

BARRIE ELLIS-JONES

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NOTE

In this Reader, care has been taken to explain the technical terms in the text either when they first occur or shortly afterwards. Because of this it has not been found necessary to include a glossary.

ONE

INTRODUCTION

Thousands of years ago there was a group of people who hunted and killed animals for their food. These people lived in caves. On the walls of their caves they painted pictures of the animals that they hunted. And they painted pictures of themselves too. They wanted to show how the animals moved and how people moved when they hunted animals. And so they painted a lot of pictures to show all the different movements the animals and the hunters made.

The caves were dark. They needed lights to see the pictures. With a light they could go from picture to picture and see the whole story of a hunt, with all the movements that the hunters made from beginning to end.



Prehistoric cave painting in the caves at Lascaux, France.

We can still see these caves and pictures in Lascaux, a town in France. They tell us that the earliest men tried to show the movement of the real world in pictures.

In 1895, again in France, the two brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière made a machine that they called the cinématographe. It was from this word that we now have the 'cinema'.

For about sixty years the cinema was the most popular entertainment in the world. Then television was invented and soon became more popular than the cinema.

Here we tell the story of the cinema, and its sixty years of greatness. The most popular films came from one place, from Hollywood. Much of the story of the cinema is the story of Hollywood, the story of the American film industry.

It is a story that has a beginning, a middle and, almost, an end. Most of the Hollywood studios that made films for cinemas throughout the world have now closed or make films for television.

Most of the changes in the cinema happened first in Hollywood. The first successful sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, was made there. And so was the first successful colour film and the first wide-screen film too.

The men who lived in the caves near Lascaux painted their pictures with difficulty in those dark places. Perhaps the painter needed the help of someone who stood with a light so that he could see to work.

The man who makes a modern film needs the help of hundreds and sometimes thousands of other people. In Chapters 9 and 10 we see how a modern film is made. We look at the work of the producer. He is the person who must find a story which people want to see. The film begins with him. He must also find the money to make the film. When the film is finished, it is his job to make sure that people see it. If a lot of people see it, the producer earns a lot of money. But there have been many films

that have never been shown in cinemas. If his film is not seen, the producer can lose hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The director actually makes the film. He works for months to make something which stays on a cinema screen for ninety minutes. The result of months of work can be seen in minutes, but it can have a powerful effect.

We know that the cinema has helped to change the way people think. It has also changed the way that people behave. Men have smoked cigarettes like Humphrey Bogart or, in England, like Gerald du Maurier. They grew moustaches like Ronald Coleman. Women wore clothes that made them look like Greta Garbo. A film called *Rock Around the Clock* started a revolution in Western popular music. In Britain there was fighting and screaming everywhere it was shown.

The cinema also brought much deeper changes. It gave people a chance to see parts of the world that they had never seen before. It showed them new ways of living. Hollywood has been called 'the dream factory'. Films gave people new dreams. They showed people that life could be different and, sometimes, better. If you want to change your life, you must be able to dream of something different. But the cinema did not give people one dream. It gave them a great many dreams. But dreams are not real, and the things that happen on cinema screens are not real either. And so the cinema made people want a better life, but did not show them how they could get it.

Before the cinema, people found their dreams in books. But when the cinema came, people saw many different ways of life and felt them more strongly. And so the cinema made people more dissatisfied than they had ever been before.

People still argue about the changes that the cinema brought to the world. And they will go on arguing. They can only agree that the cinema has changed people.

In this book we do not join in these arguments. Instead, we show briefly what the cinema is. We speak about the different kinds of films that have been made, and about the different people who have made them.

In their caves, the men of Lascaux made pictures of the things that happened in their lives. When we look at these pictures now, they help us to understand the lives of the people who painted them.

Many of the films that have been made since 1895 show the life of the last eighty years. Thousands of years from now, they may still show how people lived in the twentieth century.

TWO

THE BEGINNINGS

One of the early films tells a very simple story. A gang of outlaws ties up a railway telegraph man and holds up a train. The telegraph man is found by his little daughter and set free. He gives the alarm. The Sheriff calls the townsmen together and they ride off on their horses to capture the outlaws. There is an exciting chase and in the end the outlaws are captured.

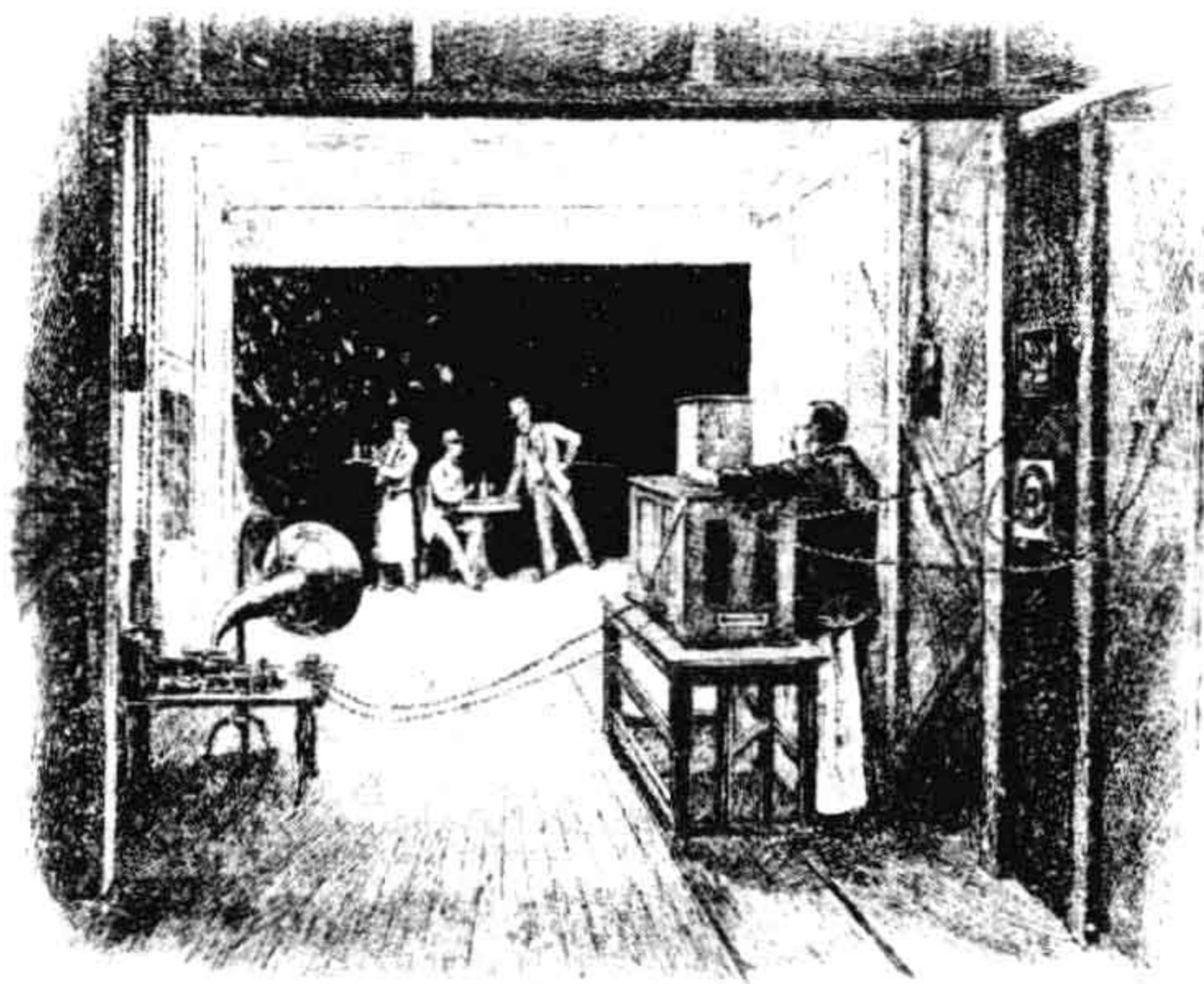
It is a simple story, but it is a very important one. It is the story of a film called *The Great Train Robbery*, which was written, photographed and edited by an American, Edwin S Porter, in 1903.

The Great Train Robbery, like many films of the time, was about eight minutes long. It told a story and that was unusual. But it was not the first film to do so. Also, it was a Western, but not the first Western. The real difference between *The Great Train Robbery* and earlier films was

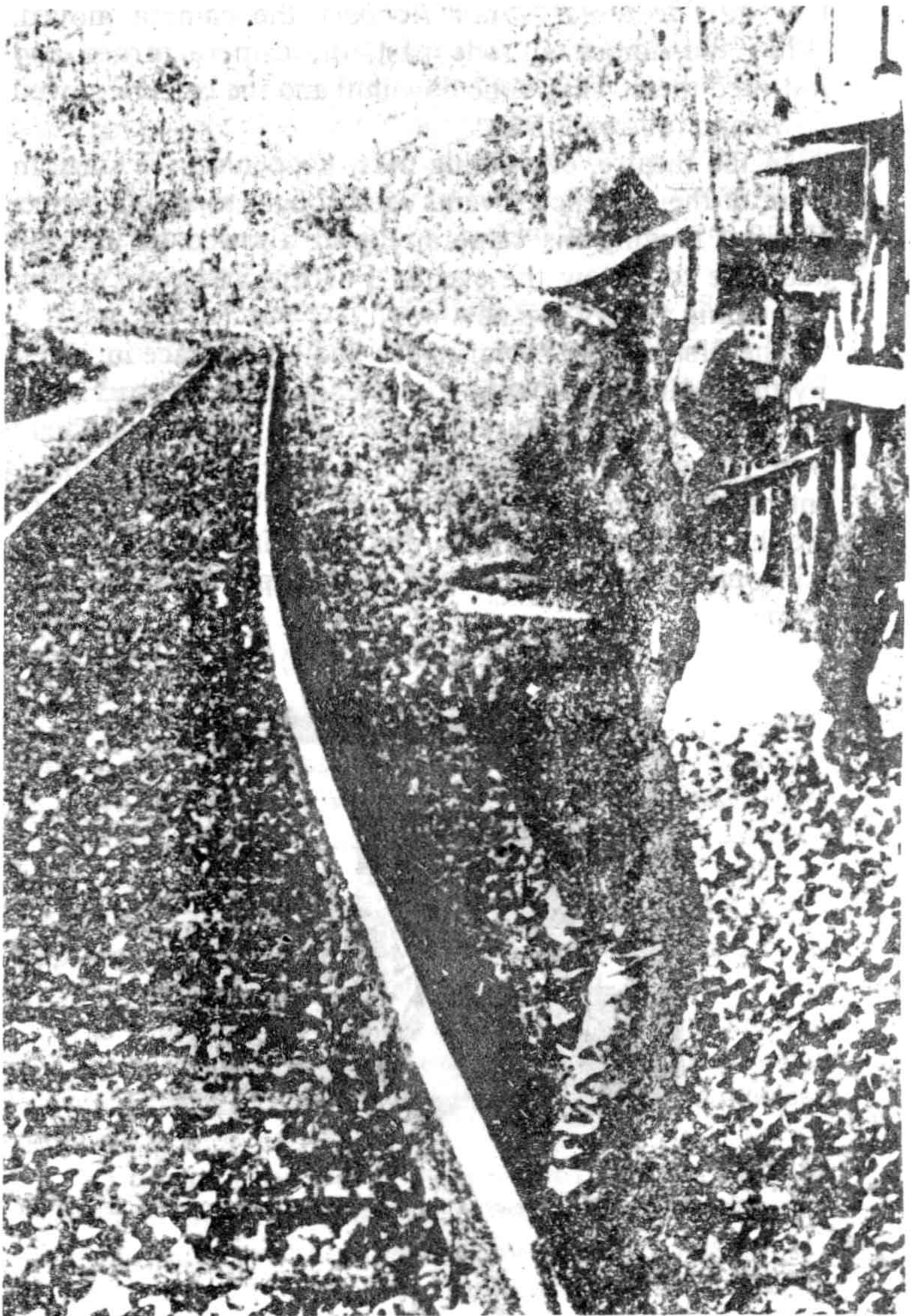
that in *The Great Train Robbery* the camera moved. When the horsemen rode past, the camera turned and followed them. They rode downhill and the camera moved down and followed them.

In the theatre, everything must happen on the stage in front of the audience. Events are brought to the audience. But, by moving his camera, Porter allowed his cinema audience to follow the events. For the first time, a film was telling a story in a new way.

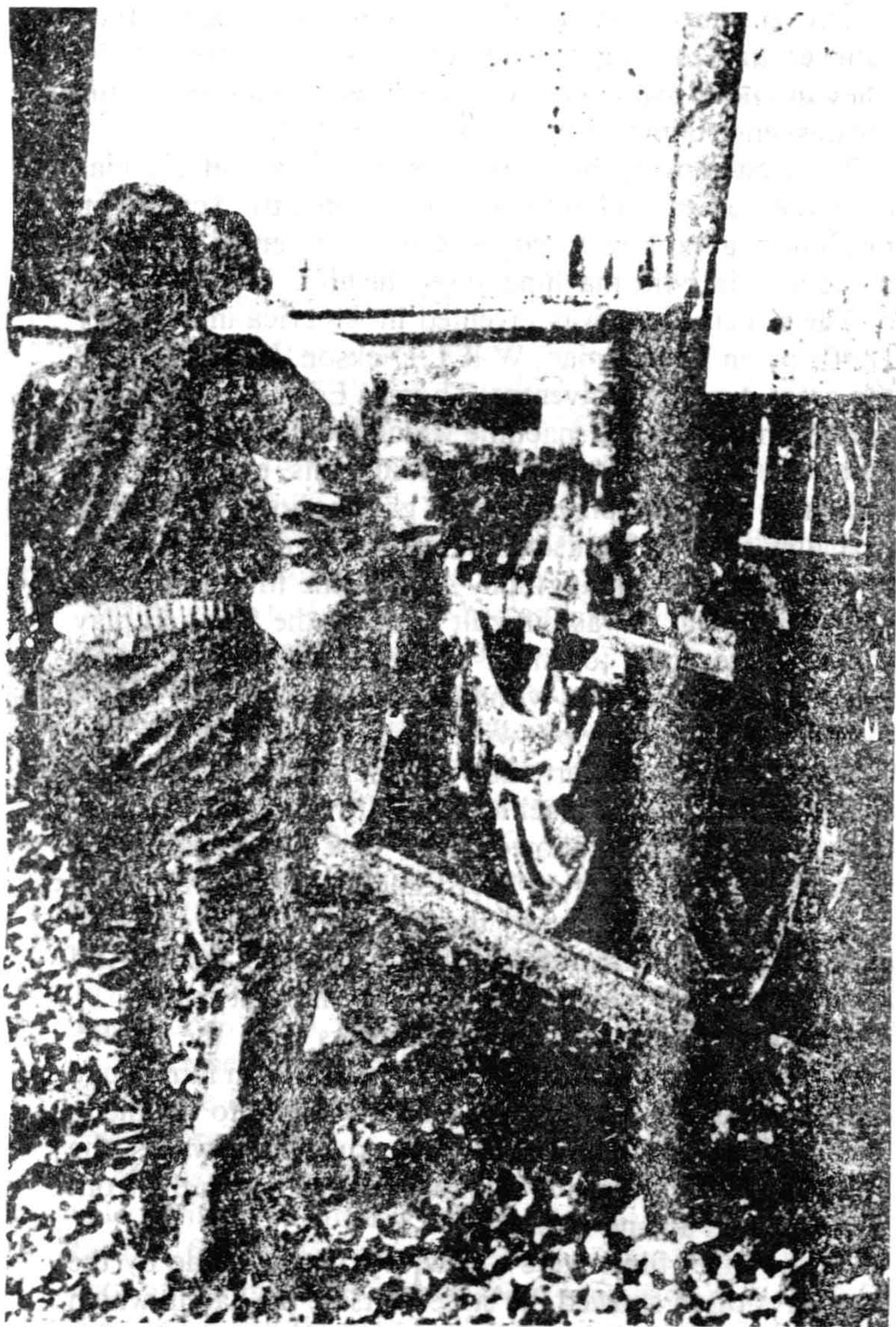
The first cinema performance had taken place in 1895. By that year, inventors in Europe and America had made the first moving picture cameras and projectors. There were many different ones and each machine had a different name. There was the Bioscope, the Bioskop, the Biograph, the Cinématographe and the Cinematoscope, the Kineopticon, Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and the Vitascope.



Edison's laboratory in New Jersey, USA. showing a phonograph and kinetograph.



A scene from the film, *The Great Train Robbery* directed by Edwin S Porter in 1903.



The inventors made their machines because they believed that moving pictures could be useful to science. They did not dream that their inventions would lead to the greatest entertainment industry in the world.

The first moving pictures were not shown in cinemas on large screens. They were shown on little screens in machines called Kinetoscopes. Only one person at a time could look into the machine to see the film.

The Kinetoscope was invented in America in the early 1890s by an Englishman, W K L Dickson. He worked for the great American inventor, Thomas Edison. Edison had asked him to make a machine which would show moving pictures. The idea was to combine this machine with Edison's phonograph, the first gramophone. Dickson's first film showed Dickson talking while his words could be heard on the phonograph. And so the first film was a sound film. But it was difficult to show the film and play the sound exactly together. Because of this, Dickson's Kinetoscopes were sold without sound.

Inventors in Europe were able to learn from the Kinetoscope. In a short time France, England and Germany had their own machines. The Frenchmen, Auguste and Louis Lumière, showed their first films throughout Europe in the years after 1895. Their machine was called the Cinématographe and by the end of 1896 they had sent it to India and Australia. In 1897 it reached Japan. And so, from the very start, the cinema was international.

The first films were a great success with the public. They were shown in theatres, small halls and in fairground tents. Audiences sat crowded on hard chairs to see them. A favourite film showed a train rushing towards the audience. When it was first shown, the people in the front rows jumped up and ran.

These early films were a new toy. Those made by the Lumières often showed the street outside the hall in which the audience was sitting. People saw on the screen the out-

side world that they had just left. And they thought that it was wonderful, even though the world on the screen was in black, white and grey. The audiences were delighted to watch grey waves rolling onto grey beaches for a minute at a time. These films usually lasted for only one minute. And there were pictures of circus acts, little pieces of theatre plays, visits by foreign statesmen and military parades. But after a time the audiences became bored with these films.

It was another Frenchman, Georges Méliès, who first saved audiences from boredom with their new toy. Méliès had seen the Lumières' first show in Paris in December, 1895. He was a magician and immediately thought of using films in his stage show. The Lumières were friends of his and he asked them to sell him one of their Cinématographe machines. But they refused. So Méliès went to London, where a man called Robert Paul was making machines of his own. Méliès bought the English machine and returned to Paris.

Méliès soon discovered the magic possibilities of trick photography. While the Lumières were still showing street scenes and parades, Méliès was making people appear and disappear in his films. It was a simple trick. He stopped the camera and moved the actor in front of it. Then he started the camera again.

He also invented the technique of the dissolve. In a dissolve, one scene slowly changes to the next without any sudden jump. Méliès did this by winding back the film in his camera a little way at the end of one scene. Then he filmed the beginning of the next scene over the end of the one before.

Méliès did most of his filming in a small studio just outside Paris. It was in this little studio that he made his most famous film, *A Voyage to the Moon*. Moon explorers are shot at the moon in a shell from a gigantic gun. We see the shell flying through the air and hitting the Man in the

Moon in the eye. After they land on the moon, the explorers leave their gun-shell. They see the earth rise above the moon's horizon and meet moon monsters.

The film is both clever and funny. Méliès had shown that films could do more than simply show things moving. And throughout Europe and America other film-makers quickly learned this lesson. Even the Lumières began making films that told simple little stories. Films had become more than a toy.

But when we look at Méliès' films today, we can see that there is something missing from them. And the thing that is missing is the moving camera. In spite of all Méliès' trick photography, his inventiveness and humour, his films look flat. For Méliès, the camera was like the audience in a theatre. The camera stayed still and he made all his events happen in front of it. When we see his films, we feel that we are in a theatre.

But, when people saw *The Great Train Robbery*, they knew they were in a cinema. As soon as Edwin Porter moved his camera, they knew they were seeing something different. It is a simple dramatic story, told without any trick shots, but it is something no theatre could ever show.

Audiences loved *The Great Train Robbery* and it was a great financial success. Its technique was copied at once by other American film-makers and in England, two years later, by Cecil Hepworth. This was in a film called *Rescued by Rover*. In this film the camera not only moves, but at times it shows the world from the eye-level of its hero, the dog Rover.

But the style of *The Great Train Robbery* was not copied by everybody. Méliès, for example, never used it. Even Porter himself did not always use it afterwards. And four years later, in 1907, a company was formed in Paris which deliberately made films of a very theatrical kind. This was the *Film d'Art*. It filmed classical plays and used famous stage actors. The films that it produced