

John Timbs, "The Daguerreotype," 1855

(keywords: St. Croix, John F. Goddard, Richard Beard, Miles Berry, Antoine François Jean Claudet, John Herschel, John W. Draper, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

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EWER ARCHIVE B8550003

Published in:

John Timbs, *Curiosities of London: Exhibiting the most Rare and Remarkable Objects of Interest in the Metropolis* (London: David Bogue, 1855): 248–49.

DAGUERREOTYPE (THE).

The first experiment made in England with the Daguerreotype was exhibited by M. St. Croix, on Friday, September 13, 1839, at No. 7 Piccadilly, nearly opposite the southern Circus of Regent-street; when the picture produced was a beautiful miniature representation of the houses, pathway, sky, &c., resembling an exquisite mezzotint. M. St. Croix subsequently removed to the Argyll Rooms, Regent-street, where his experimental results became a scientific exhibition. One of the earliest operators was Mr. Goddard. The discovery was patented by Mr. Miles Berry, who sold the first license to M. Claudet for 100*l.* or 200*l.* a-year; and in twelve months after disposed of the patent to Mr. Beard, who, however, did not take a Daguerreotype *portrait* until after Dr. Draper had sent from New York a portrait to the editor of the *Philosophical Magazine*, with a paper on the subject.

With reference to the conditions of a London atmosphere, as regards its influence upon Daguerreotypic or Photographic processes, there are some very peculiar phenomena; for the following details of which we are indebted to Mr. Robert Hunt, the author of many valuable researches in Photography.

The *yellow haze* which not unfrequently prevails, even when there is no actual fog over the town itself, is fatal to all chemical change. This haze is, without doubt, an accumulation, at a considerable elevation, of the carbonaceous matter from the coal-fires, &c. Although a day may appear moderately clear, if the sun assume a red or orange colour, it will be almost impossible to obtain a good Daguerreotype. Notwithstanding in some of the days of spring our photographers obtain very fine portraits or views, it must be evident to all who examine an extensive series of Daguerreotypes, that those which are obtained in Paris and New York are very much more intense than those which are generally procured in London. This is mainly dependent upon the different amounts and kinds of smoke diffused through the atmospheres respectively of these cities. At the same time, there is no doubt the peculiarly humid character of the English climate interferes with the free passage of those solar rays which are active in producing photographic change. It was observed by Sir John Herschel, when he resided at Slough, that a sudden change of wind to the east almost immediately checked his photographic experiments at that place, by bringing over it the yellow atmosphere of London: this is called by the Berkshire farmers *blight*, from their imagining that smut and other diseases in grain are produced by it.

It is a curious circumstance, that the summer months, June, July, and August, notwithstanding the increase of light, are not favourable to the Daguerreotype. This arises from the fact, now clearly demonstrable, that the luminous powers of the sunbeam are in antagonism to the chemical radiations, and as the one increases, the other diminishes. This may be imitated by a pale yellow glass, which, although it obstructs no light completely, cuts off the chemical rays, and entirely prevents any photographic change taking place.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

John Timbs was also the editor of the annual, *Year-book of Facts in Science and Art*. Excerpts from these latter volumes are forthcoming.

Regarding Draper and the portrait sent from New York, see R. Derek Wood and E. D. Shorland, "The Daguerreotype Portrait of Dorothy Draper," *The Photographic Journal* vol. 110 (December 1970): 478–82.¹

Additional information regarding John F. Goddard is found in John F. Goddard, "Valuable Improvement in Daguerreotype," *Literary Gazette* (London) No. 1247 (12 December 1840): 803.²

1. <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20100311230213/http://www.midley.co.uk/>

2. http://daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8410001_GODDARD_CHEMIST_1841-05.pdf

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URL: http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8550003_TIMBS_CURIOSITIES_DAGS_1855.pdf

Document author: Gary W. Ewer

Creation date: 2008-12-15 / Last revision: 2012-05-11

Citation information: John Timbs, *Curiosities of London* (London: David Bogue, 1855): 248–49.

Prepared from: from an original volume. Also available from *Google Books*.

(<http://books.google.com/books?id=8N1JAAAAIAAJ>)

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