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"Heinrich Tönnies"

By Egon P. Bodtker

Heinrich Tönnies has been known to Danish archivists and photo-historians primarily for his topographical views of Aalborg. His pictures made Aalborg the second most photographed city in Denmark in the 19th century. Alexander Alland has ensured Tönnies a place among recorders of social history by the exhibit in Aalborg he arranged in 1975. For this redirection of our attention we in D.A.H.S. and others are indeed thankful.

Between 1864 and 1902 Heinrich Tönnies took portraits of no fewer than 75,000 individuals. During the height of the Danish emigration from Jutland, 1870-1890, Tönnies photographed at least 45,000 individuals, many of whose names, addresses and occupations he recorded.

Ansel Adams writes that "Tönnie's prints are beautiful, extraordinary quality. It is good to see the historical spirit displayed in beautiful images." This succinct statement summarizes the content of the book. Alland has provided in a four page introduction a short essay on photo-history of the nineteenth century dealing both with technical developments and stylistic changes, and the role which one Danish photographer played in the events of that time. In addition, Alland has provided us with some high quality portraits of 19th century Danes.

The people are portrayed with an intensity of feeling which belies the formal rules for portraiture in the 19th century. Their eyes are full of feeling, the set of the jaw gives evidence of their attitude, the stances which they take reflect the familial relationship. The portraits range from busts of strong willed burghers, through the "dandies" of the time, and a pair of coquettish girls behind an ironing board, to a small child determined to play the violin. The formality of portraiture is perhaps best reflected by the young chimney sweep standing on an ornate rug and framed against a classical backdrop.

Mr. Alland has already given us Jacob A. Riis, *Photographer and Citizen* (1974). This book is a welcome addition to a growing photo-literature reflecting the status of people at the time in which they, or many of their fellow countrymen, were deciding to emigrate.

