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SIDE LIGHT OR FRONT LIGHT.

THE question as to the best mode of lighting the sitter must constantly recur as one of the most interesting which can engage the attention of photographers, inasmuch as light and shadow are not only the chief elements of pictorial effect at the photographer's service, but are also of vital importance in securing true likeness as well as pleasing portraiture. The great difficulty in writing or talking about the subject arises from the fact that it is almost impossible to discuss it in the abstract. It is a practical question, which it is much easier for a man to state his experience upon than to make clear by argument.

The members of the recently formed Bristol Society have had, in the course of the last few weeks, two able papers on the subject of glass houses and lighting; the first by our ingenious contributor who is known by his pseudonym of "Ennel," and the second by Mr. Gillo, whose excellent contributions to the recent exhibition give interest to his dicta. The paper of "Ennel" was clever, but in many respects, we venture to affirm, misleading, advocating, as it did, "front light," by which is commonly understood light directly in front of the sitter and behind the camera, as the dominant light; but he admits, at the same time, that he requires more light on one side than the other, by which admission he at once concedes that a dominant side-light is required. The facts quoted show how important it is in all discussions to begin by defining terms. In a certain sense, all the light used in portraiture is front light, inasmuch as it is in advance of the sitter; but the light which is at the side of the sitter, as well as in advance of him, is spoken of as side-light, because it derives its essential value from being at the side, crossing over the face instead of striking it full in front, lighting up the salient features, which acquire relief and vigour by being defined against those parts which, escaping the touch of the dominant light, are left more or less in shadow. The direct front light, on the contrary, falls on every part of the face with equal force, and the only indication of form, gradation, and modelling are obtained by the slight recession from the light of the retiring parts of the face, and the inevitable tendency is to flatness in the delineation. By throwing a flood of light on a globe directly in front, it may be made to look like a disc, and direct front light has tendency to flatten into a disc-like effect many faces in portraiture. "Ennel" states that he would have more light on one side than the other. We answer, that in proportion as the front light is the dominant light, the tendency will be in the direction of flatness; and the recommendation of front light at all tends to mislead, as, in proportion as it obtains attention, it may induce some to introduce direct front light in their studios, and such light, as a rule, we regard—both theoretically and from practical experience and observation—as troublesome and injurious.

The common experience of the best photographers has determined that a high side-light, at a variable position in advance of the sitter, is the easiest to manage, and gives the most satisfactory results. It may be of a little interest to some of our readers to know that excellent authorities, in relation to pictorial art, have determined that such a mode of lighting is most effective and pleasing, and have directed its use long before photography, as an art, was in existence. Frank Howard, in his clever "Whole Art of Picture Making," says:—

"The light should never be directly in front of the picture, or object chosen for the picture, that is to say, coming in over the head of the spectator from behind him. If the subject be a flat object, such as the side of a tower, it will present a mass of equal light, or a spot. If the object approach the circular form, as a round tower or tree, the light will graduate equally from the centre to the two equally dark sides. The outline of the two sides of the tower, and throughout of the tree, will be of uniform degrees of dark, and all pictorial effect in danger of being lost."

The same author, in a chapter on the treatment of heads, in another work on "Imitative Art, or the Means of Representing the Pictorial Appearances of Objects," says:—

"If a head is to be represented, it should be treated in a similar manner to be a globe, and should receive the light on that side which will afford the greatest breadth.

"On what is technically termed a three-quarter view of the head, the brightest light will be upon the forehead, cheek-bone, and nose, from whence it should graduate to the retiring side and the chin. The brow will receive light in proportion to its prominence, and under it will be perceived a shadow strongest between the eye and the nose. The light will again glance upon the cheek-bone, graduating up to the hollow under the eye, and down to form the oval of the cheek. A light will run down the line of the nose, glance upon the point of the upper and the fullness of the under lip, and faintly touch the prominent part of the chin.

"The retiring side of the head graduates into shadow, slightly relieved by half-lights upon the eye, the brightness of which will depend, as in the other, upon the prominence of the eye, or the heaviness of the lip, but must not be equal to the light upon the nearest eye.

"If a head be seen in front, the same assimilation to the effect of a globe should be preserved; the principal light being on one side of the forehead, cheek, and nose, and graduating from thence diagonally to the other cheek and chin. The treatment of the various parts will be nearly the same as the view just described, the difference being principally in the outlines of the several forms.

"A profile will be made most intelligible by introducing the light rather behind the head, so as to throw the receding boundaries of the front of the forehead, eyes, cheek, nose, and chin into a half-tint. The principal lights will be on the upper parts of the temples, the cheek-bone, and the ear; and the principal shadows under the hair, upon the cheek and temples, and under the eyebrow, close to the nose. The whole of the front of the iris of the eye will be light, except close under the eyelashes. The pupil of the eye will be scarcely visible, but the eyeball will appear darkest where the pupil is known to be."

This kind of treatment of ordinary forms of portraiture is, there can scarcely be a doubt, calculated to give the best result pictorially, and not less the best result in point of