Chapter 1 : American hand book of the daguerreotype, (Book,) [blog.quintoapp.com]

It has been well observed by an able writer, that it is impossible to trace the path of a sunbeam through our atmosphere without feeling a desire to know its nature, by what power it traverses the immensity of space, and the various modifications it undergoes at the surfaces and interior of terrestrial substances. Light is white and colorless, as long as it does not come in contact with matter. When in apposition with any body, it suffers variable degrees of decomposition, resulting in color, as by reflection, dispersion, refraction, and unequal absorption. Newton the world is indebted for proving the compound nature of a ray of white light emitted from the sun. The object of this work is not to engage in an extended theory upon the subject of light, but to recur only to some points of more particular interest to the photographic operator. The decomposition of a beam of light can be noticed by exposing it to a prism. If, in a dark room, a beam of light be admitted through a small hole in a shutter, it will form a white round spot upon the place where it falls. If a triangular prism of glass be placed on the inside of the dark room, so that the beam of light falls upon it, it no longer has the same direction, nor does it form a round spot, but an oblong painted image of seven colors--red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. This is called the solar spectrum, and will be readily understood by reference to the accompanying diagram, Fig. These rays always hold the same relation to each other, as may be seen by comparing every spectrum or rainbow; there is never any confusion or misplacement. There are various other means of decomposing [page] white light besides the prism, of which one of the principal and most interesting to the Daguerreotypist is by reflection from colored bodies. If a beam of white light falls upon a white surface, it is reflected without change; but if it falls upon a red surface, only the red ray is reflected: The ray which is reflected corresponds with the color of the object. It is this reflected decomposed light which prevents the beautifully-colored image we see upon the ground glass in our cameras. The accompanying illustration, Fig. The various points of the solar spectrum are represented in the order in which they occur between A, and B, this exhibits the limits of the Newtonian spectrum, corresponding with Fig. Sir John Herschel and Seebeck have shown that there exists, beyond the violet, a faint violet light, or rather a lavender to b, to which gradually becomes colorless; similarly, red light exists beyond the assigned limits of the red ray to a. The greatest amount of actinic power is shown at E opposite the violet; hence this color "exerts" the greatest amount of influence in the formation of the photographic image. Blue paper and blue color have been somewhat extensively used by our Daguerreotype operators in their operating rooms and skylights, in order to facilitate the operation in the camera. I fancy, however, that this plan cannot be productive of as much good as thought by some, from the fact, that the light falling upon the subject, and then reflected into the camera, is, coming through colorless glass, not affected by such rays as may be reflected from the walls of the operating room; and even if it were so, I conceive that it would be injurious, by destroying the harmony of shadows which might otherwise occur. The greatest amount of white light is at C; the yellow contains less of the chemical power than any other portion of the solar spectrum. It has been found that the most intense heat is at the extreme red, b. Artificial lights differ in their color; the white light of burning charcoal, which is the principal light from candles, oil and gas, contains three rays--red, yellow, and blue. The dazzling light emitted from lime intensely heated, known as the Drummond light, gives the colors of the prism almost as bright as the solar spectrum. If we expose a prepared Daguerreotype plate or sensitive paper to the solar spectrum, it will be observed that the luminous power the yellow occupies but a small space compared with the influence of heat and chemical power. Hunt, in his Researches on Light, has presented the following remarks upon the accompanying illustration: Such a series of circles may well be used to represent a beam from the sun, which may be regarded as an atom of Light, surrounded with an invisible atmosphere of Heat, and another still more extended, which possesses the remarkable property of producing chemical and molecular change. A ray of light, in passing obliquely through any medium of uniform density, does not change its course; but if it should pass into a denser body, it would turn from a straight line, pursue a less oblique direction, and in a line nearer

to a perpendicular to the surface of that body. Water exerts a stronger refracting power than air; and if a ray of light fall upon a body of this fluid its course is changed, as may be seen by reference to Fig. It should be observed that at the surface of bodies the refractive power is exerted, and that the light proceeds in a straight line until leaving the body. The refraction is more or less, and in all cases in proportion as the rays fall more or less obliquely on the refracting surface. It is this law of optics which has given rise to the lenses in our camera tubes, by which means we are enabled to secure a well-delineated representation of any object we choose to picture. When a ray of light passes from one medium to another, and through that into the first again, if the two refractions be equal, and in opposite directions, no sensible effect will be produced. The reader may readily comprehend the phenomena of refraction, by means of light passing through lenses of different curves, by reference to the following diagrams: By these it is seen that a double-convex lens tends to condense the rays of light to a focus, a double-concave to scatter them, and a concavo-convex combines both powers. If parallel rays of light fall upon a double-convex lens, D D, Fig. Those rays of light which are traversing a parallel course, when they enter the lens are brought to a focus nearer the lens than others. Hence the difficulty the operator sometimes experiences by not being able to "obtain a focus," when he wishes to secure a picture of some very distant objects; he does not get his ground glass near enough to the lenses. Again, the rays from an object near by may be termed diverging rays. This will be better comprehended by reference to Fig. The closer the object is to the lenses, the greater will be the divergence. This rule is applicable to copying. The reason of this is, that the distance of the picture from the lens, in the last copy, is less than the other, and the divergence has increased, throwing, the focus further from the lens. I would remark that the points F and A, in Fig. To illustrate this more clearly, I will refer to the following woodcut: It will be observed that in the last cut the image produced by the lens is curved. Now, it would be impossible to produce a well-defined image from the centre to the edge upon a plain surface; the outer edges would be misty, indistinct, or crayon-like. The centre of the image might be represented clear and sharp on the ground glass, yet this would be far from the case in regard to the outer portions. This is called spherical aberration, and to it is due the want of distinctness which is frequently noticed around the edges of pictures taken in the camera. To secure a camera with a flat, sharp, field, should be the object of every operator; and, in a measure, this constitutes the great difference in cameras manufactured in this country. Spherical aberration is overcome by proper care in the formation of the lens: Lenses for the photographic camera are now always ground of a concavo-convex form, or meniscus, which corresponds more nearly to the accompanying diagram. It will be remembered, that in a former page a beam of light is decomposed by passing through a glass prism giving seven distinct colors--red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Now, as has been said before, the dissimilar rays having an unequal degree of refrangibility, it will be impossible to obtain a focus by the light passing through a double-convex lens without its being fringed with color. Its effect will be readily understood by reference to the accompanying cut. If the rays of the sun are refracted by means of a lens, and the image received on a screen placed between C and o, so as to cut the cone L a l L, a luminous circle will be formed on the paper, only surrounded by a red border, because it is produced by a section of the cone L a l L, of which the external rays L a L l, are red; if the screen be moved to the other side of o, the luminous circle will be bordered with violet, because it will be a section of the cone M a M l, of which the exterior rays are violet. To avoid the influence of spherical aberration, and to render the phenomena of coloration more evident, let an opaque disc be placed over the central portion of the lens, so as to allow the rays only to pass which are at the edge of the glass; a violet image of the sun will then be seen at v, red at r, and, finally, images of all the colors of the spectrum in the intermediate space; consequently, the general image will not only be confused, but clothed with prismatic colors. To the photographer one of the most important features, requiring his particular attention. By the remarks given in the preceding pages, he will be enabled, in a measure, to judge of some of the difficulties to which he is occasionally subjected. We have in this country but two or three individuals who are giving their attention to the manufacture of lenses, and their construction is such, that they are quite free from the spherical or chromatic aberration. I do not give the method employed by our regular plate manufacturers; this is not important, as the operator could not possibly profit by it from the fact of the great expense of manufacturing. The following will be found practical: Plates can be purchased in a high state of preparation from the

engravers. Having prepared the copper-plate, well rub it with salt and water, and then with the silvering powder. No kind answers better than that used by clock-makers to silver their dial-plates. It is composed of one part of well washed chloride of silver, five parts of cream of tartar, and four parts of table salt. This powder must be kept in a dark vessel, and in a dry place. For a plate six inches by five, as much of this composition as can be taken up on a shilling is sufficient. It is to be laid in the centre of the copper, and the figures being wetted, to be quickly rubbed over every part of the plate, adding occasionally a little damp salt. The copper being covered with the silvering is to be speedily well washed in water, in which a little soda is dissolved, and as soon as the surface is of a fine silvery whiteness, it is to be dried with a very clean warm cloth. In this state the plates may be kept for use. The first process is to expose the plate to the heat of a spirit flame, until the silvered surface becomes of a well-defined golden-yellow color; then, when the plate is cold, take a piece of cotton, dipped in very dilute nitric acid, and rub lightly over it until the white hue is restored, and dry it with very soft clean cloths. The silver is thus converted, over its surface, into an ioduret of silver; and in this state it is exposed to light, which blackens it. When dry, it is to be again polished, either with dilute acid or a solution of carbonate of soda, and afterwards with dry cotton, and the smallest possible portion of prepared chalk: The rationale of this process is, in the first place, the heat applied dries off any adhering acid, and effects more perfect union between the copper and silver, so as to enable it to bear the subsequent processes. The first yellow surface appears to be an oxide of silver with, possibly, a minute quantity of copper in combination, which being removed leaves a surface chemically pure. The copper plate, varnished on one side, is united, by means of a copper wire, with a plate of zinc. The zinc plate being immersed in the acid, and the copper in the salt, a weak electric current is generated, which precipitates the silver in a very uniform manner over the entire surface. After each application of the nitrate, the plate should be rubbed gently in one direction, with moistened bitartrate of potassa, applied with buff. This coat of silver receives a fine polish from peroxide of iron and buff. Proofs are said to have been taken on it, comparable with those obtained on French plates. Soliel has proposed the use of the chloride of silver to determine the time required to produce a good impression on the iodated plate in the camera. His method is to fix at the bottom of a tube, blackened within, a piece of card, on which chloride of silver, mixed with gum or dextrine, is spread. The tube thus disposed is turned from the side of the object of which we wish to take the image, and the time that the chloride of silver takes to become of a greyish slate color will be the time required for the light of the camera to produce a good effect on the iodated silver. The following method of producing Daguerreotypes has by some been named as above. Most experienced operators have been long acquainted with the effect of the vapor of ammonia upon the chemically coated plate. I will here insert Mr. This gentleman, in referring to it published in , says: The effect is produced upon a simple iodized plate, but still more upon a plate prepared in the ordinary way, with both iodine and bromine. By this means, the author obtained impressions instantaneously in the sunshine, and in five to ten seconds in a moderate light; and he hopes to be able to take moving objects. It can be applied by exposing the prepared plate over a surface of water, to which a few drops of ammonia have been added sufficient to make it smell of ammonia ; or the vapor can be introduced into the camera during the action. In fact, the presence of ammonia, in the operating-room, appears to have a good effect, as it also neutralizes the vapors of iodine and bromine that may be floating about, and which are so detrimental to the influences of light upon the plate. In consideration of the importance of galvanized plates, I shall endeavor to give as plain and concise a manner of manipulation as possible. For some time it was a question among the operators generally, as to the beneficial result of electrotyping, the Daguerreotype plate, but for a few years past our first operators have found it a fact, that a well electro-silvered surface is the best for producing a portrait by the Daguerreotype. From my own experiments, I have found that a plate, by being galvanized, can be rendered more sensitive to the operation of the light in proportion of one to five, viz.: In connection with this subject, there is one fact worthy of notice; a plate with a very heavy coating of pure silver, will not produce an equally developed image, as a plate with a thinner coating, hence the thin coating, providing it entirely covers the surface, is the best, and is the one most to be desired. The experiment is plain and simple. Let the slate receive a heavy or thick coating by the electrotype, then polish, coat, expose in the usual manner, and the result will be a flat, ashy, indistinct impression; when, on the other hand, the thin coating will produce a bright, clear and

distinct image, with all the details delineated. Some claim the superiority of the first from its uniformity of action; others, of the latter, for its strength.

Chapter 2 : American Hand Book of the Daguerreotype by Samuel D. Humphrey - Full Text Free Book (Pa

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Having duly arranged the camera, I sat for five minutes, and the result was a profile miniature a miniature in reality, or a plate not quite three-eighths of an inch square. Thus, with much deliberation and study, passed the first day in Daguerreotype-- little dreaming or knowing into what a labyrinth such a beginning was hastening us. The reflector C was kept up to the required position by the handle lever, upright post and bolts. Reflector B was hinged at its upper end at the top of the window frame, the only motion being necessary was that which would reflect upon the sitter the incident rays from reflector C--the reflector B being kept at the required angle by the connecting lever m, etc. Suitable back-grounds were placed behind the sitter. The reflector B and C, had frequently to be renewed, the heat of the sun soon destroying their brilliance or power of reflecting, light, before renewing them, however, we resorted to the springing of them, by which means their power was increased for a period. The camera or reflecting apparatus, invented by Mr. Wolcott, was, from the nature of the case, better adapted at that day to the taking of portraits from life, than any other instruments. After carefully examining the camera described by Daguerre, and the time stated as necessary to produce action for an image, it became evident to the mind of Mr. Wolcott at once, that more light could be obtained as the field of view required was not large by employing a reflector of short focus and wide aperture, than from a lens arrangement, owing to spherical aberration and other causes. Many experiments having been tried with the small instrument figured p. Wolcott having on hand reflectors of the right diameter, for Newtonian telescopes, of eight feet focal distance, resolved as it was a matter of experiment to grind down or increase the curve for the focal distance before named-- this required time. In the mean time, many plans were pursued for making good plates, and the means of finishing, them. As the completion of the large reflector drew to a close, our mutual friend, Henry Fitz, Jr. Wolcott, in that and other business is offer was gladly accepted-- Mr. Wolcott himself having frequent engagement; to fill as operator in the details of mechanical dentistry. Thus, by the aid of Mr. Fitz, the reflector was polished, and experiments soon after tried on plates of two by tow and a half inches, with tolerable success. Illness on my part quite suspended further trial for nearly four weeks. On my recovery, early in January, , our experiments were again resumed with improved results, so much so as to induce Mr. Wolcott and myself to entertain serious thoughts of making a business of the taking of likenesses from life, intending to use the reflecting apparatus invented by Mr. Wolcott, and for which he obtained Letters Patent, on the 8th day of May, Up to January 1st, , all experiments had been tried on an economical scale, and the apparatus then made, was unfit for public exhibition; we resolved to make the instruments as perfect as possible while they were in progress of manufacture. Experiments were made upon mediums for protecting the eyes from the direct light of the sun, and also upon the best form and material for a back-ground to the likenesses. The length of time required for a "sitting," even with the reflecting apparatus, was such as to render the operation anything but pleasant. Expedients were ever ready in the hands of Wolcott: The objections to these screens, however, were serious, inasmuch as a multiplication of them became necessary to lessen the intensity of the light sufficiently for due protection to the eyes, without which, the likenesses, other than profiles, were very unpleasant to look upon. Most of the portraits, then of necessity were profiles formed upon back-grounds, the lighter parts relieved upon black, and the darker parts upon light ground; the back-ground proper being of light colored material with black velvet so disposed upon the light ground, this being placed sufficiently far from the sitter, to produce harmony of effect when viewed in the field of the camera. Other difficulties presented themselves seriously to the working of the discovery of Daguerre, to portrait taking-- one of which was the necessity for a constant and nearly horizontal light, that the shaded portions of the portrait should not be too hard, and yet, at the same time, be sufficiently well developed without the "high light" of the picture becoming overdone, solarized or destroyed. In almost all the early specimens of the Daguerreotype, extremes of light and shade presented themselves, much to the annoyance of the early operators, and seriously objectionable were such portraits. To overcome this difficulty, Mr. Wolcott mounted, with suitable joints,

upon the top of his camera, a large looking-glass or plane reflector, in such a manner that the light of the sun as a strong light was absolutely necessary , when falling upon the glass could be directed upon the person in an almost horizontal direction. Early in February, , Mr. On his arrival a joint arrangement was effected with Mr. Richard Beard, of London, in patenting and working the invention in England. Up to February, , but few friends had been made acquainted with the progress of the art in the hands of Mr. From time to time reports reached us from various sources of the success of others, and specimens of landscapes, etc. Morse, all of this city; Mr. Goddard and others of Philadelphia; Mr. Southworth, Professor Plumbe, and numerous others were early in the field; all, however, using the same description of camera as that of Daguerre, with modification for light, either by enlargement by lens and aperture for light, or by shortening the focal distance. Mapes being present, a question was asked if any one present could give information relative to portraiture from life by the Daguerreotype. Kells, a friend of Mr. Wolcott and a scientific and practical man sinced deceased , at once marked out upon the black-board, the whole as contrived by Mr. This gave publicity to the invention of Mr. Shortly after, Professor Mapes, Dr. Chilton, and many others, sat for their portraits, and were highly gratified. Professor Morse also came and proposed to Mr. Wolcott to join him in the working of the invention, etc. From this time much interest was manifested by our friends in our progress. Rooms were obtained in the Granite Buildings, corner of Broadway and Chambers street, and fitted for business. The rooms being small, it was soon found impracticable to use the arrangement of looking-glass, as previously spoken of; a new plan became necessary, to introduce which, the sashes were removed, and two large looking-glasses were mounted in proper frames, thus: The most plausible thing that suggested itself was blue glass; but, as this could not be found, numerous were the expedients proposed by the friends of the art, who from time to time visited our rooms. At the suggestion of Professor Mapes who is ever ready to assist those in perplexity , a trough of plate glass s, about twenty-eight inches square in the clear, and from three to four inches thick, was filled with a solution of ammonia sulphate of copper, and mounted on the frame as in the sketch, which, for a time, answered extremely well; soon, however, decomposition of this solution became apparent from the increased length of time required for a sitting, although to the eye of an observer, no visible cause for such long sittings could be pointed out. Professor Mapes being appealed to, suggested that to the above solution a little acid be added which acted like a charm-- shortening the time for a sitting from six, eight, or ten minutes to that of about one. Decomposition, however, would go on by the action of light and heat through the solution. New solutions were tried, when the whole were finally abandoned as being, too uncertain and troublesome. The reflecting apparatus R, was placed upon the stand as in the sketch, with a wedge for elevating the camera, between it and the table, to obtain the image properly upon the plate. A quantity of blue window glass was next obtained, and holes drilled through the corners of it, and several sheets were wired together to increase the size, and, when complete, was suspended from the ceiling in its proper place, and so arranged that when a person was sitting, this sheet of glass could be moved to and from, the object of which was to prevent shadows on the face of the sitter produced from the uneven surface of the glass. This latter contrivance was used until a perfect plate of glass was procured. The number of persons desirous of obtaining, their miniatures, induced many to entertain the idea of establishing themselves in the Art as a profession, and numerous were the applications for information; many persons paying for their portraits solely with the view of seeing the manner of our manipulations, in order that they might obtain information to carry on likeness-taking as a business. The reflecting camera being a very troublesome instrument to make, and difficulties besetting us from every source, but little attention could be given to teaching others; and, indeed, as the facts seemed to be at this time, we knew but little of the necessary manipulations ourselves. In course of time, several established themselves. The first one, after ourselves, who worked the discovery of Daguerre for portrait taking in this city, was a Mr. Prosch; followed soon after by many others, in almost all cases copying the reflecting arrangement for light, as figured above, many using it even after we had long abandoned that arrangement for a better one. Innumerable obstacles to the rapid advance of the daguerreotype, presented themselves almost hourly, much to the annoyance of ourselves, and those dependent upon our movements for their advancement. Among the most difficult problems of the day, was the procuring of good plates. To explain more clearly, it was the practice of most silver platers to use an alloy for silver-plating. In the reduction of the ingot to sheet metal, annealing has

to be resorted to, and acid pickles to remove oxides, etc. The number of times the plated metal is exposed to heat and acid in its reduction to the required thickness, produces a surface of pure silver. The most of this surface is, however, so rough as to be with difficulty polished, without in places removing entirely this pellicle of pure metal, and exposing a polished surface of the alloy used in plating. Whenever such metal was used, very unsightly stains or spots frequently disfigured the portraits. The portrait, or portion of it, developed upon the pure silver, being much lighter or whiter than that developed upon the alloy; it therefore appeared that the purer the silver, the more sensitive the plate became. Accordingly, we directed Messrs. Soon after this, some samples of English plated metal, of a very superior quality, came to our possession, and relieved us from the toil of making and plating one plate at a time, an expedient we were compelled to resort to, to command material to meet the pressing demands for portraits. Having it now in our power to obtain good plated metal, a more rapid mode of polishing than that recommended by Daguerre was attempted as follows: This metal was cut to the desired size, and having a pair of "hand rolls" at hand, each plate, with its silvered side placed next to the highly polished surface of a steel die, was passed and repassed through the rolls many times, by which process a very smooth, perfect surface was obtained. The plates were then annealed, and a number of plates thus prepared were fastened to the bottom of a box a few inches deep a foot wide, and eighteen inches long; this box was placed upon a table and attached to a rod connected to the face plate of a lathe, a few inches from its centre, so as to give the box a reciprocating motion. A quantity of emery was now strewn over the plates, and the lathe set in motion. The action produced wag a friction or rubbing of the emery over the surface of the plates. When continued for some time, a greyish polish was the result. Linseed, when used in the same manner, gave us better hope of success, and the next step resorted to was to build a wheel and suspend it after the manner of a grindstone. The plates being secured to the inner side of the wheel or case, and as this case revolved, the seeds would constantly keep to the lower level, and their sliding over the surface of the plates would polish or burnish their surfaces. This, with the former, was soon abandoned; rounded shots of silver placed in the same wheel were found not to perform the polishing so well as linseed. Buff-wheels of leather with rotten-stone and oil, proved to be far superior to all other contrivances; and, subsequently, at the suggestion of Professor Draper, velvet was used in lieu of buff leather, and soon superseded all other substances, both for lathe and hand-buffs, and I would add, for the benefit of new beginners that those who are familiar with its use, prefer cotton velvet. The only requisite necessary is, that the buffs made of cotton velvet should be kept dry and warm. The former of these articles is very objectionable, inasmuch as there is no positive certainty of being enabled to procure or make the article of uniform grit--the nature of the substance rendering, it impossible to reduce it to varying degrees of evenness, by the well known process of washing, for that purpose, and the burning of rotten-stone changes its chemical nature somewhat, at the same time rendering, this invaluable article harsh and gritty. And especially, no reliance can be placed upon burned rotten stone if purchased from those who do not give very great attention and care to its preparation; and the same remarks apply to rouge. The best article for polishing Daguerreotype plates is rotten-stone, such as can be procured in any town, prepared after the following manner: Procure, say half a dozen wide-mouthed bottles, of suitable dimensions, numbering each from one to six. Then, with a proper stick or spatule, mix well the rotten-stone and water; after which, let No. Again fill bottle No. When a sufficient quantity of washings from bottle No. A quantity of such washings may be collected in a large bottle, and allowed to stand a few hours, when all the rotten-stone will have settled. The water may be poured off and the rotten-stone put into an evaporating dish, and while being dried, must be constantly stirred to obtain an impalpable powder. Further washings may in like manner be resorted to for finer qualities of rotten-stone. So fine a quality as this, however, is seldom required. In using, rotten-stone, I mix with it, for polishing, fine olive oil, until I obtain a thin paste--and the best of all methods for polishing well planished Daguerreotype plates, is one like that used for glass by lens polishers; that is, by using a disc or buff-wheel, and having, a suitable holder by which to secure the plate, and then by pressing the plate against the revolving buff, well saturated with the mixed oil and rotten-stone, a very good surface is obtained. A quantity of plates may be prepared in this way, and all the adhering oil, etc. A very slight excess of temperature will at once destroy all the polish previously obtained.

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