

“Louis J. M. Daguerre, His Character and Biography,” February 1852

(keywords: Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, Joseph Nicephore Niepce, Francis Bauer, Isidore Niepce, Vincent Chevalier, Diorama, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

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**LOUIS J. M. DAGUERRE,
HIS CHARACTER AND BIOGRAPHY.**

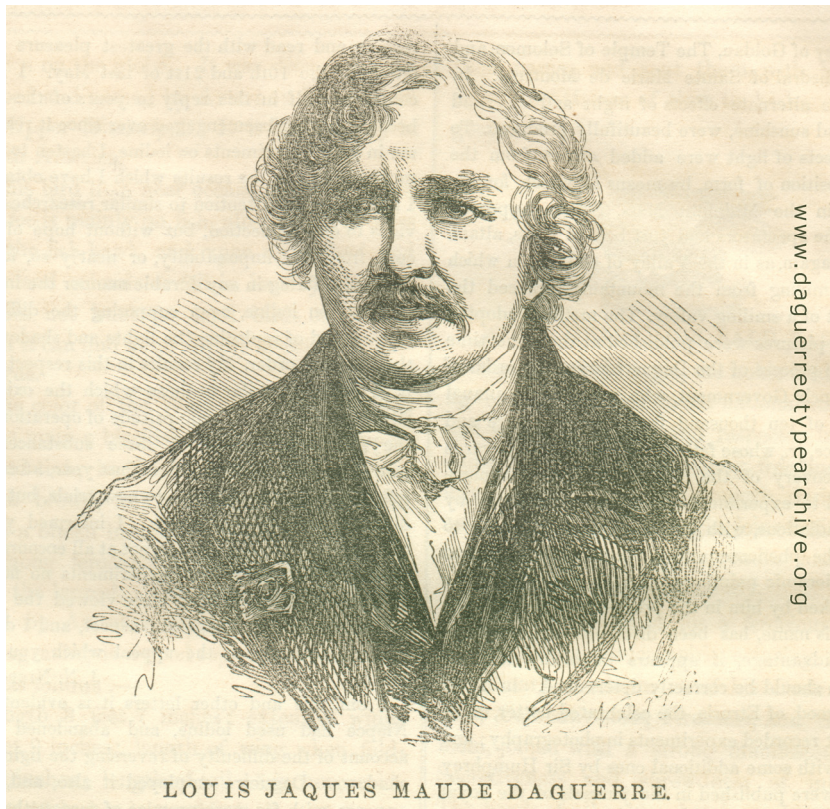
Who, in the wide range of civilization, has not heard of the daguerreotype? Where can we go, from the rich mansions of wealth in our cities to the rude log-cabin in the new settlements in the far West, that the image of the “human face divine” is not found enstamped on imperishable silver by this wonderful art, Daguerreotype. It has, however, almost ceased to be regarded as a wonder, and yet it is, nevertheless, as bold a step in art as has blessed the world since the art of printing. To fix the portrait of a man or a child, or an entire senate, or congregation, in all their nicer lineaments, more clearly and delicately than could even be done by the most elaborate and costly engraving—nay, more, to take all the minutiae of the most elaborate pile of architecture without leaving out a virtue or a blemish—indeed to copy an entire landscape, its every shrub, twig, rock, and even the eternal cataract of Niagara, or the bleakest cloud-smitten mountain, and all within the space of a few seconds, and fix them forever on durable silver, is to us as much of a marvel, to-day, as it was when it was first promulgated to the world some thirteen years ago. True, we know thoroughly the process, the *modus operandi* of man’s agency in the matter, yet precisely how it is that the rays of light so act upon the chemical substances on the silver plate, as to produce a durable picture of whatever is reflected upon it, we do not fully comprehend.

We are here strongly tempted to give our readers the process and philosophy of this great art, so far as it is understood; but it would be wandering from our present object, viz., a sketch of its inventor. We will give, in a future number, an illustrated article on this interesting subject.

Daguerreotype is one of the great improvements of the age. It cheapens the production of portraits, and is thereby a great social advantage. If a friend wishes, he can with a dollar, and then minutes’ time, procure a perfect miniature that may be sent by mail to any part of the world. If a friend dies without leaving a portrait, the Daguerrean is called, and he, in a moment, takes the sleeping feature of the deceased loved one, and before the hour of the funeral arrives can copy it for fifty of the mourners, each of whom can carry to their home a perfect image of the departed.

Since the discovery of this art, pictures of all kinds, portraits of the human face—of rare and valuable animals—copies of machines, works of art, buildings, as specimens of architecture, for the edification and instruction of the million have been multiplied a thousand fold; and now a magazine, and almost a common newspaper, must be

“pictorial” to meet the demand of the age. If a great man, or an eminent woman, appears among us—a rare painting, an elegant statue, a noble edifice, or splendid ship, is introduced, in which, the whole people are interested, and which few can see, Daguerreotype seizes the image in an instant, and in a week it is transferred, by the aid of the engraver and the printer, to a million copies of periodicals, and is being borne to fifty million of eager eyes throughout a continent, with the fleetness of that other wonder of the age, the locomotive.



LOUIS JAQUES MAUDE DAGUERRE.
caption: LOUIS JAQUES MAUDE DAGUERRE.
[Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre—Edit.]

No mode of teaching is so effectual as the pictorial, and no discovery has ministered so much to the increase of this species of teaching as the art in question. It speaks directly to the eye, and impresses the thought in bodily form upon twenty of the faculties, while without this mode, the imagination must draw the picture which words may lamely describe.

This fact will make the name of Daguerre* immortal, for it is attached to the art he has given to the world.

In the portrait of this illustrious artist, what particularly attracts the notice of the Phrenologist is the firmness and compactness of his general organization, giving intensity of thought, and patient, penetrating effort to his mind. His forehead was very broad and prominent at the base in the region of the organs of Perception and Memory. If ever there was a head qualified for scientific investigation and experiment, this is one. How

prominent across the brows; how large at Order; how broad between the eyes, showing large Form, Size, and Individuality; how full in the center and upper part of the forehead in the region of Eventuality and Comparison; how very broad at Constructiveness through the temples, He would have excelled in Engineering, Architecture, or in any of the Natural Sciences. From the fact that Daguerre was always very much averse to sitting for his own picture, there are but a few photographs of him in existence. The one from which our excellent engraving of him is copied, was taken in Paris by Messrs. Meade and Brother, of this city, to whose kindness we are indebted for the privilege of copying not a few of their excellent pictures.

The following interesting remarks respecting the labors of Daguerre we copy from a recent number of the International Magazine:—

LOUIS JACUES MAUDE DAGUERRE, whose name is for ever associated with the photographic process, of which he was the discoverer, died July 10th, 1851, in Paris, in the sixty-second year of his age. He was a man of extreme modesty and great personal worth, and was devoted to art. He was favorably known to the world before the announcement of his discovery of the Daguerreotype. His attempts to improve panoramic painting, and the production of dioramic effects, were crowned with the most eminent success. Among his pictures, which attracted much attention at the time of their exhibition, were, The Midnight Mass, Land-slip in the Valley of Goldau, The Temple of Solomon, and The Cathedral of Sainte Marie de Montreal. In these the alternate effects of night and day.

In these, the alternate effects of night and day, and storm and sunshine—were beautifully produced. To these effects of light were added others, arising from the decomposition of form by means of which, for example in the Midnight Mass, figures appeared where the spectators had just beheld seats, altars, &c; or again, as in The Valley of Goldau, in which rocks tumbling from the mountains replaced the prospect of a smiling valley. The methods adopted in these pictures were published at the same time with the process of the Daguerreotype, by order of the French Government who awarded an annual pension of ten thousand francs to Daguerre and M. Niepce, jr, whose father had contributed towards the discovery of the Daguerreotype. Daguerre was led to experiments on the chemical changes produced by the solar radiations, with the hope of being enabled to apply the phenomena to the production of peculiar effects in his dioramic paintings. As the question of the real part taken by him in the process to which he has given his name, has been discussed sometimes to his disadvantage, it appears important that the position should be correctly determined. In 1802, Wedgwood, of Etruria, the celebrated potter, made the first recorded experiments in photography; and these, with some additional ones by Sir Humphry Davy, were published in the journals of the royal Institution. In 1814, Mr. Joseph Nicephore Niepce was engaged in experiments to determine the possibility of fixing the images obtained in the camera obscura; but there does not appear any evidence of publication of any kind previously to 1827, when Niepce was in England. He then wrote several letters to Mr. Bauer, the microscopic observer, which are preserved and printed in Hunt's *Researches on Light*. He also sent specimens of results obtained to the Royal Society, and furnished some to the cabinets of the curious, a few of which are yet in existence. These were pictures on metallic plates, covered with a fine film of resin. In 1824, Daguerre commenced his researches, starting from that point at which Wedgwood left the process. He soon abandoned the employment of the nitrate and chloride of silver, and proceeded with his inquiry—using plates of metal and glass to receive his sensitive coatings. In 1829, M. Vincent Chevalier brought Niepce and Daguerre together, when

they entered into partnership to prosecute the subject in common. For a long time, they appear to have used the resinous surfaces only, when the contrast between the resin and the metal plates not being sufficiently great to give a good picture, endeavors were made to blacken that part of the plate from which the resin was removed in the process of *heliography*, (sun-drawing), as it was most happily called. Amongst other materials, iodine was employed; and Daguerre certainly was the first to notice the property possessed by the iodine coating of changing under the influence of the sun's rays. The following letter from Niepce to Daguerre is on this subject:—

“ST. LOUP DE VARENNES, June 23, 1831.

“SIR, AND DEAR PARTNER,—I had long expected to hear from you with too much impatience not to receive and read, with the greatest pleasure, your letters of the 10th and 21st of last May. I shall confine myself in this reply to yours of the 21st, because having been engaged ever since it reached me in your experiments on iodine, I hasten to communicate to you the results which I have obtained. I had given my attention to similar researches previous to our connection, but without hope of success, from the impossibility, or nearly so, in my opinion, of fixing in any durable manner the images received on iodine, even supposing the difficulty surmounted of replacing the lights and shadows in their natural order. My results in this respect have been entirely similar to those which the oxide of silver gave me; and promptitude of operation was the sole advantage which these substances appeared to offer. Nevertheless, last year, after you left this, I subjected iodine to new trials but by a different mode of application. I informed you of the results, and your answer, not at all encouraging, decided me to carry these experiments no further. It appears that you have since viewed the question under a less desperate aspect, and I do not hesitate to reply to the appeal which you have made.

J. N. NIEPCE.”

From the above and other letters, it is evident that Niepce had used iodine, and abandoned it on account of the difficulty of reversing the lights and shadows. Daguerre employed it also; and, as it appears, with far more promise of success than any obtained by M. Niepce. On the 5th of July, 1833, Niepce died; in 1837 Daguerre and Isidore Niepce, the son and heir of Nicephore Niepce, entered into a definite agreement; and in a letter written on the 1st November, 1837, to Daguerre, Isidore Niepce says, “What a difference, also, between the method which you employ and the one by which I toil on! While I require almost a whole day to make one design, you ask only four minutes! What an enormous advantage! It is so great, indeed, that no person, knowing both methods, would employ the old one.” From this time it is established, that, although both Niepce and Daguerre used iodine, the latter alone employed it with any degree of success, and the discovery of the use of mercurial vapour to produce the positive image clearly belong to Daguerre. In January, 1839, the Daguerreotype pictures were first shown to the scientific and artistic public of Paris. The sensation they created was great, and the highest hopes of its utility were entertained. On the 15th June, M. Duchatel, Minister of the Interior, presented a bill to the Chamber of Deputies relative to the purchase of the process of M. Daguerre for fixing the images of the camera. A commission appointed by the Chamber, consisting of Arago, Etienne, Carl, Vatout, de Beaumont, Toursorer, Delessert, (Francois), Combarel de Leyval, and Vitet, made their report on the 3rd of July, and a special commission was appointed by the Chamber of Peers, composed of the following peers: Barons Athalin, Besson, Gay Lussac, the Marquis de Laplace. Vicomte Simeon, Baron Thenard, and the Comte de Noe, who reported favorably on the 30th July,

1839, and recommended unanimously that the “bill be adopted simply and without alteration.” On the 19th of August the secret was for the first time publicly announced in the Institute by M. Arago, the English patent having been completed a few days before, in open defiance and contradiction of the statement of M. Duchatel to the Chamber of Deputies, who used these words “Unfortunately for the authors of this beautiful discovery it is impossible for them to bring their labor into the market, and thus indemnify themselves for the sacrifices incurred by so many attempts so long fruitless. This invention does not admit of being secured by patent.” In conclusion, the Minister of the Interior said, You will concur in a sentiment which has already awakened universal sympathy; you will never suffer us to leave to foreign nations the glory of endowing the world of science and of art with one of the most wonderful discoveries that honor our native land. Daguerre never did much towards the improvement of his process. The high degree of sensibility which has been attained has been due to the experiments of others.

* De-gare, hence De-gare-o-type. This is the usual English pronunciation among artists. Webster pronounces it Da-ger-ro-type, but this is, we think, less correct, according to present usage.

[End of text.]

The graphic is also available in JPG format:

http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/graphics/P8520003_DAGUERRE_PHRENO-JOURN_1852-02.html

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The text quoted from the *International Magazine* first appeared in “M. Daguerre,” *Illustrated London News* 19:504 (26 July 1851): 117-18.¹ The *Illustrated London News* article is accompanied by a wood engraving portrait of Daguerre taken from another Meade daguerreotype (mistakenly credited to Claudet).

This wood engraving portrait of Daguerre also appears, with facsimile signature, in *Christian Parlor Magazine* (New York) (1851): 18.² It was Charles Richard Meade (of the well-known Meade Brothers) who, in 1848, took the daguerreotype portrait of Daguerre upon which this wood engraving is based. The original daguerreotype is not known to be extant.

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510007_DAGUERRE_ILN_1851-07-26.pdf

2. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510005_DAGUERRE-XIAN-PARLOR_1851.pdf

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