

# THE PHOTOGRAPHIC NEWS.

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### MR. McLACHLAN'S DISCOVERY.

PENDING the three months' preparation necessary for an experimental verification of Mr. McLachlan's mode of working, a few words on his recent communication may not be out of place. His candid, outspoken manner of dealing with the whole subject; the unhesitating opinion he has expressed of the prevalent ignorance amongst photographers and the imperfect information of journals, entitle him to candid and outspoken rejoinder. Complimentary platitudes are out of place under such circumstances. They would be unfair alike to Mr. McLachlan and to photographers. It is due to both that if this gentleman be right, an ungrudging acknowledgment should be made of the fact; that if he be wrong, his error should be unhesitatingly pointed out. As we have already said, we give Mr. McLachlan credit for the most perfect honesty of intention, and not only purity, but liberality of motive. We believe him to have been an earnest, self-sacrificing experimentalist; and the effort and expense undertaken, at his own sole cost, to bring information, which he believes to be important to the progress of the art, fully and freely before his brethren, ought to entitle him to their careful attention. If he be proved to be in error, the cost and the mortification are all his; if he be right, the gain is that of the photographic community.

At the outset, however, we deny in the strongest terms the nature and extent of the ignorance and incapacity which Mr. McLachlan attributes to photographers generally and to photographic journals. On theoretical questions we admit that much remains to be determined; on practical points we admit that uncertainties at times exist, and that we should have thankfully received information which would have set aside some of the difficulties which occasionally beset the ablest men; but we deny that the majority of professional photographers of any position are groping in the darkness, or struggling with the vagaries which Mr. McLachlan so forcibly pictures, and we simply appeal to facts in reply to his allegation. Let us examine the practice of any photographer whose name and work are known. Take that of Francis Bedford. When he travelled in the suite of the Prince of Wales in the East, working the wet collodion process on large plates, under the greatest possible difficulties and disadvantages, without the power of remaining as long over each subject as he chose, without the power of revisiting the scene of any negative to repeat his operations if desirable, did he fail, or return without a good picture of any one of the important objects visited? On the contrary, he brought home, after his hurried trip, one of the most perfect collections of Eastern scenery that could be desired, charming as pictures and perfect as photographs. Whatever the difficulties, there was the practical issue. Mr. Frank Good has recently repeated a very similar task. Mr. England has for years past, in mountain and valley,

crowded street or lonely glen, worked with a precision of which the number and excellence of his published works are the best evidence. We might extend the list to include the name of every landscape photographer of position, and we especially mention these because working in tents and with travelling equipments involve difficulties little dreamt of in the studio. Then, if we were to mention the portraitists who, in daily practice, produce in regular succession any number of perfect negatives, we might fill many columns of these pages.

Mr. McLachlan's allegation as to the absence of information in the journals we might be content to pass without comment, as probably done without thought of the insult it conveyed to the gentlemen of the highest rank as chemists, artists, and practical photographers, who have from the commencement contributed the results of their study and practice to societies and journals. If the journals have been deficient in information it must be because the ablest men connected with the art are either incapable or dishonest, for there is not an illustrious name in photography which has not been attached to contributions in the journals. We are afraid that this allegation, like some others, was the offshoot of imperfect knowledge. We asked Mr. McLachlan what journals he had been in the habit of reading; and learnt that, until very recently, he had *not* been a reader of the PHOTOGRAPHIC NEWS!

We were reminded of the anecdote of a chemical student calling upon Faraday with a discovery he alleged he had made. "Have you read the published authorities on this subject?" Faraday asked. "No; believing I had made an important discovery, I did not like to waste time in consulting books," was the response. "So," responded the great philosopher, "you come to waste my time by bringing under my attention experiments which are already well-known, and published. In future, when you think you have made a discovery, before announcing it, make yourself master of what has already been published."

On the subject of uncertainty in working let us not be misunderstood: every photographer has occasional difficulties; but the more prudent the practice, the fewer the occasions, as we shall presently show. The very nature of the circumstances necessarily involves occasional uncertainty. The photographer works with materials prepared for him of the exact nature or condition of which he can never be quite certain. The soluble cotton is a material peculiarly liable to slight variations of constitution; the ether and alcohol peculiarly liable to traces of varied impurity, and peculiarly liable to change; and these, when mixed and iodized, are liable to other and complex changes dependent on conditions and time of keeping. Although pure nitrate of silver may be easily obtained, and a good bath made, that bath must—however perfect the materials, however comprehensive the knowledge employed—be constantly changing in constitution,