

# THE LITERARY DIGEST

April 30, 1921

## THE ORIGINAL MOVIE MAN AND HIS FIRST "SHOW"



**M**OST of the important people in the movies have their press-agents, but the man who invented them has nothing of the sort. "And it's a safe bet," writes Homer Croy, one of the best known of movie chroniclers, "that the movie fans never heard of him." Almost any day he may be seen walking down Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, and yet nobody knows him. Mr. Croy goes on in the *New York Tribune*:

All the attention people pay to him is to push him out of the way. He goes jostling on down the street, but if some movie queen comes along she blocks traffic. Thus life runs away.

Ten million people a day go to the movies in the United States, but how many of them know who made the first movie? The Noes have it. The man who made the first motion-picture, as we know it to-day, is C. Francis Jenkins. Many girls who have not been "in pictures" a month are better known. C. Francis is too much given to hiding his light under a bushel. If any motion-picture actress endeavors to hide her light under any kind of protection her address at present is unknown. Instead, she crawls up on top of the measure and calls for the spotlight man. If he does not give it to her quick she will kick the four pecks to Kingdom Come!

C. Francis Jenkins was a clerk in the life-saving division of the Treasury Department at Washington, but he was not content with putting on his sleeve-protectors of a morning and taking them off at five minutes of five. He did not want to spend his life beating the clock of a morning and of an evening watching to see if the boss had yet gone home. He was hipped on photography, and in the back-yard of his boarding-house made many experiments. He was working with a magic-lantern, which was then considered about the furthest north of human ingenuity. Young Jenkins was seized with the extravagant idea of making pictures move by means of the lantern, and to work he set. In he called a vaudeville dancer named Annabelle, whose particular bit of entertainment was a so-called butterfly dance. Of her

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Jenkins made pictures. Many men in the United States and Europe had been working on the idea of "animal locomotion," as it was then called, but as glass plates had to be used the result was not any bewildering success. The heavy, cumbersome plates could not be progressed in front of a light source fast enough to make any animal look but what it was in its last mortal struggle. Then the celluloid film was announced. It was light and flexible. The inventors were off. It was a race.

The summer vacation came along after a while, as it always does, and C. Francis asked for an extra week. On ahead he sent a mysterious box by express, and then, mounting his bicycle, rode the whole distance—720 miles—to Richmond, Ind., his home. When he got there he was a hero.

To a jewelry-store run by his cousin he took the mysterious box and asked if the curtains might be drawn down for a brief bit. Business was never so brisk in Richmond that the sacrifice would be absolutely disastrous. The only electricity was a trolley-wire passing the door, and, using a pail of water as a rheostat, C. Francis made his connections. Invited in were his father and mother, the editor of the local paper, and a few others.

Not a word had the young man said of what they were to see. To them it was just another of Francis's time-killers. The room was darkened; there were a sputtering, a grinding, and a groaning of moving machinery, and out on the wall before the astonished eyes of the good citizens stepped a young and more or less beautiful girl. They gasped—there was some trick to it, because there wasn't any trap-door in the wall. People was getting so slick with them shadowgraphs, anyway! Just the other night there had been a fellow down to the Opry-house who could wrap a handkerchief around his hands and make pictures of almost any animal, especially a rabbit. And he could make them move! Especially the ears.

They looked at C. Francis, but his handkerchief was in his pocket. Nor did he have his sleeves rolled up. He was not the most important part of the show, says Mr. Croy, and soon—

They no longer turned to watch C. Francis, for the girl was trying to imitate a butterfly. In her hand she held sticks and to these were fastened the draperies of her gown. Higher and higher she began to lift her skirts, while around she flapped her sticks in imitation of a butterfly that suddenly feels itself called on to dance. Higher and higher the skirts went as the contortions of the lepidopteral creature grew more perfervid.

The men lost all interest in C. Francis, while the good women turned to look at each other. What had C. Francis been doing all this time in the wicked city of Washington? That came from letting boys get away from home. But the men

## MOVIE MAN

did not care. C. Francis could go to where Talmage said—they wanted to see the rest of that dance.

The skirts went higher—

And then two or three of the good women, nudging each other significantly, got up and marched out—thus leaving the first motion-picture show in the history of the world. The date was June 6, 1894.

Pictures had been projected on a wall before from lantern-slides, but never from a strip of intermittently moving film. The machine which projected the picture is on exhibition at the National Museum in Washington. It is the forerunner of all present-day projectors.

Nobody paid much attention to the show. It was just another of them illusion tricks. But it was sure wonderful ridin' all that 720 miles. That boy would amount to something some day. It must 'a' took a lot of grit, especially along in the evenin'.

The first time admission was charged was at Atlanta, Ga., in 1895. The show was a failure. People could not believe that you could show pictures of people moving about, and would not surrender their money on any more of them catchpennies. The term motion-picture had not been invented. There was nothing to describe what was to be seen. The project was abandoned and the young inventor came home pretty down in the mouth. Later he sold his interest in the invention for \$2,500. That is all he got for the second most wonderful invention in the world. The first was printing. The total sum he got wouldn't pay Babe Twoknees's salary for a month. And, again, thus life runs away.

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