

PHOTOGRAPHY FOR THE BEGINNER

THE DARK ROOM

By L. W. BROWNELL

MUCH of the success of a photograph depends upon how the negative is treated in the dark room, and therefore it is, while not absolutely necessary, still very essential that the dark room should be properly made and conveniently equipped.

In the first place, this room need not be large. Four feet square is plenty of space, but another foot added will make it a little more roomy. My advice is not to attempt to use the bath-room or some closet for a dark room. These places are never as convenient as they might be and, besides, the operation is bound to be more or less injurious to the bath-tub or wash-bowl. It is much better to build a room in some out-of-the-way corner, such as the garret or cellar. The latter place is the better, especially if it contains a furnace, for it is apt to be cool in summer and correspondingly warm and comfortable in winter, and the temperature of your dark room is a great consideration.

It should be built of about one-inch planks and, as I have said, four or five feet square, with a door that will shut tightly, on one side. The boards should be dove-tailed, so that no particle of white light can come through any crack. On one side, at a height of about three feet from the floor, should be cut a hole about one foot square, which should be covered with a piece of ruby glass, and a shade that can be pulled down to shut out all light when necessary, should be hung over this, inside.

Just underneath this window should be placed the developing shelf. It should extend the full width of the room, and if another one should be placed beneath it to hold the hypo trays it would be a great convenience and obviate all chances of splashing hypo into the developer. It is a great convenience to have running water in the dark room, and it would be very inexpensive to have a plumber run a pipe to it and put up a small sink at one end of the developing bench. The convenience of it would fully compensate for the outlay.

On the right-hand side of the room should be built two shelves, one for loading and unloading the plate-holders and the other for holding the empty plate-holders, boxes of plates and any other paraphernalia which it is found necessary to take into the dark room.

On the left-hand side two more shelves should be placed, one for holding the developers and the other the developing trays. It is well to have plenty of shelf room, so that things may not be crowded, and it is also well to have one place for each thing and always keep it in that place, for it is often necessary to work quickly and the success of a picture sometimes depends upon one's being able to place his hands upon a bottle or other object

without taking his eyes from the plate he is developing.

The source of light should come from outside the window, for if gas or a lamp is used inside it would quickly over-heat the small space of the dark room. Of course, electric light is the best and most convenient, and if the house is wired for electricity, a wire can be run to the dark room and a bulb hung outside the window at almost no cost. A lamp, however, placed on a small shelf outside the window, will answer all purposed.

If ruby glass for this window is not easily obtainable, then common window glass covered with three or four thicknesses of orange postoffice paper will answer. This, however, is more opaque than the ruby glass and consequently does not admit as much light with the same amount of safety. The curtains over the window should be made of some dark material that will shut out all light, for it is sometimes almost absolutely necessary to work in the dark.

This dark room should always be kept clean and free from dust, for in photography cleanliness counts far more than godliness, for godliness will not make a picture, while cleanliness will oft times aid materially in doing so. Therefore, as I say, the room should be kept as clean as possible; the shelves frequently dusted, especially the ones used for changing plates, and one should always be careful not to splash or spill his developer or hypo any more than he can avoid. Of course there are careless, sloppy workers in this as well as any other profession, but the careless worker is never the one who obtains the best results.

A towel should always hang in the dark room, on which to wipe the hands, and this should be made of some cheap material, for the chemicals used in photography all stain more or less badly, and a towel soon loses all semblance of whiteness.

The door of this room should be weather-stripped, in order to preclude any possibility of light coming through the cracks, and it is always a good idea to have it fitted with a lock and key, in order to keep inquisitive people from annoying you while you are at work and from upsetting your arrangement of things when you are away.

This describes a dark room that can be built at little cost, but which is absolutely convenient and complete.

It may be well to add that no plate will stand too strong a light, even though that light may be red or orange, without becoming fogged. Much of the ruby glass that is sold is very poor for photographic work, and it is always a wise precaution to test the glass with a spectroscope before using it, to be certain that the white ray is entirely eliminated.