

The Photographic News.

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THE PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION.

To grumble at the shortcomings of a banquet to which you are invited, is not only bad manners, but very ungracious behaviour into the bargain; but there is this excuse for us, in expressing a few words of dissatisfaction at the outset, namely, that the Photographic Exhibition partakes more of the nature of a picnic than a formal gathering, and if the entertainment provided is not in every way praiseworthy, this is due rather to a lack of co-operation on the part of some, rather than to any deficiencies in the fare that has been provided. Names that are familiar not only in connection with good work, but with contributions that usually form the chief attraction of this yearly gathering, are absent from the catalogue, and if it had not been for the goodly contingent of new exhibitors, this year's show of pictures, about which there has been so much speculation and tiptoe-expectancy, would have fallen far below the average of former years. Francis and William Bedford, whose clear soft landscapes of dark purple tone are so familiar to the visitor at Pall Mall, are unrepresented this year. Of William England's name, the walls are equally silent, and we must perforce wait another twelvemonth for the wonderful results of his last campaign among the Swiss mountains, for those caverns of translucent ice, those white crystal glaciers sweeping down among the black firs, those clear-shadowed cascades, he knows so well how to imprison in the camera. Colonel Stuart Wortley has neither bright cloud nor breaking wave; Slingsby of Lincoln fails to put in an appearance with picture or portrait; and Captain Abney has neither stalwart oak nor tiny fern or floweret to remind one that his pretensions to art are hardly less marked than his title to science. The graceful foliage and sweet summer pictures of Payne Jennings are absent, as also the dainty flower studies of Mrs. G. Payne; and of foreign portraitists there is scarcely a representative. As it is, there are signs of progress, no doubt, but not such proofs as one might have expected from the initiation of a "new era," as the advent of gelatino-bromide has been rightly termed. At Wimbledon, when the small-bore rifle gave place to the old Enfield, there was, it will be remembered, a marked improvement in the shooting; and similarly, it was only to be expected that with better means at their disposal, photographers would this year have made some marvellous practice. But the exhibition, small as it undoubtedly is, fully bears out the expectations of the most sanguine upon the capabilities of gelatine. The instantaneous studies of swans, by Messrs. Marsh Brothers, of Henley-on-Thames, for which one of the medals were awarded, are marvels. The life and animation of the birds, their firm, snowy plumage, and, above all, the troubled motion of the water upon which they move, make up a picture that for truth and brightness is unrivalled. The water alone is a study; its surface, while smooth as a mirror, is broken into eddies by the quick-turning swans, and hence there is that viscid appearance of molten metal upon the pool which constitutes one of the principal charms of the picture;

there are, indeed, patches of iridescence upon the liquid surface, and in one place, where a drop of water has fallen from the swan's bill, a series of tiny circles mark the spot. Altogether, the scene is a triumph of photography and happy artistic rendering.

Altogether ten medals were awarded. An eleventh would without doubt have been secured by Mr. Gale's charming little series of Brittany and Normandy, had Mr. Gale not been *hors concours* as one of the jurors. The recipients were Messrs. Marsh Brothers, Mr. Mayland of Regent Street, Mr. H. P. Robinson of Tunbridge Wells, Mr. Barton of Bristol, Mr. Seymour Conway of Beckenham, Mr. T. G. Whaite of Brighton, Mr. Silvester Parry of Chester, The Platinotype Company, Mr. Andrew Pringle of Knowlesworth, and the Berlin Photographic Company.

To begin with the last mentioned, the medal is awarded for a magnificent copy of Raphael's Madonna di San Sisto, from the Dresden Gallery. When we mention that the copy measures no less than 10 feet by 6 feet, and that none of the details of the priceless original appear wanting, it must be conceded that it is a work upon which the stamp of approval may well be set. It is the work, we hear, of Herr Hoffmann, and it is printed in nine sections, all of which are so well matched in tone and detail that the junctions are not easily discovered. The cost of this fine copy is stated to be seventy-five guineas, but as it stands in the same relation to the painting as a large cartoon, the price to a connoisseur or collector is scarcely high. In any case, it shows to what perfection the copying of large classic paintings may be brought.

Mr. H. P. Robinson of Tunbridge Wells, another medallist, sends four pictures. "In Maiden Meditation Fancy Free" (201), has attached to it the green label "medal," and so we suppose it was the most favourably regarded by the jurors. A young girl stands beside a tree, holding a broken branch in her hand, glancing round half coyly, half roguishly. Has she screened herself from the view of some one, and is that some one approaching? There is a freshness and a girlishness about the dimpled face that is very winning, and a modesty withal that tells of rustic simplicity. There is, too, a mixture of timidity and "come-if-you-dare" in the pose under the tree that is exceedingly taking. "At Gwysaney Hall" (202) represents the stone steps and portico of an old lichen-grown mansion, with a group on the threshold; it is like a familiar bit of painting from Haddon Hall, the harmonious detail of the picture being free from any of those hard photographic touches, those white hard lights or inky shadows on the coping stone and window sill. "Dorothy" (215), a black oak interior, with a little white-robed lady standing at the casement, the third of the series, is a triumph over a difficult subject; and the fourth is a study of sheep (216), in which the artist has been bold enough to seize the moment when the backs of the fleecy models were bathed in silvery sunshine.

Mr. Barton's pictures are a prominent feature of the Exhibition. His pictures of Bristol are peerless; "A Bristol Mansion of the Olden Time" (38) is to our thinking the best of the series, a photograph with those qualities of which we have just spoken in "Gwysaney Hall." There are detail, depth, harmony, and all absence of hardness. You might walk into the "Mansion," there is so much space and atmosphere, and from ground-floor to roof, the building is as softly rendered as in a painting, and yet there is no lack of contrast. St. Stephen's Church, Bristol (39), a difficult problem, as every photographer is aware who has had to do with lofty architecture, is another magnificent victory of photographic art; indeed, all Mr. Barton's architectural studies exhibit high ability and exquisite finish. "Wickham Bridge" and "Autumn Morning" also show the hand of the master, and with the former especially—note the water under the bridge—no one can fail to be pleased. But, perfect as these landscapes are, it is in his treatment of architecture that Mr. Barton makes his mark.

Mr. Mayland (13) depicts the busy Thames. His series