

IMAGE

Journal of Photography of the George Eastman House

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GATHERING WATER LILIES. One of a series of photographs of life in East Anglia taken in 1885 by P. H. Emerson, author of the controversial book, *Naturalistic Photography*. Lent to the George Eastman House by Dr. William C. Emerson of Rome, New York.



EEL CATCHER shows Emerson's theory of focusing. Background, though slightly blurred, still retains form. Platinotype in collection of Dr. William C. Emerson.



FISHERMAN'S PORTRAIT is one of the few close-ups taken by P. H. Emerson of East Anglian types. From collection of Dr. William C. Emerson.

P. H. EMERSON

These photographs were taken in the 1880s by Peter Henry Emerson, an American amateur photographer who lived in England. They are from the collection of his nephew, Dr. William C. Emerson of Rome, New York, who has graciously lent the George Eastman House two albums of original platinum prints.

When P. H. Emerson lectured at the London Camera Club in 1886 on what he called "Naturalistic Photography," he startled the photographic world, and for years magazines fairly bristled with letters. For Dr. Emerson (he was trained as a physician) believed that photographers should go out of their studios into the open air. He had no patience with the technique of "combination printing" then in vogue, by which several separate negatives were used to produce a single print. Above all he abhorred brittle, overall detail, and preached the gospel of differential focusing—rendering the principal areas of the picture sharp, and subordinate areas unsharp.

Emerson's "bombshell" cleared the air for a new approach to photography, based on respect and understanding of the medium. Modern photography may be said to date from his 1886 lecture and the publication, three years later, of his book, *Naturalistic Photography*.

Despite his influence, Emerson's photographs are not as well known as his book. He published several albums of photo-gravures made directly from his negatives under his supervision, and one album of platinum prints, *Life and Landscape of the Norfolk Broads*, in 1886.

CAMERAS BEFORE PHOTOGRAPHY

LONG before photography made the camera a familiar, everyday object, it was a thing of wonder—a magic room, where a living picture appeared upon the wall. “Camera” means a room, and the first cameras were just that—rooms big enough to enter. On one wall there was a very small aperture, a pin-hole, which formed an image on the opposite wall of what lay outside.

In the middle of the sixteenth century a lens was substituted for the pinhole. The image became more brilliant. Entire buildings were made with a lens on the roof which threw its image onto a table. People paid admission to gaze in awe as the world outside reappeared in all its color and movement. Street traffic could be seen hurrying by, and pedestrians strolled along unaware that they were being observed. Life cast its shadow on the wall of the camera obscura, but it was a living, moving shadow, replete with all its color, and lacking only a voice to make it mimic life itself.

There were practical uses for the camera obscura beyond amusement. Astronomers found that they could better study the sun in eclipse by its image than by direct observation. Artists found the optical pictures helpful in solving problems of perspective. Those who could not draw merely traced the image. The camera was made smaller, so that it could be carried around on poles, like a sedan chair. Then it was discovered that the observer did not need to get inside the camera but could see the image plainly enough from the outside on a

ground glass screen. Small cameras, like modern reflex cameras, became popular in the eighteenth century.

The desire to reproduce the image of the camera by some means more accurate, swift and facile than tracing it with a pencil, led to the invention of photography in the nineteenth century.

We do not know who invented the camera. Ever since Euclid described the phenomenon in his *Optics*, written about 300 B. C., it was discussed by natural philosophers, but always in a theoretical way. The first accurate description of the pin-hole camera is to be found in the book *Magiae Naturalis (The Secrets of Natural Magic)* written by Giovanni Baptista della Porta of Naples and published in 1558.

The date is significant. The Renaissance was at its height, and men were thirsting for knowledge. Printing had just been invented, and for the first time scholars could publish their observations for others to test. Medieval superstitions were mixed with valid scientific experiments. The foundations of modern science were emerging.

Della Porta was an alchemist. It was whispered of him that he understood the secret of making gold, and that he could turn quicksilver into silver by heating a toad with mercury in an earthen pot over a slow fire. The book is full of alchemical hocus pocus, which science was soon to reject. The description of the camera obscura is one of the few observations which survived scientific scrutiny, and there is no question that Della Porta's book popularized knowledge of it.

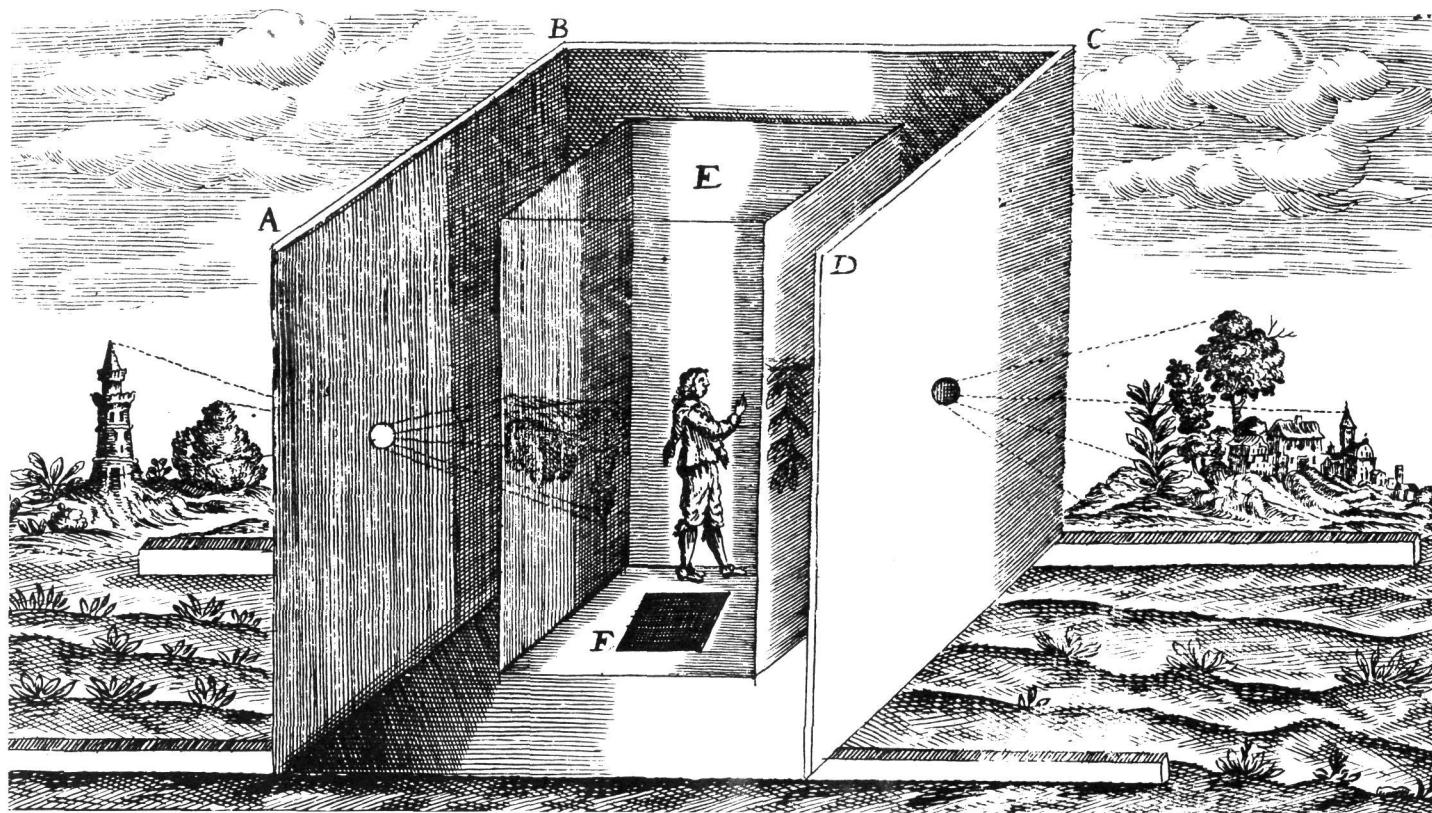


IMAGE WAS TRACED by artist standing inside one of the first cameras, which could be moved from place to place like a sedan chair. Earliest known illustration of a camera obscura, from the book *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*, published in Amsterdam in 1671.

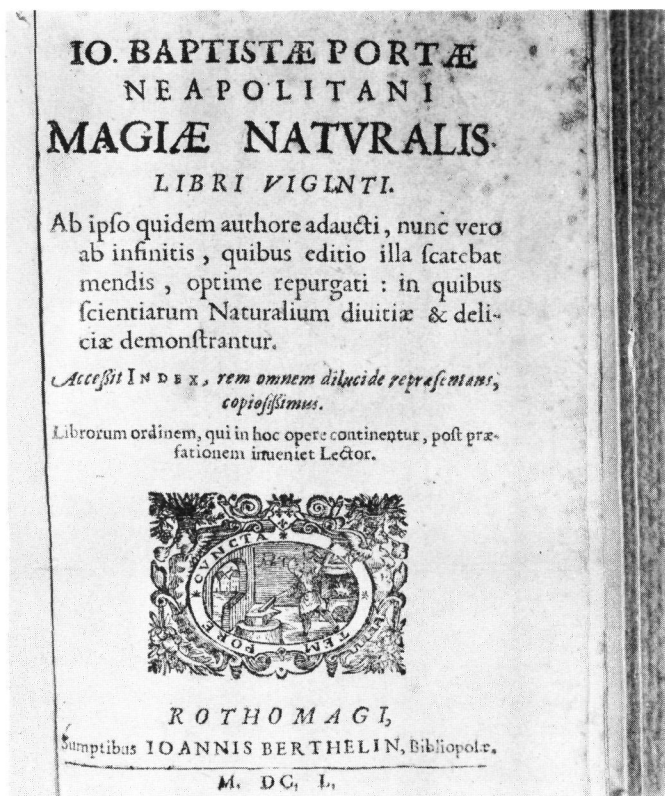
LITTLE GEMS

TINTYPES smaller than postage stamps became the vogue in the 1870s and 1880s. Called Little Gems, they sold as cheaply as fifty cents a dozen. They were put in cardboard mounts, in tiny albums, in brooches, in lockets—or in the drawer of the family parlor.

The Little Gem was not a new kind of photography, but the application of mass production to the already popular tintype. They were taken on quarter plates (3¼ x 4¼ inches) in cameras fitted with twelve lenses. One exposure thus produced a dozen identical pictures which, after processing, could be cut apart with scissors. This ingenious technique made it possible to bring the cost of production down to a point where nearly anyone could afford to have his picture taken as often as he liked.

Enterprising tintypers put their studios on wheels and hauled them to any place where there might be travelers, vacationers, or anyone who wanted a cheap portrait in a hurry.

There was no tin in a tintype. First called "ferrotypes" or "melainotypes," they were direct positives made by the collodion process on thin sheets of iron that had been japanned black—that is, painted with a mixture of linseed oil, asphalt, and lampblack. (These sheets, still called ferrotype plates, are still used by photographers for drying glossy prints to a high finish.)



TITLE PAGE of the book *Secrets of Natural Magic* by Della Porta, containing first description of camera. This late, unrecorded edition was published in Rouen, France, 1650. Alden Scott Boyer Collection, George Eastman House.

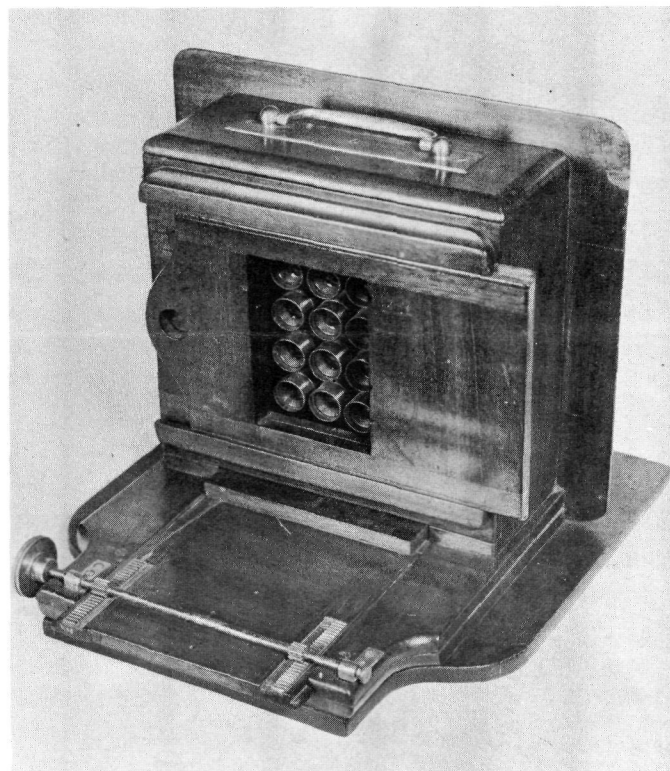
Magiae Naturalis appeared in many different editions. The revised 1589 edition included a description of the camera obscura with a lens substituted for the pinhole, lifted without credit probably from Daniello Barbaro's *La Pratica della Perspettiva*. Translations were made into Italian, French, German and English. All told, seventeen different editions are recorded.

The George Eastman House has acquired an edition in Latin published at Rouen (the ancient Rothomagi) in 1650, which appears to have escaped the notice of scholars.

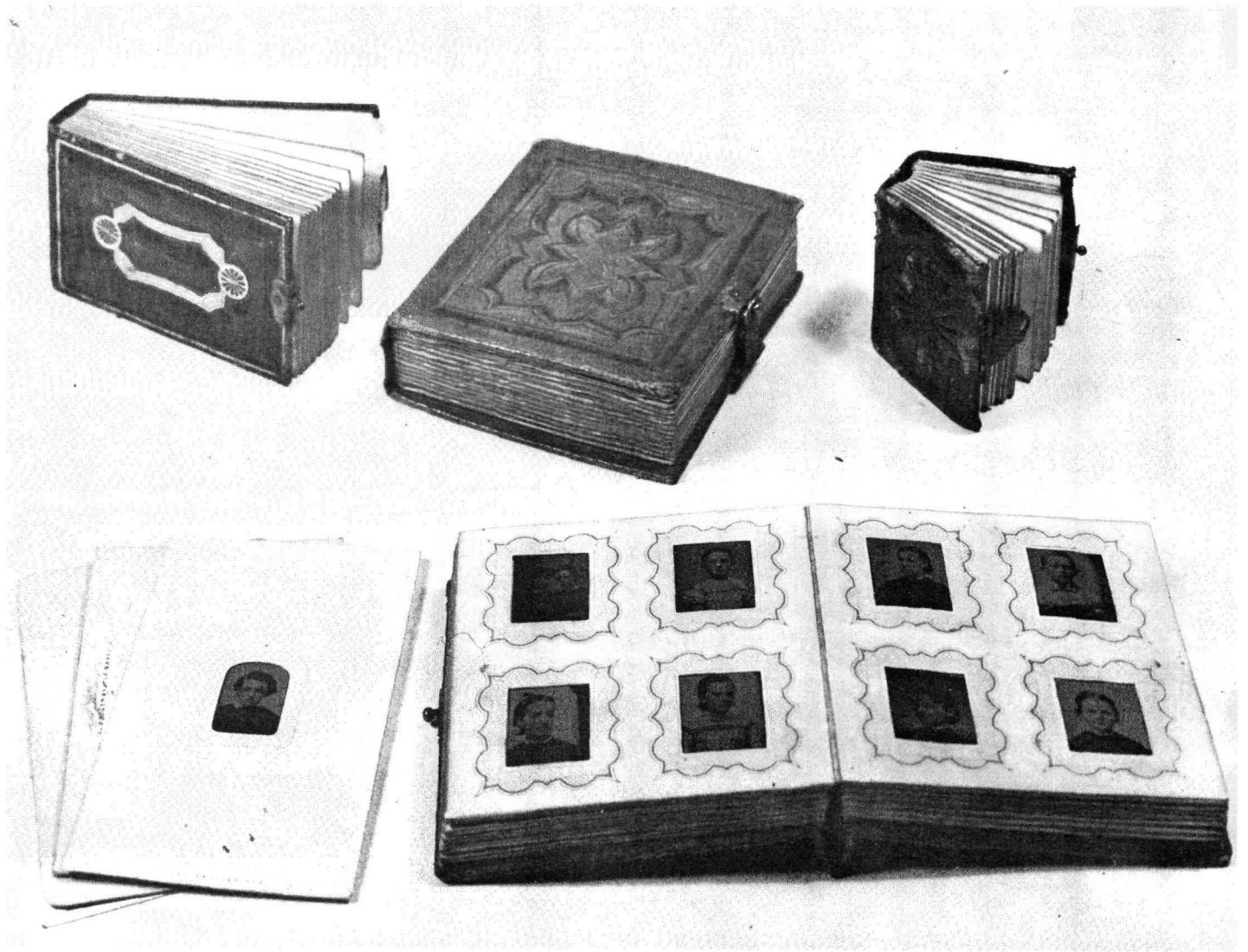
THE GIFTED CAMERA

From *The Photo-American*, December, 1895.

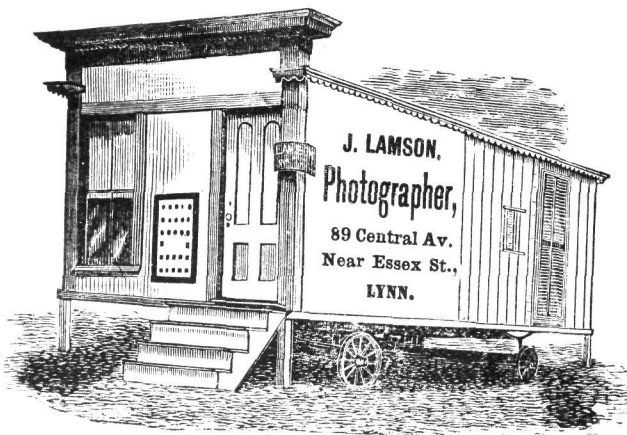
A New York inventor has devised a magazine camera in which the plates can be developed automatically, without removal, as they are exposed. This is very good as far as it goes; but would it not be an improvement if it was also supplied with an automatic tripod operated by clockwork, or some other light but powerful and enterprising motor? Then it would only be necessary to wind it up in the morning and start it off on a photographic trip all by itself, while its enthusiastic owner could await in comfort under his vine and fig tree the triumphal return of his gifted camera, bearing a dozen phenomenal negatives, all ready for filing away in some handy ash barrel for future reference.



TWELVE LENS CAMERA made it possible to take a dozen Little Gem tintypes at one exposure. The design of the camera remained unchanged for years. This model was carried in stock by Lancaster of London as late as 1900. George Eastman House collection.



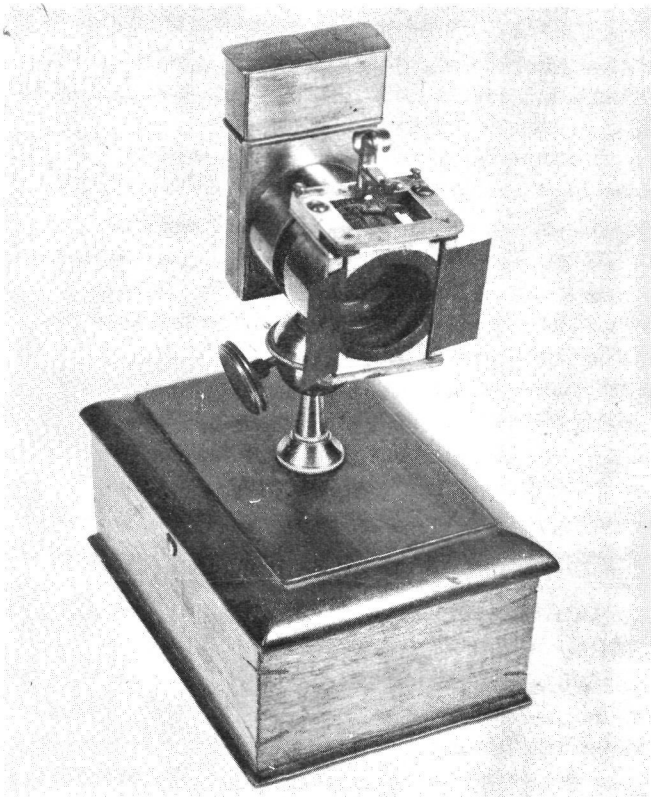
LITTLE GEM tintypes were kept in miniature albums or mounted in cards. George Eastman House collection.



TINTYPE GALLERY on wheels serves as illustration on envelope in which tintypes were delivered to customer in 1882.

To make a tintype, the plate was first coated with collodion and made light sensitive by dipping it into a silver nitrate bath. Because the exposure lasted for fully ten seconds, the headrest was essential. After exposure the image was developed by pouring iron protosulphate across the surface. It was fixed with potassium cyanide—a deadly poison which spelled the end of more than one tintyper's career. The plate was then thoroughly rinsed in water and dried over a flame. If the exposure had been made in the multiplying camera, the pictures were cut apart with a pair of tin snips.

These operations were all done while the customer waited. At the end of the day the tintyper could count his profits in cash, climb into his ambulatory studio, and drive off to fresh pastures. It was a lucrative, lone wolf, trade. Edward M. Estabrooke, one of the first to make Little Gems, stated that he "made, with his own hands, as many as one hundred and twenty dozen a day, and sold every dozen at fifty cents."



1859 MINIATURE CAMERA, called by inventor the Pistolgraph, is fitted with $f/2.2$ lens and instantaneous shutter. George Eastman House collection.

1953 SNAPSHOT taken indoors by daylight with antique Pistolgraph on plate $1 \times 1\frac{1}{2}$ inches cut from lantern slide plate. Three times enlargement.



THE PISTOLGRAPH

IN 1859 Thomas Skaife of London invented a miniature camera which he named the Pistolgraph. With it he claimed to have taken instantaneous photographs, and it was stated that he was once arrested on a charge of attempting to shoot Queen Victoria when he aimed his camera at Her Majesty while she was taking a drive.

None of Skaife's pictures have come to light. But tests made with a Pistolgraph in the George Eastman House indicate that his claims were not unreasonable. For even with the slowest sensitive material readily available—ordinary lantern slide plates—it was possible to take fully exposed snapshots indoors by natural light. For outdoor exposures a neutral density filter had to be used. The resulting negatives, despite spherical aberration, proved to be of good quality and were enlarged three diameters.

The camera, which is all of brass, is little more than a lens barrel with a shutter attached to one end and a holder for a wet plate 1.2×1.5 inches at the other. The back of the plateholder is removable, and apparently the entire camera was taken into the darkroom for loading. The shutter is ingenious: two flaps, each pivoted on the outer edge, are held closed by a rubber band. On pressing a release they fly open for approximately one-tenth of a second.

The lens is a Dallmeyer modification of the Petzval type of 40mm. focal length and the unusually large aperture of $f/2.2$.

THE DEMONIAIC SCREEN

L'Ecran Demonique, by Lotte H. Eisner. Paris, Editions André Bonne, 1952. 187 pp. Illus.

Lotte Eisner, who is curator of the great Paris film library, the Cinémathèque Française, has given us one of the most valuable and penetrating criticisms of German film making yet to appear. She has chosen a provocative title for this collection of essays which, literally translated, means "The Demoniatic Screen." The adjective is used, not with the implication of things evil, but to characterize preoccupation with the psychological attitude which is so typical of the German films of the silent period.

Since its production in 1919, Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* has been re-shown more often than any other feature film ever produced. More has been written about this German film than any other single motion picture production.

Last year an enterprising showman obtained a license from the Justice Department's Office of Alien Property which surprisingly claims jurisdiction over this cinema antique, and *Caligari* has been enjoying yet another commercial revival in the large cities of the United States.

Yet in all the articles discussing the film no mention has been made of the English names given to the characters: even in the German original they were called Alan, Francis, and Jane. English names were characteristic of German literary characters in the novels of the neo-romantic period, and their choice for the memorable roles in *Caligari* reinforces Lotte Eisner's argument in her excellent book on German films of the resourceful silent period.

Siegfried Kracauer in his book *From Caligari to Hitler* professed to see in the "demoniac" movies of Germany an unmistakable prophecy of the Nazi regime. In the light of recent developments, one would have to find a similar pattern of motion pictures in Soviet Russia to accept Dr. Kracauer's thesis that a nation's movies are symptomatic of developing mass-psychoses. But the early Russian films are in no way comparable to the German films described by Dr. Kracauer, although the political disaster of both countries appears to be terrifyingly similar.

Like Dr. Kracauer, Lotte Eisner was a refugee from Nazi terror. Yet her appraisal of German films is without malice and far more convincing to those who have had the opportunity of seeing the films under discussion.

Before the war, Miss Eisner was closely associated with the exploitation of films in Germany. In a nightmare escape from Nazi persecution, she found refuge in France, only to have her enemies enter that country as conquerors. She changed her name to Eschoffier and aided Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque Française in his heroic feat of saving important films of France from the Germans who were eager to have them for their Reichsfilmarchiv. Today the combined efforts of Langlois and Lotte Eisner-Eschoffier (as she is now known) have made the Cinémathèque Française in Paris one of the world's richest archives of early motion pictures.

L'Ecran Demonique is a collection of twenty essays that provide the most discerning discussion yet to be published on

the films of Germany which, at their best, have made such enduring contributions to the art of motion pictures.

Miss Eisner properly relates *Caligari* and its companion pieces in gothic terror and the war-encouraged expressionism, to German literary traditions. She concludes an especially fascinating chapter called "Symphonies of Horror" by asking whether one might not declare the German cinema simply an extension of romanticism through modern technology, which makes it possible to give visible form to romantic imaginings.

Equally intriguing are Miss Eisner's discussion of the great historical films of Lubitsch that were so successful in this country: *Madame DuBarry* (also known as *Passion*), *Anne Boleyn* (alternatively *Deception*) along with the epics and spectacles of Fritz Lang and Richard Oswald. In all these the influence of Max Reinhardt is traced.

Thanks to Miss Eisner, it is possible to see the whole development of the German cinema in its relationship to Teutonic literature and the stage. It is a relationship far more convincing than Dr. Kracauer's attempt to isolate German film as a symptom and manifestation of imminent genocide.

Miss Eisner has written her book in French rather than her native tongue: perhaps that is why the text is so readily understandable by the non-French reader. It is a book very much deserving of translation, for it provides new shades of appreciation for both "the white magic of Scandinavia and the black magic of Germany."

THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI, the most famous German film, has been re-shown more than any other production since 1919.



PHOTOJOURNALISM, LIFE STYLE

Words and Pictures: An Introduction to Photojournalism, by Wilson Hicks. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1952. 171 pp. \$5.00.

Reviewed by Vincent S. Jones.

Words and Pictures is an important addition to the slim list of useful literature on photojournalism.

Mr. Hicks bases most of his study on the gospel according to *Life* magazine, which he served as executive editor during the period when it really began to click. But the author has had valuable experience elsewhere. He started with the *Kansas City Star*, one of America's finest newspapers, but one which sometimes seems to cling to the old view of photography as an auxiliary to be used cautiously and sparingly. He was with The Associated Press when that world-wide news agency pioneered Wirephoto which had made it possible to present word and picture coverage simultaneously.

He knows photographers, writers, and editors well and writes of their problems with extraordinary sympathy and skill.

His theme is the happy marriage of words and images, with the editor functioning as priest. He traces the evolution of *Life* as the most aggressive practitioner of the new photojournalism. It was a logical development, delayed by the failure of word-bred editors to realize the power of pictures; stimulated enormously by the technical advances in the 1920-35 period—particularly the development of the miniature camera and practical flash equipment. There were important contributions to editorial thinking abroad, especially in Germany, but there the balance again was upset when this time the words were slighted and the pictures were called upon to do most of the work.

Life went through some of the same struggles before finding a solid formula. There have been signs recently that a new brew is being stirred up in the Luce kitchens—this time emphasizing text and other pictorial forms than photography. In any case, *Life* deserves all of Mr. Hicks' praise for its leadership, but the story seems incomplete without at least a nod of recognition to other magazines and some progressive newspapers who have not been idle either.

By far the most readable chapter is the one entitled "Life Lays Out a Picture Story." It is certain to provoke violet controversy because it makes it crystal clear that in *Life's* hierarchy a mere photographer is a serf of low order, ranking well below the salt and just a cut or two above the "reporters" (researchers, and not to be confused with writers).

The scene is a layout session in the office of the Managing Editor, a godlike creature who makes sweeping decisions based on a combination of divination and profound knowledge.

Everyone holds his breath in this august presence, although occasionally an underling is asked for some information. On the very periphery of this ceremonial gathering is the photographer, almost literally hat in hand, grateful for any crumb tossed in his direction, and automatically disqualified as a consultant under the theory that his point of view is hopelessly subjective. He is depicted as browsing funereally through the rejected prints, as making a tactless pitch for a double truck and, finally, as inquiring of the writer: "Do you think I'll get a byline?"

All of this is told with consummate skill and made understandable to the layman by the skillful insertion of italic paragraphs which translate technical terms and bits of *Life* office parlance. But it is not likely to make photographers feel like people.

This chapter (and the approval implicit in the presentation) will startle most readers in view of the author's careful presentation of the exacting requirements of the profession and his warm tributes to so many of our finest photographers.

Mr. Hicks, now a picture consultant, is almost uniquely qualified for the role of picture editor (one of the most difficult of all journalistic executive positions to fill) because of his deep knowledge of the history and science of photography and its proper role in the art world.

The value of the book is enhanced greatly by superb illustrations, new and old, with exceptionally discriminating comment.

Vincent S. Jones is Director of the News and Editorial office of the Gannett Group of Newspapers and was formerly Executive Editor of the Utica Daily Press and the Utica Observer Dispatch.

TO OUR READERS

Beginning with this issue, the number of pages of *Image* will be increased to eight, in order to allow a more generous use of illustrations.

We shall be pleased to send you *Image* for the rest of the year if you so desire. In order to bring our mailing list up to date, we should appreciate it if you would return the enclosed postcard with your exact mailing address.

A Correction. The double issue of *Image*, dated January-February, 1953, should have been marked "Vol. II, No. 1-2."

The columns of IMAGE are open to all who are interested in tracing the development of photography. Unsigned articles which appear in these pages may be reprinted providing that credit is given the George Eastman House.

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