

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC NEWS.

VOL. V. No. 152.—August 2, 1861.

INSTANTANEOUS PHOTOGRAPHS OF LONDON.

The term instantaneous photography is too often spoken of as if it were an absolute thing without any relation to time, place, or circumstance. Thus we hear of "instantaneous processes," "instantaneous collodion," "instantaneous dry plates," &c., without any reference to the other conditions necessary to instantaneity. What constitutes an instantaneous picture is not absolutely defined; in some instances an exposure of one second would be held to be instantaneous, and in others the tenth part of a second only would be required to produce a similar effect. In taking objects in motion, if the proofs are sharp and crisp without any blurring of the moving figure, the picture is held to be instantaneous. The rate of motion of the object, its direction across the field of vision, and the distance from the camera, are rarely considered, neither are the amount of actinism present nor the luminosity of the objects to be taken. If an instantaneous process were an absolute thing, then an express train, passing at the rate of fifty miles an hour, might unquestionably be photographed successfully, a feat which has not yet, we believe, been accomplished. The train passes over a space of about eight feet in the tenth part of a second, our readers may judge, therefore, the rapidity of the process necessary for securing a sharp image of an express train. Nevertheless, we have seen steamers at sea and clipper yachts before a smart breeze with all canvas spread, cutting the waters, perhaps, at a speed of twelve knots, or upwards, an hour, in which every line of cordage has been secured as sharp as if traced with a needle, waves with every crest of foam distinct, and flying clouds, without a blur. We were recently at the sea-side in company with Mr. Samuel Fry, who, in securing instantaneous marine effects, frequently found that the utmost possible rapidity of exposure, with an aperture of less than three-eighths of an inch, whilst giving perfectly instantaneous effects, in some cases produced over-exposure, such was the sensitiveness of the chemicals, the amount of actinism present, the luminosity of the objects, and the perfection of the lens. We may add, as a fact somewhat startling, that on one occasion that we—Mr. Hughes, Mr. Fry, and ourselves were present—secured fine effects of water, cliff, and sunset clouds at nearly nine o'clock on a July evening, with an exposure of ten seconds.

Instantaneous effects, in a city, present a new class of difficulties. Whilst the rate of motion is less rapid, it is more confused and varied; the objects are less luminous, and the light is less actinic. Messrs. Ferrier and Soulier discovered this fact in producing their street scenes in Paris. If this were manifest in Paris, what must it be in London? The constancy and energy of the stream of moving figures, pedestrian, equestrian, and vehicular, and above all, the smoky, misty, non-actinic atmospheric conditions are well calculated to baffle the most ardent photographer.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that so few instantaneous views of London exist. We have recently received from Messrs. Dages and Harman, of Peckham, a score of specimens, of by far the best street scenes of London which have come under our notice. With a courage which is most praiseworthy, they have not shrunk from selecting many scenes presenting the greatest difficulties, where it has happened that they have at the same time possessed the most interest. Amongst these we may mention London Bridge Railway Terminus, with its crowds of cabs, omnibuses, and foot-passengers, London Bridge itself, similarly crowded, and the clock tower on the Surrey side. Charing-cross, the

Strand, Fleet-street, Regent's-quadrant, and others, all present a similar scene of activity and bustle. In some of these it is quite easy to count upwards of fifty boldly-defined foreground figures, without mentioning those in the distance. There are also some very interesting river scenes on the Thames, with shipping and steamboats in full motion, &c.

It would be too much to say of these that they were all first-rate specimens of photography; but they are very good under the circumstances. The chief fault which strikes us—and we mention it because we feel assured that these artists having done so much are able to profit by the hint—appears to have arisen from some over-anxiety to obtain intensity. If we judge correctly, the negatives have been taken by some process requiring subsequent intensifying—probably by means of iodine, pyrogallic acid, and silver—and this has been carried slightly too far. The tendency in rapid processes is to the production of what Mr. Hughes has happily phrased a "phantom image." A negative with all the detail there, but so faint, so filmy, so transparent as to be little more than a phantom. To intensify such images at all, so as to secure printing qualities, requires some skill, and there is a great temptation to go too far, and so produce chalkiness. In these prints the distances, which at best in London are generally misty enough, appear obscured a little more than even the smoky atmosphere demands, by too long continued development or intensifying; the same process at the same time producing another defect—the white sky. But these drawbacks are not present in all, many of the pictures being surprisingly good photographs of such scenes.

The instantaneity is in many cases perfect. Here are omnibus horses with uplifted legs without a blur, and foot-passengers in every stage of action perfectly defined. Some few of the figures are not quite crisp and sharp, but this is chiefly where they have been defined with the extreme edge of the lens, rather than from want of rapidity in the exposure. Altogether they are very interesting, and, as we have said, the best instantaneous street views of London we have seen.

There is another hint we would throw out to these artists and others of our readers whom it may concern. The mounts of all photographs, and of stereographs in particular, should never be of a positive colour. The bright yellow of these mounts mars much of the effect. A warm grey, drab, or stone colour, in all cases as neutral and unobtrusive as possible, should be chosen, to secure the best effect.

THE FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY AND THE EXHIBITION OF 1862.

SOME curious misapprehension seems to have existed amongst the members of the French Photographic Society when discussing the question concerning the proposed classification of photography in the forthcoming International Exhibition, to which their attention was called by the secretary of the London Society. Interpreting, apparently, Professor Playfair's letters in an authoritative sense, and regarding his strongly-expressed conviction that photography *must* be placed in its proper position, they are puzzled by the recommendations of Dr. Diamond's letter, which advise entire abstinence in contributing; and, as may be seen in the letter of our Paris correspondent, some of them are inclined to attribute sinister motives, and allow exploded notions of the supposed bad faith of "perfidious Albion," to take possession of their minds. The letter