

The Photographic News, June 25, 1880.

PHOTOGRAPHY IN AND OUT OF THE STUDIO.

THE LATE O. G. REJLANDER'S PICTURES—VARIATIONS IN DRY PLATES—INSTANTANEOUS SHUTTERS AND POLARISED LIGHT—A LITTLE INCIDENT.

The Late O. G. Rejlander's Pictures.—There is a melancholy sight just now in some of the minor print shops in London. Side by side with the portraits of brazen-faced ladies (mostly French and American) in scanty costumes and in vulgar and ungraceful attitudes are to be seen many of the studies of Mr. Rejlander, unapproachable in his day, as in our own, for his artistic perception of what photography is capable. The studies are badly printed and slovenly mounted; some are inferior to others, but all show that originality of treatment and idea inherent to everything which Mr. Rejlander produced. In a little shop in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, where the majority of the pictures shown in the window seem but suggestive of less nice ones to be obtained within, the cruel irony of fate has placed a ten by eight study, under which the intelligent shopkeeper has written, in an execrable scrawl: "O. G. R. as is own modle" (*sic*). This is, indeed, the fact. The artist photographer is standing with the chest and shoulders nude, and the lower part of the body enveloped in drapery, the folds of which are in themselves a valuable study. The head is bent, and the features are half concealed by the hand, which is raised to the face. The whole attitude and arrangement forcibly suggest shame and grief at the folly and degradation by which he is surrounded, and appeal silently and pathetically to the spectator. Does it not seem a reproach to photographers that, on the death of Mr. Rejlander, his collection of negatives, exhibiting an almost inexhaustible play of fancy, should have been allowed to drift into the hands of unsympathetic dealers; that a host of inferior efforts, which the artist himself would never have permitted to go forth, should have been dragged to light; and that, worst of all, some should be fated—we mean his studies from the nude—to be classed among those pictures which a noble art has been debased to produce? To our minds, nothing in the history of photography is so sad as this; that the man whose whole aim was to raise the photographer to the position of an artist, who worked in a time when the idea of photography being classed as a fine art was laughed to scorn, and who extorted admiration for his genius from the scorners, should now only be known to the public through the medium of all that is degrading and vicious. In an exhibition of photographs to illustrate the progress of the art from its earliest stages—an idea which may be carried out some day—Rejlander's pictures should occupy a prominent position; but unless the negatives are speedily collected, there will be very little chance of the next generation knowing much of what he did.

Variations in Dry Plates.—One of the most singular characteristics of gelatine plates is the variations they display when in different hands. We hear one photographer enthusiastic over the unapproachable qualities of the plates sent out by Mr. A. The next one cannot use A.'s plates at all, but swears by B.'s. B.'s are denounced in no measured terms by a third, who contends there is nothing under the sun so fine as C.'s, and so on. It is a mortifying thing, after a man has vaunted his success with a particular variety of plate in his own studio, to fail in convincing you in yours, and to be unable to explain the cause. An example of this kind of thing happened a short time since when a clever photographer who had prepared a number of plates after a formula of his own wished to show off their merits to a brother photographer, himself an experienced hand at dry plates. The plates were brought, their virtues expatiated upon, exposed, developed; result, a dismal *fiasco*. A multi-

licity of suggestions all more or less unsatisfactory as to the reason of failure, followed, until at last, in despair, the preparer of the plates exclaimed, "Well, I'm as certain as possible, if I had exposed these plates in my own studio, that every one of them would have been a success." And no doubt he was right. At the same time, it is not to be supposed that the conditions were the same. Wherein the difference lay it was of course difficult to tell; but that there was a difference, either in the apparatus, the dark room, or the manipulation, is clear as noon-day. In making experiments of this kind, we fancy photographers do not always proceed with scientific accuracy. Some little point of detail which may appear insignificant is often sufficient to cause wide variations. The hot controversy which has been raging respecting the efficacy of canary-coloured medium as against ruby glass, and the entirely opposite experience of those who have tried the former, show the folly of expecting things to produce the same result when the circumstances are not exactly similar.

Instantaneous Shutters and Polarised Light.—Some curious effects of sunlight as seen through a narrow slit, which have lately been observed by Lieut.-Commander Nicholson, who called attention to the subject in the New York Academy of Sciences, seem to have some bearing on the question of instantaneous shutters. As the slit was diminished Commander Nicholson found the diffraction bands spread out and separate, until nothing is seen but the central light space; and when the slit became 1-100th to 2-100ths of a millimetre in width, the light became slightly bluish, and a Nicol prism revealed in it traces of polarisation. On further narrowing the slit the blue tint and the polarisation become more decided; and when a width of about 0.001 millimetre had been reached the tint changed to violet, and the polarisation appeared to be complete, the polarisation being in a plane at right angles to the slit. It has been suggested that the polarisation is caused by most of the light reaching the eye being reflected from the edges of the slit, but there is an objection to this theory on the ground that although the experiments were made with slits in iron, brass, and obsidian, the results were the same, whereas a difference in the material should have produced a difference in effect. It is also contended that were the polarisation the result of reflection it should also be observed when the slit is wide as well as narrow, which is not the case. The experiments, at all events, certainly prove that light when passing through a very narrow slit is polarised, and that the shorter waves of light pass more freely than the longer ones. Now in some forms of instantaneous shutters where a slit passes rapidly over the plate, is it not possible that the conditions may approach those just described? If so, the question of the position of the shutter in relation to the plate may become a most important one. There may be nothing in it photographically, but we throw out the hint to some of our clever philosophical workers as one worth investigating.

A Little Incident.—It is not often that the President of the Photographic Society is taken aback, but this certainly happened at the last meeting, when, in the midst of the exhibition of instantaneous shutters, a member who had signified that he had something to exhibit rose in obedience to the call of the president. Of course, everyone expected he was about to demonstrate some new form of shutter; but instead of that, he gravely said, "Mr. President and gentlemen, I have brought with me a specimen of a retouching pencil which, so far as I have been able to find out, will not do a single thing which it is advertised to do," and then as gravely sat down. We do not know whether the gentleman intended a practical joke, but it certainly looked very much like one. The President, when he had got over his surprise, mildly pointed out that it was instantaneous shutters upon which the meeting was engaged, and another member's shutter coming to the rescue, the proceedings regained their wonted solemnity and calmness.