

WILSON'S PHOTOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE.

EDITED BY EDWARD L. WILSON.

VOL. XXXVIII.

MARCH, 1901.

No. 531.

BAKER STREET, LONDON.

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.

IN lieu of a Fifth Avenue, London has a "West End," and its leading photographers may be found in several streets, while single ones are dotted in all directions. The streets more intimately associated with the fraternity—those down which the provincial photographer wanders when he comes idea-hunting to town—are Regent Street, Bond Street, and Baker Street. Baker Street is, in a measure, similar to Broadway, New York; for its glory is eclipsed by newer and more glorified streets, and it holds several strong, old-established firms who keep their customers without following the stream of fashion to newer districts. The street itself is one of the innumerable short north and south streets of London. For a few yards it is known under some other name, becomes Baker Street for a short quarter of a mile, and as suddenly becomes, under a third name, a double row of most respectable boarding-houses. The houses on Baker Street are mostly of four stories, and were built at a time when roominess was essential. Now they are mostly occupied, as to the ground floor, by broad display windows, and above are show-rooms or work-rooms of the various firms. Baker Street is a fairly quiet thoroughfare, along which cabs and mediæval 'buses drive. Seen on a normal winter day it develops considerable "atmosphere" at one hundred yards distance, and at three hundred yards melts into the yellow oblivion of a slight London fog. If it is noon a slightly brighter splurge on the fog to the south tells that the sun is brightly shining in a cloudless sky, but

helplessly beating on the uppermost strata of the veil. There are some nine photographers in Baker Street, of whom two-thirds may be considered as leading men. The photographer usually occupies the entire building, and this gives him a wealth of display space beyond the usual. Whether this is entirely to the advantage of the photographer is doubtful; it may help business, but is rather severe on the reputation of the photographer. A display usually means a packed window, and the inevitable result is much work not of the best. The photographer is notoriously careless in judging his own work, and display is often treated in the most perfunctory fashion. The resulting impression is at first unfavorable to the London work, for the bad work is aggressive where the good retires; and it is not until a very careful examination that it is seen that if 80 per cent. of the work were weeded out there would be left a display exceeding in number of prints that of the average New York case and fully equal to it in quality.

Another thought that suggests itself is that the London photographer needs a thoroughly good illustrated *professional* journal that will not only give him technical information but will hammer a few absolute facts into his head. This remark is suggested more particularly by the prevalence of the vignette—the commercial vignette of fifteen years ago. This is often used absolutely without discrimination, and it is no surprise to see a notice in one of the windows, "vignettes charged extra." The worst case of vignette was in one of the

best displays. A baby's head, against a dark background, was sharply graded off, with the old commercial "pear-shape," into the white paper. The dark effect vanished suddenly at the baby's shoulders, for the little dress was white, under-exposed and hard, and indistinguishable from the white paper into which it merged. Seen placed back in the window, a halo of background was the one insistent thing, and that "shouted" across half the breadth of the street. Not only were there many *bad* vignettes, but there were very few good ones.

Thomas Fall, "photographer to the Queen by royal warrant"—such appointees are plentiful—has two large windows, one on each side of his entrance. One of these windows is devoted to men—or rather to women and children—and the other to beasts, for Fall is a noted photographer of noted dogs. His window of persons contains half a dozen life-size and several smaller enlargements. These large pictures are evidently in larger demand here than in America. Carte sizes are quoted by the best men, and those below the first rank supply midgets.

Three large frames hold cabinet pictures. A large cut-out mount is pierced to hold from twelve to twenty-four prints. The mounts used are black, the cut-outs are bevelled and gilded, and the whole inclosed in a colored wood frame. Placed, as these frames are, four feet back from the window it is of course impossible to examine them critically.

More interesting is the second window—one which will attract every lover of animals and every admirer of good photography. There is a frame containing some thirty wonderful cabinet photographs of pedigree dogs. Each one is plainly titled with the name of the dog and owner—a commendable plan. They are evidently the work of one who both loves dogs and understands the "points" of valuable dogs. Almost all the dogs are in profile, and in every case their attention has been attracted in some way, and in some very slight way, for there is no tense alertness, the look being almost one of reflection in many cases. One little picture shows a little maiden in white, with her six white, long-haired pets; every one is

near perfection. Needless to say every photograph is perfect in its definition, and printed on a fine-textured paper. The rest of the window is filled with enlargements of dogs and pussy cats, with a couple of paintings of landscapes and a colored enlargement of five puppies. The whole is a display which will win the heart of every woman. The frames used for these enlargements are of oiled oak, carved, with or without (usually with) gold strip.

Within a few doors of Fall are Brown, Barnes & Bell, an old-established firm of many branches, and in this one, at least, doing work of only moderate quality, for which they charge a reasonable price, considering their location. Cartes \$2.50 per dozen or cabinets \$5 is not unreasonable for Baker Street. Their show-case—window it might almost be termed—takes half of a broad entrance. It gives about twenty feet of glass, and the "case" is four feet deep. How closely the trade of any establishment can be graded by its show-case! The expensive enlargements and massive frames of Fall here give place to a few prints ranging near 11 x 14 in size and a preponderance of cabinet prints, mounted singly, and frames usually in silver, of a somewhat rococo kind. On the opposite side of the entrance are three large frames of half-inch mould, once white, with an inch-wide white, flat inside bordering a red-plush ground. These contain cabinet prints. Some of them are on plate-sunk mounts with a pasted-down centre, and with the firm's name on the mount in silver or in gold. These prints are platinotypes, and hard and under-exposed they look. The other cabinets, from similar negatives, are printed on glossy paper, which by bringing out the fullest possibilities of the negatives give just a suggestion of modelling in the faces. Either the vignette or a decorative, accessory-helped background are the prevalent treatments.

Russell & Sons, among the most fashionable and successful of royal photographers, have appropriately decked their windows—a great 18 feet one—with royalty, mostly the late Queen. These are almost all glossy cabinets (price 36 cents each) of the old, old school; very black and very white. As examples of photography some would be tolerated only on the charitable

supposition that they were taken under the conditions which beset the average amateur and that they are of interest as records. The window is relieved of its mourning sombreness by a few colored enlargements, mostly military; bright in the red tunics, with belts and buttons emphasized in the most approved fashion. The color is of a rich, opalescent quality not usually deemed artistic, and the frames are mostly gold. A dozen pictures look attractive, and I hope they appealed to me by their worth and not merely by contrast. They were circular prints, about five inches in diameter, platinotypes, toned slightly warm.

The subjects were heads or half-lengths of ladies. This circular picture is very fashionable here just now, being used more than it should be. The mount is square, about eight inches, slightly granular, with a circular plate-mark showing a margin of about a quarter-inch all around the print. This white mount, with its plain depression, is used in all sizes both for round prints and those of the ordinary shape. The name is printed in black, usually from engraved script but occasionally from type; the name in the left corner and the address in the right.

Close to Russell & Sons a photographer rejoices in seven cases a yard square, with an extra one on the corner of the entrance. It is again work at \$5 a dozen cabinets (platinotypes 50 per cent. extra). Vignettes are favored, and when not used they give place to the old-time background and accessories, including the rustic (or baronial?) balustrade, palms, and basket of artificial flowers. Some of the prints show careful lighting, and his retouching gives a sharp-cut finish to the features which will doubtless please the customers.

Photographers of children are always interesting, and we evidently have such a firm in Robert Faulkner & Co. But the result is scarcely successful. Fifteen cabinets of children are woefully posed and commonplace, and this is the more strange, as some carbons exhibited beside them (and also of children) show much better and more feeling work. This evidence of thought is also apparent in four 10 x 12 three-quarter lengths of men against dark backgrounds relieved by a patch of white. In spite of one or two very obvious faults

they are interesting as attempts out of the ordinary groove.

There are in one of these cases several miniatures (enamels), and as several firms in Baker Street show miniatures I will deal with them as a whole, for I cannot speak favorably of them. Strictly speaking, they are not miniatures but small-sized photographs, for there is too often no attempt at any line or composition, or indeed any pictorial or decorative treatment whatever. It would seem as though these photographers had no conception of such work as that turned out by Dudley Hoyt, Benjamin, Kemp, and others, work illustrated in *Mosaics*, 1901, and in the *MAGAZINE* during the past year. These attempts are ordinary work reduced to some two inches in height and burnt into a piece of china. Some are in red—a weak, flat red, with dirty whites, very thoroughly ineffective; and there is a custom of vignetting about one-eighth of an inch all around the edge, which gives a result still more degraded. It is not too severe condemnation to say that some of these miniatures (not all) would be in their proper class if made up as 10-cent button pictures.

Next to Faulkner's is a well-known name, "Histed"—for he uses it here in quotation marks—who poses as "photographer and art publisher," has again a large window in which he shows thirty-five framed portraits.

It is another palpable case of overdoing it. Half-a-dozen prints carefully selected from the lot would do credit to the producer, but the display as a whole is less convincing than the one or two examples which he displays in New York. By the way, where is Histed? I thought I had left him in New York, but here in London they effusively assure me that Histed is here, and clinch their confidence by saying that "there are two of him here, in spite of New York." I rather incline to think that a good understudy is responsible for the work. Histed's work, like Hollinger's, is a kind that can, to a certain point, be imitated, and much of this work suggests such an origin. That there are here a number of pictures by Histed is doubtless true, but some of them are violently lighted faces against dark backgrounds, far from pleasing. It is easy to pose a figure against

darkness and easy to suppress all except the face or a part of the face; but woe to the man who does it without knowing why! Some of these portraits are violent almost to vulgarity—the sort of picture which should have its face turned to the wall—and suggest those extremest effects into which Doré occasionally lapsed when illustrating some weird, mythical tragedy. Histed's frames are almost all dark, and are good when placed against a black background; but he occasionally uses Rembrandt mounts, and the effect of a two-inch margin on the lightest part of one of these mounts dividing a black frame from a black background may be imagined.

Alfred Ellis & Walery, a firm almost directly opposite Histed, make a strong display of royalty; cabinets 36 cents each. Again we have the lavish use of space for display, for not only is a handsome window devoted to it, but the passage ending in swinging plate-glass doors leading to the first-floor studio is lined with a dozen large show-cases. Four of these tall mahogany show-cases are filled with a large oak board, each pierced with twenty bevel-edge openings for prints up to 10 x 12 in size. Six cases contain framed colored portraits or carbon cabinets, and two contain miniatures hung against dark red. The colored miniatures are doubtless a profitable line, but the uncolored ones (except those toned red) are more pleasing. Here as elsewhere glossy paper holds its lead. Negatives are made sufficiently hard for it—almost too hard. The lighting of royal ladies, in evening dress, from the side gives, close and sudden against shadow, an ivory, lustrous whiteness to arms and neck. It doubtless "takes," though it is not pleasing. One or two of these hard negatives have been used for platinotype—and the prints have yellowed!

The prices quoted are: Miniature enamels from \$7.50 each; cartes, "silver process and two proofs," \$3 per dozen; cabinets, \$7.50 per dozen; boudoirs (5 x 8), \$15 per dozen; platinotype prints, 50 per cent. extra.

After so many extensive displays it was with a feeling almost of relief that I reached the doors of Elliott & Fry and found not a single specimen on view. I pushed through the swinging doors into a small

hall some sixteen feet square. Around it ran the stairs to the top of the house—three stories—and as I looked up I could see pictures hung around the walls; but except three enormous enlargements they were paintings—many of them water scenes and scarcely attractive on a cold winter's day.

Window & Grove, again, have no prominent display. All that face the street are two picture portraits, one on each side of the door. Each is a 15 x 18 red carbon of a lady—those ladies with wavy hair rippling over their shoulders and downward to the margin of the print, such as we so often see in photography. Just outside the entrance door are two other frames, one containing a dozen theatrical subjects, the other eight circular sepia platinum. Six of these latter are mounted on rather effective brown mounts with the usual plate-sunk centre. The door, standing open, is a good, old-fashioned English one, of mahogany, with name-plate, letter-box, door-knob, knocker, and lock all of highly burnished brass. Inside the door one side of the passage is fitted with a large case divided into four. Three of these divisions each contain fifteen cabinets. A piece of unbleached white board has been used for the mount, and it has been carefully squared and pencil-marked to get the prints placed with precision; and every print has been so placed and well pasted down. Somehow, the suggestion of someone so carefully attending to this detail and ignoring any showy or expensive mount or arrangement is pleasing. The fourth case contains eight mounts similarly treated. In many ways this is the best display in the street; there is evidence of much careful, thoughtful work. A frame on the opposite side of the passage contains twenty-four panel portraits of Ellen Terry in different characters. Three large and good carbons of Miss Lily Hanbury are placed over a case containing framed pictures. Another case contains some eighteen theatrical portraits. Imagine this display of actresses, and not a grin in the lot!

It would be easy to discuss Baker Street and to attempt to analyze it, but whether it would be wise or not I do not care to decide. Among many things just one prevalent thought arises, and as it is one

which cannot unduly hurt susceptibilities I will state it. The trimming of prints has often been spoken and written of as one of the minor details of photography. Such displays as those just seen suggest that it is

a major and very vital detail, and it is devoutly to be hoped that English photographers will take a very real step forward by emancipating themselves from traditional sizes.

NATURALNESS.

BY ARTHUR SUGDEN.

THE art of "not posing" has been much written about of late, and the plan of seizing the unconscious pose rather than of creating a graceful composition is considered as one of the discoveries of latter-day workers. But we of a younger generation sometimes receive a humiliating but wholesome shock in looking over the work of our predecessors. We are ready to grant the preëminence of their technique, but not so open to admit their careful good taste and knowledge of things beautiful. But often, fortunately, the admission is forced from us that the old days saw work as perfect as that of to-day, and perhaps they saw less bad work. Forty years ago A. H. Wall, now a veteran among us, spoke of "expression," and his words would sound in place if addressed to a convention in this year of grace.

Some of our greatest painters have demanded for one portrait as many as fifty sittings, not, of course, for general outlines or mere manipulatory details, but for the embodiment of an expression which should most forcibly depict the very soul, as it were, of their model. The accomplishment of this lofty aim is commonly held to be the great point of superiority which the painter claims over the photographer, but why? The painter must see the expression before he can catch it; and if you secure for your camera that same expression, in less time than the draughtsman needs to impress it on his memory or transfer it to his canvas, the art which can depict a cannon-ball in motion will seize and render it permanently visible. Those photographers who are not satisfied with "a mere map of the face" may and do frequently secure expressions as beautiful and far more truthfully characteristic than any I have seen in drawings or paintings. The

great point is, either by the art of your conversation or by similar means, to call to your sitter's face such an expression as may be most pleasing in the picture.

Now, this is not done by solemnly impressing his or her mind with a nervous fear of moving—better spoil a dozen plates than do this—but by endeavoring to make your sitter feel perfectly at home and unrestrained by your presence. Nothing is more distressing than photographic portraits of uncomfortable looking people, upon whose faces we at once read a feeling of nervous apprehension. But these are not more objectionable than grinning likenesses. Should the sitter desire to smile, the smile should be a faint one. If in real life the sitter is noted for a merry expression, a mere suggestion of it—just a latent twinkle—will sufficiently suggest the full smile to the sitter's friends and will meet with much approval. However beautiful a smile may be fitting like passing sunlight over the face, when it is seen fixed and unchangeable it too frequently conveys the idea of a mere grin or piece of affectation.

Fortunately for us, we are in an age of steady photographic improvement. The abolishing of the universal full-length, so often supported by a pillar and by—in the case of man—a "high hat," has been one of the greatest forward movements. We seldom—too seldom—see a male full-length from any high-class studio, but when we do, how different from the stereotyped old timer! The head and shoulders and the half-length have proved a somewhat cowardly refuge for the photographer at a time when he began to see the faults of his old full-length and yet began to taste the difficulties of improvement. Now he is gradually finding his way back, and though the