

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC NEWS.

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PHOTOGRAPHY AND FORGERY.

The facilities afforded by photography, and more especially by photolithography, for effecting forgeries of bank notes and other documents, appear to have been considerably overlooked by those who are, or should be, most concerned. The sources of danger have been looked for in other directions, and it is from the imitative skill of the skilful engraver that counterfeit productions have been feared. In regard to Bank of England notes, a great safeguard has been believed to exist in the inimitable character of the paper, in quality, design of water mark, &c. But since the robbery of bank note paper, from the Laverstock Mills, this reliance has vanished into thin air, as the genuine paper manufactured for the bank authorities is now actually in circulation as the basis of the forgery. The bank authorities themselves rely upon the simplicity of the design and characters upon their notes, and upon the mode of printing adopted as their surest protection against imitation. Others maintain that complexity of design, produced by artists of the first ability, is the truest source of safety, arguing that, notwithstanding the skill and enterprise which have, unfortunately, been engaged in the nefarious profession of the forger, it must always happen that genuine art will be in advance of the spurious or counterfeit art. It is further argued that the number of persons who would be able, with any chance of success, to imitate the designs of genius, must necessarily be very few, and "these," as it is argued by an old writer on the subject, "by the legitimate use of their talents, can acquire competence; they, therefore, are not likely to employ their time, or risk their lives, in felonious imitations. Nay, if, in the perversity of the human mind, a first-rate artist were inclined to turn forger, he could not then do it successfully, because, even in the very first rank of historical engravers, one cannot imitate the engraving of another in a work of importance without the difference of manner being visible."

Adopting these and similar arguments, the bank authorities have held, we believe, that their position was impregnable, and that the precautions against forgeries of their notes were as complete as it was in the nature of things, or at least in the present state of science, possible to make them. Moreover, they may, and we believe do, argue, no forgery has ever yet been executed which they could not, themselves, detect; and as they could only become losers by counterfeits produced with such skill as to deceive their own tellers, and induce them, without question, to convert them into specie, they were not called upon to entertain further anxiety upon the subject. They believe that their own safety from deception is absolute, and that, for the public safety, they have done sufficient, or, at least, all that was possible; and there the matter must rest.

But the imitation produced by photography is absolute in all its parts. The most complex design of the most skilful artist is as easily produced as the most simple commonplace production of the greatest bungler. The secret marks however unobtrusive; the signature, no matter how marked its individuality or character, are all unerringly produced by the lens and camera, in the negative image. The ordinary silver print from such a negative, it is true, whilst it might deceive some persons if well executed, would speedily be detected on careful examination. It is for this reason, we doubt not, that the subject has received comparatively little attention, and excited no apprehension hitherto. But this is not the real danger. It is from the processes of photolithography, photoglyphography, and similar processes, by

which photographic impressions can be produced in printer's ink, in the very material, and of the exact tint of the original, that the danger is to be apprehended; and that danger threatens the bank authorities themselves as well as the public, for it is possible to produce, by these means, imitations, which not the most skilful teller, or the most practised expert, could detect, or make oath as to the forgery.

Let us take the case of photozincography, photolithography, or the processes which have at present attained the highest state of perfection. The first of these methods, the invention of Colonel James, is practised at Southampton, for the production of the maps produced in the Ordnance Survey. The second, the invention of Mr. J. W. Osborne, and practised under his superintendence, at Melbourne, for the production of the maps and plans issued by the colonial Government of Victoria. Specimens of the work of both these gentlemen are exhibited in the International Exhibition. *Fac similes* of maps, engravings, manuscripts, pages of printed books are exhibited, all of which would defy detection. These are gentlemen, it may readily be said, from whom there is no danger of forgery. But their processes are made public; and not only may be, but actually are, practised by others. We refer those interested in the matter again to the International Exhibition; Mr. Ramage, of Edinburgh, exhibits a series of photographs in the British Photographic Department, perhaps the finest we have seen. By which process they are produced is not stated, but it is probable that the method is similar to that of Mr. Osborne. They are very perfect copies of engravings, and we have no hesitation whatever in saying, that by the same method and the same manipulator, *fac similes* of Bank of England notes might be produced which would entirely defy detection. It so happens, that these notes offer very especial advantages for imitating by such means. The design is clean, bold, and well marked: they are produced, not from engraved plates, in intaglio, printed at the copper-plate press, the printed impression of which always present a slight amount of relief which may be felt by the finger; but by block printing at an ordinary typographic press. Such an impression can, therefore, be imitated by the photolithographer without difficulty, and in such a manner that the Bank authorities themselves may be deceived.

Mr. Osborne, who is now in London, on a visit to the Exhibition, recently informed us, that wishing to call the attention of bankers in Melbourne to this danger, he produced by photolithography copies of various of their signatures, of which they admitted they would be unable to repudiate the genuineness. Any colour of ink, resembling either printing or writing ink, or any number of colours, may, of course, be easily produced, so that an actually written signature, instead of the printed signature now used, would not be an absolute safeguard.

We do not enter at present into any extended examination of the means by which such forgeries might be prevented, our object being rather to call the attention of those concerned to the existence and imminence of the danger. The means of prevention require careful consideration, and are not so easy and simple as might at first sight appear. Some years ago the subject came under consideration in the United States and in Canada. Coloured inks were employed for some parts of the note, and black for the other; but it was found that the coloured inks, not possessing, like black, a carbon basis, were easily discharged by chemical means, and photographic copies of the remainder easily produced, the coloured portion being supplied by a subsequent operation.

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