

## THE ART OF BEING PHOTOGRAPHED

"An album," said my uncle, as he sat and turned over my collection of physiognomy, "is, I think, the best reading in the world. You get such sidelights on the owner's heredity, George; distant cousins caricature his features and point the moral of his nose, and ancestral faces prophesy his fate. His friends, moreover, figure the secret of his soul. But what a lot we have to learn yet in the art of being photographed, what grotesque and awkward blunders your common sitters make! Why, for instance, do men brush their hair so excessively when they go before the lens? Your cousin here looks like a cheap chess pawn about the head, whereas as I know him his head is a thing like a worn-out paint-brush. Where but in a photograph would you see a parting so straight as this? It is unnatural. You flatten down all a man's character; for nothing shows that more than the feathers and drakes' tails, the artful artlessness, or revolutionary tumult of his hair. Mind you, I am not one of those who would prohibit a man wearing what he conceives to be his best clothes to the photographer's. I like to see the little vanity peeping out--the last moment's folly of a foolish tie, nailed up for a lifetime. Yet all the same, people should understand that the camera takes no note of newness, but much of the cut and fit. And a man should certainly not go and alter his outline into a feminine softness, by pouring oil on his troubled mane and plastering it down with a brush and comb. It is not tidiness, but hypocrisy.

"We have indeed very much to learn in this matter. It is a thing that needs teaching, like deportment or dancing. Plenty of men I have noticed, who would never do it in real life, commit the sin of being over-gentlemanly in an album. Their clothes are even indecently immaculate. They become, not portraits, but fashion-plates. I hate a man who is not rumpled and creased a little, as much as I do a brand new pipe. And, as a sad example of sin on the other hand, on the side of carelessness, I have seen renderings of a very august personage indeed, in a hat--a hat! It was tilted, and to add to the atrocity, he was holding a cigar. This I regard as horrible. Think! your photograph may go into boudoirs. Imagine Gladys opening the album to Ænone; 'Now I will show you him.' And there you sit, leering at their radiant sweetness, hat on, and a cigar reeking between your fingers.

"No, George, a man should go very softly to a photographer's, and he should sit before the camera with reverence in his heart and in his attitude, as if he were in the presence of the woman he loved."

He turned to Mrs Harborough's portrait, looked at it, hesitated, looked again, and passed on.

"I often think we do not take this business of photography in a sufficiently serious spirit. Issuing a photograph is like marriage: you can only undo the mischief with infinite woe. I know of one man who has an error of youth of this kind on his mind--a fancy-dress

costume affair, Crusader or Templar--of which he is more ashamed than many men would be of the meanest sins. For sometimes the camera has its mordant moods, and amazes you by its saturnine estimate of your merits. This man was perhaps a little out of harmony with the garments of chivalry, and a trifle complacent and vain at the time. But the photograph of him is so cynical and contemptuous, so merciless in its exposure of his element of foolishness, that we may almost fancy the spook of Carlyle had got mixed up with the chemicals upon the film. Yet it never really dawned upon him until he had distributed this advertisement of his little weakness far and wide, that the camera had called him a fool to his face. I believe he would be glad now to buy them all back at five pounds a copy.

"This of Minnie Hobson is a work of art. Bless me, the girl must be thirty-seven or thirty-eight now, and just look at her! These photographers have got a trick now, if your face is one of the long kind, of raising the camera, bending your head forward, and firing down at you. So our Minnie becomes quite chubby again. Then, this thing has been retouched." My uncle peered into the photograph. "It seems to me it is pretty nearly all retouching. For instance, if you look at the eye, that high light is not perfectly even; that was touched in on the negative with a pencil. Then about the neck of our Minnie I have observed certain bones, just the slightest indication of her collar-bone, George, but that has disappeared under the retoucher's pencil. Then the infantile smoothness of her cheek, and the beautifully-rounded outline, is produced by the retoucher carefully

scraping off the surface of the film where the cheekbone projected with a sharp knife. There are also in real life little lines between the corner of our Minnie's mouth and her nostril. And again, Minnie is one of those people whose dresses never seem to fit, but this fits like a glove. These retouchers are like Midas, and they turn all that comes to their hands to gold; or, like Spring, the flowers come back at their approach. They reverse the work of Ithuriel, and restore brightness to the fallen. They sit at their little desks, and scratch, scratch, scratch with those delicate pencils of theirs, scratching away age, scratching away care, making the crooked straight, and the rough smooth. They are the fairies of photography, and fill our albums with winsome changelings. Their ministry anticipates in a little way the angels who will take us when we die, releasing us from the worn and haggard body of this death, and showing something of the eternal life and youth that glows within. Or one might say that the spirit of the retoucher is the spirit of Love. It makes plain women beautiful, and common men heroic. Her regal fingers touch for the evil of ungainliness, and, behold, we are restored. Her pencil is like the Queen's sword, and it makes knights out of common men.

"When I have my photograph taken," said my uncle, "I always like to think of the retoucher. I idealise her; I fancy her with the sweetest eyes I have ever seen, and an expression infinitely soft and tender. And she looks closely into my face, and her little pencil goes gently and lovingly over my features. Tickle, tickle. In that way, George, I get a really very nice expression indeed." My uncle turned to his own

presentment, and mused pleasantly for a space. Then he looked again at Mrs Harborough as if inadvertently, and asked her name.

"I like this newer way of taking your photograph, against a mere grey background; just the head of you. One should always beware of the property furniture of the photographer. In the seventies they were great at such aids--a pedestal, a cork rustic stile, wide landscape in the distance, but I think that we are at least getting beyond that now. People in those days must have been afraid to be left alone before a camera, or they wanted it to seem that they were taken unawares, quite against their modesty--did not know what the camera was, and were just looking at it. A very favourite pose for girls was a graceful droop over a sofa, chin on elegant hand. When I was at Dribblebridge--I was a bright young fellow then--I collected a number of local photographs, ladies chiefly, and the thing was very noticeable when I put them in a row over my mantleshelf. The local 'artist' was intensely fond of that pose. But fancy the local leader finding her cook drooping over the same sofa as herself! Nowadays, I see, you get merely the heads of your girls, with their hair flossed up, intense light from above, and faces in shadow. I think it is infinitely better.

What horrible things hands become in a photograph! I wonder how it is that the hand in a photograph is always four shades darker than the arm. Every girl who goes to be photographed in evening dress should be solemnly warned to keep her hands out of the picture. They will look as though she has been enamelling the grate, or toying with a bucket of

pitch. There is something that sins against my conception of womanly purity in those dark hands."

My uncle shut the album. "Yes, it is a neglected field of education, an important branch of deportment altogether forgotten. Our well-bred ease fails us before the camera; we are lucky if we merely look stiff and self-conscious. I should fancy there would be an opening for some clever woman to teach people how to dress for the occasion and how to sit, what to avoid and how to avoid it. As it is, we go in a state of nervous agitation, obsequiously costumed; our last vestige of self-assertion vanishes before the unwinking Cyclops eye of the instrument, and we cower at the mercy of the thing and its attendant. They make what they will of us, and the retoucher simply edits the review with an eye to the market. So history is falsified before our faces, and we prepare a lie for our grandchildren. We fail to stamp our individualities upon our photographs, and are mere 'dumb-driven cattle' in the matter. We sin against ourselves in this neglect, and act against the spirit of the age. Sooner or later this haphazard treatment of posterity must come to an end." He meditated for a moment. Then, as if pursuing a train of thought, "That Mrs Harborough is a very pretty woman, George. Where did you happen to meet her?"