

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC NEWS.

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TRUTH IN PHOTOGRAPHY.

On another page we publish an interesting communication from our esteemed contributor who chooses to be known to the photographic world as "Lux Graphicus," which, in relation to the truth as it is in photography, seems to require one or two words of comment. Our remarks will be confined to questions of fact, not of opinion. He remarks that "Photography is truth embodied, and every question raised about the purity of its productions should be discussed as freely and settled as quickly as possible." We always delight in giving facility for untrammelled discussion of any point whereby the interests of our art are advanced, and we add one or two words to aid in settling the questions raised in our contributor's excellent remarks.

Referring to Mr. Robinson's picture entitled "Sleep," "Lux Graphicus" points out what he deems to be some essential errors, and thereby made the picture untrue to nature. He says:—

In the centre of the picture he shows a stream of light entering a window—a ghost of a window, for it is so unsubstantial as not to allow a shadow to be cast from its seemingly massive bars. Now, if the moon shone through a window at all, it would cast shadows of everything that stood before it, and the shadows of the bars of the window would be cast on the coverlet of the bed in broken lines, rising and falling with the undulations of the folds of the covering and the forms of the children. In representing moonlight, or sunlight either, there is no departing from this truth: if the direct rays of either stream through a closed window and fall upon the bed, so will the shadows of the intervening bars. Any picture, either painted or photographed, that does not render these shadows is simply untrue to nature.

Now this should be true criticism, and would seem to be a simple statement of fact. But the simple truth is, that the picture was taken with direct sunlight streaming through the window on to the bed, and the sash-bars, massive and opaque enough to cast black shadows—we know them well—were there at the time, and yet the picture shows but a very slight indication of these shadows? What is the reason, then, for this apparent violation of a natural law? Simply this: that there was sufficient of a weak light entering the room from another source to give some degree of diffused illumination and nearly neutralize the shadows of the sash-bars cast by the direct sunlight. How far this would be possible with moonlight we do not now pause to discuss. How far the production of moonlight effects by the action of sunlight is the most legitimate application of photography we do not now discuss, nor how far it is here successfully attempted, our opinion of the picture being already on record. We merely point out the qualification which was necessary to give value to the general statement of a critical canon.

On another subject our contributor's usual good judgment is a little at fault in asserting that a thing is so-and-so because it seems so-and-so. We refer to the retouching of M.

Salomon's portraits. We have stated that it is very easy to be deceived on this subject. In M. Salomon's studio we examined prints with a conviction amounting almost to certainty that their modelling was due to elaborate retouching; but a fuller examination of the same prints without a glass over them, and with the negative for comparison, convinced us of our error, and we feel it our duty very emphatically to enforce what we have already said on the subject of retouching as regards these prints, namely, that as a whole they owe neither gradation nor force to retouching, and that the best prints are not retouched at all. We repeat this because we feel that half their lesson would be lost to many photographers if they could—as some seem anxious to do—take the flattering unction to their souls that the marvellous brilliancy and modelling of these pictures was due to some skilful artifice rather than to legitimate photography applied by a perfect master. We have seen the prints in various stages, and we have examined scores of negatives with the prints side by side: we have examined most of the prints exhibited in Conduit Street side by side with the negatives from which they were produced, and can speak with absolute certainty on the points upon which we offer an opinion. There was not a single retouched negative amongst all we examined: on the best prints there is no retouching at all; on many others there is the retouching common amongst all photographers, such as the strengthening of the iris or pupil of an eye, &c.; on some there is, here and there, a boldly-hatched line, to give force or form to some portion; but in no case is there elaborate working up; in no case is the modelling of the print or the brilliancy of the picture due to the pencil of the artist. Individual parts—such as an eye, a hand, or a lock of hair—have been often improved by clever touches not difficult to detect, because no especial pains is taken to hide them; but the print might be sponged without injuring the general effect of brilliancy, modelling, and relief.

Let the matter not be misunderstood, however. M. Salomon is an artist of high culture and fine taste, and his aim is to produce a good picture; and if the photograph were not as good a picture as he desired, he would without hesitation retouch it. He does, in fact, retouch just to the extent that each picture may require, and no more; and we repeat, that his best pictures are scarcely ever retouched at all.

Some months ago, after a careful examination of the prints and negatives in M. Salomon's studio, we arrived at the conclusion we now express, and all subsequent examination has confirmed it. We then said, in reference to the varied assertions on the subject, what we now repeat:—"It is again a case of the gold and silver shield. Some of M. Salomon's prints are retouched, and some are not. We have four examples of his work before us, which are capitally typical of the varied results. One is very much retouched in the