

Collyer, "The imitative faculty of the Yankees," (mentions Gouraud) 1843

(keywords: Robert Hanham Collyer, François Gouraud, François Jean-Baptiste Fauvel-Gouraud, Francis Fauvel-Gouraud, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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Selected text published in:

Robert H. Collyer, *Lights and Shadows of American Life* (Boston: Redding & Co. 1843):

34. The section of text presented here is "The imitative faculty of the Yankees."

Lineage of some of the "big bugs"—Anecdote of the Boston Bill Sticker—The imitative faculty of the Yankees—Humbug Mesmerisers.

The Yankees are said to have the faculty of imitation in a remarkable degree. I believe it is true from the best of my observation. There is nothing on the face of the globe too great for them to manage—nothing ever thought of by mortal man too grand or mighty for them to comprehend. If Herschel had made a telescope seven times larger than the one which has already astonished the world, some New England Yankee would beat him by an inch or two. Newton's laws of gravitation are nothing to the Yankee laws of gravitation, and Symmes great hole at the North pole is made to gape with wonder at some larger hole in the East. I never knew any thing in my life too great for a Yankee to comprehend or an 'experiment' too complicated for him to encounter.—His tact is omnipotent, his talent omnipresent and his genius is the essence of the whole world. He is a restless being, continually on the wake of speculation, constantly in the full pursuit of novelty—let any one produce a great thing, some other Yankee is sure to produce a greater. If one discovers a diamond, another is sure to discover a diamond to cut it with.—There is not an invention made by one but is improved upon by another. If one gets a patent for a scythe with a flat top, another will take away his right by making it round. If one invents a mouse trap for catching one mouse, another will improve upon the principle by catching two at a time. If one man in Boston establishes a lucrative business, in less than a month there are a hundred of the same sort.—Every body are so much wedded to novelty and speculation that there is no surety for any business being without competition a moment. As soon as Spurzheim caused an interest in the science of Phrenology to be awakened in the community a thousand ignoramuses arose—men who did not know scarcely the difference between the animal and the intellectual regions, and set themselves up as disciples of Gall and Spurzheim, and went about to enlighten the world. As soon as my friend, Dr. Gouraud, introduced the exquisite specimens of Daguerre's genius in Photography, he filled the Tremont House with admirers—the 'big bugs' and the little ones were the admirers, and thousands applauded his merits, but nobody paid. Dr. Gouraud opened an exhibition at a fair price, offered to teach the art at a fair price, but no one scarcely became his patrons, and he was forced to leave the city without having received half enough to pay his expenses. Lo, the consequences! In less than six months, a few, shrewd, cunning Yankees fathomed the art, at least enough to make it practicable, and 'Photographic establishments' were in full blast all over the

country. Every town in New England had a Daguerreotype apparatus and a professor, and pictures were taken at the price of a song.

[End of selected text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

A sixth-plate daguerreotype of Collyer accompanies the informative article, Bernhard Hildebrandt, "'This My Likeness': The Facts in the Case of the Notorious Dr. R. H. Collyer," Leonard A. Walle, ed., *Daguerreian Annual 2007* (Cecil: The Daguerreian Society, 2009): 102–11.

A contemporary sketch of Collyer states:

Dr. Collyer is one of the most fearless advocates of magnetism we have ever known ; and although somewhat peculiar in his public discourses, and somewhat eccentric in his general character, yet from his thorough acquaintance with chemistry and physiology, his burning enthusiasm, and his dauntless energy of character, he is a man admirably qualified for an advocate of Mesmerism, which excites at once the strongest prejudices and the fiercest opposition of all classes of society. If Dr. Collyer has done little to convince the mass of mankind of the truth of magnetism, he has done much to excite investigation and inquiry, and to revive the subject from its dormant state, and he has been justly styled "the champion of Mesmerism in the United States."¹

For a review of Collyer's volume, see *Rover: a Weekly Magazine of Tales, Poetry, and Engravings* (New York) 2:16 [no month stated]: 254–55. When poking fun of Collyer's frequent references to various individuals as "my friend. . ." the reviewer continues:

The Doctor speaks very *encouragingly* of our aristocracy, both in intellect and money, and seems to think that they will be entitled to rise in the estimation of all Europe, after he has commended them. This is generous, exceedingly so, considering the eminent situation held by Robert H. Collyer, M. D., &c., &c., who lays claim to an intimate acquaintance with the first men in the country. We have no doubt that the Doctor made some *grate* acquaintances while incarcerated in the Leveret street prison, of Boston, for libeling one of the citizens.

Later, Collyer landed in San Francisco 7 August 1851 with a "model artists" troupe.² The exhibitions were not without some controversy.³ Collyer public behavior was also far from faultless as he engaged in public fighting with F. W. Rice, junior editor of the *Courier*.⁴ Also included in the papers of the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance of 1851 is a communication by Collyer proposing a lecture regarding the "Anatomy of Crime."⁵

Two portrait illustrations of Gouraud and many texts regarding Gouraud are available in the Ewer Archive.

The most comprehensive information regarding Gouraud is found in Ron Polito, "The Emergence of Photography in Boston: 1840–1841," *The Journal: New England Journal of Photographic History* No. 164 (Spring 2005): 16–32. Polito's article is also reprinted in *Daguerreian Annual 2006* (Pittsburgh: The Daguerreian Society, 2007: 154–73.

1. *The History and Philosophy of Animal Magnetism* (Boston: J. N. Bradley & Co., 1843): 7–8. The volume is dedicated to Collyer, "The Great Champion of Mesmerism."
2. "Model Artists," *Sacramento Transcript* 84:8 (8 August 1850): n.p. (third page of issue);
3. "The Athenaeum," *Illustrated California News* (San Francisco) 1:2 (15 September 1850): 10–11; "Scene in Sacramento City," *Illustrated California News* (San Francisco) 1:3 (15 October 1850): 22.

4. "A New Lay Out," *Sacramento Transcript* 2:14 (9 November 1850): n.p. (second page of issue); "Fracas," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco) 2:38 (17 January 1851): n.p. (second page of issue).
5. Mary Floyd Williams, *History of the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance of 1851* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1921: 322. The present editor begs forbearance in wishing to declare Williams' volume as an outstanding, brilliant example of scholarship and historical writing.

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