

Photographic Notes

Photographic Possibilities.

EDWARD C. CHICHESTER.

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The length of time to expose a plate is certainly one of the most difficult problems the photographic tyro has to solve, notwithstanding the elaborate exposure tables that have been published for the guidance of all such as may be beguiled into their use.

Further, many admirable and ingenious actinometers are purchasable for a very small outlay, and yet with all these so-called advantages the enthusiastic beginner, and even the hoary-headed veteran, are not always successful. Why is this? The answer is not far to seek. The success of the whole business turns upon one factor—light—the value of which is never constant.

It is, however, a good thing for photography, that, artistically considered, this is so. Already photography is apt to become too mechanical, and if the whole procedure is ever reduced to a matter of mathematical certainty—then a long farewell to artistic results. By this, however, is not to be understood that the true artist will be influenced, but that the productions of photographic prints will become so easy and so certain that persons without any æsthetic instincts whatever will deluge the world with technically perfect productions that will make artistic photography absolutely unremunerative to follow.

One of the charms of a picture, the work of an artist, is the suggestion that we are face to face with the best work and the best thought of the maker of the work. The moment the result of such thought and such work can be reproduced mechanically, that moment part of the subtle charm of the work is lost. As an example, consider the picture, "Bubbles," by Millais. Chromo-lithographs of this admirable picture are scattered broadcast up and down the world by a firm who are first enterprising advertisers and secondly soap-makers. This mechanical reproduction is an admirable example of what mechanical skill can do, and the prints under certain conditions of light might pass for original work. Although there is reproduced much of the delicate harmony of color, the perfect drawing and the skilful composition, the whole thing is utterly devoid of individuality. To look at such work for any length of time suggests the clunk of the press, the whirr of the engine, and the smell of greasy cotton waste, the highly-paid and worthy mechanics, and the stacks of copies ready to be shipped to all the four corners of the earth. Instead of feeling the individuality of the artist one is oppressed with the grind and tear of modern machinery. If even then the production of photographic pictures can be reduced in every

direction to a certainty, then so much the worse for any artistic possibilities of which photography is capable.

The best photographic pictures are undoubtedly those that are not produced in a studio, and when the conditions are not as nearly perfect as possible. In America to-day the most technically perfect photographs are made. The studio accessories are obviously the very best that money can buy, the lenses are suited to the subject, and the subjects themselves faultlessly dressed, posed according to the rules of *photographic art*, and lighted in the best *photographic manner*. The *print is printed on the shiniest and toniest* of paper, and the result is a technically perfect *print* and an abominable *picture*.

Here is where the amateur has a chance. In matters of pure technicality it is doubtful if he will ever compete successfully with the man who runs a studio, and indeed why should he wish to. Professional photographers run their galleries to make a living; they sell what the public want and give very good value for the money. But the amateur can work for the sake of art and perhaps occasionally produce a picture that has more interest in it than a chromo lithograph.

The noble army of snapshooters, quarter-plates and half-plates is imposing as far as numbers go, and it is doubtless a very comfortable reflection to the dry-plate maker, but the quality of the work! Does it not admit of improvement from the artistic side. It is not possible that by training to become really a *photographic artist*? Are there not subjects that admit of *artistic* photographic treatment? So that on looking at the finished picture one is conscious of the artist's individuality. Now, the query is, What plates do you use? How long did you give? &c., &c. Imagine seeing a painting and asking what make of colors were used, or who prepared the canvass, and so and so. Not until such purely mechanical details are dismissed from the amateur's mind, and the subject approached from the æsthetic side will much be done artistically in photography. That photography has artistic possibilities there can be no question, up to the present, except by a few earnest workers, these possibilities have not been cultivated, and it remains for us here to do our share in this important direction.

Film in Relation to Amateur Photography.

Read at the World's Congress of Photography by G. D. MILNERS.

The subject of celluloid film is of considerable interest to a great number of photographers. The two chief points to be considered are:

First. The reason for substituting celluloid film for glass as a support for sensitive bromide of silver emulsion.

Second. Its practicability, and in what form.

The first can be answered very quickly namely: the main object is to overcome

bulk and weight. The question then arises: Is this greatly to be desired? Yes, to the tourist pursuing photography as a pleasure, as well as the out-door photographer, a light, compact outfit is a great desideratum. For instance, go back to the old wet plate days and compare the outfit with one of the present day, and note the greater opportunities of the latter.

The second point is more open to discussion, especially considering that manufacturers of the rolled celluloid film have made complete failures of producing the commercial article. But perhaps before we go any further it is as well to explain the difference between rolled celluloid film and cut-sheet film. It should be understood that the former is made by spreading celluloid in a plastic or semi-fluid state on a long table made of several plate glass slabs and allowing it to dry, while the latter is sliced by machinery from a solid block of celluloid. Cut-sheet film, when properly manufactured, is allowed to get well seasoned (several months' seasoning) before it is coated with the bromide of silver emulsion, thereby partially insuring the sensitive emulsion from coming in contact with the harmful volatile parts of the celluloid. On the other hand, the rollable film, from necessity, is coated with the bromide of silver emulsion within ten or twelve hours after the celluloid is first spread on the glass table. To this, in some extent, is due the rapid deterioration of the bromide silver emulsion. It also accounts for the edges of a rolled film drying, leaving the centre full and baggy, and in practice making a sharp picture one of the impossibilities. Rollable film is usually coated with a sensitive emulsion before the celluloid is stripped from the table, which makes the stripping a very delicate operation—its adhesiveness causing endless trouble with electricity, producing in the negative fine branch-like markings.

It will be remembered that I have mentioned the table upon which the celluloid is spread as being long. Several glass plates are joined to make the whole. To a casual observer it would seem as if the glass plates could be so well joined that the joints would not materially show in the film, but, alas, not so! contraction and expansion play an important part and will not permit it; the result is that the semi-fluid celluloid enters the joints and very annoyingly appears in the finished negatives, giving the impression of the celluloid having been crudely joined. This nuisance, as if not satisfied, goes still further and often imprints itself on several of the adjacent layers of film in the roll.

But the most serious defect with the rolled film will be found in its sensitive surface contracting when first spooled. It is a well known fact that in rolling or bending any substance the inner side contracts and the outer side expands, the particles striving to re-arrange themselves to the new existing conditions.

So with the rolled film, which is neces-