

LIFE MODEL STUDIES.

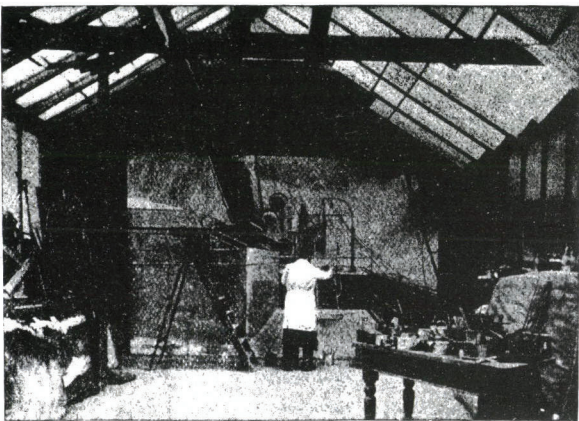
I.—A peep behind some scenes.



By Willie Anderson.

A WONDERFUL man is James Bamforth, of Holmfirth; a man who frankly admits that his success in life depends entirely upon his powers of deception. He is truly a man of many parts, for besides being, in actual life, a scene-painter, stage-carpenter, stage-manager, photographer, plumber, glazier and gasfitter, and a host of other trades too varied to specify, he poses in his own creations in rôles which range from bishop to congregation, from magistrate to mendicant, from temperance orator to drunken loafer.

It is unnecessary to say that Mr. Bamforth's specialty in photography is the creation of life-model illustrations to poems and stories, for exhibition as lantern-slides. In this business he has been engaged for sixteen years, and there is probably no lantern-slide catalogue in the English language which does not include some of his productions, as his work is very largely for "the trade," and he has a practical monopoly of this class of work. The premises in which the business is conducted are curious in the extreme, consisting as they do, of a series of successive studios and workshops perched at various points on a precipitous slope between the house, which overlooks the valley and the village of Holmfirth, and the first studio, which is well down toward the valley. This slope, almost impossible of cultivation as a field,



JAMES BAMFORTH AT WORK.

has been banked, terraced, and dotted with flights of steps, fountains, shady walks, leafy dells and pleasant summer-houses, in a variety that might be thought impossible in such a space. Thus, within a few yards of the studios, can be found almost infinite changes of setting for "life models" in rural life. And yet, convenient as are these surroundings, it is surprising to us, after looking through many hundreds of the slides, to see how comparatively little these "real" accessories are used. The fact is, that the controllable lighting of the studio is so very convenient for the figures, that Mr. Bamforth finds his use of open-air surroundings steadily decreasing.

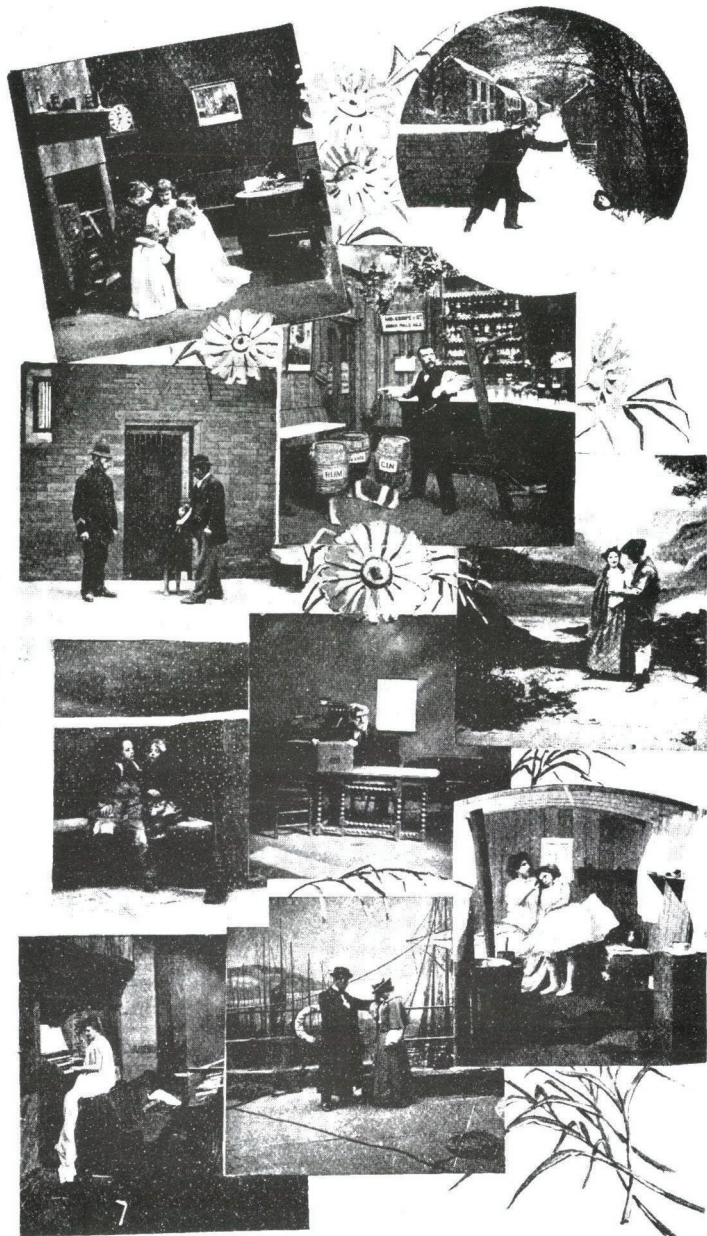
The life-model studio is a room of 31 ft. by 18 ft., with a scene-dock and a property-room at each end; and with roof-light and side-light at both sides. Two new rooms of the same size are to be built this year, but even when they are completed, it is probable that the properties will soon be—as they are at present—overflowing all over the place. The need for almost every utensil, apparatus and tool, of almost every trade and calling, and the absolute necessity of frequent variety of furniture, costume, carpet, wall-paper, pictures, crockery, etc., makes the collection of sixteen years a most fearful and wonderful affair. In one of the slide-rooms are two or three "grandfather" clocks, waiting to be sold and replaced, because they have appeared so often; and everywhere, in the studios and work-rooms, in the garden, in special sheds and houses, the "props" are in evidence.

The backgrounds are sometimes painted flats, but more often they consist of flats combined with a good deal of built-up structure. The flats are 14 ft. by 10 ft., on stretchers (both sides used), and are painted by Mr. Bamforth, from all sorts of originals—photograms, sketches, book-illustrations—as well as from original designs. Generally they are painted out after being used for a few subjects only, and sometimes after serving as the original for only one slide. Of backgrounds that can be used in various stories, however, a stock of at least a hundred is kept. As the year's output of new life-model subjects averages about six hundred, and as the season of work is from early in April to early in September, it can easily be believed that a great amount of system and planning is necessary, as well as hard work, by both principal and staff. Mr. Bamforth spends the winter planning and designing subjects, when his assistants are all busy as can be producing and supplying the slides; but, in spite of all possible provision, the detail work and anxiety during the operating season are so great, that, during several years, Mr. Bamforth has broken down completely by September, and the work has concluded simply from inability to undertake more for awhile.

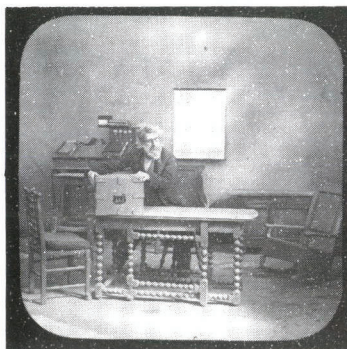
The subjects chosen for illustration are very varied—pathetic, dramatic or humorous. In some cases the poems or stories are written specially for illustration (Mr. Bamforth holds twenty-six such copyrights), but generally the illustrations are to well-known poems or tales. Usually the publishers give all facilities for the work, as they find the lantern lectures useful in popularising their books, but there has been one case in which a firm alleged that such illustration was an infringement of their copyright, and threatened legal action. The case was never brought into court, and the firm now aids the sale of the slides, but the case would have raised some very interesting points. Some publishers are so far anxious for the lantern-slide publicity, that they send copies of all books that are at all suitable for illustration, and in some cases, where Mr. Bamforth has not cared to take the risk, have commissioned him to produce illustrative sets at their risk and cost.

The studies reproduced herewith need little explanation. Next month it may be possible to give some peeps into the interesting subject of finding the models.

The Photogram, February 1899



Collection: David Robinson



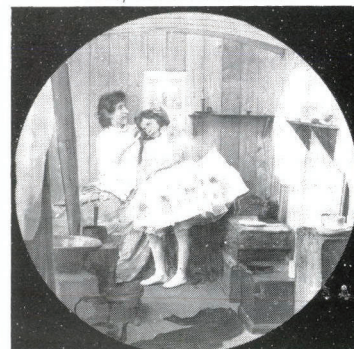
Dimes and Dollars



Matt Stubb's Dream

The Anchor's weighed

A Peep Behind the Scenes





LIFE MODEL STUDIES.

No. II.—The Models Themselves.

IT SEEMS scarcely possible, but it is nevertheless a fact, that the sitters for the varied scenes of lantern-slide life can all be drawn from the inhabitants of a small West Yorkshire manufacturing town, almost a village. To most genre photographers the task of making pictures from such models would seem hopeless, yet a great deal of James Bamforth's success depends upon his skill in adapting himself to untrained material. The very personality of his sitters forced him to choose homely stories as his themes, and the very nature of the stories with the unaffected naturalness of the figures in the illustrations has endeared his life-model sets to millions of children and of "the masses." These critics are strong realists with no great amount of "art" prejudice, hence they at once recognise a "real" policeman, and like him much better than the policeman of the opera stage or the artist's studio.



By James Bamforth

The fact that the models are untrained and therefore can not pose themselves according to instruction, renders it necessary to make their surroundings so real that they pose with scarce a suggestion. An incidental advantage, too, is that in a little town like Holmfirth, where everybody knows everybody else, the neighbors are always pleased to help their only photographer; they take a real interest in their work and a little reciprocity saves quite a sum that would be spent if professional models had to be hired.

It is true that the particular person needed cannot always be found, and sometimes Mr. Bamforth has kept a sketch-idea waiting a few years until a sitter who looked the part has happened to move into the district. People are not always posed in their own natural surroundings—for instance, though one "Village Blacksmith" set has a real blacksmith for the central figure, a grocer posed for another set of the same title—but in most cases the surroundings are perfectly natural.

In some cases the sitters are very familiar with their surroundings, as when a grocer's shop is in question. In such case, as soon as the shop interior with its counter and shelving has been erected in the studio, a local grocer will lend a set of scales, flour scoops, etc., stock to fill the shelves, and himself or his assistants for models, and at the end of the day all hands feel that they have had quite a holiday.

When a school, a tea-party or a temperance-meeting is needed, a line to the local schoolmaster will ensure a call for volunteers when the school is dismissed, and as the photographer takes care to be popular with the children, there is no difficulty in obtaining any desired number. A public-house interior is, perhaps, the easiest possible scene to fill with realistic sitters, for though Holmfirth is a busy little town there are always some idlers in the nearest "pub," and they know that whatever else in the studio may be a fraud the beer is real. These good folk see no possible objection to posing as a room-full of "awful examples" for a temperance reading; and, curiously enough, there are some of the neighbors, harmless enough in real life, who make beautiful models as "leading drunkards," wife-beaters, etc., and who are quite willing to oblige by doing so. Portraits of two of these are reproduced.



By James Bamforth

One of the most carefully elaborated of the minor pieces is "The Lost Chord," one scene of which is reproduced in the mosaic last month. The principal figure (the lady at the organ) is a young local musician, though she "makes up" better than many a professional model. Policemen can always be borrowed, in their own uniforms "by arrangement," but real soldiers and firemen are not so easily obtainable in Holmfirth, so their places are supplied by volunteers and amateur firemen, who wear uniforms belonging to Mr. Bamforth's stock.

Although most of the work is done in the studio or in the terraced garden described last month there are some scenes which can be more satisfactorily arranged in the open, as, for instance, the railway-station scenes on the departure or the return of a soldier son or a sailor lover.

Fortunately, the railway officials are always willing (subject to the calls of duty) to place a train in any position and to give all possible facilities for the weeping or the rejoicing crowd.

Another class of subject which is particularly popular with the "sitters" is a country ramble or a picnic party, into which the children enter with a whole-souled enthusiasm, tempered with a reasonable obedience to instructions. As a result, the scenes including crowds are amongst the most real as well as the most animated of Mr. Bamforth's series; and this is particularly the case where the crowd is supposed to be moved to deep emotion, whether it be joy, sorrow, indignation or anger. Good examples of the anger of crowds may be seen amongst the subjects reproduced this month and last.

The subject is an interesting one, and the number of examples of simple effective posing and grouping by these untrained models is almost inexhaustible, but what has been written is probably sufficient to suggest many possibilities to amateurs of the "genre," who often fear to attempt because they have no access to "trained models." It will also serve to introduce to some few new admirers the ingenious work and the wonderfully varied subjects of James Bamforth's life-model collection of lantern-entertainments.

The Photogram, March 1899



Farmer Gibson's Harvest Thanksgiving



Out on the Deep



Fireman's Little Maid



Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep



When the heart is young

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