PHOTOGRAPHY as an emotional art is one of the interesting discoveries that the twentieth century has forced upon us, for the Secession photographers here in America have made the phrase “mechanical process,” as applied to the camera, show ignorance in the critic rather than limitation of the instrument. It is now acknowledged that Secession photography is in its way strongly creative, inasmuch as it reproduces conditions mellowed by the imagination and saturated with the quality of the artist, just as a Chase portrait is a creation, or a Tryon landscape is a work of individuality. Gertrude Käsebier, who is one of the original secessionists from conventional methods of photography, distinctly belongs to this class of emotional artists, because, in every photograph which she takes, she is expressing her own temperament and life as it has reached her through her imagination and through her growing understanding of humanity.

Creative art demands that the artist should know life, either by experience or by inspiration, and this knowledge of life must develop a profound sympathy with humanity. The technical method of expression may be whatever the artist wishes, whatever seems the simplest process. There is not a variety of creative arts; there is imagination and impulse to create and a variety of methods. The past few years have proved that photography is one of these methods, and Mrs. Käsebier has done much to establish this method on a basis with the older and more significant arts. She began doing this by living, in a largely comprehensive way, life as it came to her; by having the temperament that felt all its joys and its agonies; that was attuned to the utmost subtilty and resented equally all banality. Later was born in her the great need of expressing what had been experienced; then technique was acquired and the creative impulse found its channel. That this channel proved to be the camera rather than the palette or a musical instrument or a bit of wax, did not change the quality of the imagination which moved through it. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Käsebier first painted portraits, but felt it to be for her talent a less significant medium than photography and has actually
From a Photograph by Gertrude Käsebier.

"REAL MOTHERHOOD." FROM THE SERIES OF MOTHERHOOD PICTURES.
From a Photograph by Gertrude Käsebier.

"THE MANGER," FROM THE SERIES OF MOTHERHOOD PICTURES.
From a Photograph by Gertrude Käsebier.

"BLESSÉD ART THOU AMONG WOMEN,"
FROM THE SERIES OF MOTHERHOOD PICTURES.
From a Photograph by Gertrude Käsebier.

"THE HERITAGE OF MOTHERHOOD," FROM THE SERIES OF MOTHERHOOD PICTURES.
From a Photograph by Gertrude Käsebier.

STANFORD WHITE. "THE MAN OF FUNDAMENTAL KINDNESS AND GREAT ACHIEVEMENT."
From a Photograph by Gertrude Käsebier.

AN INDIAN PORTRAIT.
PHOTOGRAPHY AN EMOTIONAL ART

done greater work with her camera than she ever did with her brush. She lived, and then studied, and then achieved, which is the natural process for the development of creative art, and of these three stages of growth the method of expression is the least significant. Possibly the greatest joy for an artist is to be found where the method is more or less undeveloped, where it can be enlarged, and where something of creation goes into the mechanical side of expression. It would seem that there was but little further opportunity for variation in painting or music, although in recent years Monet has enlarged our field in one direction and Richard Strauss in another; but the people who have dealt with the camera during the last few years have all but originated a new method of expression. It is an interesting experience in life to an artist when the medium and the art have grown side by side.

Yet the medium ever remains but a necessary detail which should never be confused with art itself; for art must come out of nature. And the price exacted from life for admitting workers into an intimacy is that they express her vividly, emotionally, heart-breakingly, perhaps, but truly at any cost. Thus is art created. To be an artist is to suffer through nature, and to think suffering a little price for great emotional opportunity. Each man makes good according to his own method. He expresses his interest in life, in what he has experienced, in the way which best suits him personally.

AFTER studying six years to become a portrait painter, overcoming almost unsurmountable difficulties to adjust her work to her home duties, and at last arranging matters so that she could see what Paris had to give her, just by chance Mrs. Käsebier discovered that the camera afforded her the widest field of expression for what she had found in life, and without any hesitation she promptly relinquished the "north light" for the "dark room." The point of view of the world at that time toward photography as a mechanical process without relationship to great art held no significance for her. She knew that when she was taking a photograph she was realizing an opportunity for big expression, for getting the utmost from her sitter, for accomplishing the utmost that she could in life, and so she devoted her time to making portraits in this way rather than in any other, regardless of the work she had done to perfect herself in portrait painting.
PHOTOGRAPHY AN EMOTIONAL ART

To quote Mrs. Käsebier’s own words, “I am now a mother and a grandmother, and I do not recall that I have ever ignored the claims of the nomadic button and the ceaseless call for sympathy, and the greatest demand on time and patience. My children, and their children, have been my closest thought, but from the first days of dawning individuality, I have longed unceasingly to make pictures of people, not maps of faces, but pictures of real men and women as they know themselves, to make likenesses that are biographies, to bring out in each photograph the essential personality that is variously called temperament, soul, humanity.

“Now, from my point of view, it is impossible to understand people unless you understand life. You see through experience. You can not read faces, the joy and sorrow in them, unless you have suffered and enjoyed; we do not see far beyond our own development; at least we see better through our own development, and my development came slowly through much suffering, much disappointment and much renunciation. I have learned to know the world because of what the world has exacted of me.

“First I gave my life to my children, then I gave years of it to the conventional study of portrait painting, and so it has come about that the quality in my portraits that is hardest to describe, for which the public has placed them in the realm of art, which has seemed to touch the heart of the world, I have achieved by getting at humanity, down in the deep sad places of humanity. I have learned most from the simple people, from their primitive qualities, and among these simple people are some of the greatest I have ever known—Rodin is one of them, my frontier grandmother was another. My people were all simple frontier people, out in the beginning of things in the West. My grandmother was of the splendid, strong, pioneer type of women. She was an artist with her loom. She made her own designs, and weaved the most beautiful fancies into her fabrics. She knew life from living, and was great through her knowledge. She was a model to me in many ways, and the beginning of what I have accomplished in art came to me through her.”

In speaking of her need to express a certain creative impulse in art, Mrs. Käsebier used almost the identical words in which Eugene Higgins, the “painter of poverty,” recently expressed his attitude toward his art.
"Certain conditions in life," said Mr. Higgins, "certain qualities of people seem to me so overwhelmingly significant that I must express them in some way. I have often felt that I could not live without expressing them. There is a terrible picturesqueness and almost frightful beauty in the masses of color and outline that go with the last stages of poverty. These are the things that I want to speak of—not from the sentimental interest in poverty, but from the paintable quality of it, though that may sound very cruel and heartless." The one medium that appeals strongest to Mr. Higgins is painting. The urge of expressing himself would be no greater and no less, if it were plaster or music. Charles Haag, the sculptor, who has the same point of view about the picturesqueness of misery, does not wish to say it in color, but in plaster and bronze, and Rodin can see things best in stone. Mrs. Käsebier creates her most mysterious and beautiful effects in technical expression when seeking to realize the quality of her sitter, while studying every light and shade that will express the soul of the person before her; and with the work of adjustment and arrangement often is born a rare subtilty of atmosphere and of wonder that no striving for mechanical perfection would produce. It is the creative urge, not the machine, that develops the photographs which have made Mrs. Käsebier the subject of comment among artists all over the world.

It is a matter of fact that this photographer never approaches the sitter without a feeling that is a combination of excitement and stage fright. Each picture is a fresh experience to her, just as each painting must be a new phase of life to the artist, and each composition a fresh development to the musician. Every man and woman, old or young, who comes to Mrs. Käsebier, becomes for the time a part of her life. She is reading their biographies and studying into their lives, while she is posing them and moving her camera about. She has grown to understand people from this short reading of faces and expression as a blind man grows to see faces by touching them; the appealing glance of a plain woman, the patience on the face of the mother, the hope and inexperience in the young girl, are all twice told tales to this student of humanity; the man who has lived through imagination to indifference, the woman who has gone through joy to boredom, they all find a genuine sympathy, and their development, through success or failure, is what Mrs. Käsebier is photographing to the amazement of sitter
PHOTOGRAPHY AN EMOTIONAL ART

and friend. These portraits are ultimate studies of the real people; they are human documents of permanent significance.

"It is not just that I am anxious to make these photographs for the sake of people," is Mrs. Käsebier's expression, "I am thirsty to do it for my own sake, to express what there is in me. I want to re-live life in this way. I want to see what life is doing to other people. I want to acquire the widest possible outlook on life. It is my way of living to the utmost to see other people live, and to prove that I have seen it in my pictures. I do not think of my work as photography, but as opportunity." And this is surely the profoundest craving to express the creative impulse which, when born of inspiration, becomes that strange thing we know as genius, and, when born of experience, follows in the footsteps of genius, and often fits into them very perfectly. Of course, apart from the emotional side of Mrs. Käsebier's art, there is a most careful study of mechanical detail, and the sincerest effort to perfect the means so that it may most completely express the end. Her knowledge of painting she has found invaluable in giving her a wide mastery of posing. She also has an understanding of color and form, and has learned to translate color into black and white at a glance, and to get effects from masses without being troubled by detail. Of the usual expressions of technical methods and the usual studio talk Mrs. Käsebier cares nothing, and knows but little. Her interest is not centered in the mechanical end. She knows it, and uses it with supreme skill, but with that unconscious skill with which a musician plays or a great painter wields the brush.

HER real work is done with the sitter—not in the dark room, and even here it is again not detail that interests her, not the actual question of dress and form; to her, photography is the essence of the individual, not the external. It is very difficult to express in words what this artist wishes to achieve in her photographs. She is trying to gather up the illusive mystery of character, of life itself, and hold it on paper in black and white. Rodin recognized this when he signed a letter to Mrs. Käsebier—"From one artist to another." The great Frenchman felt in her work what he had achieved in his own. And this quality of world sympathy it would be hard to express more sincerely and convincingly than Mrs. Käsebier has done in a series of photographs of Motherhood (which are shown in this article): "The