

How I Came to Photograph Clouds. By Alfred Stieglitz.

What follows was written with no idea of publication. It is from a letter, a private letter, one of those wonderful epistles which it is the privilege of his friends to get now and again from Steiglitz—dashed off in the spirit of the moment, never corrected, not even re-read by their author. We were shown the letter; and we print from it these extracts, with its writer's permission, telling just how the cloud photographs, which were shown at a recent exhibition of his work in New York, came to be made.—Ed.

AS for the cloud series perhaps it will interest you how that came about.

Last summer when manuscripts were sent in by the various contributors for the issue of the publication, "M.S.S." devoted to photography, and its æsthetic significance, Waldo Frank—one of America's young literary lights, author of "Our America," etc.—wrote that he believed the secret power in my photography was due to the power of hypnotism I had over my sitters, etc.

I was amazed when I read the statement. I wondered what he had to say about the street scenes—the trees, interiors—and other subjects, the photographs of which he had admired so much: or whether he felt they too were due to my powers of hypnotism. Certainly a lax statement coming from one professing himself profound and fair thinking, and interested in enlightening.

It happened that the same morning in which I read this contribution my brother-in-law (lawyer and musician) out of the clear sky announced to me that he couldn't understand how one as supposedly musical as I could have given up entirely playing the piano. I looked at him and smiled—and I thought: even he does not seem to understand. He plays the violin. The violin takes up no space: the piano does. The piano needs looking after by a professional, etc. I simply couldn't afford a piano, even when I was supposedly rich. It was not merely a question of money.

Thirty-five or more years ago I spent a few days in Murren (Switzerland), and I was experimenting with ortho plates. Clouds and their relationship to the rest of the world, and clouds for themselves, interested me, and clouds which were most difficult to photograph—nearly impossible. Ever since then clouds have been in my mind most powerfully at times, and I always knew I'd follow up the experiment made over 35 years ago. I always watched clouds. Studied them. Had unusual opportunities up here on this hillside. What Frank had said annoyed me: what my brother-in-law said also annoyed me. I was in the midst of my summer's photographing, trying to add to my knowledge, to the work I had done. Always evolving—always going more and more deeply into life—into photography.

My mother was dying. Our estate was going to pieces. The old horse of 37 was being kept alive by the 70-year-old coachman. I, full of the feeling of to-day: all about me disintegration—slow but sure: dying chestnut trees—all the chestnuts in this country have been dying for years: the pines doomed too—diseased: I, poor, but at work: the world in a great mess: the human being a queer animal—not as dignified as our giant chestnut tree on the hill.

So I made up my mind I'd answer Mr. Frank and my brother-in-law. I'd finally do something I had in mind for years. I'd make a series of cloud pictures. I

told Miss O'Keeffe of my ideas. I wanted to photograph clouds to find out what I had learned in 40 years about photography. Through clouds to put down my philosophy of life—to show that my photographs were not due to subject matter—not to special trees, or faces, or interiors, to special privileges, clouds were there for everyone—no tax as yet on them—free.

So I began to work with the clouds—and it was great excitement—daily for weeks. Every time I developed I was so wrought up, always believing I had nearly gotten what I was after—but had failed. A most tantalising sequence of days and weeks. I knew exactly what I was after. I had told Miss O'Keeffe I wanted a series of photographs which when seen by Ernest Bloch (the great composer) he would exclaim: Music! music! Man, why that is music! How did you ever do that? And he would point to violins, and flutes, and obes, and brass, full of enthusiasm, and would say he'd have to write a symphony called "Clouds." Not like Debussy's but *much, much more*.

And when finally I had my series of ten photographs printed, and Bloch saw them—what I said I wanted to happen happened *verbatim*.

Straight photographs, all gaslight paper, except one palladiotype. All in the power of every photographer of all time, and I satisfied I had learnt something during the 40 years. It's 40 years this year that I began in Berlin with Vogel.

Now if the cloud series are due to my powers of hypotism I plead "Guilty." Only some "Pictorial photographers" when they came to the exhibition seemed totally blind to the cloud pictures. My photographs look like photographs—and in their eyes they therefore can't be art. As if they had the slightest idea of art or photography—or any idea of life. My aim is increasingly to make my photographs look so much like photographs that unless one has *eyes* and *sees*, they won't be seen—and still everyone will never forget them having once looked at them. I wonder if that is clear.

Alpine Photographs.

THE Alpine Sports Exhibition Photographic Competition, which is being held by the Rheims Cathedral Fund in aid of the restoration of Rheims Cathedral, will remain open until October 1st. Mounted but not framed photographs of snow sports and Alpine scenery can be sent to the Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Aubrey Le Blond, 39, St. James Street, London, S.W.1, in batches of a dozen or fewer, for an inclusive fee of 5s.

Mrs. Le Blond, whose own Alpine photographs are so well known, writes us that she has received many beautiful exhibits, but still has space in which to display more.

The Alpine Club Gallery at Mill Street, Conduit Street, W.1, will house the exhibition, which will be open daily from October 23rd to November 3rd.