

# PICTURES BY THE MILLION

A CHAT WITH A LANTERN-SLIDE MAKER

We none of us sufficiently realize the remarkable degree in which our knowledge of the world is being increased through the teaching of pictures. I do not mean merely the pictures which we find in books, nor the street Arab's picture gallery on the hoardings of a London street, nor the products of artistic advertising, remarkable as all these are for the unconscious training in form and colour which we derive from them.

I mean rather that picture process by which, line upon line, the familiar *magic lantern* brings home, to the dullest comprehension, picture lessons of all that is curious, wonderful, and grand in the world we inhabit, and, to some extent, of the worlds beyond it.

Not alone in the crowded city is the picture process at work, for it is spreading the wide world over. Far away within the Arctic Circle, 'beyond the dreams of avarice', over the Klondike goldfields, the Eskimo lives in the eternal silence of Arctic snows, his chief food and shelter the seal and its skin. His only knowledge of a more wonderful world, where,

Like the fabled King of old,  
The sun is turning all to gold,

comes to him through the broken speech of some stray whaler. Into this far-away region the missionary has penetrated, and, beneath a curious little seal-skin roofed cathedral in the snow, unfolds to the astonished Eskimo, by means of the magic lantern, pictures of the wonderful world where snow and ice never come, and the parables and lessons of the 'old, old story'. In its way, the magic lantern within the Arctic Circle is surely the *ultima thule* of art! What Florence is to the cultured traveller, this little show, or 'miracle play', is to the Eskimo.

One of our largest lantern slide-makers, in a chat with the writer, said:

No one who is not in the midst of it has the slightest idea (and you cannot convey an idea) of the enormous development in the use of pictures in education. You may take it roughly, multiplying the parishes by the number of lantern exhibitions given, and by the pictures presented at each, that this process of conveying instruction and amusement by pictures presents to the eye of the British public millions of pictures in a single season!

*To what do you attribute chiefly this remarkable development in the use of lantern pictures for instruction and amusement?*

Well, you may take it that, while in many directions it is the demand that creates the supply, it is equally true in this case that supply creates the demand. The immense increase in the number of amateur photographers, too, who make slides from their negatives and exhibit them at photo societies, meetings and elsewhere, has not only added to the number of slides, but kept up the standard of their excellence. So far as the lantern is concerned, a great deal of it has been due to the extended use and convenience of mineral oil, which has made it possible for many persons to make use of the lantern upon all sorts of occasions, who formerly could only themselves share with the rest in the enjoyment, at the hands of the professional lecturer, of 'an imaginary trip round the world.'

*And about the supply of lanterns – does the 'made in Germany' fashion touch you at all?*

No. It does not touch the English market, excepting for toy lanterns – lanterns for the nursery, which are sent here from Germany. For a lantern to stand the wear and tear of public use, the English make is so much superior that it is actually sent from England to Germany.

*Then, what about these millions of pictures which are shown to the British public yearly – how is the demand for them met?*

By up-to-date methods of production. Photography

is mainly responsible for the enormous increase in the output of lantern slides. Formerly the hand-painted slide was the work of a highly-skilled artist, and the finished slide cost from 15s. to 21s. Now, the artist, in producing a coloured slide, has a photographic basis to work upon, and he or she – for it is very largely the work of ladies – has simply to add the requisite colours. The difference in price is such that, instead of a slide costing from 15s. to 21s., a plain photographic slide can be had for 1s. and a coloured one for 2s. and upwards.

*Do the Germans or other nations compete with you in the making of these enormous quantities of picture slides?*

Not in the production of photographic slides, nor in the finished slide in any form, but for what are known as 'chromo-litho' slides, both France and Germany send us the coloured pictures printed in sheets – it is colour printing really – which can be transferred to the glass 'slide', something after the fashion of the children's toy 'transfers' sold at the stationers. By this transfer process – for which France and Germany supply the pictures, and we find the glass and do the work – it is possible to produce a 'chromo-litho' slide at 3d.; while for the toy lanterns for the nursery, slides can be produced at ½d. each – not much for glass and pigments, to say nothing of the labour!

*Can you give me any indication of the growth of this business of making pictures for the British public by the million?*

Yes. Here are seven of our annual catalogues, taken at different periods. The first, you will see, consists of but twenty pages; the third of seventy-two pages; the fifth of 128 pages; the seventh of 200 pages; while this year's catalogue, with supplement, will run to 250 closely printed pages; and other wholesale houses could, I suppose, tell you a similar tale.

*What are the chief destinations of the slides you make?*

We send them to France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Russia, America, Canada, the West Indies, South Africa, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, and many other parts, even to the Norfolk Islands, 'a thousand miles from anywhere', as one of our customers describes it. A fairly large proportion of the trade in these slides is in exports, which shows that the British workman can hold his own in this particular line in spite of foreign tariffs.

*I see your catalogue contains sets of pictures on all kinds of 'subjects', from the revelations of the microscope to the wonders of Niagara and the Yosemite Valley, to say nothing of fairy tales and nursery rhymes!*

Yes, and besides having to stock all these sets, we often have special demands to make slides for curious and particular occasions. One customer required a picture of a clock which for some reason must stand exactly at the hour of nine. This we could easily supply by photographing a clock at that hour. Others want slides with such mottoes as 'Don't forget the collection!' or 'Pay your subscriptions to-night!'

*What do you find are the favorite subjects among the familiar stories for the magic lantern?*

Well, all the old nursery tales are still in demand, but among comparatively modern sets, *The Tiger and the Tub* has had perhaps the greatest run. It has been going for some years and, like *Charley's Aunt*, is still running.

*What among contemporary events are the most popular with the lantern folk?*

War subjects, undoubtedly. I suppose nothing suits a lantern-slide maker so well as a big war!

*Then, I suppose, the present disturbed relations in the world favor your trade?*

Well, not exactly, at present. We have not had a decent war – I mean from a lantern-slide maker's

point of view – since the Egyptian War. I got more money out of the Egyptian War than anything I ever did. Stanley's journey in search of Emin Pasha was also a popular subject.

*Who are your best customers for lantern-slide sets?*

I should say the religious bodies and temperance societies. We consider now, for instance, that no church or chapel is complete without a lantern. Until lately a magic lantern in connection with a religious service would have been looked upon by some, I suppose, as most objectionable; but now the demand for pictures of this character is such that we supply sets of slides for throwing upon the screen practically the whole of the Church Service both in English and Welsh. As for hymns, we have enough for a complete hymnal, nearly a thousand hymns in stock for this year's catalogue, and the number is constantly increasing. For hymns we photograph the letterpress and make a negative, and if necessary have the type set up specially, and photograph a proof of that. Then we have the chief incidents of the Bible from beginning to end.

*How came the use of pictures to be introduced and become so popular in connection with the Church Service?*

Well, very largely by the Church Army in their efforts to reach the masses. Besides this, there has been the powerful example of such men as the Rev. W. Carlile, rector of St. Mary-at-Hill, E.C., whose lantern services have drawn large congregations, many of whom have gone to scoff and remained to pray; or have gone with a prejudice against his methods, and have come away and adopted them. The result has been that we find an increasing demand for this class of slides in our hire department. Sets are sent off on Friday night for the Sunday service, and returned to us on the Monday.

*And what other fields has the lantern invaded?*

Many advertisers are making a large use of lantern slides, and a railway company has had sets of slides made for sending out on loan to illustrate the attractions on its line of route. Then there are certain authors who get well 'boomed' by means of the magic lantern – such as G.R. Sims, Eaton, and others, whose stirring ballads can now be recited, and the chief incidents thrown on the sheet. In this way we can show you *How Jane Conquest Rang the Bell*, *How Bill Adams Won the Battle of Waterloo*, the scene at *The Fireman's Wedding*, or the drama of *The Life-Boat*.

*And what of the future of lantern pictures in our homes, our education, and amusements?*

They will continue as long as people like to look at pictures. If ever people should get tired of looking at pictures, then the lantern may go, but not otherwise.

*And for improved methods of showing these pictures, do you think we may look forward to seeing a combination of photography, electricity, and the phonograph giving us our stage plays at home? Do you think that is a dream, considering the progress already made in the uses of lantern pictures?*

Perhaps not; 'living pictures' are coming very much to the front. But at present the question of expense seems altogether against the 'cinematograph' being used on any such scale as the present lantern pictures have attained. As to electricity, it is doubtful how far this may be used for such a purpose. The introduction of gas cylinders has very much facilitated the use of the lime-light, and that is the most powerful light we have.

*In any case, you think that the picture element in our instruction, amusement and business life is likely to grow rather than to diminish?*

Yes. The more people travel, the more pictures will come into play for preserving and disseminating their impressions.