapped the whole repertory of sanguinary crime as illustrated in the daily papers. From *The Story of a Crime* sprang a posterity of violence which is still with us. In 1906 Pathé produced a "dramatic and realistic" *Underworld of Paris*, half a reel in length. Here is the plot of this ancestor of *The Exploits of Elaine*:

This film offers us an authentic study of the lower depths of the city and reveals the operations of the fearsome apaches, so much dreaded by the inhabitants of Paris. In eight strikingly realistic scenes we are offered a complete survey of the Paris underworld and its sinister denizens.

Two o'clock in the morning: The bold robbers under cover of darkness pry up the heavy cover of a sewer and disappear into the bowels of the earth. The gang proceeds to the cellars of a bank and breaks in through a wall. We see the floor give way beneath their repeated blows and the thieves climbing through one by one. They seize the safe, lower it into the street and carry it off.

At dawn near the fortifications: Near the fortifications, meeting place for all the most dangerous of Paris' human vermin, the

* "Les Dernières Cartouches" by Alphonse de Neuville, "La Défense du Drapeau" by Paul Alexandre Protais exhibited respectively at the Salons of 1873 and 1876. The first depicts an incident during the battle of Sedan and the other an incident at Metz.

bandits gather to divide the spoils. The empty safe lies abandoned in the grass: the bags of gold it once contained are being passed from hand to hand. Vagrant women, the pitiful companions of these thieves, lend their aid. But now the police, hot on the trail, arrive on the scene and by an ingenious maneuver, every detail of which can be followed, encircle the gang. After a stubborn resistance the bandits are captured, save one of the fiercest who engages the police sergeant in a hand-to-hand contest.

This extremely lively film will delight all with its vivid realism, depicting as it does one of the depredations carried out daily by these bold thieves who are the terror of the merchants of Paris and the despair of its police.

As this dramatic genre proved popular, each firm now started to issue quantities of story films. Pathé began with *The School of Adversity*, ancestor of many psychological pictures. In 1904 his firm produced *Roman d'Amour: A Drama Relived*, in seven scenes: The Seduction—From Toil to a Life of Pleasure—Abandoned—Dying of Hunger—A Letter to Her Parents—The Dreadful Expiation—In the Hospital. This film was issued with a colored poster and with illustrated handbills. A little later came *A Fair Spy, A Woman in Despair, A Venetian Drama*. This was a rich era of plots from Henry Bataille, of velvet gowns à la Worth, of bicycles and of last-minute reconciliations. There was nothing to prevent the movies from progressing from plots inspired by the penny novelette to the full splendor of the psychological drama; and Pathé produced *The Age for Love*. About this the Pathé catalogue grows lyrical:

She had married out of ignorance, or fear, or obedience, or indifference, as young girls do.

He was an elderly general, gallant and covered with medals, decorations and glory. . . .

She was everything in the world to him, the one great love in the life of a man already growing old.

Her days were long, meaningless and gay, filled up with a round of engagements and visits where everyone ate and drank and laughed without knowing why. She had no child. She lived without cares, without hope, without anchorage.

A young acquaintance of her husband's who came often to the house brought new interest into her life. She felt happy, suffused with a quick and radiant joy under the influence of a dawning sympathy for him. They went for walks together, talking as they strolled slowly side by side. She drank in his every word, gazing entranced as he spoke of things often disturbing to hear but delicious to listen to.

He became her lover. . . . How should it happen otherwise when two human beings are drawn together by a mutual love?

The husband, warned by an anonymous letter, surprises them in a hunting lodge. Yet in his troubled soul pity arises and, maybe, a realization of the helplessness of two such young and ardent lovers, and he turns against himself the weapon with which he had thought to reap revenge. 250 feet,* price 170 francs.

In 1902 Pathé also produced an ancestor of many a screen adaptation by offering the first *Quo Vadis*, a film that lasted all of twenty minutes and which, apparently, caused audiences to roar with laughter.

TALKING FILMS AT THE PARIS EXPOSITION

Only the spoken word was needed to make these masterpieces the equal of Henry Bataille's and Henri Lavédan's plays but, happily, at that time speech was reserved for other uses. Talking films, however, were not unknown and before the war Léon Gaumont gave a talkie each week in his theaters. In 1900 he had effected a combination between the phonograph and the movie; in 1902 he put the Chronophone on the market. Synchronized films were also given under the name of Phonos-Scènes. In 1912, even colored talkies were to appear.

Here again Méliès had led the way. When Paulus had inspired him to create a studio, he had also given him the idea of allying the old-fashioned cylindrical phonograph record to the movie projection machine. Paulus sang on the screen every evening thereafter.

Others were not slow to take the hint. Various kinds of spe-

* Two hundred and fifty feet of film last four minutes.

cial phonographs for synchronization were manufactured. Several *Duos from Carmen* (film and record, 120 francs) and the like were issued. Sketches by Galipaux, songs by Yvette Guilbert were recorded; and in 1902—for the delectation of those sensitive souls in love with high-class poetry—they produced a talkie of *The Dress* by Eugène Manuel, with the sound of a distant nocturne apparently drifting in through a window and a double-exposure angel floating around: film and record, 120 francs.

At the Paris Exposition of 1900, talkies of recitations by famous actors, of songs and of snatches of opera enacted before shaky scenery, in fact everything from Little Tich to Coquelin and Rostand was shown, though only with relative success. Today these early talkies strike one as extraordinary, for, despite their imperfections, one can observe the gestures, catch the inflections and study the postures of the famous performers of yesterday. The duel scene from *Cyrano*, a fragment from *Les Précieuses Ridicules* has the power to amaze and disconcert us. Was that what they called great acting in 1900? Can they actually have admired such barefaced mugging, such winks and nods to the audience, such poses, such an extraordinary style of delivery? The really astonishing thing is that the film, deriving in part from a theatrical tradition such as this, should ever have developed a style of its own.

At times the primitive talkies have power to move us, ridiculous though they be. Yet they were hardly more effective in their way than the old cinema noise machines, borrowed from the Châtelet, from which, by means of a complicated system of cranks and rolls, emanated the sound of hoofbeats, trains, automobiles and the smashing of china. These reproduced sounds about as well as the early sound films of 1928.

As recording for the phonograph was a tricky business at best, and as it was necessary to speak close to the recording apparatus, these early talkies were made by two separate operations. The actors sang first, then acted afterwards. An ingenious device roughly synchronized lip movements and sound. Thus from the very birth of the talking film, sound-synchronization has been used, and from the very birth of cinematography the films have

talked. Understandably enough, it was announced in 1907 that "the cinema has now attained its climax."

THE AMERICAN FILM *

What was happening in America all this time? The early years of the American film resemble in many ways those of the French film. Events were perhaps more excessive and frenzied, and there was an almost terrifying amount of invention, of wild experiments, of crazy ideas and of fortunes made in a few weeks and lost in a day. A horde of adventurers of every description—cattlemen and plumbers, furriers, secondhand furniture dealers and fairground proprietors—hurled themselves upon the new amusement, engaged in epic struggles with one another and finally from out of chaos created the foundations of a great industry.

Edison had invented, at about the same time as Lumière, a machine called the kinetoscope.† In 1895, Armat and Jenkins had also perfected a machine much better adapted for projection, which they called the vitascope. The first private exhibitions with the vitascope were given during the summer of 1895. Edison invited Armat to join the firm he had already founded for the exploitation of the kinetoscope, and to use a projector which would combine the features of both machines.‡ This was done and, in April 1896, Edison gave a first public performance at Koster and Bial's in New York, which proved as much of a success as had Lumière's first exhibition in December 1895. A few weeks later the Lumière company and B. F. Keith also gave exhibitions in New York, the former at the Eden Musée and the latter in a theater on Union Square. These first shows were received well enough, though with a certain suspicion. The Ameri-

* Much of this and of subsequent sections devoted to the American film is based on Hampton's *A History of the Movies*, Covici Friede, New York, 1930. *q.v.*

† Edison had invented the kinetoscope or peep show in 1889; it was this which inspired Lumière to make motion pictures which could be projected, in 1895. The first kinetoscope parlor opened on Broadway in 1894.

‡ Actually the sequence of events was not as simple as this. The facts can be found in *A Million and One Nights*, by Terry Ramsaye, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1926, 2 vols.

cans had recently been familiarized with all sorts of new marvels by Barnum and others, and had encountered various good reasons for mistrusting dark halls. There seemed something odd about this novelty which offered so much in the way of entertainment for a few cents; and the public remained so obstinately suspicious of a trick of some kind that one enterprising exhibitor cut a hole in the back wall of his hall so that prospective customers might peep in before buying a ticket and convince themselves that there really would be something inside worth seeing. There was also the danger of pickpockets but, as people gradually discovered that darkness provided certain compensations as well as dangers, they finally got used to the idea.

By some common instinct, the first American films were very much like those being turned out by Pathé or Gaumont or Méliès. In any case, the Americans did not insist upon originality. As late as 1905 their films, broadly speaking, followed the lines indicated by the French. Their studios painstakingly imitated the brief farces and the love scenes made in France. During those early years the producers cared little enough about what they turned out, though they were firmly convinced that the public would accept only films lasting no more than two or three minutes and that anything longer would prove bewildering or incomprehensible. As they themselves made up both the plot and the incidents of their films it is easy to imagine the sort of things they were.

They did produce, however, a certain amount of characteristically American material. Topical films and newsreels were among their earliest successes. In 1897, a patriotic superfilm was made one night on top of the Morse Building only a few hours after the declaration of war with Spain; its title, *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag!* This early effort of the Vitagraph Company (afterwards merged in Warner Brothers) proved a tremendous hit. Other producers sought to go one better and film the actual fighting in Cuba. They were not permitted to get anywhere near the scene of actual hostilities, for the unfamiliar cameras they brought with them were suspected of sinister uses and the cameramen were sent packing. Nothing daunted, one of them named

Amet, on his return to New York, launched in his bathtub a flotilla of little boats made of cork, or wood, or paper, and so filmed the sinking of Cervera's fleet before Santiago. According to M. Ferri-Pisani* the Spaniards purchased a print of this naval epic and placed it in their national archives as a record of their stubborn and heroic resistance.

Having set a fashion in this simple manner, American producers proceeded to film, at a safe distance, episodes of the Boer War: audiences vigorously booed the English troops. At other times, however, they went to the actual scene, as when in 1899 gold was discovered in Alaska and propaganda films financed by railroad and steamship companies were made to show the public (much after the fashion described in Jules Romains' *Donogoo-Tonka*) the attractions of life in the Far North.

Quite as typically American and even more revealing of American temperament was the first superfilm, two reels long and consecrated to religious propaganda. It was estimated that the piety of the public would admit of a film of such extraordinary length, and no expense was spared in the making of it. Hurd, the American representative of Lumière, was accordingly sent abroad to film the Oberammergau *Passion Play*. So popular was it that the manager of the Eden Musée decided to film another *Passion Play*, but without incurring any traveling expenses. He assembled a group of actors on the roof of an office building and made the film there in deep secrecy. Though the secret of its origin leaked out, this film too earned great success.

The first genuine expression of the national spirit did not make its appearance until 1903, when Edwin S. Porter furnished new inspiration with his *Great Train Robbery*. This was the first genuine narrative film in America, lasting twelve minutes and having a real if crude plot. *The Great Train Robbery* holds the same place in the history of the American film as the *Arrival of a Train* held in that of the French film.† Its success established

* Who borrowed it from Terry Ramsaye.

† This is surely an error. *The Black Diamond Express* made by Edison in 1897 was the equivalent of *Arrival of a Train*, and *The Great Train Robbery* of Zecca's *Story of a Crime*.

a whole school: burglaries and criminal assaults were to be the order of the day. *The Great Bank Robbery* followed, then a host of others whose success was reinforced if not inspired by French films of the same sort, such as *Story of a Crime* and *Underworld of Paris*. By 1905, Vitagraph was making *Raffles, the Gentleman Crook*.

Meanwhile a queer crowd of people had been drawn into the new industry and were fighting ferociously with one another for pre-eminence. From Chicago, New York and St. Louis they came, a host of bold and crafty businessmen hot on the scent of something new. The firstcomers were the most picturesque. Marcus Loew, a furrier, bought a projector and traveled around the fairs with it; he made money and rented two or three halls. He then took one of his friends as partner, Adolph Zukor, also a furrier, and was shortly followed by a secondhand clothes dealer called William Fox. Carl Laemmle, a clothier, left a town in Wisconsin in order to rent a hall in Chicago, after long debating whether there really were people crazy enough to pay money for something they couldn't carry away with them. A fireman in Kansas City made a fortune by giving shows in a simulated railway coach across the end of which shimmered movies of far-away lands.* In 1905 an ingenious Pittsburgh businessman had the happy idea of renting a store, outside which he erected a glittering and many-hued façade. Here he provided a show lasting twenty minutes with piano accompaniment, all for five cents; he remained open from 8 A. M. to midnight. This emporium of elegance combined with cheapness was baptized a nickelodeon, a name which hit the public fancy and also indicated exactly what the cinema was to be for years to come. Nickelodeons opened in towns everywhere, attracted a large public and made it difficult for the producers to keep up with the demand for film.

The producers were not well organized. In 1895 † Edison had taken out a patent on his kinetoscope, and again for the vitascope

* These were shown similarly all over the world and were known as "Hale's Tours."

† Edison applied for his first patent on the kinetoscope on August 24, 1891. See Terry Ramsaye.

when he went into business with Armat. But, like Lumière, he regarded the films as a mere toy, interesting as a scientific problem but due for a vogue of a few months only. When he was urged to take out international patents he replied that he would not lay out so much as a dollar on any such foolery. He was an obstinate man and a genius: no one argued with him. But a few years later, when Edison saw how the film industry was developing, he became anxious to protect his patents in the United States and thus to exercise an absolute monopoly over the whole American industry.

As early as 1897 he started to fight by putting his affairs in the hands of a celebrated firm of lawyers, Dyer and Dyer, and instituting suits against all existing producers. It was the beginning of a protracted battle. Edison employed private detectives to ferret out all unauthorized copies of his machines. The old inventor at that time cut a singular figure, and a harsh one. Passionately intent on protecting his own interests, he actually bore little resemblance to the idyllic savant whom we were taught to admire in our childhood. Litigious, rapacious, he became a positive menace to film businessmen, who never knew when the sheriff would serve a subpoena of Edison's on them next. As a matter of fact, the other producers themselves were no better, and it is rather significant that the industry in America developed as a series of guerrilla wars between gangs armed literally as well as figuratively. Pathé had founded an American branch and attempted in 1907 to interpose in the endless series of lawsuits, but without success. All the talent of the best American lawyers barely sufficed to deliver the other producers from Edison's domination. Peace was signed in 1908 at a great and solemn banquet at which, in the presence of his rivals, the artful old fellow-faced with the threat of a relentless war against him waged by all of them in concert—finally came to terms.

It was only after this that the industry could go ahead and begin to make films seriously, though the earliest years are not without interest. America had no Méliès, but already in her first efforts, so full of movement and action, it is possible to foresee what she was to develop. It is possible also to foresee in what

light America was to regard the cinema as a whole: as a rich and entertaining *industry*.

A GLANCE BACKWARDS

After 1900 the film was to enter upon a new phase, but in its first years it most singularly recorded the death throes of an epoch. More clearly even than in the advertisements of the magazines of the period one may discern in the earliest films what the character of the era was, the secret history of its fashions, its bad taste, its aspirations and illusions. In the topical films and newsreels, in the buffooneries of the vulgar little comedies and farces, one catches the very flavor of the period when dining rooms, to be elegant, had to be furnished with Tudor reproductions, when the *art-nouveau* entrances to the Paris subway stations were erected, when automobiles first chugged along the highways and melodramas were all the rage. It is not a full photographic likeness of the time, but the cross references are unmistakable and not very flattering. An involuntary gesture can sometimes tell us more than a whole volume of memoirs, and the films with their abrupt and unstudied imagery really reveal the age. When the history of manners of 1897-1905 comes to be written the historians must not neglect to refer to these documents, for the authentic *look* of the epoch is there.

In all those first years, Méliès stood apart. Very much a man of his time, he was greatly impressed by "the marvels of science." As the Jules Verne of the cinema, he stems from the same impulses as produced the Eiffel Tower, the switchback railway and the novels of H. G. Wells. His predilection for make-believe was his salvation. He saw clearly that the cinema is not vowed to honesty and mere representation, that it knows no compulsion to logic or probability and that, above all else, it is a machine for creating illusions. Stamped all over his work is the first great law of the cinema: "Thou shalt deceive," and thus he invented an art and forged far ahead of his rivals.

He was one of the first to love his work genuinely, to realize its potential richness and greatness. "The art of cinematography,"

he wrote, "calls for so much experiment, necessitates so many different kinds of activity and requires so much sustained attention that I do not hesitate to say in all sincerity that it is the most alluring and the most interesting of all the arts, for it makes use of virtually all of them: drawing, painting, the drama, sculpture, architecture, mechanics and manual labor of every sort are all called into play in pursuing this extraordinary profession."

It was only much later that some extraordinary results of this attitude of his were to be seen, and they were to appear in another land. Using quite different methods from his, the animated cartoon was later to reveal what absolute freedom the moving image enjoys. The laws that govern the elements, the law of gravity, even life and death itself were to be suspended in favor of Mickey Mouse when trickery again became the inspiration of the cinema. But that was far ahead. When the champion in *Million Dollar Legs* flashed fifteen times around the stadium at the speed of a motorcycle, when the trees in the garden shed their bark to reveal cautious spies, when the dictator's palace proved to be a positive nest of trap doors and false panels, who could fail to recognize in this film a younger brother of *An Impossible Voyage* and *The Merry Frolics of Satan*?

Even if it had not been destined to constitute the first tentative step towards an original development of the film, the work of Méliès would still have been valuable. It can only be studied today in sadly few examples. In 1914 Star-Films was already insolvent when the government commandeered its offices and studios for military uses. There were several hundred kilograms of film there, the product of twenty years of work. In order to remove them, money was needed both for transportation and for new storage room. Méliès had lost most of his customers, his affairs were in bad shape, all entertainments had momentarily been closed and so he accepted an offer from a junk merchant, who melted his four hundred films down into a substance used in the manufacture of footwear. M. Maucières, founder of Studio 28, has since unearthed a few reels in an attic. They are the best-known ones—*A Trip to the Moon*, *The Merry Frolics of Satan*, *The Conquest of the Pole*, and one or two others. Caroly, a well-

known prestidigitator, owns a few others, and that is all that remains in France of the work of this pioneer. There is some consolation, however, in the knowledge that Star-Films had a New York branch which prospered not at all: Vitagraph bought it out in 1913. An almost complete collection of Méliès' films is now owned by a Mr. S. . . . He will neither sell them nor show them, presumably believing that some day they may have a value.

In 1928 M. Druhot, of the *Ciné-Journal*, discovered Méliès selling candy and toys in a booth at the Gare Montparnasse. He was given a banquet, and much lauded; he was even given some sort of decoration. Today he lives at Orly.* The Chambre Syndicale, which he founded and of which for ten years he was president, offered him quarters in its Home for the Aged there. One would imagine that something more might have been managed, in recognition of the role he played and of his own eminence as well as that which he conferred on the French film internationally. He was the only one of the first producers who did not make a fortune.

* Georges Méliès died after a short illness in January, 1938.