DOWTY'S WRITING STYLE

It is hard to categorise Dowty's humourous writing. His tone was usually of studied irony, and his work is devoid of literary quality. He made much use of laboured puns, for example. Much was written when he was a young man, of course, but to the present-day reader is seems very laboured and somewhat juvenile, as these examples show:

It is clear he was a prolific writer, and it would require much research in a copyright library to trace now. Had he ever published books of his verse, apart from the Smiff titles, he would be much better known today.

O. P. Q. Philander Smiff, of *The Figaro*, (London,) once suggested that the play of Hamlet might be made use of as an advertising medium, with a few minor alterations, as, to take the Soliloquy for example: —

" To sleep, or not to sleep — that is the question.
Whether 'tis well to suffer indigestion;
Or bear the burden of a dozen ills.
Whilst Mr. Cockle offers me his pills.
To have a headache, and a tongue that shocks.
Whilst they are sold at thirteen-pence a box.

or, on another evening we might have: —

" To be in debt or not, that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to go to Mr. Howse, in Staples Inn,
And thus take arms against a sea of trouble."

Parody of "You are old Father William", by Lewis Carrol in *Alice Though The Looking Glass.* appeared in *The Figaro*, (London,) March 1st, 1873, and seems to have been so much admired by the editor of that journal, that he served up a second edition of it, with some alterations, on July 15, 1874, as follows: —

You seem cold, Father William, the young man cried,
And chilblains are massed round your nose,
I rarely in all my experience before saw
chilblains so broken as those.

You are right, my young man. Father William replied.
These chilblains you see are the fruits
Of the snowballs I put, when a youngster like you
in my Aunt Mary Ann's Sunday boots.

You seem cold, father William, the young man cried,
And if I may venture to say so,
You have influenza most awfully bad.
Come, why do you wheeze in that way so?

In the days of my youth, father William replied,
I found it uncommonly easy
To sit on the ice when I wanted to skate,
'Tis hence that I now am so wheezy.

You seem cold, father William, the young man cried.
And I see you incessantly shiver;
Do you think, aged pal, such a jellyish trick
Is good, at four score, for the liver?

I shiver, young man, father William replied.
Because, with your mirth bubbling o'er.
You slipped lumps of ice down the nape of my neck.
But I'm blowed if I stand any more!

O. P. Q. Philander Smiff, Esq., in his remarks on the Weather.

Truth January 1 1885 THE BARREL ORGAN feature , Dowty wrote anonymous miscellaneous verses under this heading for almost 30 years
It is quite long, so only the first three are included here

Tune . - SEASONABLE CYNICISM .

JUST a twelvemonth ago , every house , every street ,
With the same cheering accents resounded ;
And in places where men are accustomed to meet ,
Good wishes profusely abounded .
But now , when the year then beginning has closed ,
And the same festive wishes are ringing ,
We feel ourselves sternly and strongly disposed
— In spite of the carols they're singing-
To ask , in what manner of way ' twould appear
Aught has come of the wish of A HAPPY NEW YEAR !

If we turn to the Court of our long - widow'd Queen ,
We see an affectionate mother
Bemoaning a son with an agony keen
That as yet Time's unable to smother !
Whilst the Monarch we hoped would come out as of yore
Finds a reason renewed for seclusion ,
Which dashes the wishes of Courtiers once more ,
And makes Court display a delusion .
So here , at the least , it would seem but too clear
Naught has come of the wish for A HAPPY NEW YEAR !

Our Army , too , -think you , ' tis now better off ?
Just muse on its present position ,
When *Ouida* is able at Wolseley to scoff
For bribing the Nile Expedition !
And as to the Navy , why , every one knows ,
Though Brassey may mumble and mutter ,
That , ' stead of affording defence from our foes ,
It is sinking to ruin most utter .
Both Army and Navy have had , it is clear ,
A depressing instead of A HAPPY NEW YEAR !

SMIFF'S HUMOUR

An extract from *London Sketchbook*
February 1874, p 17

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF O. P. Q. PHILANDER SMIFF.

(Written by Himself.)

CHAPTER I. My Babyhood.

My baby hood was a very pretty one. It was made of quilted white satin, trimmed with swan's down, and caused such feelings of jealousy to rankle in the bosom of Mrs. Blogg, who could only run to white llama for her offspring, that Mrs. B., the wife of a baker who systematically alumed his bread, openly expressed to Mrs. Dimbleby her commiseration that Mrs. Smiff's baby - boy had such a dreadful squint in its little eyes.

Mrs. Dimbleby told this to my mother, the following morning; and, weak as my parent was - I was three weeks old at the time - it was with considerable difficulty that the monthly nurse prevented her rushing off to Mrs. Blogg's, in her dressing - gown, and demanding the retractation of the foul physiognomical slander, in the adulterating baker's front shop.

How well I can remember my mamma clasping me to her bosom, and exclaiming, whilst a large pearl button and a brooch - pin made havoc in my little mottled chest

"And did ums say that my beauty had a squinty pinty, then?"- the rest of her well meant speech being drowned in my infantine shrieks. …

Soon after, lulled by the female voices, I fell into a flatulent sleep, and I remember no more till I woke to sup, at seven, and found that Mrs. Blogg had come to tea with my mother, and that both of them agreed, over tea and crumpets, that Mrs. Dimbleby was a false creature and worthy of no belief - a statement roundly backed up by the monthly nurse, who, with her mouth full of my pap, declared that she "nussed her with her fust two, and that a miserabler and more doublefaceder woman never was."

But all this is anticipatory. I have not, as far as this autobiography is concerned, been born yet, and I will hasten to supply the omission.

It was a gusty October night, in the fall of 18- (I purposely conceal the date, lest I invalidate several premiums of Life Insurance by disclosing it), when I first saw the light.

It was a dim one upon which my eyes lighted. Please observe this phrase. If my eyes lighted, does not it follow they must have been a match? And if a match, where is the foundation for the Dimbleby - Blogg scandal? It crumbles away like the baseless fabric of a dream. No; your Smiff does not squint.

But to resume. I did not come before I was expected. My father expected me, and had purposely made business at the other end of the town. Doctor Masterman expected me, for he had been warned of the imminence of my advent, and sat up waiting for my arrival over an old number of the *Lancet* and a bottle of port. My two sisters expected me, and, having been put up to it by the housemaid, stayed up very late, intently watching the small plot of vegetable - garden behind our house through their bedroom window, under the firm impression that Mrs. Scoblin - this was the nurse and the doctor would dig me up from the rhubarb - bed, at some undefined period of the night. How long the little dears flattened their noses against the pane, I cannot tell; but I have heard since that they were found, in the morning, sound asleep on the hearth - rug, in their night - gowns, and had bad chilblains all the rest of the winter.

I was expected, too, most undoubtedly, by the Mrs. Scoblin already alluded to, for that good woman had arrived the previous day, per carrier's cart, from Slushton, accompanied by her umbrella, pattens, and a big basket with a cover to it, containing, amongst other things, a large jar of pickled onions (without which she never travelled), a copy of "Bogatzky's Golden Treasury" (which she read with great emotion on Sunday afternoons, upside down), and a phial bottle of Godfrey's Cordial, labelled Raspberry Vinegar, which was only administered to me when my mother was out of the way.

Why, though, talk of the expectations aroused by my coming? Let me rather talk of my consummated arrival.

I came! I saw! and I was convulsed. But how little Nurse Scoblin thought, as she patted my tiny back and laved me in a mustard bath, that it was ill - suppressed merriment with which my gristly frame was writhing, and which was purpling my infant face! So it was, however.

I was born with a strong sense of the ludicrous, and when, before I had been in the world three hours, I heard a soft footfall coming down the passage, and, with the one eye that I managed to get out of the flannel in which I was swaddled, saw a man of mild and elderly aspect anxiously reconnoitring the room through a crack in the door, I felt constrained to utter a knowing "Coo," upon which the mild and elderly one flung up his arms in dismay, sendded away for his life, and put on such a vile decoction of herbs to stew over the kitchen

fire, that the doctor sent down word to say that "if his wife died of asphyxia it would be downright manslaughter."

Somehow or another, it struck me quite unaccountably that this man must be my father; and as I recalled the sudden change that passed over his anxiously placid face when he heard my voice, I literally went off into such a fit of laughter that only prompt treatment saved me, Mrs. Scoblin improving the occasion by assuring my poor mother that "two o ' Missis Chidling's was tookt off in that way, quite sudden."

It has just struck me that I have begun this autobiography quite wrongly. I have only by vague hints suggested my parentage, and have said nothing at all about my pedigree.

I was born of middle - class, but I may say unadulterating, parents. My father his name was Philander, and is now, as far as I know was a herbalist, commonly called a quack, and had for many years been the proprietor of "The Medical Saloon," High - street, Mudzay. His patronymic will go down to posterity linked with an antibilious pill of immense local fame, a pill which has been taken by a retainer of royalty itself, and of which three two - and ninepenny boxes are sent every March to the Antipodes, to a senator of the Sydney Legislature, who began life in Mudzay as a dustman, and who has now put enough money into the hands of trustees to enable fifty poor men of his native town to have a small box of the invaluable medicine, to which he owes his exemplary liver, every Christmas - day, for all time.

On the father's side, my family traces back to the Saxon era. The Smiff's are an ancient lot. There was a Smiff in the time of Alfred the Great, and he is said to have written a very curious history of the Danes. Chancing to fall into the hands of these sea - rovers, at the battle of Athelney, he was brought before their king.In what way will you end your days?"said the monarch, only he put it more in the form of"Fjord njevka wodinthor coppen hagenstern?"

"There is but one proper termination for them,"replied my ancestor,"and that, great king, is enough. My days will always end in ' s, ' whether I will it or not, for I am not a verbal coiner, and have no power to alter my beautiful language.

It is said that the viking was so pleased at my forefather's ready wit, that he had him buried with military honors, after he had been promptly speared by his body - guard.

I am proud of that ancestor. It was whilst pondering over one of his last jokes that King Alfred burned the cakes.

We assumed the name of De Smiff at the Norman Conquest, and the head of our house cunningly perfected himself in French, by Ollendorf's method, in three weeks, and only spoke broken English for the rest of his days. He so deceived William, that the Conqueror bestowed on him the manor of Sloozebury. It was not in our family long. It belongs to a manufacturer of patent starch, at this moment; but I have vowed it shall be mine again. I feel I was"to the manor born"(Shakspeare).

And so on for several more chapters.

Hood's Annual 1875-76 pp109-112

One of his short stories

THE ELEPHANT'S HIND LEGS. A Super's Confidence.

I LITTLE thought, when on the 26th December, 1873, I appeared as the hind legs of an elephant in the annual pantomime at one of our metropolitan playhouses, that my dramatic career was to be so shortly after nipped in the bud. I am not ashamed to confess that up to that time I had indulged in Thespian aspirations of a most ambitious character. For years I had nursed them in private; they were, in fact, well - nigh instinctive in my soul. When I tell you that my father had been agent in advance to a circus in his palmier days, and theatrical bill - poster in his decline; that my mother for eight and twenty years was associated with the purveyorship of ginger beer, lemonade, bottled ale and stout, and bills of the play; that my uncle Benjamin was one of the original"supers"in Batty's Battle of Waterloo; and that my aunt Charlotte was connected by marriage with a family that had turned out a"first violin"and a"triangle"for the orchestra at Sadler's Wells, you will not be surprised to hear that the stage was my dream and my destiny. At the fatal time to which I have referred, I had been seventeen years before the footlights, working steadily on with a fixed goal before me. That fixed goal was to play the Ghost in Hamlet before I shuffled off this mortal coil. For many years I had known every line of the part by heart; I had educated myself at odd times with the same object in view. It was the dream of my life to appear in the well - known suit of armour, and beckon the Hamlet of the evening with my truncheon to a more remote part of the platform. To play the part of Hamlet himself seemed to me a consummation to be by no means so much desired; my fancy had always turned to super - natural parts. My earliest characters, whilst still a youth, had been of an impish and demoniacal kind; I was always serenely happy when I had to come up a trap or disappear in the midst of blue fire, and to be cast for an Apparition in Macbeth filled me with calm joy. The Ghost in

Hamlet was the star that led me on through my protracted supernumerary life, and prompted me to shine even in the most ungrateful parts. But, alas! all is over now; my star is snuffed out.

I have already said I was to appear on Boxing Night, 1873, as the hind legs of an elephant. It was not a part to which I took kindly. It was decidedly a step backwards, after appearing, as I did in 1872,as a Myrmidon of the King of the Gold Mines, and saying "I swear!" twice whilst I drained a paste- board goblet to its hollow dregs, in addition to having a fine piece of business with a practical nose which worked by a string concealed up the back of my waistcoat. I need scarcely tell even outsiders that "Hind legs" is not a part that can be worked up to any appreciable degree. It is not a part calculated to bring down the house, and cannot, most assuredly, be considered a legitimate stepping - stone towards the Ghost in Hamlet. I ventured in a mild way to hint as much to my stage - manager, a gentleman who had his trials, to be sure, but whose copious objurgatory vocabulary fully enabled him to meet them. He treated my protest with disdain.

"Not a good part!" said he; "stuff and nonsense! Why, you forget the tail. It's to be of real india- rubber. A splendid chance. Be off with you! be off!" True, I had forgotten the tail; but not even the knowledge that this elastic appendage would be left to me to work satisfied the cravings of my soul. I was still far from happy. In fact, I was gloomy, and felt the presentiment of coming evil hanging over me, until I really ceased to find pleasure, as I had been wont, in rehearsing my favourite Ghost, in a sheet, when I retired to my chamber for the night.

I was six feet three inches in my half - hose, and to this cursed lankiness of mine I owed my appearance as the hind legs of the mammal already bitterly re- ferred to. The first rehearsal came, and I had some inkling of what my part was likely to be. It was indeed to be a “ heavy ” one. Not only had "Front legs" and I to sustain between us the framework of the ponderous quadruped and a richly - caparisoned howdah, but our low comedian, a podgy wag of over twelve stone, was to sit in it, with the Queen of the Tartars (Miss Clandebois was no feather - weight, I can assure you) in his lap. To support all this upon our shoulders I soon found to be impossible - it was having the weight of the piece on our backs with a vengeance; and at the final and dress rehearsal a third "super," who would not fit the Ostrich for which he had been cast, was drafted in to our as- sistance. There was no help for it; and though it spoiled the symmetry of the elephant to give him six legs, and rather rudely challenged the quadru- pedal theory laid down with regard to this beast by Mr. Buffon and others, it had to be done. Thus aided we staggered through the scene after a fashion; but by the time we had been once round the stage with our burden, I, for one, was so fatigued, and had the pluck so taken out of me, that I had not the heart to do anything with the tail when a halt was called, and came in for stage - managerial correction in consequence. I could ill afford to throw up my eighteenpence a night, or I should have been very bitter through the small opening in the elephant's side which availed me for air and sight.

"Sir," I should have liked to say, "my highest aspirations are crushed; my chance of playing the Ghost in Hamlet removed farther off than ever. Is this a time, then, to call on me to play the fool with an india - rubber bauble?"

But the nightly one - and - six kept me quiet, and I twitched the tail in morose silence. As I strode to my Great Wild Street home that evening, I found I was unsteady in my gait. My knees, never of the strongest, trembled as I trod, but I put it down to natural indignation, and thought no more of it.

Boxing Night came. Our house, as usual, was very full, and I was half proud and yet half ashamed to know that my uncle Benjamin was somewhere in the upper gallery, unless, indeed, the poor old man had been mashed to death on the steps. For his sake - for the prestige and honour of the family — I was determined to do all I knew with the tail. do more than this was impossible. To attempt to put humour into the hind legs was simply absurd. I defy any man to be comic with his feet when he has his share of a weight of five and twenty stone on his shoulders. The moment arrived when the elephant had to be put together in one of the O. P. wings. I got into my legs with a sad heart. The foreboding of some great ill still overshadowed me, and I yearned to go up to the stage manager and beg to be an ostrich or a camel - driver at the last moment; but it was insane to encourage such a yearning, and I knew it. The band struck up — as a rule, that is, for, sad as I was, I remember distinctly that the kettle - drummer struck down - the procession started. It was the marriage one of Muley Assan, our low comedian, and the Queen of the Tartars.

All the talents of our property - man, Old Bunter, had been lavished on this procession. It contained six camels, ten ostriches, two tigers, a performing mule (real), and three pairs of fiery and untamed steeds. Why couldn't I have been a fiery and un-tamed steed? There's a chance for a man, if you like! Those horses you put your head and body through, and wear over your shoulders with straps, are a safe laugh. But no! my fate was hind legs. The tomtoms beat, the gongs boomed, bangles and sequins were scattered amongst the expectant crowd. The procession wound in from the back of the stage, and every eye awaited the climax - the elephant.

“Room for the Rajah!" was the cry, as our stage manager, disguised as a eunuch, cleared

the stage with all his might in front of us. He did not know, though, that Maggs was drunk. Maggs was the unhappy man who took the extra pair of legs. I knew, however, that he was inebriated, and I feared the worst. He had come into the theatre late that night, and could not have unlaced his boots to save his life. Twice he bent down to his left Blucher, and fell heavily on his head. And I understood the sign. However, we got him into his elephantine extremities at last; and the weight of Muley Assan and his Queen steadied him - at any rate for the time.

The last two eunuchs filed in, and our "Front legs," putting the tip of the elephant's trunk round the L. U. E., playfully waggled it. It was a good bit of business, and convulsed the house. Then very slowly we moved in. The band struck up "See the conquering hero comes!" and as our low comedian and Miss Clandebois were recognized, a big shout of welcome filled the theatre, and a shower of bouquets fell around. This was pre - arranged, and Creedy, the "Front legs," picked them up with the trunk, and curled them gracefully over the elephant's head to the fair occupant of the howdah. The house screamed with laughter, and I, my hind legs positively out of sight, could have done Creedy an injury, as I vainly worked the elephant's tail committed to my care. This tail was literally nowhere; and I half hoped, wicked though my aspiration was, that my uncle Benjamin had in truth been mashed on the steps, and did not see my discomfiture.

But all this tomfoolery with the trunk took time; and Maggs, overcome by the heat and close air, was becoming every moment more unsteady on his feet. In vain I entreated him, in muffled tones, to stand firm. He was too far gone to understand me. Not soon shall I forget his maudlin reply to my appeal."Stand yourself," said he, "and make it a pot of four ale."

With that his legs shrank spasmodically for a few seconds, and then down he dropped on his knees. The result can be easily guessed. Creedy, full of his by - play with the trunk, and quite unprepared for the sudden increase of weight thrown on his shoulders, could not stand up against it, and entirely collapsed. Down went the elephant's head, and our low comedian and his fair colleague were all but pitched headlong out of the howdah on to the stage. If I had given way also, the wreck would have been complete; the whole quadruped, its riders and acces- sories, would have been in a heap. But I did not give way. Superhuman strength seemed to enter into my joints. Had my sinews been made of the Ghost's armour I longed to wear, I could not have stood firmer. I felt the eyes of the house were on me.

"Now, uncle Benjamin," I muttered - and I hoped, then, that he had not been mashed— “now, see how I sustain the family prestige!"

"All right!"I called out to our low comedian;"hold on, I can stand firm!"

And hold on he did, whilst I, with what I must call most valuable presence of mind, began to make play with the hitherto despised tail, with the view of distracting public attention from the catastrophe. It succeeded admirably, and the front flats were soon run together amidst loud applause; and, if I mistake not (it was just like dear old uncle Benjamin!) there was a distinct call for "Hind legs!" But I did not go in front. No sooner, indeed, had our low comedian and his bride jumped down, than I also collapsed. It had been a great effort; it was over; and I fell in a limp heap like the other legs.

"Bravo! "said the stage - manager, “ you did that very well! Get a bottle of Guinness from my room, Tommy," this to a call - boy.I smiled faintly as I drank the stout. The cloud had not been lifted from my heart, although Maggs had been summarily sacked.

The stage was being cleared for the transformation, and I got up to go, for my night's work was over. As I stood up I felt that a great change had come over me, or rather that some good had gone out of me. I never was a skater, but as I staggered off the stage, I saw I was placing my feet as though I were attempting the outside edge. I found myself utterly unable to toe a line, and had a strange feeling in my lower limbs as though my thighs and legs were connected by a very loose pair of hinges. A horrid thought rushed across my brain, a thought prompted partly by instinct, and partly by the oft- related experiences of uncle Benjamin. The gloom of the previous days was more than accounted for. My doom had come! I had successfully passed through the ordeal, but at what a price! I sat down on a basketful of property vegetables, for use in the harlequinade later on, and fairly wept. Is it any wonder that I did?

I was gone at the knees! I raved wildly about elephants and Ghosts in Hamlet in my delirium, the doctors told me afterwards, and made murderous attacks on one Maggs with my pillow. I left the hospital cured of the fever, but "goner" at the knees than ever, if I may use the expression. Life had no longer any charm for me. Hope was stifled in my breast; and after a few months ' service as a photographer's tout in the Euston Road — a vocation for which I was far too misanthropic and morose - I sought the last retreat of the gone - at- knees ones, and became a sandwich man.

It is true my aunt Charlotte's influence procured me a situation as waiter at a theatrical chop - house in Bow Street; and here my "goneness" would not have stood in my way, had I not developed a habit of going about muttering snatches of my favourite part, which speedily led to my dismissal. Mixing up "sulphurous and tormenting flames" with a loin chop, and telling a regular customer I would

“harrow up his soul, freeze his old blood," and so on, when he requested a kidney to follow, would not do at any price, my master told me. So I went, and I was not sorry to leave. I yearned for solitude and time for silent meditation; and between a pair of boards announcing, I think,"Athletic Sports at Lillie Bridge, ”

I don't know how I got home that night. My feeling was that all the world knew my fate; and I slowly slouched to my fourth floor by out - of - the way streets, for fear I should meet an acquaintance. Horrible reflections crowded upon my brain. Where was my dramatic ambition now? The aspirations that fed on the prospect of my some day playing the Ghost in Hamlet must be plucked sternly from my bosom. A Ghost gone at the knees! Impossible! At the best, my dramatic career now only opened to me a vista of banner - carrying, or "all hail - ing," and "I swearing," in the background of a stage crowd. Even the parts of First Citizens are never given to broken - kneed "supers," and for the front row of a battle I was practically useless. Before I slept I determined, in my wounded and proud spirit, I would never return to the stage that had witnessed my sudden decline and fall. I felt I could never bear to be told officially by the stage - manager that I was gone at my knees, and I had not moral courage enough to meet the chaff of my colleagues. No! I would drop out of the profession and make no sign.

I did so; and for the next two months I was an in - patient at Guy's, stricken down with brain fever.I wandered dreamily down the Strand, and for the first time since my collapse felt the equanimity of the old days. I find the life suits me well. Amongst the board - men I am not at all peculiar. Out of twenty of us who were walking in Indian file the other morning, advertising the virtues of Puffin's Pills, I counted seventeen gone at the knees, besides one who walked with crutches. Were it not for one thing, my life would pass quietly away. I have, though, one bitter trial to bear; and that is, when my boards bear placards relating to the performance of Hamlet, and I see names other than my own as the representatives of the Ghost. Then the old aspirations come again, and I drink more than I should. For this reason I have deeply regretted the recent re-habilitation of Shakespeare. But increasing "gone-ness" warns me that I shall not very much longer have to run this risk. I may be six feet three in my half - hose -alas! I have no half - hose now - but I am not long for this world.

AGLEN A. DOWTY.