

Bungay, "Daguerreotype Materials," (Benjamin French) 6 August 1853

(keywords: George Washington Bungay, Benjamin French, Luther Holman Hale, 109 Washington, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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DAGUERREOTYPE MATERIALS.

WHEN Dagerre, the distinguished French philosopher and artist first made the grand discovery, that the sun could command a pencil which mocks the skill of the most accurate painter, the incredulous shrugged their shoulders, and pronounced the discovery, a sham, to be used by sharpers for cheating the public. They probably indulged the idea, that the sun was a good luminary but a poor limner—that he could rise and shine but not reach down from his silver throne in the heavens, and with a pencil of light, delineate in charming pictures, exact representations of the prototypes before him.

Experiment has become experience. Science and art are compelled to acknowledge, that Nature is the chief picture painter. The genius who suggested the magnificent idea, that light might be used so advantageously, has won a name which cannot die—indeed, it is associated with the history of the sun, and will shine until that orb is blotted from the sky. When we speak of the great men of modern times, we say Columbus discovered a Continent—Franklin tamed the lightning—Washington won republican liberty—Fulton harnessed steam—Morse taught electricity how to write, and Daguerre learned the sun how to shine in the firmament of art, as well as in the heaven of nature.

The trophies of this triumph of genius are found in every city, town, and village in Europe and America. They adorn the walls of our libraries and drawing-rooms—they ornament our centre tables, and embellish our curious cabinets. Everywhere they are cherished as mementoes of affection, and are classed among the household gods in every well appointed dwelling. Ingenious men who have a taste and talent for the fine arts, easily acquire a theoretical and a practical knowledge of Daguerreotyping, hence hundred of enterprising men, have furnished themselves with the requisite attainments and instruments, and started in pursuit of fame and fortune in this pleasant, and profitable, and honorable employment. Some travel from town to town—hiring a room here and there, and exercise their skill on a small scale, while others with more capital, move from place to place in palaces on wheels, and others still, who have earned a reputation in their profession, may be found in the best apartments of our most crowded thoroughfares. In our large cities, their rooms so sumptuous with the portraits of persons known to fame, form the most attractive museums for the multitude.—So vastly important is this branch of art, and so great is the demand for material to supply the artists, it has been found necessary to establish depots where they can be supplied on short notice.

This afternoon we visited one of these establishments. One of the most extensive concerns of the kind in this country. There may be others in New England, but we know nothing of their whereabouts. This one is kept by Mr. Benjamin French, and it is located at 109 Washington street. After ascending a broad flight of stairs, a turn to the right, brings you into a well arranged apartment, where every article needed by the class of artists we have described, can be obtained on the most reasonable terms.

In cases, on counters, and on shelves, is a large stock of goods, embracing every kind of material and every sort of instrument used in this art of arts.

In crystal cases may be seen—cameras from the quarter to the whole size—also, lockets, seals and rings, ready to receive the reflection of the “human face divine;” and be borne as memorials of affectionate regard.—Here also are French cases, and papier machie cases, and jewel cases, and Jenny Lind Cases, and velvet cases, and cases elaborately carved, and cases inlaid with silver and pearl, and composition cases, and common cases of every size and shape—round, oval, square, octagon, plain-figured, single and double.

We were much pleased with a splendid stereoscope case, which is something new, and worthy of notice.—The case had a likeness on one side—and a pair of little magnifying windows the size of spectacle glasses on the other,—a view through these glasses magnifies the figure so that it appears large as life.

On the shelves are great quantities of frames and cases of every description. Here are chased mattings, gleaming with gold—there is the chemical department with plentiful supplies of potassium, mercury, rotten-stone, gilding material, and everything needed in the laboratory of the daguerrotypist. Here also are glasse, and brass mattings, excelsior, engraved, gilt, stamped, and common. Yonder are cheap cases, silk, velvet, cotton-velvet, patent velvet, and silk. Quantities of camera boxes, and chemical boxes, and bath boxes, may be seen in their appropriate departments. We have neither time nor space to enumerate even a tithe of the articles on sale here, and if we made the attempt, uninitiated as we are, ten to one, we should omit to mention some things of the most importance. Suffice it to say, no man of correct taste can fail to be pleased with the elaborately carved, and gorgeously gilded frames, fit to hang upon the walls of Aladdin’s palace.

We venture the remark, that the proprietor of this establishment will cheerfully gratify the curious, who may desire to see the handsome handiwork—foreign and domestic, connected with this branch of business, exhibited in his establishment. Mr. French was formerly associated with Mr. L. H. Hale, who was a daguerreotypist himself, and his practical relationship to that art enables him to procure precisely the very best things demanded in that department of industry.

France, Germany, and other European as well as American manufacturers have contributed to his stock of goods. Let those who wish to obtain genuine materials and superb instruments of the most approved style, call on the gentleman whose store we have sketched, before they exhaust their resources elsewhere. Persons at a distance can have their orders answered by express, and thus prevent loss of time, and save the expense of travel. Having a large supply of such materials on hand, and devoting his attention and his capital exclusively to this business, Mr. F. is enabled to supply orders either wholesale or retail, on the most advantageous terms. We think Mr. F. quite fortunate in selecting such a favorable location for his business—in the heart of the city, on the main artery of travel, near the important rendezvous of trade.

We will now conclude this sketch with the beautiful words of Washington Allston, who was a painter, and a poet: "On Rembrandt: occasioned by his picture of Jacob's Dream."

As in that twilight, superstitious age,
When all beyond the narrow grasp of mind
Seem'd fraught with meaning of supernal kind,
When e'en the learned philosophic sage,
Wont with the stars, thro' boundless space to rage!
E'en as thy visionary scenes I hail;
That like the rambling of an idiot's speech,
No image giving of a thing on earth
Nor thought significant in reason's reach,
Yet in their random shadowing's give birth
To thoughts and things from other worlds to come,
And fill the soul and strike the reason dumb.

[End of text. Many misspelled words exist in this text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

George Washington Bungay, 1818–1892, was an author, poet, and Temperance promoter. He is perhaps best known for his book, *Crayon Sketches and Off-hand Takings, of Distinguished American Statesmen, Orators, Divines, Essayists, Editors, Poets, and Philanthropists* (Boston: Stacy and Richardson, 1852).

An albumen portrait of Benjamin French appears in *Philadelphia Photographer* 10 (January–December 1873).

In a 1902 article regarding the death of his eccentric widow, Julia B. French, it is stated that the French estate was worth over half a million dollars.¹

See also number 38 of this series for the text, "Hale's Picture Gallery," which is a review of the daguerreotype gallery of Luther Holman Hale.²

The nature of Bungay's series, "American Enterprise," is explained in the following notice:

To Merchants and Manufacturers.

Under the auspices of some of our Merchant Princes and leading Manufacturers, the subscriber has commenced a series of elaborate sketches of our prominent Commercial, Mechanical, and other Industrial establishments. These articles are published in the "WAVERLEY MAGAZINE," a well-known and widely circulated journal, printed weekly, in this city. This magnificent Magazine is printed with handsome type, on beautiful white paper, and contains more reading matter than any other publication in the world. It has an immense circulation, not only in New York and New England, but it finds its way to every State in the Confederacy and to the British Provinces. These truthful and graphic sketches are read at least by sixty thousand persons, consequently forming splendid advertisements. The writer makes a personal visit to the establishment he describes, and each sketch occupies from one to two columns of closely printed matter,—for which he charges the sum of ten dollars. Travelling expenses are added to this when he is called from the city. Without additional cost these articles appear in the elegant *monthly*, issued from the same office, and will be eventually collected in a volume, thus forming a permanent record of American Enterprise. The following establishments with others have already been sketched:

Simmon's Block, (Clothing;) Gove's Palace, (Clothing;) Hinckley & Drury's Locomotive Works; Jones, Ball & Co.'s Silver Ware Palace; G. W. Warren's Dry Goods

House; Dana, Farrar & Hyde's Wholesale Grocery; Boston Belting Company; New England Cordage Manufactory; Hunneman's Fire Engine Manufactory; Gavett's Lamp Manufactory; Seth W. Fowle's Drug Store; Reed's Music Store; Boston Sugar Refinery; Boston Flour Mill; Boston Iron Works' Wentworth's Marble Works; Chillson's Stove Warehouse; Jacob Chickering's Piano-Forte Establishment; Prouty's Plough Establishment; Doe, Hazelton & Co.'s Furniture Palace, &c., &c.

Those who desire to patronize this novel mode of advertising their business will meet with an immediate response by directing a note to the subscriber, at his Dental Room, 165 Court Street, Boston.

GEORGE W. BUNGAY.³

Although not part of the series, another article of interest in this publication is a sketch of the Boston daguerreotypist, Jesse Stone. See "Daguerrean Gallery," 7:26 (24 December 1853): 414.⁴

1. "Eccentric widow found dead in shaft," *New York Times* 51:16,288 (21 March 1902): 1.
2. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8530009_HALES_WAVERLEY_1853-08-13.pdf
3. *Waverly Magazine* (Boston) 7:2 (9 July 1853): 21.
4. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8530010_STONE_WAVERLEY_1853-12-24.pdf

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