

Henry Hunt Snelling, "O, sad fate of the beautiful daguerreotype! . . ." 1858

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Selected text published in:

Henry Hunt Snelling, *Sunlight Sketches' or the Photographic Textbook: A Practical Treatise on Photography* (New York: H. H. Snelling, 1858): 25–27.

(Please see the disclaimer below regarding the language in this text.)

Timing in the Camera.

By this process when carefully managed, the time required in the camera is very short. With a well arranged light from 5 to 10 seconds is sufficient. Great precaution should be used, not to overtime. Remember the author is not advocating the *goneby* intense process which required three minutes time in the camera redeveloping with pyrogalic acid, one week and eight days to print from it. The process herein given produces the natural negative, one that will print in three minutes and give black for black, and white for white. It does not run into the scotch-snuff order. The proof is like the beautiful daguerreotype, developed and defined in all its parts, and beautiful as the light of heaven can make it.

O, sad fate of the beautiful daguerreotype! I would to heaven I could forget it. But it lingers in my soul like fond remembrance of a dear departed friend. Fifteen long years I revelled with it in its glory, and for four years past I have mournfully watched by its dying couch, flattering myself with a hope of restoration, and yet it is constantly drugged and kept in state of suspense between life and death, by a class of vulgar-mouthed avaricious filibusters who have scarcely sense enough to make the cheap ambrotype much more the beautiful daguerreotype.

But so it must lie. Kings are mighty, but dollars are more mighty! I would not be greatly surprised to see the American mother bartering away her offspring for gold, or exchanging the smiling babe at her breast for a negro or a monkey. For such is the comparison between the daguerreotype and the ambrotype. Imagine for one moment; before you, stands two female figures, the one is a black wench and the other a beautiful white lady, and at the same time held in one hand is a daguerreotype, and in the other an ambrotype; the ambrotypes is most distinct, it stands out the boldest, and so is the wench in looks and smell stronger than the white lady; but look again, and again, and if you finally decide that the wench is more beautiful than the white lady; or that the ambrotype compares in beauty with the daguerreotype, you are a fool and ought to be dispatched at once to Nicaragua as a boot-black to Captain Walker. You have mistaken your calling and have assumed a position for which nature has not fitted you, and are more contemptible and troublesome than a *dead ass* in the gateway. But you offer your wares cheap and fools buy them.

[End of selected text.]

NOTES:

Many of the original daguerreotypists were saddened by the demise of the daguerreotype. This text is perhaps the most evocative of all such published commentaries.

Henry Hunt Snelling (1817–1897) was the founder and editor of the *Photographic Art Journal* (variant: *Photographic and Fine Art Journal*) from 1851–1860. He also authored *The History and Practice of the Art of Photography* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1849). A substantial portion of the latter was plagiarized. See Kahan, Schaaf, and Flukinger, "Plagiarism in the 'first' American book about photography," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 67 (1973): 283–304.

For other quotes regarding the daguerreotype, see *EWER ARCHIVE R0080002: Research notes: "Quotes regarding the Daguerreotype."*¹

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/research/R0080002_DAG_QUOTES.pdf

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