

# The Photographic Times

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## PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE SCHOOL.

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[Photographs by pupils and by the author. All rights reserved.]

**D**ESPITE a brief career of less than a century, the camera is established as an indispensable adjunct to modern society. Witness its services in the adornment of the home, where reproductions bring in the distant world of history, geography, and art,—in current literature, where the pictorial appeal in books, magazines, and newspapers is made so effective by the inexpensive and rapid methods of reproduction afforded by photography. The manufacturer finds it just as essential in his calling. The scientist, be he astronomer or bacteriologist, bases many of his investigations upon the records made by this new servant. Furthermore, there are those, numbering not a few, who are ready and eager to add photography to the fine arts.

The discussion thus far, however, has been centered upon the adult,—it has been the question of just what culture photography has to offer this man or that woman. It would seem, then, that the child is to be left out of all these good things,—but, if this new art is such an inspiration and help to the grown-ups, why

not to those in the formative period of life? It is to the conservative educational world, then, that we refer this important question, “Why are we not using the camera to help in the education of our children?” and it is timely, for a similar query has been coming, of late, from various parts of our country. Nor is the responsibility to be shaken off by bestowing upon the boy or girl a Brownie camera and remaining content to foot the bills that result from its use or misuse.

For some time, in the Ethical Culture School, the idea has been growing that there are educational possibilities in the right kind of camera work which are not brought out by the desultory, snapshot methods pursued by the average boy or girl. Even the very young children, in the kindergarten and the lower grades, begin to use the elements of these processes in the blue-prints they make of leaves, flowers, and grains, the records of which they wish to preserve.

As an illustration of what we have done in the use of the camera with pupils of the Elementary School, I will cite a recent case, a section of the sixth grade,



THE "COMMERCE CAMERA CLUB" AT WORK.

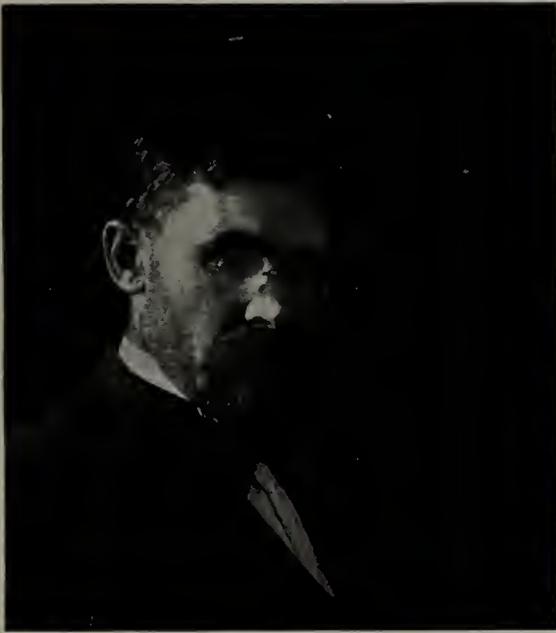
*Photographed by a member of the Camera Class.*

composed of children about eleven years of age. While planning an excursion, which was to take the class by ferry across New York bay and to a great freight terminal in South Brooklyn, the idea occurred that it might be a help to have the children make a more systematic attempt than they had ever done before to get snapshot records of what they saw. These records were, of course, to be pertinent to their study of commerce, in

which they were engaged in the geography class. The "Commerce Camera Club" was organized for the occasion. A little time was spent, in addition to the usual preparation for the trip, to make sure each one knew the ins and outs of his or her camera and could use it readily. Beside the extra interest that the cameras contributed to the trip, they were of great value in concentrating the attention of the children upon the matters



SNAP SHOTS TAKEN BY THE PUPILS.



WORK OF MEMBERS OF THE CAMERA CLASS.

which they were studying. The importance of having some strong, controlling idea kept in the foreground will be seen when one considers the distractions of such a journey, the thousands of irrelevant matters constantly passing before the children. Ten of the fourteen children had cameras, and a number of prints resulted from the trip and served on succeeding days to keep up the interest in organizing a permanent record from the ideas gained that day. This made a very effective review of the places and activities seen on the excursion, the

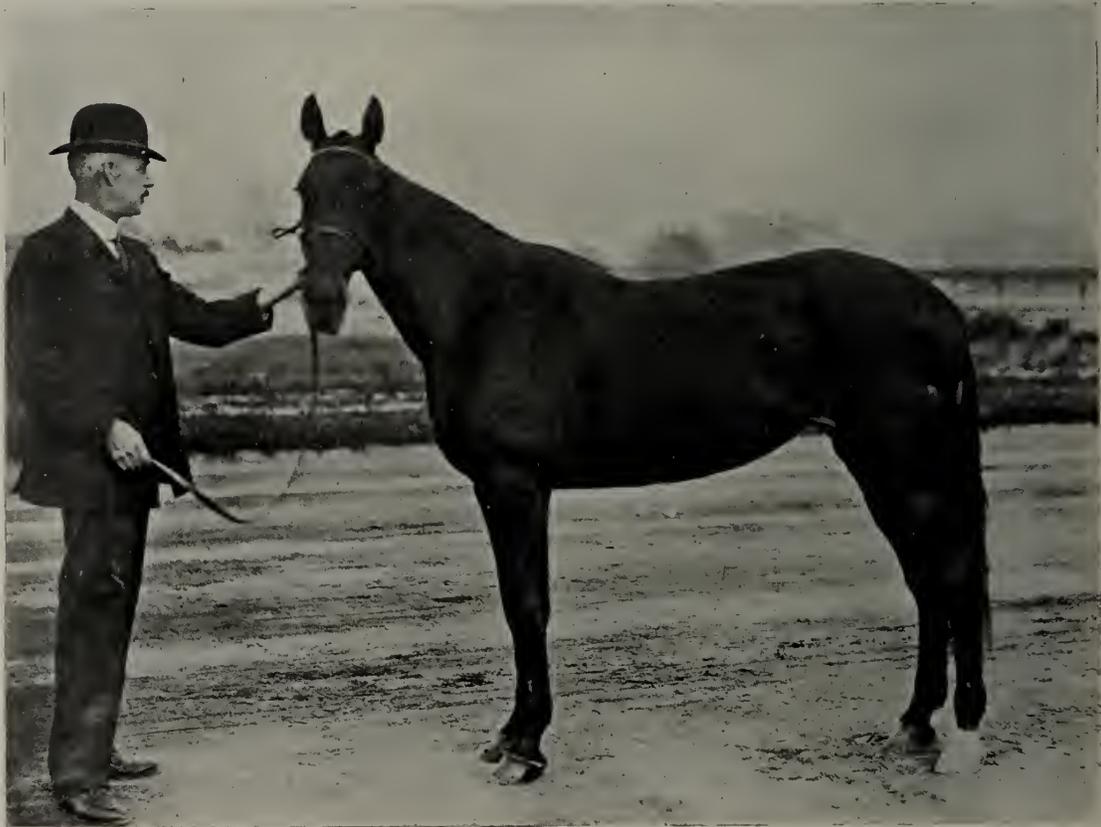
glimpses of which had necessarily been rapidly made in many instances.

The pupil of High School age is ready to build upon previous camera experiences and, with the interests of this impressionable period, to develop an appreciation of art that might, otherwise, never have been awakened. The Camera Club has been for several years a clearing-house for photographic experiences,—giving opportunity for an exchange of ideas gained through practical work and reading, a place to learn how to develop and print, and, having learned, a chance

to help the rest in similar ways. Trips, taken as a club or in groups, bring results to all. This organization certainly has a place in every modern school.

The Camera Class has a different function. This was the outcome of a need for more serious work than the Club could do. The course consists of definite laboratory work, the results of which

photography is a question of art. As the study progresses and the pupils realize that a real photograph is not a "lucky hit," but the result of intelligent, patient effort, they are given instruction in the choice of subject and in the principles of composition. This is done by means of a study of good examples of art, photographs and paintings, even to the length



WORK DONE ON A COMMERCIAL BASIS. "PRODUCTIVE LABOR."

warrant the granting of credit to the pupil on the same basis with art and manual work. During the year, about one hundred hours are devoted to class work in the darkroom and in the field, to say nothing of the time voluntarily spent outside of school hours. The fundamental aim of the course is to help the pupils to a better appreciation of good photography and how to attain it,—in short, to give the artist's point of view, for, in the last analysis, good

of making sketches, from the works of these masters, for the purpose of impressing the points studied. Then follows practice in trimming and mounting the photographs they have made. Some times, in order to help them select the salient features in a picture and to realize something of the amount of study that is required to obtain good composition, a masterpiece will be taken as a model. Then an effort is made to reproduce its essence by means of a study of present-



A TENEMENT MADONNA. A STUDY IN COMPOSITION.

day conditions. The "Tenement Madonna" (see illustration) is a study made by the instructor to represent maternity among the poor, following the conception used by Raphael in his "Madonna of the Chair." In every way possible, the beautiful and picturesque in the commonplace are brought out and the study is helped by means of visits to some of the photograph and art exhibitions. Reading in the current photo literature is encouraged as a means of getting the new ideas on process and product. Then there are the field trips into the country, the parks, and to points, which are so abundant about the city, of interest industrially and historically.

One of the chief reasons for endeavoring thus to present the study of art through the camera is that many an adult realizes, too late, that a life interest in art might have been possessed had such

a medium as the camera presented itself. Unfortunately, during the school period, the brush and the pencil had made no appeal and could not be mastered. As a result, that side of life is to these persons of small moment, even though they may realize their deficiency.

Naturally, the art side of photography is of little value without the technical ability to manipulate camera and developer. This is of first importance, for, before real artistic results can be attained, the control of the mechanism of the camera and the processes of developing and printing must become automatic, that they may respond readily to the will of the worker. This requires a long apprenticeship, which, when dutifully served, evolves a quality of accuracy in judgment which is certainly as valuable as that brought out by tool work. Therefore, we have found it practicable to

substitute photography for shop work when the camera is the best medium of expression for the individuals in question. These minds seem to respond better to the process work of developing and printing, which involves more thought and less merely mechanical skill than the operations of the tool work.

When sufficient skill has been gained, the pupils are given work on a commercial basis,—productive labor, we call it. Teachers and pupils send films and plates to this department to be developed and printed. This puts the matter upon a practical and responsible foundation,—the pupils are held up to the standard of first-class commercial work, and for it receive market prices. It is not long before they are receiving orders from friends and acquaintances. One of the boys, out with his camera recently, was hailed by a man exercising his horse on the speedway. An appointment was made, and after several trials a successful photograph was obtained. The boy cleared several dollars from the prints that were ordered, beside having the valuable experience of being thrown upon his own resources in a business transaction. By means of these orders, some pupils pay all of their photographic expenses, and, in several cases, have earned enough to buy a new camera. They also lend their assistance to the school in the photographing of school activities. A member of the Camera Class was called upon to accompany the sixth grade on the excursion to investigate commerce in the port of New York, mentioned in a previous paragraph. The school now has some valuable records of the trip and the boy has the added experience.

In brief, our reasons for believing in the manual value of photography are that we feel the manual instincts of our boys and girls are not to be confined to the few

recognized channels of shop-work, sewing, basketry, and cooking. The intense interest this boy or that girl shows in the camera, may be due to the fact that he or she has found a medium that is in accord with a natural bent. We no longer require that a boy shall prepare to be a doctor or a minister, regardless of ability in these directions. Why, then, say to him that in order to profit by the manual work of the school he must conform to the few lines that have been laid out by educational authorities?

The city child needs to have good, wholesome hobbies of this kind. First, because they are involved in the actual doing of things. They draw upon the resources of the child and help him to realize what he can do, meanwhile helping to direct his countless impulses and activities. Moreover, wholesome avocational interests are provided, which, unfortunately, are so often shut out by the city environment, but may be replaced by this method of giving employment to leisure hours, enjoyment to friends, and opportunities to turn an honest penny. Then, the sharpened vision gives, throughout life, a greater appreciation of the beauties to be found on every hand. Finally, in many instances, a start is made that will undoubtedly give direction to the choice of life work.

The use of photography in the school is in its infancy. Many lines of connection with other studies are possible. Its social effects are manifold. All we have done, thus far, is to demonstrate that here is an opportunity to make our school work more effective by giving one more channel in accord with the bent of the individual pupil. There is great need of more light upon this question of the particular value of photography in education. It is a question full of possibilities. The answer may be slow but it is coming.