

Gabriel Harrison, "Crystal Palace Daguerreotype vs: The New York Tribune," September 1853

(keywords: Gabriel Harrison, Horace Greeley, Dogberry, Martin M. Lawrence, "The Three Ages", Harrison & Hill, Harrison and Hill, Levi L. Hill, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

THE DAGUERRETYPE: AN ARCHIVE OF SOURCE TEXTS, GRAPHICS, AND EPHEMERA
The research archive of Gary W. Ewer regarding the history of the daguerreotype
<http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org>
EWER ARCHIVE P8530001

Published in:

Photographic Art-Journal (New York) 6:3 (September 1853): 194–95.

CRYSTAL PALACE DAGUERREOTYPES vs: THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE.—*Mr. Editor*

My attention was called, yesterday, to a somewhat lengthy editorial upon the fifth page of the *Tribune*, under the caption of "American Art-Daguerreotypes," in which the writer, after endeavoring to explain the reason why American operators were *inferior* to the artists of Europe, indulges his readers with a criticism that honorably entitles him to wear the mantle of ancient *Dogberry*, for the remainder of his life. I cannot, Sir, determine whether it were better to admire the conceited attempts he has made to induce the public to imagine him conversant with the details of an art, of which he apparently knows absolutely nothing, or his equally absurd attempts to represent himself partially acquainted with the vernacular of his mother tongue. The lack of grammatical accuracy which is seen in every line of his composition, renders him most unfit for the position he occupies as a reporter, and qualifies him to exclaim, with his ancient namesake, "But masters, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass." It is not a fair and impartial criticism that I object to; but any sensible man would avoid the kick of a vicious donkey, were it in his power to escape the infliction.

M. Daguerre has, in common with other distinguished savans, admitted that American operators have *always* excelled. The best operators now in London, Liverpool, and Paris are *Americans*. So much for his first position.

The chemicals of this country, so far from being superior to those of Europe, are actually regarded as inferior for the purpose, and operators never use other than French or German chemicals, if they can avoid it.

In describing the necessary chemicals used by daguerreotypists, Dogberry alludes to certain articles that are now regarded as obsolete; comments upon others which are never used, and omits to mention the recent discoveries which have made the greatest improvements in the art. The logical deductions he presents exhibit an ignorance of the subject upon which he has written, rather than the calm and lucid researches of the scholar. He says:

"Our people are readier (?) in picking up processes, and acquiring the mastery of the art, than our transatlantic rivals. Not that we understand the science better, but the detail of the practice is acquired in a shorter time by us."

This is logical to say the least—*very* logical.

"A Daniel come to judgment! yea, a Daniel!
Oh, wise young judge, how do I honor thee!"

Dogberry asserts that “it requires great skill to focus the image.” so far from this being the case, I guarantee to instruct a child ten years of age, how to take a focus as correctly as the best operator in existence, *in less than five minutes*.

He says also: “The point where a good view of the sitter is obtained, is not the point best adapted for bringing out a good picture.” These are the very points a skillful operator desires, by means of which he invariably produces good pictures.

Again: If the focus of vision, and that of chemical action, are not the same, as Dogberry asserts, why is it that operators are compelled to place the chemical surface of the plate, upon which the picture is to be taken, *in the exact spot* formerly occupied by the surface of the ground glass upon which the focus of vision was originally drawn?

Dogberry asserts, that “it is not possible to obtain a daguerreotype in its *natural colors*.” Admitted. The same fact was stated in a written report present to Hon Horace Greeley in 1852 for publication, by a committee of daguerreotypists (one of whom was myself,) appointed to examine the alleged invention of Mr. Hill. Mr. Greeley refused to publish this fact *then*, upon the ground that pictures could be taken in colors—he having evidence of the fact convincing to himself. Mr. Greeley and his reporter differ very much in their views, or the *Tribune* philosopher has “changed opinion.” There are other points I might prove entirely incorrect, but for want of space.

I again quote from the private opinions, publicly expressed of this sapient Dogberry:

“Mr. Lawrence exhibits a case in which softness of tone, and distinctness of image are united with artistic arrangement. The latter quality is especially noticeable in ‘The Three Ages.’ The mechanical execution of these pictures is unexcelled. These pictures of Mr. L. were exhibited in London.”

All very true, by why not go farther and state that these very pictures took the first prize medal at the Royal Exhibition, and that Mr. Lawrence has always kept this most important fact before the public. And why not also state, with equal truth, that these picture *were all taken by Gabriel Harrison*, and that every process, from the polishing of the plates to the finishing of each separate picture, *was performed by him alone*. A fair expression of opinion is all that is required by myself, and if these pictures of Mr. Lawrence now at the Crystal Palace, *are* really worth noticing, why not give the name of the operator *by whom they were taken*? It will be hard to believe that the operator who produced pictures in 1851, that beat the world, should, with two years’ experience in his art, aided by an establishment which for luxury, beauty, convenience, and capabilities, may safely challenge any other in existence, produce a group of pictures possessing “very indifferent mechanical execution.”

Harrison & Hill have no “gaudy frame” in which to exhibit their picture. The chaste and elegant frame in which all their pictures are placed, is from the manufacture of Waller & Kreps, Broadway artists, who have no superiors in Europe or America. It is a gem of workmanship—that reflects honor upon the mechanics who produced it.

Dogberry alludes to “a picture well developed when the chemical action extends to the margin of the plate.” An unhappy allusion, as the picture contains but two figures, both of which are in the centre of a plate 10 x 12 inches only. Our pictures are, some of them, 15 x 18, *and contain one hundred and fifty square inches more surface than any other plates on exhibition*. More than this, the objects in the picture are carried to the extreme edge of the plate. These are facts not be disputed. [sic—ed.]

Apologizing for the length of the communication into which I have inadvertently betrayed myself, permit me to remain, with the highest respect.

GABRIEL HARRISON.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

Harrison's pointed remarks are made in response to an article by Horace Greeley first serialized in *New-York Tribune* in or before September 1853; the specific date is not known to this editor. Clarifying information is welcome. Greeley's text is reprinted—with an introduction criticizing the comments—in *Photographic Art-Journal* 6:3 (September 1853): 191–4. (The reprinted *Tribune* text appears immediately prior to Harrison's response.)

Greeley's serialized texts were subsequently compiled in Horace Greeley, *Art and Industry as Represented in the Exhibition at the Crystal Palace New York —1853–4* (New York: Redfield, 1853). Greeley's comments on the daguerreotypes comprise chapter 17 (pp. 171–7).¹

Additional information regarding Harrison is in Grant Romer, "Gabriel Harrison: The Poet Daguerrean," *Image* 22 (September 1979).

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8530001_GREELEY_ART_INDUSTRY_1853.pdf

EWER ARCHIVE P8530001

URL: http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8530001_HARRISON_PHOTO_ART-JOURNAL_1853-09.pdf

Document author: Gary W. Ewer

Creation date: 2008-10-07 / Last revision: 2012-05-11

Citation information: *Photographic Art-Journal* (New York) 6:3 (September 1853): 194–5.

Prepared from: photocopy from microfilm.

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

The *source text* is Public Domain and may be freely quoted. As noted below, this document is copyright.

If citing directly from this document, please reference the Ewer Archive number and provide the following citation credit:

Gary W. Ewer, ed., *The Daguerreotype: an Archive of Source Texts, Graphics, and Ephemera*, <http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org>

THE NECESSARY DISCLAIMERS:

The document creator has made every effort to insure the accuracy of the transcription. However, the information provided in this document is provided without warranty, either express or implied. The document creator will not be liable for any damages caused or alleged to be caused directly, indirectly, incidentally, or consequentially by the information provided by this text.

The document creator assumes no responsibility for accuracy of fact; the text is prepared "as found." Factual inaccuracies of the original text are generally **not** noted by the document creator. If this text is used in academic papers, accuracy should be confirmed by consulting original sources.

The document creator also assumes no responsibility regarding the correctness, suitability, or safety of any chemical or photographic processes that may be described by this text. Many of the chemicals used in early photographic processes are extremely toxic and should not be handled without a *thorough* knowledge of safe use.

The opinions expressed in this text are solely those of the original author and are not necessarily those of the Archive editor. Some texts may contain derogatory words. Any such word is certainly one that would not be used today. The words remain in the transcription, however, to maintain truthfulness to the original text.

© 2008, Gary W. Ewer. <http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org>
