

Philip Hone, "a perfect transcript of the thing itself" 4 December 1839

(keywords: Philip Hone, François Gouraud, François Fauvel-Gouraud, Francis Fauvel-Gouraud, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

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Manuscript diary entry:

Philip Hone, dated 4 December 1839, pp. 119–123.

(Original line breaks preserved. Entire entry for date herein provided. Undetermined words indicated by underline.)

Wednesday 4 Dec^r Congress.

Congress met at Washington on Monday. The Senate organized immediately.

In the House of Representatives, every member but one (a Mr. Kempshall of this state) were present, there never before was so punctual an attendance on the first day. Arrangements were made to have the President's message in this city early this morning. But no message came. The House was not organized, a dispute arose about five of the six members from New Jersey whose seats were contested, notwithstanding they came armed with the only credentials known to the laws of their state, namely the certificate of the Governor and council authenticated by the broad Seal of the State. The clerk of the last Congress in calling the Roll of Members (the usual practice) thought proper to boggle at New Jersey because (as he was informed) some other five men wanted the seats. This produced one of those _____ of words, which rolling down from the mountain of party faction, sweep away the dignity and _____ of long established parliamentary settlements.

The nicely balanced State of parties, endorses the choice of a speaker somewhat doubtful, and the Loci _____ never scrofulous about the means resorted to maintain their power, will not permit the five member who are legally returned and who are all good Whigs. To help make a Whig speaker if they can prevent it, unless they find

(which I have reason to fear may be the case) that they can get along without committing this new outrage upon law and precedent.

The whole day was spent in debating this question, Congress was not organized, and the quid nunes were disappointed, in reading the hundred and one papers of President Van Buren's message at their breakfast this morning.

A good hoax was played off this morning by the carriers of the penny papers, being disappointed in the sale of the expected message, and benevolently disposed to save their customers from the like misfortune in not reading it. They cased copies to be printed of last years message and hawked this about the streets. And after all, it was just as well, a small proportion of those who make the Presidents would know the differences, and the Speech of Queen Victoria to her loyal Parliament would pass for the message of the American President with the substitution of "Gentlemen of the Senate and House of Representatives," for "my Lords and Gentlemen" liberty and the sovereign people for "loyalty and _____ subjects," and "la Reine le vent" for the requirements of the people's masters.

The Daguerreotype

I went this morning, by invitation of Mons^r Francois Gouraud, to see a collection of the views made by the wonderful process lately discovered in France by Mons^r Daguerre, which is called by his name. M^r Gouraud is the Pupil and friend of the inventor, and comes to this country to make known the process. The pictures he has are extremely beautiful. They consist of views in Paris and exquisite collections of the objects of still life. The manner of producing them constitutes one of the wonders of modern times, and like other miracles, one may almost be excused for disbelieving it without seeing the very process by which it is created. It appears to me a confusion of the very elements of nature. It is nothing less than the palpable effect of light occasioning in a reproduction of sensible objects. The

reflection of surrounding images created by a camera obscura upon a plate of copper, plated with silver and prepared with some chemical substances, is not only distinctly delineated but left upon the plate so prepared. And there remains forever, every object however minute, is a perfect transcript of the thing itself. The hair of the human head, the gravel on the road side, the texture of a silk curtain, or the shadow of the smaller leaf reflected upon the wall, are all imprinted as carefully as nature or art has created them in the objects transferred. And those things which are invisible to the naked eye are rendered apparent by the help of a magnifying glass. It appears to me not less wonderful that light should be made an active operating power in this manner. Than that some such effect should be produced by sound; and who knows whether in this age of invention and discoveries we may not be called upon to marvel as the exhibition of a Tree, a Horse, or a Ship produced by the human voice muttering over a metal plate prepared in the same or some other manner, the words Tree, Horse and Ship. How greatly ashamed of their ignorance the by-gone generations of mankind ought to be.

[End text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The portion of Hone's diary entry regarding the daguerreotype is also transcribed in Bayard Tuckerman, edit., *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828–1851* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1889): 391–92.

Philip Hone was among the “eminent men and distinguished artists” who received an invitation from François Gouraud for the 4 December 1839 private exhibition of daguerreotypes at the Hotel Français, No 57 Broadway. (The invitation received by the artist, William Sidney Mount, is extant.¹)

Hone served as New York mayor 1825–26, was a successful merchant, a founder of the Mercantile Library of New York, and a respected magistrate. Additional information regarding Hone is found in the source noted above (Tuckerman, 1889) pp. iii–ix (available from *Google Books*; <http://books.google.com/books?id=pL4sAAAAIAAJ>).

Hone's diaries are held at the New-York Historical Society. Several portraits of Hone are accessible via the *NYPL Digital Gallery*.²

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/S8390001_GOURAUD_NY_INVITE_1839-11-29.pdf
2. <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/>

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Original spelling/punctuation/grammar generally maintained without correction. Any in-text corrections are bracketed.

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