

and cut up. Messrs. Nelson's factories cover over five acres, and on a slope of a hill, adjoining the premises is the "Nelson Village," a model colony of workmen's cottages and villas which is provided with a club and other institutions for the social and educational welfare of the firm's employes.



THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN BIRMINGHAM.

By W. H. GARBUTT & E. C. MIDDLETON.

SOME would begin the story of photography in Birmingham as far back as 1777 with the noted Soho Foundry of Boulton and Watt as the scene of the earliest local experiments. But the famous "sun pictures," still exhibited in the Watt Room at Handsworth, have been clearly proved by an investigation made by Boulton's grandson thirty-five years ago, to have been produced by a purely mechanical process, invented by Eginton, an artist in the employ of the famous firm.

It is difficult to believe, however, that the problem of how to fix the fleeting images of the camera which occupied so many minds at the commencement of the nineteenth century should have escaped attention in a town which for centuries has been noted for its ingenuity and enterprise.

"But there is," says Boulton's grandson, "some evidence tending to show that photographic experiments were made at Soho subsequent to 1790 and that Wedgwood communicated instructions on the subject; and it is possible that these may have been the experiments which were shown to Sir W. Beechey, apparently in 1799, and were discontinued at his request. There is no difficulty in accepting this view except that caused by the long silence of my father and of Mr. Watt, who were certainly ignorant of any practice of photography at Soho."

Soho certainly would be the quarter in which one would look first for evidence of enterprise in such a matter. One of the Soho worthies, Murdoch, son of the inventor of gas-lighting, undoubtedly made Daguerreotypes in 1840, and the authority we have quoted gives in one of his pamphlets illustrations of work of the same kind which he believes to have been done about that time by his aunt, Miss Wilkinson. It was, in fact, the existence of these pictures side by side with those in the Watt collection, which for a time gave support to the myth—even now occasionally revived—which Boulton's grandson, no doubt with reluctance, dispelled.

But Birmingham though it played no part, as it seems, in the invention of photography, took an early and not unworthy share in some of the most important practical developments of the art. George Shaw, still living and now famous as a patent agent, took a photograph of a white house within two days of the publication of Daguerre's patent in 1839. Dr. Richard Hill Norris, working

at the subject concurrently with Despratz and Barnes, though independently and not on the same lines, patented in 1855 the first dry plate. He described his process in "The London Photographic Journal" in July, 1856. In the following month, writing from 46 Stafford Street, Birmingham, to Sutton's "Photographic News," he refers to this communication, and adds, "Since that period I have much modified it, having reduced it, I may say, to a certainty. The following are the advantages claimed by my process:—(1) My plates are more easily prepared than by any other process; (2) they are dry, hard and horny, and may be laid in contact when taken in the field. (3) They will keep before and after exposure for an indefinite period. (4) They may be developed with gallic acid in the same manner as albumen. (5) They are as sensitive as any of the moist preservative process."

The details given by Dr. Hill Norris and his concluding remarks throw an interesting sidelight on the difficulties of the early photographers. "All photographers," he says, "will rejoice with me that the days of tents, bottles and baths are numbered, and that we can really make a pleasure of our viewing excursions, instead of a filthy, pestiferous fag and toil. I carry with me on an excursion a camera, stand and a flat plate-box, with a yellow bag having sleeves; this bag I fasten to the camera back, at which it is at once a chamber to change plates in. I have nothing to do but select the finest position and expose my plates. On my return I transfer my plates from the box to the developing dishes, cover them up and go down to supper with a good digestion and an appetite not a little sharpened by the consciousness that after the withdrawal of the cloth I shall be able to regale my friends with the reproduction in miniature of the delicious scenery my own eyes have feasted on during the day."

Dr. Hill Norris, in fact, was the first to introduce the dry-plate in a commercial form; and certainly was among the first to use gelatine as a preservative. How narrowly he missed being the discoverer of the gelatine plate of twenty years later it is hard to say. The slowness of the development when gelatine was used seems to have gradually led him off this track, for in the communication just quoted he mentions that whereas he formerly used eight grains to the ounce in his gelatine, he had found four grains better.

His dry-plate of that day was not largely adopted possibly owing to the difficulty, at the time, of producing on a commercial scale a commodity requiring so much skill and delicacy in its preparation. Dr. Hill Norris, however, was one of the first to realise the commercial possibilities of photographic chemistry, and in the same volume of "Photographic Notes," we find him advertising:—"Hill Norris's Positive and Negative Collodion, 8d. per oz. ; 7/- per lb. of 16 oz." Dr. Hill Norris, who became M.R.C.S. in 1860 and took his degree of M.D. in 1862, continued to interest himself in photography, but chiefly as bearing upon the profession of medicine. His photo-micrographical researches in illustrating the development of mammalian blood have been recognised as exceptionally valuable. His interest in the general aspect of the art and its scientific bases was revived by his election as first president

and afterwards treasurer, and who is still active in his own business and has not lost his interest in photography, we are indebted for some clues to its history. The second column of Sutton's "Photographic Notes," that for 1857, has for its



W. T. GREATBATCH.
By Harold Baker.



ALFRED PUMPHREY.

sub-title "Journal of the Birmingham Photographic Society," the Birmingham Society having taken the place occupied the year before on the title page by the Photographic Society of Scotland and the Manchester Photographic Society. In the January number are given the following particulars: "Birmingham Photographic Society. Patron, Sir Francis E. Scott, Bart.; President, George Shaw, Esq., F.G.S., Professor of Chemistry, Queen's College; Vice-President, W. Howell, Esq., L.R.C.P.; Members of Council: Treasurer, W. B. Osborn; Hon. Secretary, E. J. T. Pitman; W. B. Henshaw, C. J. Phillips, J. T. Brown, E. Beckingham, J. O. C. Phillips, John Ward, Morris Banks. When the society's income shall permit premises will be taken suitable for all general purposes, and a photographic gallery erected where members may exhibit pictures for sale. Ten per cent. of the proceeds of such sales to be paid into the funds of the society. An ordinary member pays an admission fee of half-a-guinea, and an annual subscription of half-a-guinea. Ladies are eligible as members of the society."

Those were the days of velvet jackets and great expectations. The photographers never got their gallery, but the painters whom some of them seemed to expect to cut out, have come to recognise them as brother artists, a recognition signalled in February, 1898, by the invitation to

of the Birmingham Photographic Society in 1885. The result of these more recent researches was the invention of a new collodion dry-plate, which combines the facility of development of collodion with a near approach to the rapidity of gelatine. The plate is a bath plate sensitised in a solution of silver considerably warmed and having possibly dextrine as a preservative. The discovery was announced by Dr. Hill Norris at the National Convention held in Birmingham in 1888, and was subsequently patented

The first Birmingham Photographic Society and the first dry-plate came into being about the same time. To W. B. Osborn, who was first hon. sec.

the younger Birmingham Photographic Society to hold its annual exhibition in the galleries of the Royal Society of Artists.

The old society continued to hold its monthly meetings, and to keep itself before the public.

At the sixth ordinary meeting held on February 24th, 1857, Dr. Hill Norris and C. Fowler (Torquay) were among the members elected, and the arrangement by the council with W. Sutton to make "Photographic Notes" the society's official organ was sanctioned.

Among the advertisements in the "Notes" appeared the names of John A. Wills, Pumphrey and Elisha Mander. Pumphrey is still a well known name in photography, and Mr. Elisha Mander still provides photographers with various important accessories.

It was at this meeting that the election of O. J. Rejlander was announced, and Sutton in an editorial note says, "Mr. Rejlander is a high authority on all photographic matters, practical and artistic, and we congratulate the society on the acquisition of so distinguished a member."

At the next meeting a letter was read by Mr. Osborn from Jersey in which Sutton, who, in the interim had been elected an honorary member, thanked the council for the honor that had been conferred on him, and mentioned that the Birmingham Photographic Society was the only one of which he was a member.

The next meeting was a notable one. Rejlander attended and exhibited "a copy of the extraordinary composition which he sent to the Manchester Exhibition. The subject is an allegory representing about twenty-five figures. The picture itself is prepared from thirty separate negatives, all of which were photographed at different times." Soon afterwards Sutton came to Birmingham and was introduced to the society by Mr. Osborn. Roger Fenton was another notable visitor. Most of the Birmingham amateurs of that day, Mr. Osborn informs us, produced calotypes, though the professional photographers of the town clung to Daguerreotype. Mr. Shaw, after experimenting with the latter process, went in largely for the waxed paper process. He was not very communicative, and his fellow-members rarely got a look at his work, but some of his pictures were shown in the society's exhibition. It was through this exhibition, held at the famous old posting inn, the Hen and Chickens, New Street (of which Dickens has given some reminiscences) that the society, after a vigorous existence of four or five years, came to grief. A deficit of £60 resulted in an informal liquidation of the society. Mr. Osborn, who stood by it to the last, was led to take an interest in photography by his study of chemistry. Dr. Anthony, who is well remembered in connection with literary and philosophical institutions of the town, was another member of the early society.

Another land-mark in the local history of photography was the advent thirty-eight years ago of the French Canadian, Napoleon Sarony. He was introduced to the Birmingham public by the fine art dealers, Messrs. Thrupp & Co., who saw money in the new science. Sarony was a striking personality, small of stature, large of nose, dressy

to a degree. In Hessian boots, Astrachan cuffs, and a shako also of Astrachan of the orthodox Canadian pattern, we can well believe that his appearance in New Street created no small stir. His suave manner and his conversational power and politeness went so far to produce a frame of mind that prepared and sustained the sitters of those days through the ordeal. He was instinctively an artist, clever in black and white, and his posing was easy and graceful, but as an operator he was less successful. In fact it was not until he had as a co-worker Silvester Laroche, that his artistic ability was done justice to. In Laroche he was backed up by perhaps as capable an operator as ever worked the collodion process at this time.

So numerous were the sitters that by means of moving backs eight negatives were taken upon each plate, and those who recognise the difficulties of wet plate portraiture will realise what this meant. Many of Laroche's negatives are still preserved, and are indeed object lessons to present day workers, who leave the manufacturer to do so much for them. Sarony's brother established himself at Scarborough, Sarony himself eventually returning to America, taking £1,000 as the value of his share of the negatives. How successful he has been in New York is too well known to need comment. It is perhaps not too much to say that his influence and fashion did more for the art side of photography than that of any other worker of his day. His introduction of retouching brought fame and fortune too.

When it was known that Sarony was leaving Birmingham, the rush was something enormous. Prints could not be properly washed but were soaked together in solid blocks. The same occurred with the portrait of the once famous Ada Isaacs Menkin, whose *carte-de-visites* sold at 1/6 each, and went out in thousands, the day being spent in printing, the night in mounting and packing.

Laroche, who was a Londoner, and the man who, as defendant in Fox-Talbot's action, set free photography, was something much more than an operator. At the exhibition of 1857 his work in the form of whole plate Daguerreotypes, was awarded a gold medal. By command of Her Majesty he took a notable series of the Shakspearean recitals of Charles Kean. At the second Photographic Exhibition of 1854 he showed coloured miniatures which were then said to be equal to the best work of the miniature painters. He was an earnest worker, and perhaps went beyond the possibilities of the process. He was particularly fond of genre subjects of which we give an example. He, too, left Thrupp, and after practising in Islington Row for some time retired, and died at Birmingham in 1886. His son established a business at Llandudno, which is now carried on by his grandson.

Another of Birmingham's famous photographers was John Johnstone, who commenced business in New Street on the site of the present Midland Hotel. He was an inventor, and worked with Josiah Mason and others at the problem of electro deposition, in which as a Daguerreotypist he had an artistic as well as a scientific interest. His work as a photographer was highly esteemed,

and he carried on a successful business until his death. One who knew him well speaks of him as a very painstaking man, too much so for his own success. He would spend a day finishing a picture which another man would dispose of in ten minutes. Another characteristic reminiscence: Said one of his friends after he had corrected someone on a point of photographic science, "The worst of Johnstone is that he always insists that he is right." To which Mr. Osborn, rejoined, "Yes, and he always is right."

His son, A. S. Johnstone, who, in connection with the firm of H. Wiggin & Co., has helped to develop commercially his metallurgical discoveries still has some beautiful Daguerreotypes and other photographs executed by him. The roof lamp for railway carriages is another result of the ingenuity of this versatile and indefatigable exper-

was a cashier at Lloyd's Bank, and who still has relatives in the city, is well remembered in Birmingham not only as a photographer but as an accomplished amateur musician and violoncellist. He left Birmingham in 1881 and took up his residence at Bromley, in Kent, where he has devoted himself to commercially developing his invention. "He was always experimenting," says an old comrade of his, but he had also his artistic successes in photography.

It was in 1862 that Alexander Parkes invented in Birmingham "Parkesine," or as it is now called celluloid. To Parkes we thus owe the Kodak camera and its prototypes, as well as the kinetograph. Parkes, however, did not reap the reward of his discovery.

Fredk. Iles has rendered a great service to photography by a method of side illumination,



HAROLD HOLCROFT
(Sec. Wolverhampton Camera Club).
Photogram by R. M. Evans & Co., Rhyd.

menter. Johnstone was a close personal friend of the late Mr. J. Mayall and was also on friendly terms with Fox Talbot.

H. P. Robinson is well remembered by Birmingham photographers, though his business was at Leamington. One of his assistants was Mr. Baker, now the well-known photographer of Bristol Street.

Birmingham has reason to be proud of the results achieved by some of the men who devoted their ingenuity to photographic research. In November, 1864, W. Willis patented his aniline process, and his son, W. Willis, jun., conferred an incalculable benefit on pictorial photography by his invention of the platinotype process, which he patented in 1873, and for improvements in which he took out patents in 1878 and 1880. Willis, jun., who, at the time of his discovery,



A GENRE STUDY.
By Laroche.

which throws up pictures of magnified objects into stereoscopic relief. John Anderton, a well known Birmingham optician, has produced the stereoscopic lantern, whose blurred projections on a tinfoil screen appear in full relief when viewed through his retracting spectacles of spar.

David E. Packer in 1896 published a method of photography the sun's corona, by means of the ultra-violet rays filtered on to the sensitive plate through tinfoil.

The discovery of the cause and cure of halation by George Marlow, a coadjutor of Dr. Hill Norris's, is another notable contribution by Birmingham to the progress of photography.

It was in 1884, more than twenty years after the disruption of the old society that the present Birmingham Photographic Society was formed with Dr. Hill Norris as its president. The first hon. secretary to hold office for any length of

time was Benjamin Karleese, who was succeeded by J. H. Pickard and then by A. J. Leeson, J. T. Mousley, and J. Simpkin preceded. C. J. Fowler, who has held office from January, 1894, until January this year, a period notable for a steady growth in the practical efficiency of the society and in the success of its exhibitions.

Lewis Lloyd, who has acted as assistant secretary to Mr. Fowler for some years past, organised the 1st exhibition pending the election of H. V. Cornish.

After three increasingly successful exhibitions at the Exchange Rooms, the society, largely through the advocacy of Jonathan Pratt, the secretary, had placed at its disposal the building of the Royal Society of Artists in New Street. That it proved worthy of this hospitality was the



SYLVESTRE LAROCHE.

general verdict, endorsed by a renewal of the invitation in 1899 and 1900, while the Photographic Society recognised the favour shown to it by a subscription to the Royal Society of Artists, which gives the members of the former some of the privileges of an affiliated society.

The Challenge Cup Competition, originated by Mr. Fowler in 1895, has greatly stimulated interest in the exhibition. The first cup fell to W. T. Greatbach in 1897, and the second to W. Smedley Aston.

In 1898, the classes, the number of which had grown from one or two to about 28, were abolished and the exhibition was simply divided into general sections, much to the advantage of effect in hanging.

The idea of a photographic survey had been brought forward by W. Jerome Harrison, F.G.S.,

at a meeting of the society in 1887. Sir Benjamin Stone, who almost all his life had been accumulating photographic records of contemporary history, taking up the movement earnestly.

The society now occupies a small room at the Athletic Institute, John Bright Street. But in spite of its cramped quarters it is vigorous, and it seems a pity that an institution of such importance and achievements cannot be better housed. Societies with a far smaller claim to authoritative recognition are welcomed at the Mason University College and other public institutions. A bolder claim might fairly be made. A university which teaches brewing and trains commercial clerks would surely not be going out of its way if it did something for photography, which has a scientific basis and the pursuit of which has directly and indirectly been of great benefit to science and even to the humanities." A School of Photography under such an aegis would be a fitting culmination of the work Birmingham has been doing for the art during two generations.

Personal Opinion of "Photograms of the Year," 1899.

"Photograms of the Year" is always one of my annual photographic pleasures, and every now and then I take them from my library and compare notes. They are invaluable to the student of pictorial photography."—ALFRED STEIGLITZ.

To Contributors.—The Editors of *The Photogram* and *The Process Photogram* are open to consider original articles: preferably such describing the original work of the writer. A stamped and addressed envelope should be enclosed for prompt return in case the contribution cannot be used.

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