

AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHY

Conducted by H. McBean Johnstone

THE LANDSCAPE—THE MASSING OF LIGHT.

Though in this series, lines and mass are divided under two separate heads, in composing a picture it is impossible to use the one to advantage without a more or less thorough knowledge of the other.

Now first for an explanation of what is meant by mass. In any photograph or drawing, however small its pretensions may be, there must necessarily be accidental or intentional arrangements of light and shade, and unless this is dexterously handled the general aspect of the picture will be far from pleasing. All terrestrial objects, aerial masses and particularly light, are reckoned as mass in a monochrome drawing or photograph and we must train our minds to recognize them as such. Let us, when examining a photograph, endeavor to forget that it is a reproduction of some scene that really exists in nature, and to look at it as merely so much cleverly grouped light and shade, half tones and full tones, until by thus concentrating our attention on the massing, we are able to entirely obliterate the picture from our minds. When we are able to do this by instinct rather than by a long course of reasoning we may know that our education in such work is nearing completion. The process may be simplified by enlarging the photograph, but it is much preferable to train the eye without any such external artificial aid. It is a point, too, worthy of note, that it is much more difficult to dissect a landscape than a photograph of it. The color which obscures the light and shade is, of course, the cause of this difficulty, and to overcome this many artists use a very simple contrivance called a Claude mirror, so termed because we owe its invention to Claude Lorraine. The Claude glass is a black convex mirror by whose aid the color is subdued to gray, while at the same time the high lights and shadows are emphasized and sharpened and the whole view considerably reduced in size. To use it one stands with the back to the chosen view and holds the mirror eighteen inches from the eye. The reversed and reduced presentment thus obtained is of real value and assistance both in the choice of view and the manipulation of one's lights, for though the photographer has not the good fortune to be able to directly rearrange his lights, he has much more control over them than is at first sight apparent. Frequently his foregrounds are too dark and too strongly emphasized for the sole reason that the light strikes from the wrong quarter or at an unfavorable angle and so results in a loss of balance in the composition.

The principal object to be attained in a photograph, by the massing of light, is breadth. This does not necessarily mean equal spaces of sun and shadow, for then our results would be flat and lacking in that contrast and gradation that imparts relief to them. For an example of this take two photographs of the same subject, one with the sun behind the camera, and the other with the light so situated in relation to the scene as to stream across it and over part to cast a broad simple light, the rest being in shadow. The difference will then be more plainly seen than any amount of writing could make it.

But it must not be inferred that the proper quantity is extreme contrast of light and shade, for it is upon gradation

and delicate half-tones that the whole beauty of some compositions is entirely dependent.

Light and shade vary so with the subject that to reduce it to anything like system or to formulate laws on its use would be but little short of impossible, and to attempt to put such laws into practice would be entirely beyond most of us. But there are a few general arrangements which the photographer desiring always the best artistic effects will find valuable to him. In massing the light or spreading it through the picture, it should never be allowed to form a horizontal or vertical line, and though this is a contradiction to the beauty that is to be seen in the horizontal bars of light visible at sunset, even in these cases the lines of the clouds are often effectively broken by contrasting shapes of foreground objects such as trees in landscape or the masts of a ship in marine views. It will be often noticed that the beauties of effective light and shade consist in contrasting masses. For instance, in a view where the foreground is all in bright sunshine with the exception of a clump of trees at one side and the background shadowed by a passing cloud, the effect of breadth and depth is rendered as would be possible in no other way. If in the mass in the foreground there are combined extreme blacks and whites, the rest of the picture, consisting of variously graded half-tones, will be made harmonious by our having created a focus more brilliant than and overmastering the other lights and shadows. Or, again, the application of this principle may be reversed and a single mass of light may be thrown into relief by means of a dark background.

Though in every picture there must be a principal light, it should not stand alone, but should be repeated or echoed in other parts of the photograph in various inferior degrees. It is this subtle use of repeated lights in marvellous gradations that harmonize and mellow the strong contrasts of light and shade in the manner that is to be seen in all photographic and other masterpieces. The landscape artist, though unable to control his lights with skylight blinds, if not hurried can select from twenty different lights, from the lengthy shadows of morning, across the blazing glare of noon, to the mellow soft twilight of the evening. By varying his standpoint a few feet he can often, too, change the direction from which the light falls and cause it to strike the ground at a very different angle, so gaining a roundness and depth for objects that hitherto were comparatively flat and uninteresting, while at the same time the removal or the introduction of a tree or shrub or even a heap of dried brush will disclose a new effect that was not apparent before. The placing of a dead branch of a tree or a half-rotten log across or beside a ditch will frequently materially alter the whole composition and add wonderfully to the appearance of depth, but in attempting this it is a point worthy of remembrance that the more simply and broadly foregrounds are treated the better the result is likely to be and, indeed, it cannot be too strongly impressed upon the photographer that the more simple his subject altogether the nearer his results will approach fine art. "True genius was never better displayed by great landscape painters than in the happy simplicity of their noblest subjects." The constituents of many pictures are plentiful, but they have, first, to be picked out, and, second, to be arranged in some kind of order, for many photographs, though containing a vast number of interesting facts, are not in the strict sense of the word pictures simply because of a lack of the artistic temperament on the part of the operator. Each photograph may record enough facts to make up half a dozen pictures without being one in itself. It is often the custom of