

# THE PHOTOGRAPHIC NEWS.

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### EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN PHOTOGRAPHY.

ALEXANDER DUMAS, in a characteristic paper which we published in our last volume, describes the scene in a photographic atelier in Vienna, in which he sat for a portrait to a lady who was the operator; and he concludes by expressing a conviction that photography is a profession pre-eminently suited for young ladies. The question of the employment of women, especially of the more cultivated classes, has long been felt to be one of the most important social problems of the age, and few of the attempts to solve it by training girls to the performance of handicrafts formerly practised exclusively by men have been sufficiently successful to induce wide-spread repetitions of the experiment. Photography possesses so many branches which might be deemed peculiarly suited to the female capacity, requiring neat-handed skill rather than strength, and delicacy of taste rather than endurance, that it is somewhat surprising that so little female labour has been employed in the productive departments.

It is true that some ladies have been amongst the greatest ornaments of the art. Nothing finer than the photographs of the deeply lamented Lady Hawarden were ever exhibited. The pictures of Lady Joscelyn used to be amongst the gems of the photographic exhibitions. Some of the photographs of Mrs. Cameron, notwithstanding that we have felt it our duty to condemn her style generally, are full of art feeling; and we occasionally receive from lady correspondents examples of charming photography. Yet, as a profession, photography proper includes very few ladies. If we remember rightly, the London Directory, under the head of photography, does not give the names of more than two or three ladies. Painting, as a profession, on the other hand, includes a large number of ladies, many of whom take high rank as artists.

It is true that in certain departments of professional photography there are many young ladies engaged. For attendance in the reception-room they are almost exclusively employed. For touching-out spots, and sometimes for tinting, as also in mounting, females are largely employed. But in the various departments of printing, for which they would seem especially fitted, very few girls are engaged; whilst (except in their own establishments) we have never heard of ladies being engaged as operators. What is more singular, and more to be regretted, is the fact that, as far as we can learn, where the experiment has been tried of employing female labour in printing, it has been in the majority of instances a decided failure. One gentleman who has been for many years in the profession, and a somewhat extensive

employer of labour, in answer to some enquiries on the subject, stated that his experience in employing girls or young ladies was that he obtained about one whose services were worth retaining in every twenty he tried. Another gentleman, who for some years tried the experiment, stated that it was generally troublesome and unprofitable, and that the employment of men and girls, in an isolated printing establishment, finally issued in cases of shame and sorrow, which induced him forthwith to abandon the experiment. Others inform us that female printing is a failure, except under strict and constant supervision. Mr. Woodbury, who, in organizing his photo-relief printing establishment in Manchester, resolved to try the experiment of training female hands to the work, recently informed us that without constant watching the waste was most disastrous; in one instance the printing of some specimens intended for presentation with a contemporary having been left to the girls, thousand after thousand of useless prints were produced, so that he was finally unable to select two thousand satisfactory pictures out of something like seven thousand which had been worked off.

These facts are somewhat saddening to those earnestly interested in the social problems of the day. To what is the frequent failure of the attempts to utilize female labour due? Charles Dickens, in "Mugby Junction," seems to suggest that, under some circumstances, the attractions of the "Bandolining Room" absorb the chief attention; but no such department is to be found in the photographer's printing establishment, and in many other places where the attempts to employ female labour in various handicrafts usually pursued by men have failed. It is certainly not from inaptitude, or mental or physical incapacity, that imperfect success is due. We fear that the cause lies deeper, and is to be found in the fact that, whilst a youth commencing to learn a trade looks upon it as the employment in which his future income for life must be obtained, a girl looks upon it as a temporary task, from the performance of which she may obtain an income for a few years until she shall marry, the consummation to which she looks forward as a matter of course. The youth, however lacking in earnestness, feels, as a rule, that he must learn his business, and he generally graduates from the lowest stage, mastering all its branches, often commencing without any remuneration at all. A girl or young lady is generally placed at some specific duty for which she may be supposed to be suited, and at which she may at once earn some remuneration. If naturally apt, as most girls are, she readily acquires facility in mounting, touching-out, &c.; but she rarely aims at anything higher, and rarely feels any deep sense of responsibility as to the very careful performance of the task in which she is engaged, unless kept under close supervision. She is light-hearted and careless; the task is a temporary one, with which she hopes in a few years to be