

# Hunting Human Nature with a Camera

## A Woman Who Has Succeeded in Capturing Fleeting Human Expression

**W** O CATCH the image of a fleeting human emotion — to put a human thought upon canvas—is the dream of all painters, constantly pursued, seldom realized. The camera has made more nearly possible the expression of human emotions, but the success of the search can never be a matter of mechanics.

The search for a moment's expression must be made by a reader of human nature who knows the evasive quarry sought. It must be a matter of the close study of individuality, of fancies and of shadings of character.

Arm the hunter for human nature with a camera and a knowledge of the mechanics of photography and a part of the task of transferring thought to paper has been accomplished. Equip the same hunter also with the gift for the study of expression and there is going to be a result from the hunt.

Few persons are so equipped. The possession of the scientific knowledge and the capacity for reading expression are rarely combined. The maker of the photographs reproduced on this page appears to have been doubly endowed.

**S**ARA F. T. PRICE makes portraits that speak to you. She does her interesting work in her own home in Mount Airy, a suburb of Philadelphia. She has fitted up a studio there that bears little resemblance to the ateliers of the professional photographers of the cities.

It is a "homey" sort of place, a library joined with a little alcove room, the two rooms separated by an archway. The little alcove room is the domain of the sitter. The hunt for human nature is made with a big camera, from the library side of the arch between the two apartments.

There isn't even a skylight. The light that serves the photographer's purpose comes in through a big colonial window, and is controlled by curtains.

Mrs. Price makes all sorts of portraits, but her cleverest work is done with children as her subjects. The juvenile sitter is set at ease with a pleasing toy or an enticing cake, and a confidential chat with the artist begins. The big camera is placed in position, and when, in the conversation, the interesting point is reached, "snap" goes the shutter, and one of the happiest expressions of childhood has been put upon film.

The photographer is especially equipped for her work, because she has studied expressions from the standpoint of one who has to understand them. She was for years engaged in giving readings and character recitations. What she earlier learned to show she now has the faculty of reading when she sees it in others.

### "SOMETHING DIFFERENT"

"I strive to get something different when I make a portrait," says Mrs. Price. "I think when I get something different that is good that I have done something worth while. I try to find a phase of character in my subject, and then I try to get it on the plate."

"That's the whole story, and I suppose that is the reason why relatives and friends of my subjects say that my pictures are 'speaking' likenesses."

"I began to make photographs four years ago without any idea of ever becoming a photographer. I was going on a holiday outing and I saw a little camera in a window, marked down to 80 cents. I bought it. I made some snapshots that people said were good."

"Here is the first. It was a long time before I made another quite so good."

"It was a hard road to travel to reach the point where I was convinced that I could make portraits that were worth the name. After the first successful snapshots I acquired a real camera. I was surprised to find that I made a lot of plates that had nothing on them. I got

over that difficulty, only to find that the images I did get were far from being satisfactory. This represents one of the stages."

Here Mrs. Price showed one of those amateur photographs everybody has seen. It was an ambitious attempt at artistic lighting. It showed one side of the sitter's face dead white and the other side smothered in the blackness of eternal night.

"But just such work as that is what made it possible for me to learn to do things right. Every mistake showed me that there must be a way to do the same thing successfully, and that is what I aimed to do."



A Careful Study of Expression.



Mrs. Price's First Photograph, Made with an 80-Cent Camera.



Jack's Study of Sturdy Boyhood



The First Portrait that Encouraged the Artist.



Mrs. Sara F. T. Price. Photo by W. T. Price.

"It took nearly two years, and during that time I was as well equipped with mechanical appliances as I am today. I had the best of cameras and lenses, but I did not have experience. When I got so that I could make a portrait that looked right I began to have hope. This is the picture that convinced me that I could make portraits."

Here the photographer showed the portrait of a young girl which would reflect credit upon her work as a photographer, even today.

"That decided me. I tried to make other portraits equally good, and I succeeded. Then a friend who saw my earlier work asked me to make a portrait of a child. That was my first professional order. Then I went into photography as a business and made this studio in my home. I have worked two years as a professional, and have had hundreds of sittings. I have never violated my rule of giving to every portrait its own individuality. I have not lost the interest of the amateur, and I don't believe that I ever shall be able to do my work mechanically. I find something new in every subject. I look for it, and there are few faces that do not give the photographer something different that will stand out in a good photograph."

"I try to make the sitter feel at home. I 'visit with' my callers for a while. I talk to them and learn from a brief study of each face its greatest portrait possibilities. Then I begin to work and work quickly. I try to avoid tire-

Want You Come and Play with Me?



some sittings in dozens of positions. Of course, I make photographs in the old album poses, if my customers desire them, but I never do if I am left to do what I like, and generally the people like best what I like best.

"To work with children is my chief delight. I am able to get their confidence. I play games with them. We have all sorts of make-believe parties, and when we are on the right sort of terms I begin my work, and I get pictures that parents approve of. The picture of the little girl with a cake I think is particularly good. The caption is literal. She coyly asked me if I would have a piece of her cake, and I was ready for the fleeting expression. The picture of the child with the toys was equally fortunate. He was really at play when it was made. His expression tells what pleasure he was experiencing."

### GOOD FIELD FOR WOMEN

"Do I think women make good photographers? Indeed, I do. They are patient enough to study their subjects, and that means a prospect of success with difficult sitters. But I've nothing against the men. Much of what I know I owe to the friendly interest of professional photographers who were willing to correct my errors and suggest improvements in my work. They have aided me unselfishly, and to them I owe a great deal of my success."

"I believe that there is a field for women in photography. Those who have patience and talent will occupy it. They will not interfere with the men who are in the work. Readers of the monthly magazines see that the number of women furnishing photographs worthy of high-class reproduction is increasing all the time. Woman should, and undoubtedly will, have her success in the field of child-portraiture, but the temperament of the woman who attempts this work must be suited to the task."

Mrs. Price's experiments, it must be said, have not been along the lines of most of the amateurs who have become professional photographers. Her outfit has been of the professional type from the day of discarding the 80-cent camera with which she began her work. She has lost sight of no department of her business. She has studied the mechanical and scientific sides of it thoroughly, all with a view to making them do all they can to bring out the artistic side which she has been so successful in presenting. She is convinced that mechanical equipment has much to do with insuring the right sort of results. She develops her own negatives and prints her own pictures. She is prepared to do this because her plant is so conveniently arranged and perfectly equipped as to guarantee perfect work in all processes.



Want You Have a Piece of My Cake?



The First Portrait for Which the Artist was Paid.