

# IMAGE

Journal of Photography of the George Eastman House

October, 1952

Vol. 1, No. 7

## THE VICTOR HUGO ALBUM

IN the Gabriel Cromer Collection in the George Eastman House there is an album of photographs of Victor Hugo and his circle. Bound in morocco leather, it contains forty photographs made between 1852 and 1854, while Hugo was in exile on the Isle of Jersey. An ardent supporter of the new and struggling Republic, he had fled France after the coup d'état of Napoleon III, when a reward of 25,000 francs was placed on his head for publicly denouncing the policies of the Emperor.

The photographs were taken by the poet's son Charles and Auguste Vacquerie, who went with the patriot to his Jersey refuge at Marine Terrace. The album was composed by Victor Hugo, and his wife, Adele Hugo, to be sent to Euphemie Barbier, whose initials are embossed in gold on the cover. She was the daughter of Dr. Barbier who, with his wife, was also at Jersey and lived in the Hugo home. It forms a touching document of the life of Victor Hugo during that tragic time. It also provides an extraordinary example of early photography as the aesthetic expression of a great personality.

Victor Hugo himself did not touch the equipment which was used in making the collection of pictures in this album, but he supervised the procedures and posed for a number of the photographs. Through the crude mechanics of the apparatus then available; through the chemistry of the early albumen and collodion processes, through the inexperienced work of Charles Hugo and August Vacquerie who were sensitive and obedient to his instructions, Hugo's poetic artistry is unmistakably revealed. One finds in these prints the same "light against dark," the same tragic humor and much the same type of feeling for landscape and figures which appear in the Victor Hugo paintings and drawings.

The talented Hugo family had led a life in France full of social and patriotic activity, as well as intensive work in the fields of art and literature. Victor Hugo was able to use much of his energy while in exile writing, but Charles Hugo and Vacquerie found time hanging heavily on their hands. Photography offered a diversion in which everyone could participate. Charles journeyed to Caen where he studied with experts, and returned with some knowledge of the albumen process. Vacquerie mastered the techniques involved in using collodion. They were delighted with the simplicity of these processes compared with the complexities of making daguerreotypes. Friends sent the necessary materials. The two "operators" became proficient in handling their tools, and Hugo's imagination leaped quickly to the potentialities of this new "sun painting." The album con-



**VICTOR HUGO, posing for one of the pictures in the album which contains a photographic record of his life as an exile on the Island of Jersey.**

tains several portraits of him, and a number of landscape studies for which he posed as the tragic exile on the rocks of the wild Jersey coast.

In the volume is the famous photograph of Hugo's hand, and another of the beautiful hand of his wife. There are many pictures of companions in exile and their children. These are done with dignity and tenderness, and the discerning eye perhaps can see in them the influence of the artist Hugo most admired, "O Durer, master mind, painter old and pensive!", whose work is reflected in the poet's own paintings.

A picture of the Hugo home at Marine Terrace is included, and a detail of the house shows Hugo at an upstairs window, with Charles at another, looking out over the greenhouse where Madame Hugo rested when the family returned from the afternoon walks. In a letter which accompanied the "souvenir"

Madame Hugo regrets that Vacquerie was unable to find a print of Madame Barbier to add to the collection. Apparently the filing problems of amateurs were the same a hundred years ago. Later Vacquerie used some of the photographs in making up a more pretentious volume called *Profiles et Grimaces*, which was sent to Madame Paul Meurice, the wife of one of Hugo's closest friends.

Victor Hugo is well known as a novelist, poet, essayist playwright and patriot. A few are aware of his ability as an artist. The pictures in this album reveal him as a versatile genius who intuitively grasped the potentialities of photography as an art expression. It is fortunate that these beautiful prints of the simple scenes around his home at Marine Terrace and the faces of those in exile dear to him, are preserved in this volume. The Victor Hugo Album is indeed a rare photographic treasure.

## ROGUE'S GALLERY

"The Chief Superintendent received a little scrap of paper containing a portrait; and handed it to the Inspector with the question 'do you know that?' 'Yes,' was the answer, 'I arrested him last night.'"

Thus the Rev. W. J. Read, writing in 1856, illustrated the idea that identification and arrest of criminals would be greatly facilitated by the use of photographs. All that was lacking, he said, was trained and willing personnel in the police departments.

By 1859, New York City had its Rogue's Gallery in operation. Four hundred and fifty ambrotypes were on orderly display, and written records preserved the details of each criminal's career. Should a desperado reform, his likeness was turned to the wall. One visitor observed that the most notable thing about the pictures was "the absence of the self-satisfied smirk and ghastly attempts to look handsome; the subjects here had something to think about besides their good looks."

There were, inconveniently, many "customers" who did not care to have their pictures taken. Before the perfection of instantaneous photography many pictures were rendered useless by characters who suddenly developed twitches. The only recourse, until the criminal class reconciled itself to its photographic fate, was to use surprise tactics. With improved techniques and materials available in the last quarter of the 19th century, the criminal's own weapons of surprise and deceit were turned against him. In Berlin the subject was lead into an office and seated in the focus of a concealed camera, ostensibly for a hearing, and never knew till afterwards that his likeness had been preserved.

By this time, crime detectors were disappointed in photography. Aside from the annoyance of subjects who wouldn't hold still, even technically good pictures were not always reliable in themselves. At one time it was suggested that hands or ears be photographed, instead of the head, as such features are less susceptible to change than those of the face.

And then there were getting to be too many criminals - or so it seemed as the prints piled up. The French police, who had accumulated an unwieldy lot of 100,000 criminal photos in the space of ten years, were experimenting with a new approach to criminal identification. In 1889 Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), while Chief of the Bureau of Identification in the Prefecture of Paris, introduced an anthropological system of class-

ification which relegated the single photograph to a mere accessory.

"If there is a commonplace in police circles it is the comparative uselessness of *photography* for the discovery of a fugitive criminal," Bertillon said in 1890. Photography, he maintained, was being incorrectly used in criminology. The collection lacked organization. It was obviously impossible to compare the pictures of the 100 persons arrested daily in Paris with each of the 100,000 other pictures. Furthermore, a detective with the photograph of some wanted person in his pocket frequently passed the very man he was looking for in the street without knowing it, if the picture was poor, or the man was in disguise, or the detective's memory faulty.

Therefore, it was felt that there had to be a means of indexing criminals by exact and unchanging measurements, such as the width and length of his head, the stretch of his arms, etc. Correlations derived from these measurements placed him in smaller and smaller categories until finally his record card had one fixed place in the police file drawers.

This did not mean that photography was discarded completely; on the contrary, the police camera was just coming of age. Front and profile photographs, attached to each record card, helped to confirm the identity of suspects. Good pictures were now needed to facilitate a system born out of the inadequacy of unclassified photographs.

In his treatise *La Photographie Judiciaire* (Paris, 1890) Bertillon laid down very strict rules for making police photographs. One full-face and one profile from the right side were taken. The scale of reduction of the image was one-seventh, the pose and camera technique were always the same, and the final prints were cut and mounted in prescribed manner on a detailed information card. Retouching was strictly forbidden. There was even a custom-built posing chair which automatically standardized the pose and scale of reduction.

Major R. W. MacClaghry, General Superintendent of Police of Chicago, brought the Bertillon system to America in 1887. It spread from one police department to another, and for many years was the standard method of criminal identification, until it was replaced by the fingerprint file.

Bertillon at first felt that even if each human being possessed a distinct and different set of fingerprints, "these designs taken by themselves do not present elements of variability sufficiently well-defined to serve as a basis of classification in a file of several hundred thousand cases." But by 1894 he had provided space on the record card for four fingerprints.

Today "mugging," as the police call it, has definitely changed from an aid to anthropometrical filing to a means of having on hand a good, natural likeness of a suspect to show victims of crime or to display publicly should the subject become a fugitive again.

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.

## PHOTOGRAPHING THE VOCAL CHORDS

by T. Anthony Caruso

**T**he Brainerd Collection of photographs, famous for depicting the Long Island scene in the '80's, housed at the Brooklyn Museum, includes a wooden container of twenty-two exposures, not identified until recently. This collection was presented to the Brooklyn Academy of Photography by Mrs. Brainerd on June 22, 1887. It was later given to the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences and in 1940 transferred to its present place. Further investigation of this collection disclosed historical information discovered in the field of early medical photography.

Mr. George Bradford Brainerd (1845-1887), a graduate engineer, was interested in photography since 1858. He and Dr. Thomas R. French were charter members of the Brooklyn Academy of Photography. Together they pioneered in collaborating to develop a method of photographing the vocal apparatus. The cradle of this partnership commenced when Mr. Brainerd, in 1882, suffered an acute infection of the larynx and was a patient of Dr. French, leading both men to charter this facet of photography.

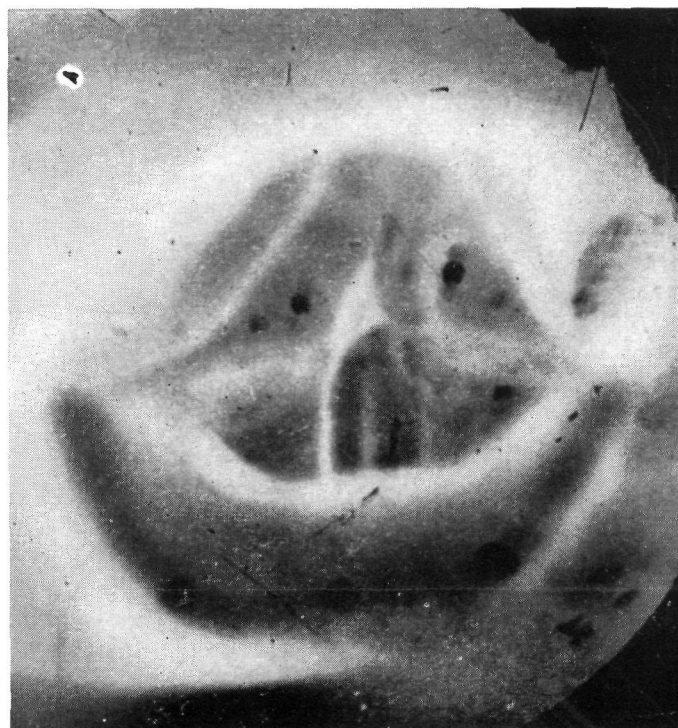
Little did they know that their search in perfecting a method for laryngeal photography would cover a period of two and one-half years. Their triumphant success was realized after they surmounted these major obstacles. The view camera, ordinarily used then, was too cumbersome for their purposes. They designed one, easily held by hand, with a drop shutter which produced instantaneous exposures. Natural or artificial illumination did not register the slightest exposure. Consequently, a "Sunlight Concentrator" was created which resulted in a "powerful light without any material heat." Its construction was of a hollow metal cone, having two double convex lenses at the narrow end. Since a large photograph was desired, the camera was placed close to the oral orifice. This led to condensation of vapors on the lens. Dr. French and Mr. Brainerd added a diaphragm in front of the lens to prevent fogging which also increased its depth of field.

Before any evidence resulting from these experiments was reached, 1500 exposures were made. Focusing was by means of a slightly convex mirror inserted in the fauces, and the dispersion of light rays reflecting from the convex mirror illuminated the entire larynx. In taking five exposures, the procedure and preparation consumed but ten minutes.

On August 15, 1884 Dr. French presented the results of this experiment before the International Medical Congress (Section of Laryngology) at Copenhagen. Dr. French stated that "The assistance rendered by Mr. Brainerd has been invaluable . . . and his interest in this work has been purely of a scientific character." Their object was not only to produce good photographs, but also to make available a feasible method for laryngoscopists to photograph their patients in their everyday practice.

A year earlier, 1883, Mr. Lennox Browne, of London, also attempted laryngeal photography. He abandoned the project because of the expensive and cumbersome nature of his equipment.

The discussion that followed Dr. French's reading at Copenhagen proved most gratifying. The Honorary President of



**Photograph showing the vocal apparatus, taken in 1884 by George Bradford Brainerd and Dr. Thomas R. French, included in the Brainerd Collection in the Brooklyn Museum.**

Laryngology, invited his colleagues to express their thanks to Dr. French and to ask him to continue his highly promising efforts in this direction. Dr. Morell Mackenzie of London, the President, in substance expressed "Admiration of the admirable series of photographs exhibited by Dr. French."

## HONG-KONG PHOTOGRAPHERS

by J. R. from *The British Journal of Photography*

**T**HE following is a condensation of J. R.'s article, and was made from a reprint which appeared in *The Photographer's Friend*, 1873.

...It may not be generally known that the Chinese in Hong-Kong and other parts of China have "taken kindly" to photography. In the Queen's road, the principal street of Victoria, there are a score of Chinese photographers, who do better work than is produced by the herd of obscure dabblers who cast discredit on the art in this country. There is something about the mystery of manipulation implied in its various processes which suits the Chinese mind.

There is one Chinaman in Hong-Kong, of the name of Afong, who has exquisite taste, and produces work that would enable him to make a living, even in London. Afong is, however, an exception to the general run of his countrymen, as their peculiar views of what constitutes art in a picture are quite opposed to our foreign prejudices and all that we have been taught to recognize as art.

I will now give a description of one of these celestial studios. ...There are a few ghastly pictures in black and white in a frame at the doorway, some of them having the cheerful expression of victims whose heads had been spiked to secure the necessary



degree of steadiness. There is a narrow staircase leading to the artist's quarter; now we must mind our limbs, as a false step would land us in the carpenter's shop below. The pungent smell first encountered is that of collodion; the other more noxious odors are native.

A gentleman with the tail and without his shirt who advances to meet us is A-hung, the operator. He immediately puts on his shirt or jacket, as we are foreigners. "Are you busy, A-hung? We want to have our portraits taken." "How fashion?" says A-hung. But I had better give his conversation in ordinary English as the pidgin is embarrassing.

"You foreigners always wish to be taken off the straight perpendicular. It is not so with our men of taste; they must look straight at the camera so as to show their friends at a distance that they have two eyes and two ears. They won't have shadows about their faces because, you see, shadow forms no part of the face. It isn't one's nose, or any other feature; therefore it should not be there. The camera, you see, is defective. It won't work up to that point, it won't recognize our laws of art." But then, I say to A-hung—"If you had no shadow the face would be a blank." "Oh no; our artists know better, for they give the features complete, without shadows." "No! look at these card picture of yours; they are not complete so far as the figure is concerned. Why not photograph the back and tail and stick it on the back of the card, so that your customers might leave no doubt in the minds of their friends as to their having a back and tail." "Very good suggestion," says A-hung; "I will propose it."

The glass house is a small den at the back of the waiting-room, lighted from above only. The glare is blinding and the heat is stifling. We keep our hats on, to avoid the risk of sunstroke, until we are seated at the posing irons, and spiked for a group. ...The minute of exposure seems to dilate into an age. Like drowning men, the incidents of our past lives are passing rapidly in review when we hear the click of the cap and rise to find that we have been photographed by a Chinaman. A-hung vanishes into the dark-room, and from a small window pronounces the plate "number one."

## COLLECTING OLD FILMS

ONE of the greatest enemies of accurate historical information is the familiar contempt with which the materials of any culture are often regarded both by those who create and those who enjoy a new phase of human activity. By now it is apparent that motion pictures are potentially a great art form. The film's swift growth from the experimental lab to its dominating position as the foremost medium of entertainment was compressed within a fantastically small number of years. It might have been possible to preserve and appraise every single film which made significant progress in the direction of evolving an art form out of the peepshow novelties.

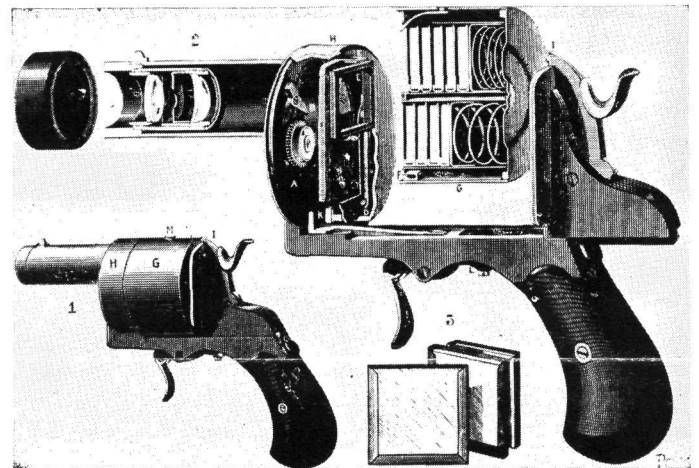
But indifference and outright enmity combined to make us almost miss the first such chance in all history. Important films had already begun to disappear utterly before action was finally taken. Letters and documents along with original negatives or sole surviving prints were, and are still being, deliberately destroyed on one hand, while those who are impelled by the historical point of view struggle to stay not too far behind in the unequal race.

Since 1936 the odds have been slightly improved for history—thanks largely to the zeal of Iris Barry, which along with the success of the Museum of Modern Art's Film Library, brought inspiration to others. Now England, France, Italy, Denmark, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland each have at least one large archive devoted to keeping important films available for study and appreciation. George Eastman House, with its Henry Strong Collection of Historical Motion Pictures has also joined the battle.

Of course this tiny number of institutions with their nets out for the thousands of elusive films, can hope at best to catch but a few of them and so save them from sinking without a trace in the ocean of perils that plague old nitrate prints.

Every re-inforcement is needed to cope with the problem in any way that is going to provide even the basic requirements of the future.

Preserving all the significant films and film data extant is just a minimum need for the proper understanding of the motion picture which means more in the lives of many people than literature, painting or music. Such a task is too great for any one institution or for any one country.



**PISTOL CAMERA** made in Paris by Enjalbert, 1886. The lens, fitted inside the barrel, is a doublet with fixed diaphragm. Ten glass plates, 3-8 inches square, are contained in revolving cylinder. Shutter is released when trigger is pulled; a fresh plate is brought into position by turning cylinder. Two models of this novel camera are in the George Eastman House.