

Benjamin Pierce Johnson, "American daguerreotypes in the Great Exhibition, 1851," published 1852

(keywords: Benjamin Pierce Johnson, Mathew B. Brady, Martin M. Lawrence, John A. Whipple, Charles R. Meade, Henry W. M. Meade, Meade Brothers, Oliver B. Evans, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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Selected text published in:

Report of Benj. P. Johnson, Agent of the State of New-York, Appointed to Attend the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nation, held in London, 1851 (Albany: C. Van Benthuysen, 1852): 116–17. The text appears under the header, "Class 10.—*Philosophical Instruments and processes depending on their use.*"

DAGUERREOTYPES were extensively shown. Those from the United States were conceded to be superior in general effect, to those from any other country. Brady & Lawrence, of New-York, each received a Prize Medal—and one was awarded to a Mr. Whipple, of Michigan, for a daguerreotype of the moon. There were several other exhibitors whose pictures were very superior. Those of Evans, from Buffalo, were much admired, as were those of Meade & Brothers, New-York. The following article, from an English literary journal, shows in what estimation our exhibition was held.

"Daguerreotypes are largely displayed by the French, as might have been expected, that country being proud of the discovery; but the examples exhibited by the Americans surpass, in general, beauty of effect, any which we have examined from other countries. This has been attributed to a difference in the character of the solar light, as modified by atmospheric conditions; we are not, however, disposed to believe that to be the case. We have certain indications that an increased intensity of light is not of any advantage, but rather the contrary, for the production of daguerreotypes; the luminous rays appearing to act as balancing powers against the chemical rays. Now, this being the case, we know of no physical cause by which the superiority can be explained, and we are quite disposed to be sufficiently honest to admit that the mode of manipulation has more to do with the result than any atmospheric influences. However this may be, the character of the daguerreotypes executed in America is very remarkable. There are a fulness of tone, and an artistic modulation of light and shadow which, in England, we do not obtain. The striking contrasts of white and black are shown decidedly enough in the British examples exhibited in the gallery—but here are coldness and hardness of outline. Within the shadow of the eagle and the striped banner we find no lights too white and no shadows too dark; they dissolve, as in Nature, one into the other, in the most harmonious and truthful manner—and the result is more perfect pictures."

[End of selected text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The author is mistaken regarding Whipple's location as Michigan." John Adams Whipple worked in Boston, Massachusetts.

This text was subsequently plagiarized in Henry Howe, *Adventures and Achievements of Americans* (Cincinnati: Henry Howe, 1858): 608.¹

An excellent essay regarding all facets of Americans and the London Crystal Palace is Robert. F. Dalzell, *American Participation in the Great Exhibition of 1851* (Amherst: Amherst College Press, 1960).

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8580001_HOWE_1851_WORLDS_FAIR_1858.pdf

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