

Vignettes.

WHAT would be thought of an artist who deliberately made a practice of painting his canvas up to the edges, and then regularly painted out all but the centre? Yet photographers act quite as strangely; they take portraits with the image up to the edge of the plate, and then vignette off all but the centre. After such a roundabout procedure it is not to be wondered at that the finished results are often so unsatisfactory.

It would be an interesting verse in the history of photography if we could gather how and by whom the first vignette was made. In all probability it was suggested by one of those crayon drawings, which photographic enlargements have to a great extent done away with. We should like to know whether the vignetting was done by printing or in the camera, or at least in front of it, by means of a screen; at any rate, it may safely be stated that the earliest vignettes could not possibly be worse than many which are now being made. It may be worth the professional photographer's while to consider whether badly-made vignettes have had anything to do with the present dull state of business, for if there is one thing more than another which exhibits the want of skill in a photographer it is a badly-printed vignette, and the worst of it is that a large majority of these vignettes need not have been so printed, and would have been far better had they been printed full to the edges. Perhaps the extra charge generally made for this class of work may have had something to do with the matter. The photographer would naturally try to get his extra shilling or two, and the sitter, with a natural desire to have the best—i.e., the most expensive—work, would prefer vignettes to plain work.

It is easy enough to see that most vignettes *are* disturbing to the eye, for generally it is this technical part of the portrait that first claims our attention, instead, as it should be, such qualities as the excellence of the likeness or skillful light and shade. After looking on

a well-printed vignette the spectator should *not* be able, if asked afterward, to say whether it was vignetted or not; if he can, some evidence of the technical part of the printing must have impressed him.

In theory, it is the easiest thing in the world to vignette a portrait properly, but in practice everything seems to conspire in the hands of many against good results, yet no photographer who understands the whims of his customers would for a moment suggest any other style of printing bust portraits, for he knows full well that if he could not vignette off the creases of that badly-fitting dress, or remove altogether that bulky waist, he would lose many an order, to say nothing of his being able to apparently reduce the size of the features of those of his sitters to whom nature has been especially kind. To be sure, the photographer could cover up any objectionable part with an oval mask, and if the oval openings in albums had in the first place been made rounder and not so large, oval portraits would be more used than they are; but as the oval of the album maker and the oval of the photographer are so seldom of the same shape, it follows that vignettes are preferred in spite of their flatness and insipidity.

The wish for more force and vitality in vignetted work has brought forth many attempts at breaking the monotony of the edges of their everlasting pear and oval appearance. By means of a few touches with a brush an artist can easily remove the tameness, but brush work on an albumenized carte or cabinet is not to be thought of. Yet, surely, it would be worth while by double printing to make the every-day vignette more artistic and attractive. One of the simplest ways of getting a good effect, with little trouble, is to make the portrait in the usual way, choosing a light background by preference, then taking an unmounted proof as a guide, to hatch or stump on a rough drawing paper the effect wished for, from this making a negative, and printing it over the portrait, covering up the face and those parts that is not desirable to add to. Portraits so treated are easily mis-