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PLATES

J. CRAIG ANNAN.

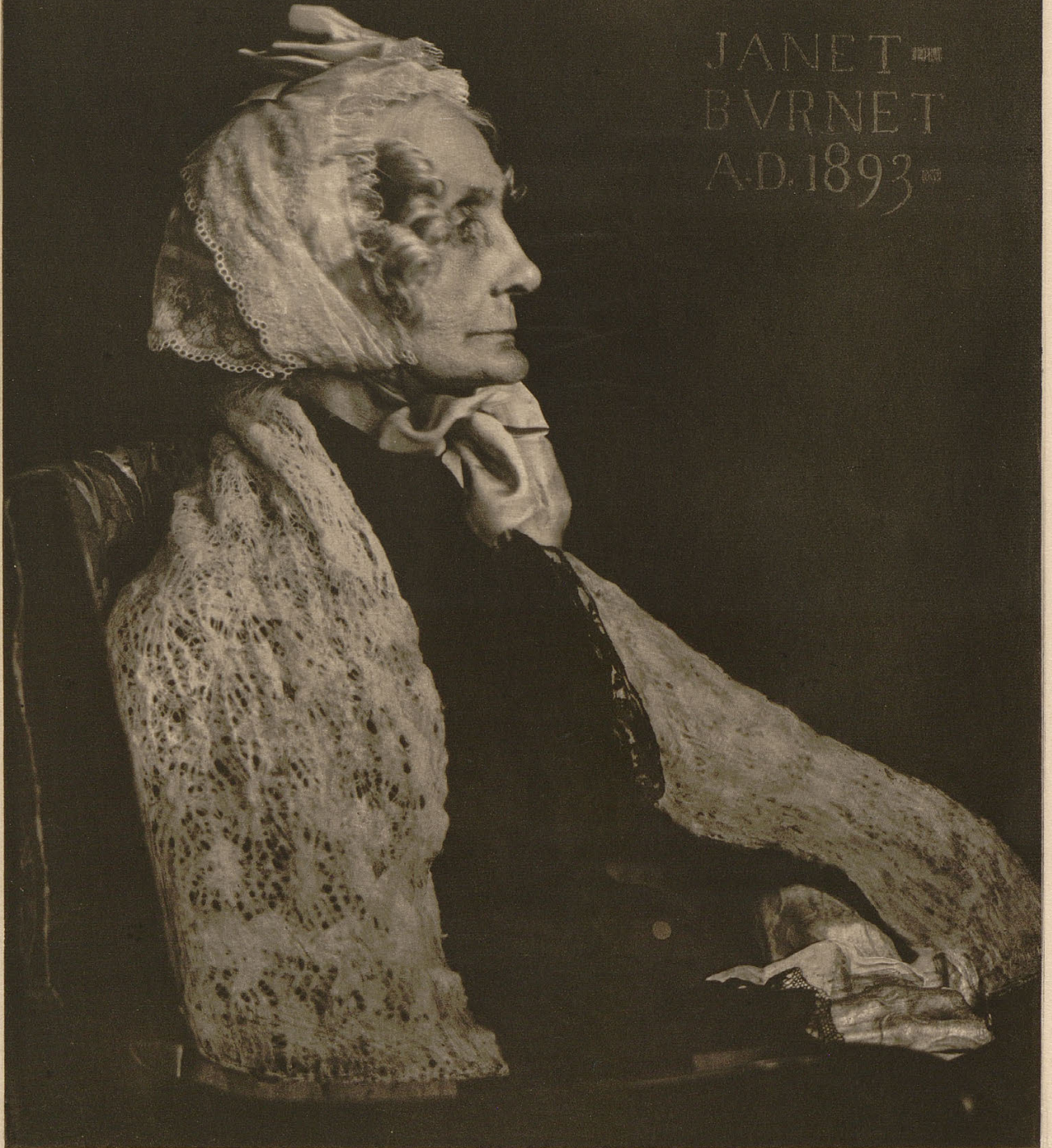
- I. Stirling Castle.
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JANET
BURNET
A.D. 1893





PHOTOGRAPHY, WHAT D'YE LACK?

THIS is an attempt to define for myself a condition that I feel rather than find in photography, the youngest of the arts. To me there is an indefinite yet serious something lacking in the exhibits of those who use photography as a medium of artistic expression. As Mr. Stieglitz has asked me to write "at any length and on any subject," I am enabled at last to sit down and analyze my photographic emotions.

I know photography only by its public displays, the exhibits at the Photo-Secession galleries in New York, and the single specimens which appear in public, for instance in Mrs. Käsebier's little showcase on Fifth Avenue; and I first met with it as an art at a series of unique semi-private shows given in Boston some years ago by Mr. F. Holland Day, in his tiny, green, Aubrey-Beardsley-like rooms at the top of a quaint old wooden house in Pinckney Street, on the summit of Beacon Hill.

So this then is my basis. I am merely an interested and sympathetic outsider. At the outset I was neither for nor against photography; it made its way with me solely by the sheer force of good work. My mind was open—"a fair field and no favor" being my creed in matters pertaining to art—and I hope to be able to keep it so.

Although I am indifferent as to whether photography goes up or down, being a fatalist as to the progress of the arts, and believing with Whistler that art happens, that it depends entirely on the individual worker, and that we can do little to either accelerate or retard its progress, yet many's the argument I've had with painters who protested, a little too vehemently, that photography was not and never could become one of the arts; for photography's achievements in the field of decorative composition alone have been astonishing, and it has already in this respect left many of our best decorative painters far in the rear.

I am enough a believer in photography to hold that a small gallery should be devoted to photographic prints in each of our American art museums, beginning with the Metropolitan, or at least with those museums which have print rooms, in which are displayed etchings, engravings and the like.

The camera is to me merely a tool with which artistic temperaments express themselves, taking its place in line with the painter's brush, the sculptor's chisel, the etcher's needle and the potter's wheel.

All of which is doubtless an old story to the readers of *CAMERA WORK*, but if the impressions which photography has made and still makes on me are worth a reading by the workers in this art-craft, it will be because these impressions have come to me uninfluenced by any reading or "talk" on the subject. In fact, I have deliberately refrained from informing myself on many points which have arisen in my mind since I started to prepare these notes, because the purpose of this paper is to record emotions produced on a rank outsider solely by the work. My very ignorance may have its value, perhaps even show which way the wind of public opinion blows, and blazon

the way for a campaign of publicity upon points regarding which the genuinely interested should be informed.

Let me also state that I disclaim and dislike the title of art critic. I should prefer and should like to deserve the fine old title of student; but who in the storm and stress of active business life can pretend to do that? I am more an observer of things artistic. I study the objects of art I like, I compare, and I read books on art subjects occasionally, when I have reached them in a logical manner, *i.e.*, through my eye. But when I do read a book on a master, or an epoch, or a special manifestation of art—I devour it! No schoolgirl reading her first love-story could be more absorbed.

I am fundamentally interested in the education of the eye, in the education of *my* eye. A Japanese appreciator—not a critic—once wrote: “In my young days I praised the masters whose pictures I liked, but as my judgment matured I praised myself for liking the master’s pictures.” All of which leads to the matter of taste; to this final test must all works of art submit themselves. Someone has said, “Everything that Velasquez did was right,” which does not mean that everything he did was impeccably drawn, or absolutely correct in color or perspective, or what not; but that it was right in the final essence—in short, that he never did anything that was not in perfect taste.

So as a too-general student I may not know photography intimately, but I am at least a very interested looker-on in Vienna, and I propose to measure photography by all the qualities found in all the other arts. If it is a fine art, it should give us everything, all that any other art can give, all that all the arts can render. Although it is the youngest of the arts, I propose to compare it, in my own mind, with one of the oldest and apparently farthest removed of the arts, that of Chinese porcelains; even with music. But photography has already given us much music, especially *adagio*.

We find in modern photographic prints so much decorative quality, so much charm of composition, so much charm of model (or in landscape, selection of subject) that these virtues are taken by us as a matter of course. But do we get solidity, weight, massiveness (the qualities inherent in the best Egyptian art—the Sphinx, the pyramids)—do we get enough of a certain brisk, masculine vigor and the freshness of virility? Does photographic work need a harking back to a little outdoors, a little more backbone in composition and execution, a little rudeness? Would even a touch of crude brutality do it harm?

Wonders have been accomplished in a short time, and photography has certainly been cleverly introduced by means of these “carefully edited” exhibits, whose decorative arrangement is far above that of any of our picture exhibits, large or small, being more like the Whistler shows in London, which were prepared under the direct supervision of the master—those exhibitions (as “A. E. G.” has written) “in which a dozen etchings or slight pastels were given all the glory of a room to themselves, a room specially decorated to receive them.”

In photography there has been too much insistence—too much success in the decorative. Is there now another way to go? One day I happened

to go direct from a small exhibition of paintings by Courbet at Durand-Ruel's to the Photo-Secession galleries, and the change in atmosphere, in lack of straightforwardness, of frankness and strength, was striking, even unpleasant. It is said that photography should not be compared with painting, but I have disposed of that in my introduction. Photography need not give us actual color, but it must give us all the spiritual qualities of color that the material color can give.

Photography must rid itself of all suspicion of pose, of self-consciousness, of becoming a "precious" thing, and unserious. At times I become suspicious; I feel as though I should like to brush all these mists away, to see what is behind them, whether something fundamentally ugly in composition is concealed by this too-easy screen, something so wrong in line and structure as to destroy the essence of the picture. Whistler wrote, "A work of art is finished from the beginning." Is this always true of the photographic work of art, or are indifferent beginnings worked over into pleasing results, when according to Whistler's dictum nothing good can possibly come from a bad start?

Is there a Michel in photography, an artist whose drawing is cold, clear, even a little hard when necessary, but beautifully calm and perfect? There seem to be numbers who can do nocturnes, dreams, poems—in fact, there is poetry to burn, but there are also a few who can do rugged prose, which is also poetry, great poetry.

Were Carrière better known in this country, I would say that in portraiture his has been the greatest influence. Is there also a Beethoven, like a great temple reaching above the clouds, but with foundations planted solid, far down into the earth?

You see I am not asking much; but a fine art must be held to a stiff standard, and if photography is an art, it must give us everything that all the other arts give us.

Is there a Holbein who renders every wrinkle and eyelash as in a miniature? A Dürer of detail, as in the etching of St. Jerome in his cell? Has photography its slashing, dashing, humorous Franz Hals, working often with apparently reckless bravado?

Are there photographic prints like the sculpture of Rodin? Yes, Mr. Steichen's profile photograph of Rodin is a Rodin. But how much of the Rodin effect is due to Rodin's massive personality, and how much to Steichen's art? Then again, Rodin is many-sided. Photography has duplicated his delicately beautiful nudes, emerging from rough-hewn rocks; but does photography also need a brutal realist who can match us the almost ugly and painful work of Rodin, like the "Burghers of Calais"? Would it be well to have an occasional return to these first principles, or am I unjust, and is this constantly being done by photographic workers?

I once knew an artist, one of the finest draughtsmen ever born, and "a young man mad about drawing"—sketching everything, everywhere, and everyone—solid, conscientious, and self-critical to a fault—as are most men who accomplish anything, although some show it and some gnaw their souls

in secret. Every now and then he would become suspicious of his technique, and would test himself to find out if he really could draw, and it was invariably accomplished after this fashion: He would clench his left fist and bring it down on the table with a bang and then draw it minutely, but with power. Hereby he measured himself, by this means he dropped the plumb line down to the bottom; he knew that if he could draw the human hand, he could draw anything on earth or in heaven—that in this one respect, at least, his work was sound.

Are such searching tests utilized or possible in photography? Do the camera workers occasionally place, say a commonplace kitchen chair, or a fist, in a good strong light, and photograph it in a clear, direct, "inartistic" manner, to see whether or not they stand on rock bottom?

A certain exhibition of old photographs, at the Photo-Secession, a series of portraits taken in England in 1860, displayed another quality, a simplicity, a sincerity, that I do not recall seeing in modern photographic shows; and many of the old daguerreotype portraits possessed an indescribable searching frankness that is not familiar to me nowadays. Is it too much to ask that we have that also, in addition to the best qualities of painting, sculpture and music?

To sum up, are my questions all foolish, or do I express a need that is felt by others? I am not criticising; I am publicly asking for information.

J. M. BOWLES.

ON THE STRAIGHT PRINT.

THE old war between straight photography and the other one—call it as you like—has begun over again. It is not, as it ought to be, a question of principle. No, it has become a personal question amongst a good many photographers, because most of them, and especially those who take purely documentary photographs, look to being recognized as artists. It follows that any definition of art that does not fit in with their methods will be violently attacked because the recognition of such a definition would limit pictorial photography to a certain number of men instead of throwing open the doors of the temple to the vast horde of camera carriers.

It is not without certain misgivings that I am attempting to give a clear résumé of this ever debated question, for I know that the above paragraph will be used against me and I shall be accused of "pleading for my saint" as we say. As a fact I am doing nothing of the sort, for though I believe firmly that a work of art can only be evolved under certain circumstances, I am equally convinced that these same circumstances will not perforce engender a work of art. Meddling with a gum print may or may not add the vital spark, though without the meddling there will surely be no spark whatever.

My meaning I hope has been made clear. Still there is a second point to be elucidated, and that is the precise signification of a term that we shall be using presently, "straight print." According to the sense that is given to this term the whole structure of our arguments may be radically changed and the subsequent verdict falsified. For here is "*par avance*" my opinion in a few words. A straight print may be beautiful, and it may prove superabundantly that its author is an artist; but it can not be a work of art. You see now that it is necessary before entering into details to give a clear definition of the nature of the straight print as I understand it, and also a definition of the work of art. A straight print, to be worthy of its name, must first of all be taken from a straight negative. There must be no playing upon words in a serious controversy of this nature. One must not call "straight" a bromide mechanically printed, but from a negative reduced locally and painted on the glass side with all the colors of the rainbow. This leads us to describe the straight negative. It will be a negative produced by normal development, or better still by tank development, during which no control is possible; and of course it will not be submitted to any subsequent retouching either on the film or on the glass. From this negative a print will be taken with a normal exposure without local shading. If the paper used for printing has to be developed, it will not be developed locally nor interfered with in any way during development. It will be mounted or framed without its surface being touched by a finger or a brush.

This is my idea of the sense of the term "straight print." If any readers consider that it is a false idea they had better leave the next pages unread. Now, speaking of graphic methods only, what are the distinctive

qualities of a work of art? A work of art must be a transcription, not a copy, of nature. The beauty of the motive in nature has nothing to do with the quality that makes a work of art. This special quality is given by the artist's way of expressing himself. In other words, there is not a particle of art in the most beautiful scene of nature. The art is man's alone, it is subjective not objective. If a man slavishly copies nature, no matter if it is with hand and pencil or through a photographic lens, he may be a supreme artist all the while, but that particular work of his can not be called a work of art.

I have so often heard the terms "artistic" and "beautiful" employed as if they were synonymous that I believe it is necessary to insist on the radical difference between their meanings. Quite lately I have read in the course of an interesting article on American pictorial photography the following paragraph: "In nature there is the beautiful, the commonplace and the ugly, and he who has the insight to recognize the one from the other and the cunning to separate and transfix only the beautiful, is the artist." This would induce us to believe that when Rembrandt painted the Lesson in Anatomy he proved himself no artist. Is there anything uglier in nature than a greenish, half-disemboweled corpse; or anything more commonplace than a score of men dressed in black standing round a table? Nevertheless, the result of this combination of the ugly and the commonplace is one of the greatest masterpieces in painting. Because the artist intervened.

If Rembrandt had painted that scene exactly as he saw it in nature he would have given us exactly the same impression that he would have felt in front of the actual scene, a sensation of disgust—mingled perhaps with a vivid admiration for the manual and visual skill of the copyist, but without a shadow of any art sensation.

Let us change the circumstances and take as example a beautiful motive such as a sunset. Do you think that Turner's sunsets existed in nature such as he painted them? Do you think that if he had painted them as they were, and not as he felt them, he would have left a name as an artist? Why, if the choice of a beautiful motive was sufficient to make a work of art ninety per cent of the graphic works in the world, paintings, drawings, photographs and chromos would be works of art, a few of them only are distinctly ugly and not as many commonplace.

Choose the man whom you consider the very first landscape artist photographer in the world; suppose he has, thanks to his artistic nature and visual training, chosen the hour and spot, of all others. Imagine him shadowed by some atrocious photographic bounder furnished with the same plates and lens as the master. Imagine this plagiarist setting his tripod in the actual dents left by the artist's machine and taking the same picture with the same exposure. Now, suppose that both are straight printers? Who will be able later on to tell which is the artist's and which is the other one's picture? But figure to yourself the artist printing his negative, selectively, by the gum bichromate or the oil process, or developing his platinotype print with glycerine. Even if the other man has used the same printing method

one print will have the artist's signature all over it from the sky to the ground, the other will be a meaningless muddle. For *the man* has intervened in both cases. One has made a work of art out of a simply beautiful picture, the other has probably spoiled its beauty and certainly has introduced no art. The moral of this fable is twofold. It shows that a beautiful straight print may be made by a man incapable of producing a work of art, and that a straight print can not possibly be a work of art even when its author is an artist, since it may be identical to that taken by a man who is no artist.

You will answer that a gum or an oil print from a master can be copied by a patient and painstaking worker, just as the above beautiful motive was stolen from the artist—well, you may try. I know of a man who has been copying Steichen to the extent of having canvas background painted exactly like the brush-developed background of one of his gum portraits. I prefer not to speak of the result. That it was all to the credit of Steichen you may believe.

Not once but many times have I heard it said that the choice of the motive is sufficient to turn an otherwise mechanically produced positive into a work of art. This is not true; what is true is that a carefully chosen motive (beautiful, ugly or commonplace, but well composed and properly lighted) is necessary in the subsequent evolution towards art. It is not the same thing. No, you can not escape the consequences of the mere copying of nature. A copyist may be an artist but his copy is not a work of art; the more accurate it is, the worse art it will be. Please do not unearth the old story about Zeuxis and Apelles, when the bird and then the painter were taken in. I have no faith in sparrows as art critics and I think the mistake of the painter was an insult to his brother artist.

The result of all this argument will be that I shall be taxed with having said that all unmodified prints are detestable productions, fit for the wastepaper basket, and that before locally developed platinotype, gum bichromate, ozotype and oils, there were no artists to be found amongst photographers. I deny all this. I have seen many straight prints that were beautiful and that gave evidence of the artistic nature of their authors, without being, in my private opinion, works of art. For a work of art is a big thing. I have also seen so-called straight prints that struck me as works of art, so much so that I immediately asked for some technical details about their genesis, and found to my intimate satisfaction that they were not straight prints at all. I have seen brush-developed, multi-modified gum prints that were worse—immeasurably worse—than the vilest tintype in existence, and I have seen and have in my possession straight prints by Miss Cameron and by Salomon, one of our first professionals, just after Daguerre's time, that are undoubtedly the work of artists. All is not artistically bad in a straight print. Some values are often well rendered; some "passages" from light to shade are excellent, and the drawing can be good if proper lenses are used at a proper distance from the motive; but there is something wanting, something all important, extremely difficult to express in words. If you can see it there is no use trying to describe it; if you do not, it is useless also, for you would not understand.

But apart from the absence of this mysterious something, this thumb-mark of the living, thinking, and feeling artist, are there not other things wrong in all straight photographs—faults due not only to the inevitable human errors in exposure and development, but to photography itself, photographic faults in the rendering of values (that no orthochromatic plates are capable of correcting without creating other exaggerations just as bad), faults in the equal translation of important and useless detail, in the monotonous registering of different textures, in the exaggeration of brilliant spots, and in other things, too? What will the pure photographer do when he has detected these faults? If he allows them to remain out of respect for the laws of the pure goddess photography, he may prove himself a high priest photographic, but will he still be a true artist, faithful to the gospel of art? I believe that, unless he has had his fingers amputated according to the dictates of Bernard Shaw, he will feel them itching to tone down or to lighten this spot or that, and to do other things also. But he *may not* do these things, the Law of the Straight Print forbids it. The conclusion is simple enough, for there is no middle course between the mechanical copy of nature and the personal transcription of nature. The law is there; but there is no sanction to it, and the button-pressers will continue to extol the purity of their intentions and to make a virtue of their incapacity to correct and modify their mechanical copies. And too many pictorialists will meddle with their prints in the fond belief that any alteration, however bungling, is the touchstone of art. Later on perhaps a sane, moderate school of pictorial photography will evolve. *La vérité est en marche, mais elle marche lentement.*

Before ending I can not but confess my astonishment at the necessity of such a profession of faith as the one I have been making. Pictorial photography owes its birth to the universal dissatisfaction of artist photographers in front of the photographic errors of the straight print. Its false values, its lack of accents, its equal delineation of things important and useless, were universally recognized and deplored by a host of malcontents. There was a general cry toward liberty of treatment and liberty of correction. Glycerine-developed platinotype and gum bichromate were soon after hailed with enthusiasm as liberators; to-day the oil process opens outer and inner doors to personal treatment. And yet, after all this outcry against old-fashioned and narrow-minded methods, after this thankful acceptance of new ones, the men who fought for new ideas are now fighting for old errors. That documentary photographers should hold up the straight print as a model is but natural, they will continue doing so *in æternum* for various personal reasons; but that men like A and B should extol the virtues of mechanical photography *as an art process*, I can not understand.

I consider that, from an art point of view, the straight print of to-day is not a whit better than the straight print of fifteen years ago. If it was faulty then it is still faulty now. If it was all that can be desired, pictorial photographers, the Links and the various secessionists of the new and the old world have been wasting their time, to say the least, during the last decade.

ROBERT DEMACHY.

PISGAH.

WHERE it happened, I shall not say. I mean to be the only one to venture there again, some springtide, when I want to forget that I am growing old—some springtide when the first feathery green of the hornbeams is vivid against the enmisted purple of the moist oak and chestnut forest, and when the slender, white stems of the old-field birches each upholds a canopy of yellow catkins. Again I shall go up the old, overgrown road, passing by the half-obliterated cellar-hole, the three graves, and the rude well, at the time when the gnarled old appletree is trying to open a handful of blossoms as a protest against the general reversion to wilderness. Then I shall strike into the old charcoal-burners' path, that still winds its elusive way upward, and then scramble up through that same cleft in the rocks.

I shall not again drag a camera into these dim woodland aisles, as I did late in the day, that year when I felt young, and for shadows, forsooth! It is the best things of life that we can not catch; that we may not hold; that we dare not try to keep—lest we be separated from our kind. The thrush knows the mysteries of such sanctified places, but he dwells there apart; and when I enter for a moment, as in a temple too vast for human creeds, I take off my everyday spiritual cap—or lid—but I must be mindful to screw it down again ere I depart, lest the devil-wagons of progress promptly immolate me, while I am beclouded by my own vaporings.

But that year I went there with a camera, through the still bare chestnuts and the tasseling oaks. One soon steps as gently as he may; for the beautiful budding laurels are rugged, and resent and resist other progress. The grouse whirred up and away from their coverts, not so startled as I who had flushed them. Then I fared on over a silent brown carpet, beneath soughing scrub-pines, and down into a dell of dense hemlock, all green and red-brown lights and shades. The fox that turned to look at me, ere he silently disappeared among the low-sweeping boughs, was not redder than the hemlock trunks where the late afternoon sun broke in on them. Peering through the branches, I saw a clear space, closed in by the hemlocks, big and little, in an irregular circle, while near the center stood a goodly maple, with low-hanging sprays thick with the coppery young leaves of May. On a low gray rock in front of the gray maple bole sat a girl clad in warm-toned gray, with hair of old copper, surely warmer even than the tone of the young maple-leaves unfolding about her head. I stood still, for she had not seen me. A cloud had passed over the sun, softening the light within these mystic precincts. I braced my box against the hemlock beside me and gave as long an exposure as I dared. She had not moved; but then I dropped a plate-holder, with a clatter, and when I looked up again, the cloud had fled from the sun, and the girl from her seat. The screen of boughs behind the maple still swayed, surely. But I felt guilty, and I intruded no further. I bore my plate home and developed eagerly, but found no girl on it, only a

faint outline, like her figure, against the trunk of the maple, and over all an obstreperous intrusion of nearby hemlock fronds.

I was puzzled at the time, although I have learned since to be glad that I can see more than a camera. In my more youthful enterprise, I revisited the mystic spot. As I went quietly, I caught a glimpse of the fox as he stole away. There was no girl there, and only faint markings on the tree. I went across to the further fringe of hemlocks, and I circled round them. The laurels and brush closed in closely and uninvitingly; I did not care for a thrash through them. I went back to the rock that had served as a seat for my vision, lighted a cigar, and meditated pleasantly. The thing was charmingly natural. I glanced luxuriously over the mossy ground, which was a harmony of greens and browns. Then my eye paused near my feet—was arrested—fixed. In a bit of smooth mold, velvety with fine moss, was apparently the print of a girl's foot, of a small sandal. But further search was useless, and I turned back to the affairs of men. Now that I am older, and know more—and less—I have learned to be well content with what small hints of lovely things the gods may let fall in my way. Even if this forest nymph were just a tenuous figment of my imagination, she was also a renescent gleam of the wonder of the world. And the dull copper of young silver-maple leaves is doubly lovely for her elusive sake.

DALLETT FUGUET.

TWEEDLEDUM AND TWEEDLEDEE.

IT appears from the latest number of *CAMERA WORK* that the *entente cordiale* between the British and French is in danger. Certain photographers are pitching charges and countercharges at one another across the Channel, mixed up with much vacant chaff about motives and methods. Stated as clearly as possible, the issue seems to be: Does a straight photograph insure a straight photographer? Can a crooked photographer produce anything but a crooked print? The conclusion arrived at on the one side, suggests that crooked ways may be made straight, if crookedness is an expression of straight intention; while the other side appear to rest satisfied, that straight crookedness can not hope to become crookedly straight.

As, at this distance, we are out of the fun of the fight, the issue looms rather small. Has photography over there powdered down to a matter of words, terminological distinctions, and the chaff-chopping logic of "What is Art?" Predigested breakfast food may be convenient for some stomachs; but is hardly a diet for artists. One feels disposed to say of these contestants: "Not by their words, but by their works, ye shall know them;" or, as we say in America, "Gentlemen, deliver the goods."

For in America also we have had our contentions. Photography has been on the defensive and offensive, and a good deal of energy that would better have gone into picture-making has been wasted on polemics. There

have been too many negative results through over-exposure of feelings; too much blur of achievement by reason of under-developed convictions; pushing of arguments rather than of buttons; in short, too little reliance on the camera, too much on jaw. And this excessive wagging of jaws for a time affected the photographer's mental attitude. While he should have been intent only on his work, he was considering its effect upon his adversaries and admirers. He was the victim of self-consciousness, which is the bane of men who, not being sure of themselves, are over-sensitive about what others think of them—an attitude fatal to sincerity.

On the other hand, in America, I believe, the controversial bacillus is pretty nigh extinct; and, if it is so, the thanks are due to the Photo-Secession. The latter, springing from a somewhat obscure source in a tiny trickle of adventure, gathered to itself the force of its own convictions, until it is now rolling on in considerable flood, pushing forward its course with something of the indifference that the Mississippi exhibits to the workers and loafers along its banks. The stream is broad, there is room for many kinds of craft, and each under its own form of motive power has the freedom of the river, provided its bow is set with the stream in the direction of the deep, wide ocean. For no putting back up-stream is tolerated. By this time the flood is so wide that the shouts of encouragement or objurgation from the people on the banks are scarcely heard by the navigators, and certainly do not influence their course.

The ideal, in fact, of the Photo-Secession is results first, and reasons, if there must be any, afterward. It is a product of that mixture of faith and logic, of logic jumping with instinct, of back-knowledge, present grip, and foresight which characterizes its most active leaders. The Photo-Secession, in fact, is all that one particular strong personality stands for, syndicated.

If, as contemporary judgment seems to admit, photography exhibits in America a lustier and more varied growth than elsewhere, it is preeminently due to the fact that the Photo-Secession, keeping track of the men and women who are doing things, has encouraged them to higher standards. And it has done this, not so much by exhortation, as by the practical expedient of exhibiting the best work under the best conditions for studying it. In these exhibitions, complete enough to make their mark, sufficiently choice in selection for detailed study, a succession of the most interesting work both of Europe and America is being passed in review, so that it is the fault of our photographers themselves, if they have not profited. But there is no doubt they have. All are benefitting by one another's successes, partial successes, and failures, and there is a well-grounded enthusiasm established that is not limited to the photographers. The Photo-Secession has passed over the heads of the critics and directly reached the public. It is winning over people to become serious collectors of photographic prints.

CHARLES H. CAFFIN.

THE CLOAK-ROOM MYSTERY.

“IT’S all very well to talk,” said Bronson, “but it seems to me that the time has come to *do* something.”

Now Davies had just proposed that a camera should be set up in a dark corner of the coat-room with a flashlamp attached, the whole connected by wires with two copper cents carefully disposed in an overcoat pocket. The thief, in seizing the pennies, would close the circuit, release the shutter, explode the flash, and automatically record himself *in flagrante delictu*, or, as Davies put it, “with the goods on.”

Halford had advocated baiting a trap with a poisoned quarter, on the ground that anyone who would steal small change would probably bite it to see if it were good. Both of them appeared hurt at the reception accorded their suggestions.

“Well,” said Halford, finally, “suppose *you* do something.” And there was silence in the assembly-rooms of the Springfield Photographic Association.

It was a dull afternoon in January and the sun, after coming out long enough to tempt these three credulous individuals to the club-rooms, had again retired, leaving them with nothing to do but to fall back upon the topic which had become the staple of club discussion. This topic had begun as a joke and had ended by becoming an obsession. At first merely supplanting the weather as a conversational *hors-d'œuvre*, it now eclipsed the intrigues of club politics and overshadowed esoteric Art. It was known colloquially as “The Cloak-room Mystery.”

Several minutes slipped by while the three members sat brooding, each, as it were, making mental exposures of faint ideas in a dull light. Suddenly, Bronson jumped to his feet.

“By Jove!” he said, “I’ve got it!”

* * * * *

Two days later the same men were seated in the same chairs with a careful and elaborate assumption of unconcern. Davies, whose knowledge of German consisted of an early nursery course in “Nicht come heraus by der Deutchman’s house,” was absorbed in the latest copy of the *Photographische Gesellschaft*. Halford and Bronson were engaged in a desultory game of chess, having, after half an hour’s play, reached the third move in a queen’s gambit. The wintry sunshine was bright and alluring, promising visitors a-plenty.

Suddenly a key grated in the lock, the hall-door opened, and Cross, the chairman of the house-committee, entered the room, crossed it and disappeared behind the cloak-room door. The three heads came to a simultaneous attention, and Halford’s finger rose warningly to his lips. Silently his watch came out and a characteristic contraction of his index-finger started the split-second-hand on its estimating march. Thirty-five seconds later Cross emerged with a package in his hand and turned toward the workrooms

in the rear. The watchers exchanged glances, shook their heads, and resumed their occupations.

They had hardly done so when Stenson entered. Stenson was a wooden gentleman with red hair who hid an almost perfect mental vacuum behind a preternatural solemnity. He was occupied in making flat lantern-slides of the Russian Steppes, and after forty-two seconds in the coat-room he hurried back to make sure of an enlarging-camera.

Then Creswell came in. No one knew much about Creswell. He was dignified and reserved and unmistakably English, but there was a something about him, a genial possibility in his blue eyes perhaps, that made men like him. He glanced casually at the three fellows by the window and, without speaking, sauntered back to the cloak-room.

A third time the heads rose to attention. A third time the watch came out and the finger gave its silent pressure. With fussy and excited deliberation, five jerks to the second, the long hand worked its way round the dial. A minute went by. A minute and a half went by. Raised eyebrows and unheard whistles, framed with pursed lips, punctuated the silence. Two minutes went by, and now the three, like boys waiting for the appearance of a rat at the trap's door, watched with tense and growing eagerness. Then, a little metallic click of the stop-watch and—still sauntering, right hand deep in pocket—Creswell emerged from the cloak-room and strolled toward the workrooms behind.

Davies looked around with a blank "Well, what's the meaning of that?" but Bronson started up, overturning the chess-board. As he did so, Helmholtz, the president, entered, crossed the room, and went into the coat-room.

"Some one must follow Creswell, boys," said Holford.

"Nonsense," said Davies, "why, it *can't* be Creswell. It's impossible."

"Nevertheless it seems to be true," said Holford. "He was in there two minutes and forty-seven seconds. What was he doing? Come, he'll get to a water-tap or something."

"Water-tap nothing!" said Davies, "the stuff's indelible."

"Well," said Holford, "some one's got to tackle him, for all that," and he walked determinedly toward the workrooms.

Now in the Springfield Photographic Association club-rooms the developing-stalls open as alcoves from a dark corridor, which is reached by an opening adjoining the door of the bromide-room. As Holford reached this opening he came face to face with Creswell, coming out. Creswell carried three plate-holders in his left hand and was looking with an astonished and thoroughly puzzled expression at his right, the thumb and finger-tips of which were stained a deep and greasy purple.

"That's a damned queer thing," he muttered to himself.

"It's a damned serious thing, Mr. Creswell," said Holford.

"Good Lord, what is it?" said Creswell, surprise and uneasiness in his tone. An uneasiness that suggested blood-poisoning, but had no suggestion of police about it.

"Mr. Creswell," said Holford, "you carry it off excellently, but—the jig's up. Helmholz is somewhere about; if you'll come with me to the library, we'll send for him and settle this thing as quietly as possible." Creswell looked at him a moment and then said, very quietly: "My dear fellow, I give you my word I don't know what you're talking about; but you seem to be in earnest. Go on, I'll follow you."

Arrived at the little room known as the library, Holford beckoned Bronson and Davies and, having silently pointed to Creswell's tell-tale fingers, asked Davies to find Helmholz and ask him to join them.

A somewhat uncomfortable silence followed, broken by Davies' return, accompanied by Stenson, whom he had found working at one of the lantern-slide cameras, and by Helmholz, whom he had found in the bromide-room. All eyes naturally turned to the president as he entered, but, having turned to him naturally, they proceeded to stare at him quite unnaturally.

Down the left side of his very handsome and protuberant German nose was a smudge of deep, greasy purple.

"Vell, chentlemen?" he said.

But there are few things in the world more disconcerting than a concerted stare, and this one pierced even the proof-armor of Mr. Helmholz's Teutonic complacency. He hesitated uneasily and raised his hand in an involuntary gesture. His thumb and index-finger were stained with greasy purple.

Holford recovered himself first. "Mr. Helmholz," he began, "you are, I believe, familiar with the Cloak-room Mystery. This afternoon Davies, Bronson, and I put some odd change in an old coat-pocket, together with some aniline dye. Creswell, here, came in, spent nearly three minutes in the cloak-room, and then walked back toward the workrooms with his hand concealed in his pocket. I followed him and, finding that his thumb and fingers were stained with the dye, insisted upon his coming here and being confronted with you. The evidence seemed conclusive, but—but now——" His voice trailed off into a hesitating silence and his eyes, like those of each of the four occupants of the small room, fastened themselves on the president's right hand.

Mr. Helmholz, following the trail of this converging gaze, raised his hand and looked at it, his expression slowly changing from one of offended dignity to a blank and incredulous astonishment.

How long this tableau would have been prolonged, it is hard to say. It was dissolved by an exclamation from Creswell. Open-mouthed and speechless, he was pointing, first to Stenson's left hand, and then to Davies's right.


Just then the library door opened and the bristly head of Cross, the chairman of the house committee, was thrust in. "I give you fellows warning," he said in his taciturn, growling voice, "that I'm not going to stand for this kind of horse-play. Some smart Aleck has smeared the thumb-screws of both lantern-slide cameras and all the electric turn-buttons with typewriter ink. Just look at my hands!"

* * * * *

The Cloak-room Mystery is more than ever the chief topic of conversation among the members of the Springfield Photographic Association. Only last Wednesday, while Bronson was busy printing souvenir post-cards, a ten-cent piece, two pennies, and a beer-check disappeared from his overcoat-pocket.

J. B. KERFOOT.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS.

 OF the six plates included in this number of *CAMERA WORK*, five are devoted to the work of Mr. J. Craig Annan, of Glasgow, Scotland. Mr. Annan's efforts are always interesting, but this small collection shows the photographer at his best. As the gravure plates and the edition therefrom have virtually been made by Mr. Annan himself, this series has an increased interest and value, for their quality as gravures is quite as remarkable as the quality of the original prints.

Pastoral—Moonlight, by Mr. Eduard J. Steichen, will certainly be appreciated by our readers, for it is interesting not only as a photograph but as a specimen of reproduction. This picture of Steichen's was one of the prize-winners in the recent Eastman Kodak Competition. The negative was made on a film with a kodak and ordinary lens; the prize-winning print therefrom was an enlargement on Eastman bromide paper, and toned greenish blue and yellow locally by a method originating with the photographer and which is a secret of his. The photogravure is practically an original as it was made from the original film from which a diapositive was enlarged according to Mr. Steichen's instructions and etched on copper. After the Manhattan Photogravure Company had etched the plate and had printed the edition, every print as published in *CAMERA WORK* was treated by Mr. Steichen so as to get the effect similar to that obtained by him in the original bromide enlargement. This plate is an object-lesson of what can be done with a kodak, an Eastman film—machine-developed—and bromide paper, handled by an expert photographer who is an artist in the true sense of the word; also of what can be done in the way of reproduction by those having feeling, brains and knowledge.

PLATE

EDUARD J. STEICHEN.

I. Pastoral—Moonlight.



PHOTO-SECESSION NOTES.

It is with pleasure that we are enabled to announce that the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession have been leased for another year. The third series of exhibitions will open early in November, and the first exhibition of the season will be devoted, as heretofore, to the work of the Photo-Secessionists, many of whom are already busy preparing their contributions. The season now drawing to a close—the Coburn exhibition being the last of the second series—has been fully as interesting as the first. The Photo-Secession and its aims and labors are gradually being understood by more than a small circle of people and photography as a medium of expression is finally coming into its own. The third season promises bravely inasmuch as the Director of the Photo-Secession is to spend the summer abroad and will have an opportunity of securing much which will be of interest to the ever-increasing attendance at the Galleries.

The exhibition devoted to the work of Miss Alice Boughton, Messrs. Wm. B. Dyer and C. Yarnall Abbott lasted three weeks. It fully maintained the spirit of the Secession. The three rooms were severally devoted to the work of one of the photographers, each exhibitor being represented by twenty-three prints. It was interesting to note how, although working in some respects along similar lines, the individuality of each of these photographers stood out in bold relief when thus placed in juxtaposition. Unfortunately, the inclement weather, continuing for months, affected the attendance of this particular exhibition more than any other.

On March tenth Mr. Alvin Langdon Coburn's one-man show was opened. Mr. Coburn had come from London especially for this exhibition and the reception his pictures found in New York was disappointing neither to him nor to the Photo-Secession. Coburn has certainly lived up to—possibly gone ahead of—his early promise. He is maturing fast. Technically and artistically he has grown amazingly during the past two years and it is small wonder that this exhibition should have attracted an attention second to none so far held at the Little Galleries, nor for that matter that it should have awakened the photographic interest of many other people who had heard about Coburn via Bernard Shaw. Coburn has enjoyed exceptional advantages, and it is to his credit that he has grasped most of them. Not least of these has been his mother. A future number of *CAMERA WORK* will deal more fully with the newer work of Mr. Coburn who, in May, returns to London where he naturally finds a more sympathetic atmosphere than in commercial and hustling New York.

NATURE OR THE MIRROR.

NOTHING better calculated to illustrate the unfruitful reiteration and dull inanity of art when reduced to academic formulas could well have been devised than the eighty-second annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design. With the bare exception of some twenty odd canvases we do not remember ever having been so impressed with the utter futility of paint to express anything. And this is the art that demands acceptance on the plea that it is holding the mirror up to nature! Can it be that contemporary life is really so poverty-stricken, the men and women of to-day so wholly devoid of charm, of all grace and nobility, as a study of this exhibition would indicate? One is very loath to believe it. And a step out into the open confirms one's faith. A look at the people passing by, and one feels the tingle of reality, in comparison with which most of the canvases in this exhibition, and in all academic exhibitions for that matter, seem tame counterfeits of a pageant long since passed. Nature is no longer reflected truthfully in the work of these dabblers in pretty trifles. They have long since befogged and polluted with the breath of ancient prejudices and musty ideals the mirror given them in trust, and to-day they would have us believe that nature is only right as reflected in this mirror with which they obscure the vision of people. To them this mirror is the thing, and nature takes a back seat for the moment.

About one life is teeming with interest — throbbing, pulsating with an almost electric energy that begets great enterprises and carries them to a successful issue. The very air is astir with big things, and on every hand lurk great subjects for the man possessed of the least spark of imagination. But the men whom we have every right to expect should be the interpreters of this virile, varied, and multicolored life, side-step as though afraid of being besmirched or knocked over the head by it. It is too brutal! For them the great drama of life, daily enacted before their very eyes in a city populated by a larger number of types than can well be found in any other place in the world, has no appeal. The poetry, the romance, the tragedy of all this stirring life, seemed to have escaped their notice entirely.

By day and by night, at early morn, and in the dim twilight hour, Beauty shyly waits to be courted. She hovers, ready to be caught, everywhere. But the great Lover, possessed of the understanding heart and the seeing eye, able to discern the loveliness in these half-veiled, wondrous eyes of Nature, has a difficult time gaining admission into the company of the elect. One can hear these gentlemen asking among themselves: "What does he take us for — a Rabelais, a Rembrandt, a Balzac, or a Frans Hals, that we should find epic grandeur in all this squalor?" And why not? Is it asking too much of the artist that he reflect and interpret the life about him, that he have a message for his time? It is expected of the writer, why not of the painter and the sculptor? Millet and Meunier succeeded in the task; why not we? But it will not be done by imitating the Barbizon men nor by casting the familiar figures of daily life in the heroic mould of the great Belgian.

Imitation may be the sincerest flattery, but it is also the rankest hypocrisy and the most soul-deadening thing a man can do. The only tribute of any value that one can safely pay a strong man is to emulate that quality in him which made him be wholly true to himself, that one may the better arrive at a realization of one's own personality. This subtle, evasive and wholly undefinable something called personality is the only thing of any

importance, the one thing of supreme value given one to contribute to the world. It therefore behooves one to coin the metal that is in one instead of attempting more or less clumsy counterfeits of other men. No matter how poor and mean this metal may appear in self-analysis, it will always have a value high above pretentious imitations of so-called nobler metals. It will always ring true! And that is what so much of the art in this country to-day does not do. Men are ashamed of the talents given them if perchance they seem of smaller dimensions than those of their neighbor. So they wrap up their birthright most carefully in a napkin and bury it, believing the while they can hoodwink man and God into taking their foolish counterfeits of men of larger stature as the expression of themselves. The result is a souvenir-postal-card art, which only needs the trade-mark, "Made in Germany," to be altogether complete.

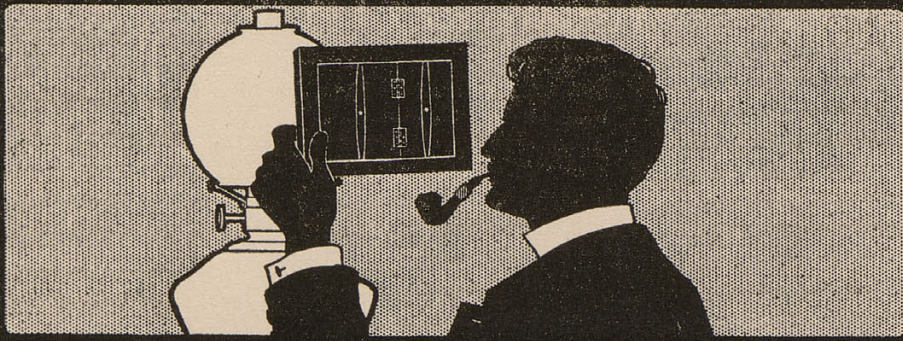
It is such work as this that, in the eyes of many people, discredits the noble art of painting, puzzling and confusing some, and hoodwinking the unwary and indiscriminating into accepting it on the plea that it is art for art's sake. A more shallow and meaningless phrase, juggled by the ignorant and even resorted to by the intelligent to escape responsibility, has never been invented. If it were true, then the gold nugget would be of equal value with the delicately wrought masterpieces of the Venetian goldsmiths. Art is for Beauty's sake, and the closer it comes to interpreting life the greater is the art.

In one of Bliss Carman's recent essays in criticism he says: "An epigram has been wittily defined as a statement of fact, which is brief, false and conclusive." This expresses perfectly the relation to truth of the art dictum promulgated by Whistler, when he said that: "The master stands in no relation to the moment at which he occurs—a monument of isolation—hinting at sadness—having no part in the progress of his fellow-men." The confutation of this statement is found in the work of the great masters of expression, from Job to Ibsen, from the creator of the "Discus Thrower" to the painter of the "Man with the Hoe," and rest assured it will always be so. The speech of the artist is as much colored by his environment and the spirit of the time as is the unconscious prattle of the child. The greater the man, the more perfectly will he respond to those subtle and all-pervasive influences in which the best thought of an age has its origin. His work will reflect the spirit of the time in which it was produced with greater certainty and authority than the chronicles of the assiduous historian. This divorcing of life from art has let loose upon the world a horde of incompetents, who threaten to swamp us with rubbish, while they blandly try to reassure us with their parrot-like cackle that it is all art for art's sake. So doting fathers and fond mothers go threadbare that a mawkish youth or maiden, empty of ideas and bereft of all feeling for life and its beauty, may unload their aimless efforts upon a long-suffering public. That juries should encourage this state of affairs by hanging the soul-sickening things one sees at exhibitions is the most discouraging feature of a far from hopeful situation. When juries shall have arrived at a keener sense of responsibility in this matter; when they shall be imbued with a finer discrimination in the selection and rejection of works, and when they will have the courage to face it squarely without fear or favor, there will be exhibitions that will be of real benefit to the people. Then, and not 'till then, will Nature take the place of the mirror.

J. NILSEN LAURVIK.

TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS.

The next number of *CAMERA WORK*, the last of the 1907 series, will be issued a few weeks late, as the Editor intends spending the summer in Europe, and does not wish the magazine to appear without his personal supervision. Communications addressed to Mr. Alfred Stieglitz, 1111 Madison Avenue, New York, and received during his absence, will receive proper attention. All personal communications will be forwarded, and duly answered.



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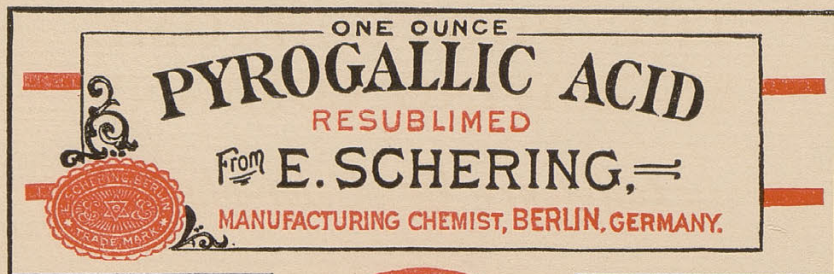
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After printing, place prints one at a time, face down, into a tray containing 16 ozs. of water, to which has been added one-quarter oz. of common salt. When prints are all in, turn over the entire batch bringing the first prints in, to the top. In this solution the prints should be kept in motion and thoroughly separated. Allow them to remain in this solution until they turn to a purple tint, when the desired tone is reached transfer to a tray of clear water where they are left until the entire batch is toned, then transfer to another tray of clear water containing just enough sal-soda to make it feel smooth to the touch. Handle the prints over in this water for five minutes. Then remove them to hypo bath, and fix and finally wash according to the directions given above.

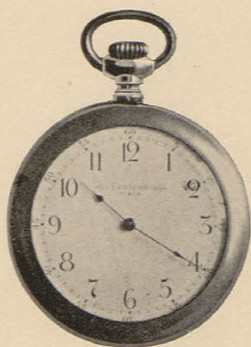
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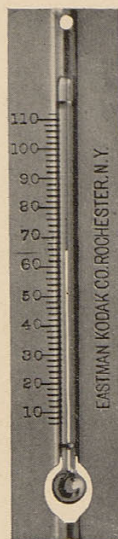
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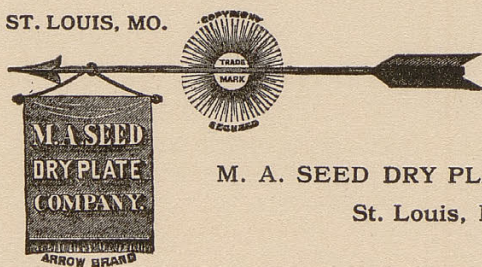
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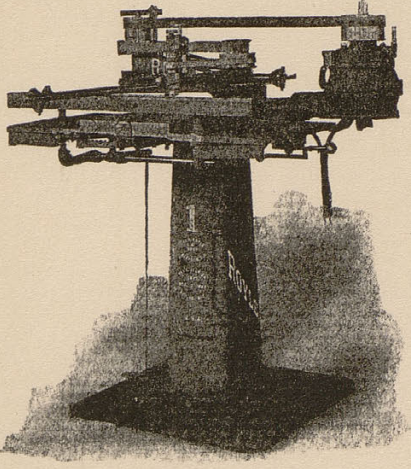
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