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CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
Preserving Prints by Means of Varnishes, etc.	521	Notes on Herr Kruger's Article on Iron Developers. By M. C. Haack	528
The Hot Water Process	522	Lecture on Light	529
Echoes of the Month. By an Old Photographer	524	On a New Test for Hyposulphites. By M. Carey Lea.....	530
Foreign Miscellanea	524	Ferro-Colloidal Developers. By J. J. Brown.....	530
Something more on Lighting. By Valentine Blanchard	525	Scientific Gleanings	531
Recent Experiments with Collodion.....	526	Correspondence—Soldering—Hints on the Magic Lantern	531
On Iron Developers and Compounds Suitable for Employment with the same. By Julius Kruger, of Stralsund	527	Talk in the Studio.....	532
		To Correspondents.....	532

PRESERVING PRINTS BY MEANS OF VARNISHES, ETC.

So long as silver printing is practised the best means of preserving the photographs from the agencies which cause fading or discolouration in the print must continue a subject of abiding interest and of constantly renewed discussion. We speak of the means of preserving the finished print as quite distinct from the consideration of producing permanent prints. Assuming that by perfect fixation, thorough washing, and careful manipulation throughout, a photograph has been produced which possesses no inherent elements of change, a silver print must necessarily be ranked amongst perishable articles. To the silversmith or dealer in silver goods it is a question of vital importance how he can best display his wares, and subject them least to the injurious action of injurious agencies present in the atmosphere, by which they are, to use a general phrase, "tarnished." The readiness with which silver is acted upon by sulphur and other agencies which discolour it induce the silversmith to devise costly air-tight cases, to use lamps outside of his shop-window, &c., to afford the best possible protection to silver goods. We recently heard of a case in which the principal of a large establishment devoted to the display of silver goods entered into negotiation with a view to the payment of a thousand pounds for the secret of a varnish which would protect the goods from the action of the atmosphere without injuring their appearance. The negotiation was not completed; but we mention the circumstance to show the importance which was attached to a means of protecting silver from the injurious agencies to which its unprotected surface is exposed. But, notwithstanding the recognition of these facts in the silver trade, there is nothing, perhaps, in the shape of a work of art which receives so little care in its treatment by the public, or so little pains to preserve or protect it, as a photograph. An engraving or a water-colour drawing is carefully framed and glazed, or carefully preserved in a portfolio. The photograph often lies about loosely, is carried in the pocket, or, at most, is placed in an album with no especial means of protection. An engraving, a pencil drawing, a water-colour drawing, it is known, would rub, abrade, and soil with careless usage; but the simple circumstance that the photograph has generally a smooth albuminized surface which does not readily abrade or soil permits it to be thrown carelessly about, with, as we have said, less care to preserve or protect it than any other work of art.

It is pretty generally felt amongst photographers that photographs ought to have some protective coating by which they may be rendered impervious to the destructive agencies to which we have referred. The great questions continually arise, which is the best mode of protecting prints? which is the varnish that most effectually protects the prints, and

at the least sacrifice of artistic beauty? and, next, can it be easily applied without great expense? The question of trouble and expense should be quite subsidiary to the considerations of permanency and beauty; but they must always enter into the estimate of the value of any plan for general use. The question of beauty we should be almost disposed to place first in the order of importance. If we had to secure permanency at the expense of vulgarizing or destroying the beauty of the print we should feel strongly disposed to encounter the risk on the score of permanency, and secure what we could of beauty for just so long as we could retain it. This feeling is, we believe, very common amongst photographers who aim at high art excellence: much as they desire permanency, they will not sacrifice an iota of beauty, or of what seems to them to be beauty. Hence a common objection has prevailed to varnished photographs as vulgar-looking and inartistic. There are three modes of protecting prints by preservative applications with which photographers are familiar; namely, varnishing, waxing, and collodionizing, each of which has certain specific advantages. The general subject is proposed for discussion at the next meeting of the South London Society. Without entering into the matter fully here, therefore, we propose to offer a brief comment or two on each method in relation to the two important aspects in which each must be considered: its effects on the beauty, and its influence on the permanency, of the print.

We will consider the question of varnishes first, the subject having been immediately brought under our attention by the following letter from Mr. Lucas:—

"37, Wigmore Street, W., October 23rd, 1867.

"SIR,—My attention has been called to the report of the South London meeting in your last week's issue, where the preservation of prints by varnish came under discussion. Within the last week or so I have been making what few experiments the pressure of my business would allow, with Mr. Nash's pure lac varnish, and have much pleasure in forwarding the results, which I trust may be of use to photographers. Mr. Nash gave me a bottle of his varnish with which to experiment, and in his presence I partially varnished, on one side only, several mounted prints which had been in my folios for some time; one of these was a copy of a painting of a nude figure, 'Andromeda,' selected more particularly on account of the extreme delicacy of the modelling, there being only the sufficient amount of shadow to give rotundity, without its in any part deepening to anything like black; of course the slightest approach to fading would be at once detected in the half-tones of such a subject. One-third of this I varnished; Mr. Nash, at his house, treated another third of the same print with Blanchard's solution; the remaining third was left untouched; after which he subjected the whole to chlorine gas for five hours, and then submitted the print to me. The part