

“The Daguerreotypes at the Fair,” 9 October 1851

(keywords: Marcus Aurelius Root, Samuel Root, “Old Arm Chair”, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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THE DAGUERREOTYPES AT THE FAIR.—Among the most attractive articles in the present Fair of the American Institute at Castle Garden, the Daguerreotypes by our City artists hold, and worthily hold, we think, a very high place. The improvements in the photographic art within a few years have certainly been extraordinary; and notwithstanding the art itself originated in France, the World’s Fair in London completely settled the question, that in this country it had already received a finish and perfection known to no other part of the earth. And yet, in the World’s Fair were to be found only some of our most inferior specimens; the display in Castle Garden at the moment, far surpassing in point of excellence in the Daguerreotypic Art, that presented by the celebrated Crystal Palace. Castle Garden, however, even to the most careless eye, exhibits, by no means, a monotonous uniformity of perfection in this particular branch of our national skill, taste and industry; for, although many of the specimens of the Daguerreotype are very good indeed, and many strikingly better, the collection in the upper, north gallery, by Messrs M. A. & S. Root, of this City, is one that cannot fail to meet the entire approval of every one. We look on those exceedingly large likenesses as beyond anything of the kind we have yet seen either in this country or in Europe. In addition to their size, which, while it brings them up almost to the magnitude of portraits, increases immeasurably the difficulty of their correct production, there is a sharpness in the outline, a distinctness in the impression, a depth and clearness of expression, a fullness of character about them, as well as an absence of the cloudy dimness and mercurial flatness which so generally characterize and mar the limnings of the daguerreotype, that they at once arrest the attention and extort from all exclamation of admiration. The likeness of Mr. Hite, the miniature painter, is exquisite. The Messrs. Root also exhibit a very beautiful series of daguerreotypic illustrations of the sentiment of the song of “The Old Arm Chair.” the pictures are eminently artistic, appropriate and poetic, natural and full of taste, If no other evidence were at hand, if the medals won by the Messrs. Root from various exhibitions in this and other States counted for nothing, if the gigantic pictures they have produced, so next to life itself in all their characteristics were set aside, this graphic illustration of so popular a song would place them in the foremost rank among the daguerreotypists of the world.

[End of text.]

EDITOR’S NOTES:

"The Old Arm Chair," (words by Eliza Cook, melody by Henry Russell) is viewable (in several editions) from the Johns Hopkins University/Sheridan Libraries website, *The Lester S. Levi Collection of Sheet Music*.¹

Marcus Root would later mention this illustrative device:

The old arm-chair, with a female sitting in or standing by it, might be happily illustrated and made to tell its sad story in a few skilfully composed pictures,—in some of which it might be well to represent her as weeping.²

The Root brothers would exhibit this same daguerreotype series at the 1852 fair at Castle Garden. See "Daguerreotypes at the Fair," *Photographic Art-Journal* (New York) 4:4 (October 1852): 258–60.³

1. <http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu>

2. Marcus A. Root, "Illustrations by Heliography," in *The Camera and the Pencil: or the Heliographic Art, its Theory and Practice in all its Various Branches* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864): 131.

3. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8520011_DAGS-FAIR_PAJ_1852-10.pdf

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