

# THE PHOTOGRAPHIC NEWS.

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### ALBUMEN AS A PRELIMINARY COATING.

THE use of dilute albumen as a preliminary coating for collodion plates has become so prevalent, and the advantages attending its use have been so generally acknowledged, that any challenge as to the genuineness of these advantages naturally startles many experienced photographers. For many years past the use of preliminary coatings has been a subject of much interest amongst photographers; but it is only within the last two or three years that the practice of applying such coatings has become common amongst wet collodion operators, and the use of dilute albumen has been almost universally recognized as a happy protective from all the failures and anxieties arising from the use of imperfectly cleaned plates. General experience, so far as published, seems to indicate that the plan has no drawbacks, whilst not a few photographers declare that they obtain much finer negatives on plates so prepared.

In a recent number we published the details of some experiments by Dr. Liesegang, from which he concluded that the use of the substratum of albumen in wet plates caused a decided loss of sensitiveness and vigour, and that the loss was in the direct ratio of the thickness of the film of albumen. Mr. C. Wager Hull had a short time previously published some similar experiences with the use of the albumen substratum in dry tannin plates; and it was this experience which suggested to Dr. Liesegang some further investigation. Mr. Hull's results with tannin plates are in keeping with those obtained by others in working that process; but we do not remember any other record of experience in which albumen was found inimical to sensitiveness and vigour in a simple collodion film. Dr. Liesegang is so well known as a capable and trustworthy experimentalist that his dicta at once demands and obtains the most respectful consideration. In this matter it is probable that some other conditions will be found to demand attention: probably the condition of the collodion. About ten years ago we devoted considerable time to research and experiment in connection with preliminary coatings, more especially to the use of albumen, and the conclusions at which we then arrived have been confirmed by repeated experiment at intervals since. Without exception, we have found that a preliminary *couche* of albumen on a wet plate promoted vigour, and only in one case have we found it interfere with sensitiveness. In this case a somewhat old and not very sensitive collodion was employed, which gave a good vigorous image with a full exposure; but employed on the albumen coating it gave with the same exposure an imperfect image with very intense high lights and no detail. With a comparatively new collodion, one half of the plate treated with albumen, and the other without treatment,

the effect of the preliminary coating was very marked: both portions appeared equally well exposed, but the albumenized size presenting a much richer and more vigorous image. The question will naturally arise, How was it, then, that such a beneficial practice did not become common very much earlier? The answer is very simple: there was an unfortunate drawback sufficient at that time to deter the majority of photographers, although some did continue its use in spite of the drawback. It injured the bath and caused fog. It was the custom at that time to use the albumen in a comparatively undilute condition, and to the thick coating so applied the injurious effect was doubtless due.

We remember that our attention was first called to the use of albumen as substratum in the wet process by Mr. Jabez Hughes, who showed us some exceedingly rich and perfect negatives taken by its aid. On our inquiring, in surprise, why he did not continue the use of such a valuable adjunct to vigour, he gave us a practical exposition of his reasons by showing a series of plates illustrating the gradual accession of fog arising from the action of the albumen upon the bath, which had compelled him very unwillingly to relinquish its use. In his experience this was the only drawback, a slightly increased sensitiveness, rather than the contrary, attending its use. Mr. Hughes, however, used undilute albumen, and encountered fog. Mr. MacNab, at that time one of the most successful portraitists in Scotland, used albumen diluted with four parts of water; but he also took the extra trouble of coagulating the albumen film on each plate before coating it with collodion. He never found fog, or drawback of any kind, arise from it, and always continued its use. It was not, however, until its employment in the most attenuated proportions, sufficient to interpose a film between the collodion and a doubtfully cleaned plate, but insufficient to act in an appreciable degree upon the bath, that its full advantages became generally recognized, and its use amongst portraitists prevalent. Its advantages in affording immunity from all the risks and annoyances attending dirty plates are so palpable, that photographers will not readily surrender them, unless it be incontestibly shown that these advantages are more than counterbalanced by other drawbacks. In our experiments we have not found the loss of sensitiveness and vigour which have been present in those of Dr. Liesegang. Probably, continued practice is of more value in determining a question of this kind than limited experimental operations, and we shall be glad to learn the results of general experience amongst operators who have worked with this coating. We publish such a statement of the results of practice on another page, in which the advantages of albumen are emphatically stated. Those of our readers willing to experiment in the matter will do well to test the coating under different conditions,