

“Daguerre,” July 1852

(keywords: Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, John Adams Whipple, Marcus A. Root, Samuel Root, crayon daguerreotype, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

THE DAGUERRETYPE: AN ARCHIVE OF SOURCE TEXTS, GRAPHICS, AND EPHEMERA

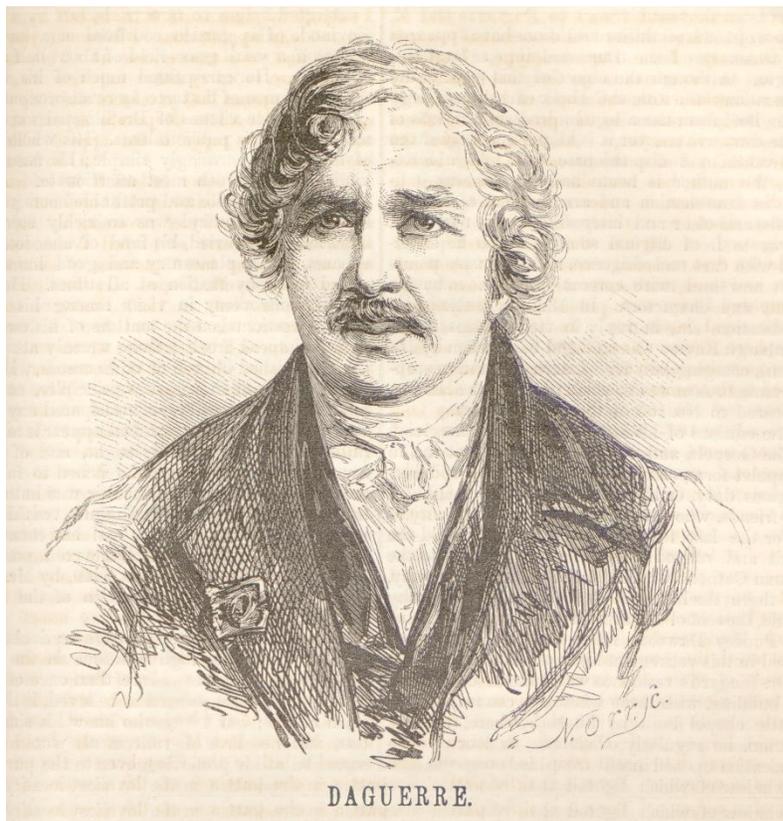
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DAGUERRE.

LOUIS JACQUES MAUDE DAGUERRE* was a native of France. In the production of dioramic¹ effects in panoramic² paintings, he became eminently successful. Among his pictures, which attracted much attention at the time of their exhibition, were the Midnight Mass, Land-slip in the Valley of Goldau, The Temple of Solomon, and The Cathedral of Sainte Marie de Montreal.

In these the alternate effects of night and day, and storm and sunshine, were beautifully produced. To these effects of light were added others, from the decomposition of form, by means of which, for example, in the *Midnight Mass*, figures appeared where the spectators had just beheld seats, altars, etc.

In 1824 Daguerre commenced experiments on chemical changes by light, for the purpose of discovering some means by which he might secure the images obtained in the camera obscura. His object was to improve his dioramic paintings. From these experiments resulted that glorious discovery by which the artist is enabled to snatch the sunbeam for his pencil, and on a tablet of silver paint a perfect likeness of the "human face divine," or copy the beauties of nature.

This discovery was reported to the world in January, 1839; and on the 19th day of August following, the French Government, having purchased the secret by securing to Daguerre a pension for life of 6,000 francs annually, the process of the art was for the first time publically announced. Thus to the French belongs the glory of endowing the world of science and art with one of the most surprising discoveries that honors its native land.

In honor of the distinguished discoverer his name was at once associated with this art, and wherever it is heard of, the name of Daguerre will be sounded, also. The art to which it has been attached is given to the world, and the name of its discoverer is immortal. Who has not heard of Daguerreotypes, and the Daguerreian Art? Wide as the range of civilization, throughout the old and new worlds, this wonderful art has been proclaimed, and its astonishing results beheld.

Daguerre never did much toward the improvement of his discovery. The high degree of perfection to which the art has attained is due to the experiments of others. Compared with the present daguerreotypes, those at first taken by him were very meager and incomplete. Much of this improvement is due to American artists.

It is acknowledged that our daguerreotypes excel the European in beauty of finish, mellowness, and depth of tint. Those taken in France are much better than English ones. This is probably due to the clearer skies of France. It may be owing much to a similar reason that the portraits of America excel.

The discoverer of the process of sun-painting was a man of great personal worth, and devotion to art. He was extremely modest, and is said to have been always averse to sitting for his own picture; hence there are but few likenesses of him in existence. The one from which our engraving is copied was taken in Paris, by Mr. Meade, of New York. Daguerre has been deceased about one year. He died in Paris, July 10, 1851.

DAGUERREOTYPES are produced by the effects of light upon chemical substances. Thus, white chloride of silver, when exposed to the light, becomes black. Many other compounds are strongly acted upon by light. It is by means of this principle that images of objects formed in the camera are permanently fixed on polished metal plates.

A thin plate of copper is plated with silver, or coated with it by means of electrotyping, and polished very brightly by rubbing. it with finely-powdered rotten-stone and Canton flannel. It is then exposed over iodine for a few seconds, until it has a golden-yellow appearance, afterward over bromide of lime, till it assumes a rose-red color. The plate is now kept excluded from the light, and as soon as the person is seated in a proper position it is placed in the camera, where, in from ten seconds to one minute and a half, it receives the image.

Next it is removed and exposed to the vapor of mercury, in order to bring the image out, for, as yet, no trace of any outline is visible on its surface. After being thus treated

from one to three minutes, the image becomes visible. The plate is then washed with hyposulphate of soda, afterward with water, and dried over a spirit lamp by holding the back of it to the flame.

Now one other process remains; that of *fixing* the picture. It is done by washing the plate over with a weak solution of chloride of gold. This is poured on the plate while it is heated over a lamp. The daguerreotype is now completed, and ready for the case. However, some are colored after the last process. This is done with a soft, dry brush.

Among the many discoveries in the daguerreian art is a style of pictures called “Crayon Daguerreotypes.” These exhibit only the head and shoulders of the person, the remaining portions having an appearance similar to that of being enveloped in white clouds; or not unlike vignette engravings. This peculiarity is produced on the picture while receiving the image in the camera. The process has been patented by Mr. J. A. Whipple, a daguerreotypist of Boston, Mass. The Messrs. Root, of New York and Philadelphia, take the “Crayon Daguerreotypes.” Some artists esteem the pictures obtained by this process superior to the others, particularly for portraits which are to be engraved.

* Pronounced Da-gāre'. Da-gāre'o-types. Da-gāre'e-an.

[¹Diorama is a name applied to paintings arranged so as to produce an optical illusion. This is chiefly effected by a peculiar distribution of light, so that it can be diminished or increased at pleasure. Thus the picture may be made to change from a bright sunshine to stormy weather, and even to assume the darkness of night.

²Panoramas, as now made, are composed of scenery, such as the shores of a river, streets of a city, voyage at sea, etc., painted on canvas, which is fastened around upright rollers, and by means of machinery is unrolled from one and wound upon the other, thus exhibiting the whole length before the audience. The painting is illuminated by means of lights so placed as to be invisible to the spectators who sit in a darkened room.]

[End of text. Bracketed text is as per original text presentation.—Ed.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The first six paragraphs of this text are derived from “Louis J. M. Daguerre: His Character and Biography,” *American Phrenological Journal* (New York) 15:2 (February 1852): 28–30.¹

The author misstates the “fixing” process. Fixing is accomplished by the immersion in hypo. The gilding process is accomplished by the heating of the gold chloride solution on the surface of the plate.

This wood engraving portrait of Daguerre also appears, with facsimile signature, in *Christian Parlor Magazine* (New York) (1851): 18.² It was Charles Richard Meade (of the well-known Meade Brothers) who, in 1848, took the daguerreotype portrait of Daguerre upon which this wood engraving is based. The original daguerreotype is not known to be extant.

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8520003_DAGUERRE_PHRENO-JOURN_1852-02.pdf

2. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510005_DAGUERRE-XIAN-PARLOR_1851.pdf

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