

At Home.

MR. VALENTINE BLANCHARD IN REGENT STREET.

In the neighbourhood of Fleet Street there have established themselves for several years past a body of gentlemen known by the name of the Whitefriars Club. The club is not a large one, and has never, we believe, since its commencement, numbered more than seventy or eighty members. It is for the most part a literary club—its predilection for the neighbourhood in question indicates as much—and amongst its past and present members may be cited men of considerable mark. Novelists, such as William Black and Charles Gibbon; editors of the great London dailies—to wit, Captain Hamber and Alfred Bate Richards; conductors of humorous periodicals that enjoy scarcely less influence in the country, the late Tom Hood of *Fan*, and William Sawyer of *Funny Folks*; actors of the first rank, like Barry Sullivan and William Creswick; painters and cartoonists, such as Orchardson, R.A., and John Proctor; these, to cite a few examples, are upon the roll of Friars. But the Club, noted as it is for the long list of talented men enrolled under its name, is famous in one other respect: it possesses, beyond question, the finest gallery of photographic portraits to be found in any hall or room in London. Probably, the collection does not at this moment fall short of half-a-hundred, and the pictures are all of them of magnificent proportions, taken direct on 15 by 12 inch plates, vigorous, life-like, and characteristic. Moreover, they are all of them the work of Mr. V. Blanchard.

In a word, no better evidence of Mr. Blanchard's ability can be afforded than this fine collection of portraits at the Whitefriars Club. It shows, too, the school, or style, of portrait, for which Mr. Blanchard has achieved a very extensive reputation. His large direct portraits—massive, dignified, full of life—are, indeed, too well known to require any detailed description here, for every visitor to the Pall Mall Exhibitions during the past half-dozen years must have witnessed examples of his handiwork. Mr. Blanchard is, to some extent, a disciple of Adam-Salomon, the well-known sculptor and photographer of Paris; but he has added to his portraits qualities which are personal to himself. The rich, luscious shadows of the Adam-Salomon school are present, together with other attributes inherent to Mr. Blanchard himself. We do not mean to say that the latter's portraits are better than those of his illustrious Paris *confrère*, but that, equally with Adam-Salomon's pictures, they have characteristics which mark them as the work of an artist in the foremost rank.

Mr. Blanchard's reception-room has but few pictures upon the walls, but they are well chosen examples of his best work. The most striking are "Rebecca at the Well," a fine Eastern study, which secured a medal at Pall Mall, and the picture of a Greek girl, that received a similar honour. In both of these pictures the management of the drapery is beyond praise; it falls in soft and graceful folds over the figure, without marring the outline of the latter. The Greek key pattern on the tunic of one of the models was pencilled by Mr. Blanchard himself, for he found that the addition of an edging or braiding to the drapery imparted a stiffness which was very objectionable to the picture. Miss Furtado, as Esmeralda, is another study Mr. Blanchard may well feel proud of, and some manly portraits on 15 by 12 plates complete the collection. Mr. Blanchard's charge for these pictures is £4 4s.; for cabinets, £2 2s. per dozen is asked, and for cartes, £1 1s.

The studio upstairs, at first sight, impresses one in a very singular manner. Instead of being light, it is dark. Indeed, there is little doubt that Mr. Blanchard employs less illumination than most of his brethren; he objects to flood his models with light. Half-a-dozen movable screens are about the studio, standing some eight feet in height and measuring six feet in breadth. These are put about with very little cere-

mony. "My light here is dead south," said Mr. Blanchard. "If I get bothered with the sun coming in, I simply stop the light from this portion of the studio, and go over there with my camera, where the light is easterly." And in a moment, our host had contrived by means of his screens a second studio at right angles to his first. "I consider," said Mr. Blanchard, "that the most perfect lighting a photographer can have is when the sun is obscured by a white cloud, and I endeavour to imitate this phenomenon in my studio. You see I have subdued illumination all on this side, and admit pure light only through two or three squares of glass."

Mr. Blanchard has an excellent plan for subduing his illumination. The side and roof, where it is of glass, and where the light is to be softened, are furnished with transparent screens of a movable character. In cloudy weather they are not needed, in sunshine they are. These screens are covered with *papier minéral*, which has the appearance of fine ground glass; the *papier minéral* has the advantage over ground glass of being far cheaper, and much lighter to handle. "English tracing paper won't do," says our host; "it goes yellow after a few weeks, and then good-bye to your white cloud effect; you get a yellow glare then, which is very unpleasant."

Mr. Blanchard has been working the powder process to good effect in producing pictures on opal, and he was kind enough to show us his method of working. In the YEAR-BOOK, recently published, will be found the whole details of Mr. Blanchard's present *modus operandi*, given in his own words, and we must say the examples of his work fully justify the enthusiasm with which he speaks of the process. Mr. Blanchard's copying camera for making his transparencies for the process is simple in the extreme. There is a long plank upon which the camera stands; at a little distance in front of the lens stands an upright board with a perforation in which the negative is placed. Beyond the negative, again, is a bit of white cardboard, or paper, sloping at an angle of 45°. The white paper reflects the light through the negative; and before focussing, a black cloth is simply thrown over the camera and over the upright board that carries the negative in order to shut out the light. This is the whole arrangement; there is no condenser, a No. 1 or No. 2B lens being employed for copying, and the apparatus, has the inestimable advantage that it can be cleared out of the way in an instant, and rigged up again without delay, trouble, or expense.

The opal pictures produced by the powder process are not so brilliant as carbon pictures, but that is a defect easily overcome with a little gum solution. Moreover, the powder pictures are manipulated to perfection with a stump and a little pumice powder. High-lights can be put in without difficulty; stains can be removed, and delicate effects of light and shade added with much nicety. The powder pictures are readily coloured, too, since they possess a fine tooth. In a word, we may confidently recommend Mr. Blanchard's mode of proceeding to all who desire to produce pictures of this nature upon porcelain or pot-metal.

Mr. Blanchard is not inclined at present to cry Eureka in respect to gelatine plates. He has had some marvellous successes and also some egregious failures; he has been fortunate in securing many clear transparent clichés with short exposures, and he has had the bad luck to come across not a few dirty plates. He believes that as manufacturers progress with their work they will be able to produce more certain and trustworthy films, but he thinks we are far off from perfection at present. There is still much uncertainty connected with gelatine plates, and although it were idle to deny that there is a great future for gelatino-bromide films, the days of wet plates are not yet numbered as some suppose. There are, doubtless, many of our readers of the same way of thinking as Mr. Valentine Blanchard.

Our "At Home" next week will be "The Woodbury Permanent Printing Company at Ealing."