

Lewis Gaylord Clark, "The Daguerreotype," December 1839

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THE 'DAGUERREOTYPE'—We have seen the views taken in Paris by the 'DAGUERREOTYPE,' and have no hesitation in avowing, that they are the most remarkable objects of curiosity and admiration, in the arts, that we ever beheld. Their exquisite perfection almost transcends the bounds of sober belief. Let us endeavor to convey to the reader an impression of their character. Let him suppose himself standing in the middle of Broadway, with a looking-glass held perpendicularly in his hand, in which is reflected the street, with all that therein is, for two or three miles, taking in the haziest distance. Then let him take the glass into the house, and find the impression of the entire view, in the softest light and shade, vividly retained upon its surface. This is the DAGUERREOTYPE! The views themselves are from the most interesting points of the French metropolis. We shall speak of several of them at random, as the impression of each arises in the mind, and not in the order in which they stand in the exhibition. Take, first, the Vue du Pont Notre Dame, and Palais du Justice. Mark the minute light and shade; the perfect *clearness* of every object; the extreme softness of the distance. Observe the dim, hazy aspect of the picture representing the towers of Notre Dame, with Saint Jacques la Boucherie in the distance. It was taken in a violent storm of rain; and how admirably is even *that* feature of the view preserved in the *tout ensemble!* Look, again, at the view of the Statue of Henry the Fourth and the Tuilleries, the Point des Arts, Pont du Carousel, Pont Royal, and the Heights of Challot in the distance. There is not a shadow in the whole, that is not *nature itself*; there is not an object, even the most minute, embraced in that wide scope, which was not in the original; and it is impossible that one should have been omitted. Think of that! So, too, of the Tuilleries, the Champs Elyses, The Quay de la Morgue—in short, of all and every view in the whole superb collection. The shade of a shadow is frequently reflected in the river, and the very trees are taken with the shimmer created by the breeze, imaged in the water! Look where you will, Paris itself is before you. Here, by the silent statue of the great Henry, how often has Despair come at midnight, to plunge into eternity! By the Quay de la Morgue, remark the array of washing-boats, and the 'Ladies of the Suds' hanging out their clothes, which almost wave in the breeze. It was but a little below this point, that our entertaining 'American in Paris,' doubtful of the purity of the Seine water, bought a filter of charcoal, 'to intercept the petticoats, and other such articles,' as he might previously have swallowed. *There* is a view, now, which Mr. IRVING has helped to render famous. It was across that very Pont Neuf, if we have not forgotten the story, one awful night in the tempestuous times of the French revolution, when the lightening gleamed, and loud claps of thunder rattled

through the lofty, narrow streets, that Gottfried Wolfgang supported his headless bride. It needs no VICTOR HUGO, to tell us that this is the time-honored *Notre Dame de Paris*. Take the view into the strongest sunlight, by the window, and survey with a glass its minutest beauties. There is not a stone traced there, that has not its archetype in the edifice. Those square towers, those Gothic arches and buttresses; the rich tracery, and that enterprising tourists looking down upon Paris—there they *were*, and here they *are*! Look sharp, and far within, you may see the very bells. What an association! What tales have the bells of Notre Dame told to Paris and the Parisians, since Pope Alexander laid her corner stone! One cannot but feel, while gazing at this scene, as did an eloquent American on first encountering similar associations: ‘Something strong and stately, like the slow and majestic march of a might whirlwind, sweeps around those eternal towers: the mighty processions of kings, consuls, emperors, and empires, and generations, have passed over that sublime theatre.’ How those bells pealed, when Napoleon’s sounding bulletins came in from Italy and Germany, from Egypt and Russia! How, more recently, they clamored at midnight, when the tocsin of revolt streamed upon the hoary towers, and the tri-color floated triumphant from their summits! But leaving the times that were, let us come down to the days that are. Near where you see that hopeful member of the *sans culottides* tribe musing on the bridge, is the spot where the renowned Mrs. RAMSBOTTOM saw, for the first time, the ‘statute of Henry Carter,’ (Henri Quatre,) and marvelled ‘whether he could be any relation to the CARTERS of Portsmouth.’ The very *affiches* then ‘black-guarded against the walls’ are still here. Close at hand, too, in another frame, are the ‘Tooleries’ and ‘Penny Royal,’ which so greatly delighted the old lady and her daughter Lavinia.

We have little room to speak of the ‘interior’ views. We can only say, in passing, that they are *perfect*. Busts, statues, curtains, pictures, are copied to the very life; and portraits are included, without the *possibility* of an incorrect likeness. Indeed, the DAGUERREOTYPE will never do for portrait painting. Its pictures are quite too natural, to please any other than very beautiful sitters. It has not the slightest knack at ‘fancy-work.’ MATTHEWS used to sing, in his ‘Trip to Paris:’

‘Mrs. Grill is very ill!
 Nothing can improve her,
 Until she sees the ‘Tooleries,’
 And waddles through the Louvre,’

This was truthful satire, in the great mime’s day; but illness, with sea-voyage cures, must decline now; for who would throw up their business and their dinners, on a voyage to see Paris or London, when one can sit in an apartment in New-York, and look at the streets, the architectural wonders, and the busy life of each crowded metropolis? We recognized, without doubt, many Frenchmen of whom we had before heard. We distinctly saw, we are confident, in the door of a restaurant, in a white apron, with sleeves rolled up, the identical cook who brought our esteemed correspondent, SANDERSON, the tough ‘*bifstek de mouton*,’ which the latter offered him five francs to eat, but which the functionary, after turning the matter over in his mind, reluctantly declined, on the ground that ‘he had an aged mother, and another relation, dependent upon his exertions!’ . . . M. GOURAUD, the accomplished and gentlemanly proprietor of the ‘DAGUERREOTYPE’ and the only legitimate specimens of the art in this country, favored us with an examination of one or two views, which were accidentally injured in the process of being taken. But although imperfect, they were still wonderful in the general effect. The ‘darkness visible,’

the floods of light, the immensity of the space, and the far perspective, in their dim, obscure state, all reminded us of the English MARTIN. But our article is already too much extended; and we close by saying to all our metropolitan readers, 'Go and see the views taken by the DAGUERREOTYPE; and when M. GOURAUD commences his lectures upon the art, fail not to hear him!

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The authorship of this often-referenced text has commonly been attributed to the publication's then-editor, Lewis Gaylord Clark. Although not specifically stated, it is likely that Clark was among the "eminent men" who received an invitation for François Gouraud's 4 December 1839 private exhibition of daguerreotypes from Paris.¹

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/S8390001_GOURAUD_NY_INVITE_1839-11-29.pdf

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