

**A POOR MAN'S PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE
GREAT PYRAMID IN THE YEAR 1865;
COMPARED WITH THAT OF THE
ORDINANCE SURVEY ESTABLISHMENT,
SUBSIDIZED BY LONDON WEALTH**

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A poor man's photography at the Great pyramid in the year 1865; compared with that of the Ordinance survey establishment, subsidized by London wealth by C. Piazza Smyth

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C. PIAZZI SMYTH

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A POOR MAN'S PHOTOGRAPHY

AT THE

GREAT PYRAMID

IN THE YEAR 1865;

COMPARED WITH THAT OF THE ORDNANCE
SURVEY ESTABLISHMENT,

SUBSIDIZED BY LONDON WEALTH,

AND

UNDER THE ORDERS OF

COL. SIR HENRY JAMES, R.E., F.R.S.,

DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE ORDNANCE SURVEY,

AT THE SAME PLACE FOUR YEARS AFTERWARDS:

A Discourse delivered before the Edinburgh Photographic Society

on December 1st, 1869;



BY

PROFESSOR C. PIAZZI SMYTH, F.R.S.S., L. & E.,

ASTRONOMER ROYAL FOR SCOTLAND.

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DEDICATED TO THE
Edinburgh Photographic Society,
WHOSE MEMBERS HAVE SHOWN SO WARM-HEARTED
AN INTEREST
IN THE SUBJECT SET FORTH IN THIS DISCOURSE,
AS GREATLY TO HAVE ENCOURAGED,
UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES OF PUBLIC ADVERSITY,
THEIR FAITHFUL SERVANT,
AND
HON. FELLOW,

C. Piazza Smyth.

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P R E F A C E.

AFTER having acceded to request, and printed, as follows, my recent discourse before the Edinburgh Photographic Society in a somewhat revised and extended form, I could not but recognise with more or less of dismay, that although my own ideas of my photographs at the Great Pyramid in 1865 have been from the first, that they were lamentably faulty, imperfect, and unequal—causing me to yearn, though in vain, through each succeeding year, for any opening whereby I might try to replace them with some better attempts—yet in this discourse I have been insensibly led on by the argument to be speaking almost all the time as it were in defence of these very photographs, or as though I thought much more highly of them than I really do.

Yet I trust that the impartial and intelligent reader will easily perceive that my private and theoretic ideal of excellence is not confined to the chance stage which I may have reached in practice several years ago, under rather forbidding circumstances; and if I have so often to allude to certain features of these Egyptian photographs as rather creditable and even worthy of note, it is only for the minute particulars of Pyramid construction which they contain, and as contrasted therein with the more recent photographs, or photozincographs, of a rich

PREFACE.

and powerful coalition in or near London—a coalition which has tried unscrupulously to consign all my Pyramid reproductions to utter obloquy, if not oblivion; and yet whose own works at the same place, in spite of wealth, power, numbers, and more recent opportunities, have not set forth the hundredth part of the exact Pyramid particulars that mine have done; nor have they pointed to any other authorities where the said important data may be procured. They have, therefore, not only attempted virtually to destroy the only known photographic record of certain excellences of primeval workmanship; but, as I shall presently show, what little the coalition has achieved with their own photozincographs, has been carried out in a manner purposely to throw the slur of their own coarseness or failings on the ancient building itself and the august mind under which it was reared.

To set forth, therefore, before the public what are the real powers for accuracy still existing in that grandest of all Primeval Monuments, the absolutely *unique* Great Pyramid—and in so far to rescue its present-day descriptions and modern character from the scientific disgrace just now sought to be inflicted upon it; as well as to demonstrate the service that good and faithful photography in the future may be of there—this is the chief object of the following pages.

C. PIAZZI SMYTH.

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ESTABLISHMENT SUBSIDIZED BY LONDON WEALTH,
UNDER THE ORDERS OF COL. SIR HENRY JAMES,
R.E., F.R.S., DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE ORDNANCE SURVEY,
AT THE SAME PLACE FOUR YEARS AFTERWARDS;
A Discourse before the Edinburgh Photographic Society, Dec. 1, 1869.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN,

ALAS! how seldom does it happen that a scientific man can set to work at his most favourite and even important subject of research with all the instruments of observation and apparatus of record that his intellect imagines or his heart desires!

At all events, in original inquiries, in the pure walks of science for its own sake alone, the usual question with each ordinary private scientist is *not* "What is the most powerful machine that can be brought to bear on some difficulty in knowledge or obstinate mystery in nature?" but, "What is the cheapest possible method by which any sufficient result may haply be obtained?" And if this be the prevailing form of the apparatus question at present, in general branches of practical science, much more must it rule in the particular branch of *photography*, which, according to its scale, eats off its head in silver baths; and much more entirely must it dominate there when that photography is being exercised during travel in foreign parts. Yet every traveller in strange lands ought to photograph; and the vital problem, therefore, is, "How shall such traveller, if a poor man, accomplish it?"

Now pray do not fancy that because the man is poor his work must, therefore, be necessarily bad, and his experiences uninteresting; for some of these same poor men are precisely the most am-

bitious souls after excellence in all society. Urged, too, by their very poverty, they often strike out useful inventions; and though, if measured by a mere material foot rule, their instrumental apparatus may too often appear pitifully small, by exactly so much has it more promise of entering into, and passing through, the eye of the needle of nature than the ponderous coaches of the rich.

Many other poor men before me have already described to this Society, and many others after me will also, I trust, continue to describe, how they have accomplished one difficulty or another in photography, despite slender means and forbidding circumstances; and I therefore only appear now as one of a large and acknowledged band of workers, neither the first nor by any means the most worthy, but simply as one under a very peculiar pressure, *i.e.*, as one compelled by a sudden combination of rich, hasty, and unscrupulous opponents, either to speak out on the instant before the world, or to let a favourite subject of study, during several earnestly-spent years, disappear at once and for ever beneath the heap of erroneous assertions, disparaging treatment, and *bad* photography which these opponents have contemptuously cast upon it.

What, then, can a poor man, and one who believes in the truth of his subject and goodness of his cause, choose to do in such a case than make a stand and speak out?

But will the Society care to hear what he has to say? That will doubtless depend in part on the intensity of the difficulties struggled with, and the degree of success with which they may in part have been overcome. These points, therefore, I will first discuss, treating them in and for themselves alone; and then, if you still approve, we will apply the final test, or that of comparison with the works of the opposite party.

HOW THE POOR MAN PHOTOGRAPHED IN EGYPT IN 1865.

When I went to Egypt just five years ago, I went—though accompanied, encouraged, and assisted by my constant helper, the partner of all my joys and sorrows—yet I went—I may say generally, alone, a private individual and a poor man. I only, in this