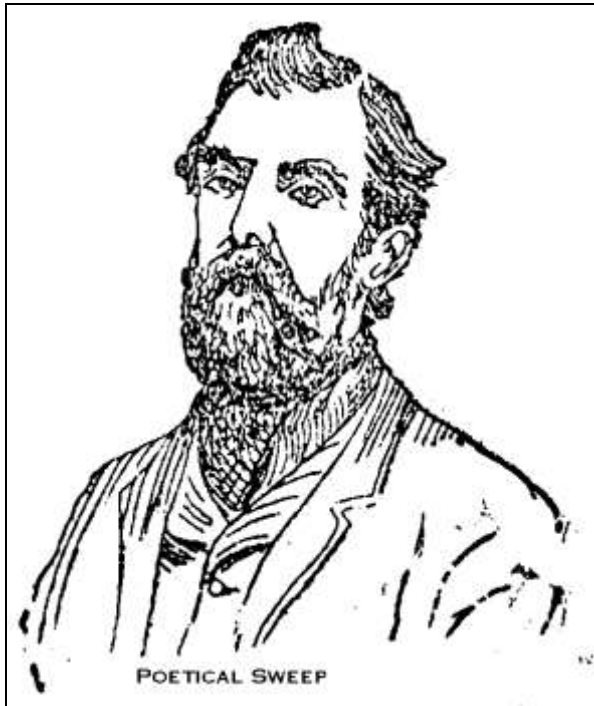


# John Smith

## Notes for a Biography



*Edited by Martin Edwardes*



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## Some of Great Great Grandfather's writing

This booklet gives some of the writing of John Smith, my Great Great Grandfather. He was a foundling and brought up as an orphan. At an early age he was turned out of the orphanage to make his own way in the world. He was subsequently abused by his chimney sweep employer in ways that would result in a hefty prison sentence nowadays.

However, he made a success of his life, creating further improvements to the chimney sweeping machine, originally invented by George Smart in 1803 and improved by John Glass in 1828. Charles Kingsley's illustration of the hard life of the chimney boy in *The Water Babies* (1863) led to Lord Shaftesbury's *Chimney Sweepers Regulation Act* (1864), which did not ban chimney boys but made their use by master sweeps difficult and costly. John Smith's improvements made the chimney sweeping machine a viable alternative to chimney boys, and the bundle of rods and circular brushes became the trademark symbol of the late-Victorian sweep (as exemplified by Dick Van Dyke in *Mary Poppins*).

The first item in this book is John Smith's autobiography, which was published as a small booklet. It is similar to many late Victorian autobiographies, written and published at the person's own expense.

The second item is a poem he wrote and, again, printed at his own expense. He used to take the train to seaside resorts and sell the poem to holidaymakers, putting the money into the collection boxes at the local lifeboat station. He saw his invention (which created a thriving business) as a good fortune he wished to repay.

The final item is an interview with The Star newspaper (no relation to the current Star), which includes several of his shorter poems. As far as I know, no complete anthology of his work survives.

*Martin Edwardes*

## **(John Smith) The Autobiography of a CHIMNEY-SWEEP, PAST AND PRESENT.**

**By One of the Trade.**

*The following is a narrative of the experiences of one who can vouch for its truth in all points, and although it may not be as sensational as many publications at the present day, yet has the merit of truth in its favour, which bears out the old maxim that "facts are stranger than fiction." To the merits or demerits of its grammatical composition the Author lays no claim, therefore he must request the indulgence of the reader to any small errors, trusting that a sincere statement of facts may cover all discrepancies, especially as it is a matter entirely novel to the reading public, and may serve to convey information which has hitherto been unheard of.*

### **History of a Chimney-Sweep, Past and Present.**

IN or about the year 1845, I being then a young child, and an inmate of a School known as Little Chelsea, and having no parents, or I might rather say, not knowing any, as the reader will see under the circumstances which I here relate, I being one of those poor unfortunate beings known as castaways, or children deserted by their parents. The cause of my being left by my parents I never knew and of course never shall, but suffice it to say I was found in a market garden situate as I have always heard and believed, in Pimlico and kept by a Mr. Smith, as the reader will see by the gardens being called Smith's Market Gardens, and on being taken to the Union of St. George's, Hanover Square, it is not surprising that they christened me John Smith, after the name of the Market Gardener. Being but an infant in arms, I had to have the care of a nurse, so cannot state what took place the first five or six years of my life, but on reaching that age, I found I had received the care of a good old dame of the name of Keys, and whom I, was always taught to call godmother, and I will state in memory of her, that if half the mothers had as much love for their offspring as she had for the little castaway we should not hear of so many child-murders and desertions. But alas! it was the Almighty's will that I was to travel through the world without even the aid of a foster-mother, for she was one of the victims of the Great Cholera Plague which took place about 1850. I will now inform the reader that I was brought up along with other boys at the School, some of whom had parents who came to see them once a week and brought them little presents, others were like myself had no parents, so of course had no presents, and so years rolled on and I grew up as other boys not without my faults. But then if I

had my faults I was not solely to blame, for was I not a being brought up in a workhouse? yes, and I had my troubles the same as Oliver Twist, and I will here state that for a mere boyish freak not only myself but other boys have received as great a flogging as what I have seen a Soldier in the Army receive for what has been considered a great crime. Yes, dear reader, it is no imagination but reality, and to explain more clearer I will here state to the disgrace of a so-called Christian profession, that whenever a poor boy got flogged, it was not only ordered by the clergyman but was partly performed by him, for he filled the place of Judge, Jury, and Executioner - the master being the prosecutor; so that between them they carried out their work of cruelty. But I will not dwell any longer on the usages of the School. I now being old enough to send to sea, I was sent on board a fishing smack for a trial of two months, but having met with an accident by poisoning my hand, I had to go back to the workhouse, where I stayed till my hand got better, when I was taken out again by a Chimney Sweeper of the name of Mr. H., it being one fine summer's afternoon. I remember being taken into the presence of my first master in the Chimney Sweeping trade, when I was asked by the Master of the Workhouse if I would be a Chimney Sweep; being a simple workhouse boy, and eager to see London Streets, I jumped at it, little thinking the hardships I should have to undergo by doing so. But then I was cut out for a life of trouble and persecution.

I remember being taken by the porter to my first place when he asked to see the bed I had to sleep in. As I may here state I was well fed and clothed in the Workhouse, and had a good bed to lay on. But it was only a farce, for he only came once more about a month after; and long ago as it is, I can remember my master taking the porter into the public-house, of course, to treat him, so that he might go back and give a good account of me to the authorities at the Workhouse. I might here add that he did not trouble himself to see the bed this time, although it was the same as when he came to see it the first time; but then I had such a jolly time of it that first month of being a Chimney Sweep, for I did nothing but play about. I was not allowed to soil my clothes, and I had a few halfpence given me to spend, so that when the porter asked me. How I liked my master and was I going to stay with him, can the reader wonder that I said yes. I did say yes, and under the circumstances, I think you would have said the same.

But now commence my hardships as a Chimney-Sweep, for the next morning when I arose, which was about four o'clock, I was not allowed to put on my own clothes but was given an old pair of trousers and a Policeman's bob-tail coat, only the tails were cut off, and which my missis bought down Petticoat Lane, the week before, when she took me with her. I was about to put on my stockings, being always used to wear them, when a man, whom I found to be the journeyman, snatched them from me, saying, "you will never make a Sweep if you wear them things." I did not mind it at the time, although I felt very uncomfortable without them, but then I had

a good pair of boots, yes till they were worn out, and they did wear out to my sorrow, for my kind master never bought me any more to take their place, although I worked for him five years; no, I had to find my own boots after they were gone, as also my clothes, and which were old clothes given me by people at the houses where we went, for I never received one penny wages the whole time I worked for my master, and even when I had a few pence given me by the good people at the houses where we went to Sweep, the, cruel journeyman would take them away, and if I made the least pretence to cry, he would not only strike me with his hand but kick me with his boots, and he would go as far as to strike me over the head with his brush till my head was out and sore all over that I could not bear to comb it, and the consequence was that I got covered in vermin. When the bed was taken away from under me and I had to lay on the floor, yes, and half-starved in the bargain, for I got very little food at home - my principal food being what I had given me at the-houses where we went to Sweep and what I bought, with the few pence I had at times, and it was very few pence I could keep without the journeyman knowing it, in fact I had to ask the people at the houses where we went to give the boy a penny, but which in reality was for the journeyman, for on leaving the house I had to give up what I had given me, or else I got kick and blows till I did, and on one occasion I remember, it was in an empty house, I happened to pick up a shilling and on taking it into the next room where the journeyman was at work, and telling him I had found a shilling, I was immediately knocked down, for why - for speaking out loud as there was another person just outside the door who was taking care of the house. At another time I remember being sent up a chimney that was on fire and on reaching the second story I found the chimney was broken through into the bedroom, I immediately gave the alarm, when some people rushed up the stairs and breaking open the bedroom door threw water on the flames, when some of the water coming through the opening it scalded me, so I made haste down the chimney when the landlord gave me a half-crown for myself, and never having had such a fortune before, I quickly forgot my share in the fire, but not so with the lynx-eyed journeyman who observed the gentleman give me the money. On my leaving the house to show my companions what a rich boy I was, he followed, and, catching me by the collar, demanded the half-crown, which I naturally refused, but my refusal and crying did not matter to him whose heart was as cold as steel, for I was kicked as usual, and to make my punishment greater, was turned out of doors all night to sleep where I could; in fact it was quite a common thing to find me sleeping in old ruins and passages. Through the cruelty of this man, who undoubtedly assumed the position of master and journeyman, as far as I was concerned. Even when I slept indoors, which generally happened when the work was. busy, it was in a small room without a fireplace, and without any bed but the floor to lay on, and when wanted to get up, which was generally about three or four o'clock, instead of the journeyman giving me a civil word and telling me to get up, I got an oath and a blow from a short cane, with a piece of lead at the end of it, and which he seemed to keep on purpose to knock me about with. But all things change

as time goes on. So it was with me, for as I began to see more of life, I was being hardened by this fiend in human shape. I began to resent his blows, by threatening to do him an injury, which only caused him to be more brutal towards me; until driven to desperation I seized the cane with the lead in it, and struck him a blow with it across the shoulder, that made him cry out with pain - as all cowards do. What must he have thought the pain was to me, considering the dozens of times I had been struck with it, and so I took good care I would never be struck with it again, for I took and burnt it after that; and I made up my mind, come what would, that I would not let him knock me about any more, and that I would try and get another place, which I did very shortly afterwards. My master and journeyman threatening to have me taken back to the Workhouse if I left, but which threats were of no avail for I found another master who was glad to take me into his employ, as I had now begun to know a little about Chimney-Sweeping, and who gave me the large amount of half-a-crown a week to find me in clothes. After being with my second master three more years, and I am happy to say he was better than the first, I was able to take a journeyman's place anywhere in London.

In writing the above chapter I hope the reader will not think I have exaggerated the facts, for facts they were; and I could mention dozens of other acts of cruelty which I had to suffer at the hands of my task-master - such as being locked in the cellar all night, which was underground, and having only a rushlight to see, whereby I have had to sift twenty or thirty sacks of stuff, and if the light went out I had to perform my task in the dark, and which if not completed by the time the journeyman came in the morning, which would be about five o'clock, I got kicked for what he called, my idleness, and the consequence was I had to undergo the same thing the next night till I had completed my task, as I was not allowed to do it in the daytime, for I was kept at work with the journeyman all day sweeping chimnies; in fact when he came for me in the morning he would sometimes find me fast asleep, fairly exhausted with my work, and with the heap of soot for my pillow, and which I stood a fair chance of being smothered in, for on his finding me asleep the cruel wretch used to amuse himself by forcing my head into the heap of soot and nearly suffocating me, at the same time kicking me or jumping on me with his heavy boots. I would then have to get up and carry the tools along with him perhaps having to go some two or three miles to one of the large houses or I might rather say mansions for they were such to me, and situated about Hyde Park, and then have to perform my share of sweeping the kitchen or any other chimnies that had to be swept. The good people of the house being fast asleep in their warm beds, little dreaming that a poor boy who had not got a bed to go into even when at home, but had been at work all night in what the reader would term a dungeon, and who had not partaken of a morsel of food since the day before and would most likely get none till the work was all done, unless some kind-hearted servant took pity on me and gave me some food, and which sometimes it was my good fortune to get, after the journeyman had gone to call up another job and left me to pick up the soot,



when I used to eat it as fast as I could; and if I could not get rid of it before I got to him at the next job I used to put it on some wall or corner, for if he knew I had the food given me and I had eaten it without him knowing he would knock me about something terrible, for he always looked to have what food was given for himself, for the very simple reason that journeymen's wages would not afford to keep them at that time and which was only ten shillings a week, out of which they had to keep themselves, besides finding their own clothes. Another freak of this cruel man was the placing of hot farthings in my boots while I was asleep and on my waking up in agony to pull them off, and which thank God were very old at the time or I might have been burnt a good deal more than I was, but of which I have some of the scars now on my feet, would laugh and push me about to prevent me getting them off too quickly. At other times when I have been turned out of doors to sleep and have gone to the ruins which were close at hand to sleep in a hole dug in the ground, and in which some other poor boys, who were either turned out by their parents or would not go indoors, would keep me company. The cruel journeyman before going to his bed would bring a pail of water and throw over me. On one occasion a policeman found me laying in the ruins and on telling him who I was he knocked my master up and told him he must let me in which he did, but it only made my case worse for I was knocked about until I was quite sore and had to lay in the passage all night as I was not allowed to go into the little empty room which I used to occupy when indoors; and again I was treated more like a pig than a human being for on taking whatever food I had at home and which generally consisted of boiled rice or broth, in fact I give it a good name when I say broth, for it was mostly what greens had been cooked in with a small piece of bacon, but they ate the bacon and putting in some stale bread which had been given us at the houses I had to sit on the floor with the saucepan in my lap, for I was not allowed a plate or a basin to eat from, and so had to partake of my humble fare, though sometimes a great addition would be made in the shape of a few peas in the broth, or I might by chance, get a piece, of pudding, but which was very rare indeed, at least the first three years of my being a Chimney-Sweep. May be the reader will wonder I was not ill through this cruel treatment, but I will tell them I was often ill, not with the bile, oh no, for my food was not rich enough to give me that, but through weakness, when the journeyman used to say I was only shamming, and I was then forced to take a dose of jalap which, of course, not liking I used to tell them I was well, when I was really ill; and even when I had sores, which I very often did have, breaking out on me they were left to get well the best way they could for I had no tender nurse to dress them for me, and all I could do was to wash them myself and dress them with any old pieces of rags I could get hold of, as sometimes I have not had a clean shirt once in a month, and sometimes none at all. But why all this cruelty? why was this man constantly ill-using me? certainly not for the harm I had done him? no, but because he was one of those brutal fellows that take a pleasure in persecuting their fellow-creatures, and especially one like myself that had no one to protect me. Then again the man was so ignorant that he could not spell his own

name, neither could he say the alphabet, which almost the youngest child at school at the present time could say, and I might remark that if he saw me reading a book he would instantly knock it out of my hand, exclaiming "we don't want none of that nonsense here," in fact this man's; sole ambition was cruelty to its utmost. But all cowards are brought to a stand-still someday. So it was with him, as the reader has already seen In the first chapter.

In writing this history I don't wish the. reader to believe that I was the only boy that had to undergo the cruelty in the Chimney-Sweeping trade of those days. Certainly not; for I could mention other poor boys who had their hardships to go through at the hands of either their master or journeyman, but for the want of a little learning they were never able to bring their grievances before the public, but thanks to the noble Earl of Shaftsbury, for in him the poor Climbing-boys have found a friend - all honour to his name, and may the day be not far distant when he will come amongst us to receive the hearty and well-wishes of those who have felt the benefit of his kindness towards the poor Climbing-boy.

Before finishing my narrative I will just add that I had two or three narrow escapes of my life through the dangerous work I was compelled to do at times. On one occasion I had to go up a ladder, it being held by my master, and on reaching the top I caught hold of the ridge to make my way up to the chimney, for it was to clean the chimney-pot out that I was sent up, when the brick-work came away in my hand and I fell backwards, and catching my leg in the top of the ladder I was allowed to drop head-first on to a heap of dung that was close by, which was very fortunate for me or I should have been killed, as it was I was very near dislocating my neck. At another time I had to take a ladder on to a roof myself and lean it against a tall chimney and as they did not think fit to come and hold it for me I had to go up without, and the consequence was that when I got to the top of the ladder, which overlooked the leads of a large house, in fact the skylight was just below which gave light to the kitchen underneath, where the cook could be seen making pastry and preparing the dinner for the people at the large house, when all of a sudden the chimney-pot went over and I with it, and had it not been that I was light and the skylight was covered with strong wirework I should have found myself amongst the pastry, or suffocated in jam instead of soot; but thanks to Providence I came off the leads with only a few bruises and bumps on my head which my kind master did not take much notice of, in fact he told the people I was used to falling about - that I was brought up hardy - and which I think the reader will agree with after having read my narrative, for had I have been a lad with a delicate constitution I could not have gone through it, and the reader would never have read the life of a poor Chimney-Sweep boy, written by his own hand, for I should have been laid in my grave without one kind friend to shed a tear over the little orphan boy. But thanks to that Providence that watches over all I succeeded in working my way up to manhood, and by perseverance and industry I have become my own master in

the trade wherein I experienced so much cruelty, but which, thank God, is of the past, and we are now looking forward to a better state of things in the trade of Chimney-cleaning. We have formed ourselves into one bond of union to protect and further the interest of our trade. We have also formed a Sick and Burial Society for the trade alone, whereby we may support our sick and bury our dead instead of allowing them to go to the workhouse after having given the whole of their life to the comfort and welfare of the public at large. And may we prosper in our noble deeds and thereby prove to the public that as a class of honest and hard-working men we are second to none.

"Though black's the surface of our skin,  
They're honest hearts that beat within."

I will now tell the reader I had two roads before me, and would it have been my fault had I have taken the wrong road? my answer is simply - No; it would have lain with the authorities at the Workhouse who undoubtedly were my guardians: but then I was a burden to them and the ratepayers that they wished to get rid of, but in seeking the remedy which they did were they not running a thousand risks of placing me in the care of other guardians, viz., the prison authorities, and so making, me a burden to the ratepayers again only in a more disgraceful form. But then they only thought of the past and not of the future as was plainly shown by their allowing a man to take me into one of the worst dens of thieves to be found in or around London and then deserting me, leaving me to the tender mercy of the wretch I had to call master, - I speak plainly and say they did desert me, for they never troubled themselves about me any more, and I might have died under that man's cruelty, or even worse still, in a gaol, for I had plenty of thieves for my companions; but Providence seemed to be watching over me, and although I was persecuted to the utmost, I never sank so low as to find myself consigned to a gaol. Again I say what mattered it if I had died in gaol, or under my master. I was nobody - only a burden in the way - to be got rid of. Better had they allowed the little castaway to have died in its cot than to have reared it up and then thrown it on the mercy of the world. I ask, could they not have found a remedy and so have put a stop to this cruel treatment of poor orphan boys taken from the workhouse? or, Was it the little trouble or the expense they would have incurred in sending an officer or some trustworthy person at least once in three months to see how we were being treated? There would have been no occasion to have asked questions as they would have seen for themselves when they saw me as to whether I was being properly treated by my master, and could have reported accordingly, and so had me and my master brought before the authorities where I could have explained the treatment I was receiving at his hands; and I think that under the circumstances my master would not have dared to put in an appearance, which would have proved his guilt, and the truthfulness of my statement to the officer who came to see me. By acting on this simple remedy I have just penned they would have saved many a poor boy from the cruelty of the masters in the Chimney-Sweeping trade, but then

that is some twenty years ago for since then the noble Earl of Shaftsbury has stepped in and put a stop to this state of things, for since he passed his bill of 1861 I don't think they have been allowed to have boys out of the workhouse, and as boys brought up in the streets are not so simple as the poor boy brought up in the workhouse, and machines have taken the place of the boys - which now constitutes it a trade, as no chimney is allowed to be swept only by machinery.

And now having explained to the reader some of the trials and temptations I had to go through as a boy I will, with your permission, say a few words on the art of Chimney-Sweeping by machinery, and which is not, as some people are inclined to think, learnt in a day. It is all very well for a painter or house-decorator to say I can sweep a chimney. I might answer yes, and I can paint and paper a room - but after what fashion? I contend that one trade has to be learnt as well as another, and not as a certain person remarked on a commission of inquiry - "that the trade of a Sweep could be learnt in twenty minutes!" No doubt our worthy informant meant the blacking of his face and the calling of "Sweep" in the streets and not the sweeping of a chimney; and I will go so far as to tell him, or anyone else that likes to try it, that it will take them six months before they can carry their tools in a proper manner, and not go knocking up against staircase walls, damaging the paper, breaking the lamps in the hall, and marble mantel-pieces and which is the common practice of these so-called Chimney-Sweeps whom our informant would have the public believe capable of going into their drawing-rooms and sweeping the chimney as well as a man that had spent his whole life in the trade. I say it is a fallacy and a great mistake, for it is like other trades and takes years to learn, for to have a thorough practical knowledge of chimneys one must give a great amount of study, as I could prove by different jobs I have had to undertake in the curing of smoky chimneys, which have never smoked till late years, and which have become gradually corroded with hard soot through improper sweeping by these so-called Sweeps. One case that I lately had to contend with will perhaps be worthy of mention, and to prove more strongly that it requires a man with a certain amount of knowledge about chimneys I will just state it was at a builder's, and in his own private residence, where for the last three years they had been troubled with smoke and could not ascertain the cause, and he being a builder and contractor, of course had his own men, who, being bricklayers and plumbers, he conferred with them. One suggested this alteration and another that, but all to no purpose; they even went so far as to pull down half the chimney, and were about to carry it up in a different manner when in stepped the Surveyor and stopped it, so what they had pulled down they had to put back again in the same position. So it went on until I was recommended to the firm, and on stating the sum that I required to cure the chimney, after having examined it, I was told I wanted too much, but I replied to the gentleman "I take it on the no cure no pay system." The consequence was we came to terms, and I cured the chimney in just three hours hard work! How? why by removing the hard soot that had been allowed to corrode by these so-called

Sweeps, for it appears they had been in the habit of calling anyone in out of the street, so long as they had a black face and a bundle of sticks on their shoulder, not even asking them whether they know how to sweep a chimney or where they lived, so that they might refer to them should they require their services again. Then how is it the public have to put up with this smoke nuisance? simply because they won't employ a good workman - one that understands his trade, and pay him a fair price for his work - but content themselves by employing these so-called Sweeps, who pretend to sweep their chimneys cheap for them, but which in the end turns out to be a very dear job to the customer for what with the smoke, the spoiling of carpets and walls with the soot that is allowed to fly about, most likely to be followed by some person being taken ill in the house through the choking atmosphere. So the chimney is allowed to gradually get corroded when it either takes fire and causes an amount of annoyance and expense, or the smoking goes on until a practical man is found who by a certain amount of hard work clears the vent when all is well. And this smoke nuisance is taking place every day in thousands of houses through the want of a practical man to sweep them. It is true we are taking one step towards getting these practical men, as the compelling of us to take out a certificate will show; but then we are labouring under a great injustice by this so-called licensing system for where a man like myself that has been brought up in the trade from boyhood and have suffered some of the hardships and trials that had to be gone through before becoming a good workman, and having obtained a position by my industry whereby I might bring up my family in a proper manner am compelled to go to the police-station and take out a license to carry on my business, while these so-called Sweeps can roam the streets at pleasure, soliciting work which they are quite incapable of performing, and which they obtain simply through the low charges they make, and this they can do without a license, simply because they are not considered master Chimney-Sweeps in the eye of the law! I ask what are they? Are they journeymen? no, certainly not; for what they do is for their own benefit. Then I say they are impostors - who ought to be put a stop to, for they are not only imposing on the public but are seriously injuring the respectable class of the trade.

What I would suggest as a remedy for this state of things, and which would be nothing but fair to us, is that all or none should be licensed, both master and journeymen, only there should be this difference in the certificate of the master which should require him to produce evidence that he had, say five years, experience as a journeyman, or otherwise, before he should obtain his certificate to carry on the business of a master Chimney-Sweep when by following this course the public would get their chimneys swept in a proper manner by qualified men, and the masters would get honest and sober men to work for them, which is not altogether the case just now, as any master wanting a man is apt to have one apply for the place representing that he has worked in the country, and on setting the man to work next morning find him and your tools gone, God knows where; and you have no remedy as you cannot afford to lose your work to find where he has gone

to not knowing the road he has taken. This is what our legislators call justice! but what I call a cruel burden on a class of honest and hard-working men who know the ins and outs of every house in the kingdom, from the cottage of the artisan to the mansion of the earl, and yet are considered the most despicable class on the face of the earth not to be thought about only when wanted to do the dirty dusty work by the humane people we have to look to for a living; but, thank God, this state of things is to last no longer, for we have begun to awaken as from a dream, but which I am sorry to say has been a reality, for we have come forward and joined ourselves in one bond of union, resolved that by head and hand we mean to stand and take our place in the coming era: for we have opened our eyes to the fact that we are a necessity which the poorest cottage in the land cannot do without, and I will venture to say we cannot be superseded, or I might rather say there is not a man in existence who would be rash enough to try the experiment, let the cost be as cheap as it may, and which I am tempted to believe would be far above what the cost is at the present time, without taking into consideration the dirt and dust he would have to contend with. At the same time I am not going to say they could not invent appliances to sweep chimneys quite as well as the present machine, for have they not invented Sewing Machines which can make a dozen garments while a tailor is making one by hand? yes, I admit it; but then ours is a machine, and a very simple one considering the work it has to do, and with its average cost of from five to ten pounds. Then it only requires one man to work it, and of course it can only sweep one chimney at a time; but I can say with a great amount of confidence that our would-be inventor's machine would do no more; certainly it might look a grander machine than the present one, with its cog-wheels and springs, for of course it would have cog-wheels, and the like appliances of such an engine, and I should consider it an engine when looking at the distance it would have to travel up some of the chimneys of the present day. Then again it would have to be at work at the early hours of the morning, and, as one of our sharp and clever critics in the *Daily Telegraph* has thought fit to class us, as "tortured spirits haunting the street-doors at the early hours of the morning." What would he say at hearing a steam whistle blowing off outside his street-door to let the people know that the engine was there waiting to sweep the chimney, for I should not think the man with the engine, that is if there were only one man, would call sweep. No, certainly not; it would insult him to call him by such a name-he would want to be called an engine-driver of course, and quite right to. On our rival, for I will not call him Sweep, getting his machine or engine into the kitchen or drawing-room, he-would get to work as quick as possible; but how he would fix. his apparatus it is hard to tell, looking at the soot that would come falling down and which he would have to prevent flying over the room. But supposing he succeeded so far and got his Machine of cog-wheels and chain up the chimney, when to his dismay, down comes a brick; which is often the case, and breaking one of the cog-wheels, throws the whole of the apparatus out of gear, very likely leaving a portion of it stuck in the chimney! Then the -people would have to wait with the whole of the place in confusion until the man went to

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Thames Street to get another cog-wheel, and which of course he would do as quick as possible. But supposing he succeeded in his task of sweeping the chimney without any apparatus, and after clearing up the soot and getting his machine into the cart, which he would have as he could not carry his machine of iron and steel, he would then require to be paid. Oh! just imagine the mortification of our model inventor on having a shilling placed in his hand, or perhaps told to call again and take a bill, before getting paid. How would such a system pay our would-be clever engineers, whose intelligence might be better expended by inventing an engine to rock the baby's cradle, than a machine to do what none but qualified and licensed Sweepmen can properly perform, that is sweep the chimney by machinery.

# THE ALDEBURGH LIFEBOAT

By John Smith

**DEDICATED TO JAMES CABLE (COXSWAIN).**

The Norwegian barque "Winifred" was wrecked on November 11th, 1891, off Aldeburgh; the saving of the crew and a young Newfoundland dog was accomplished by the Aldeburgh Lifeboat, for which service Mr. Cable received the Silver Medal of the National Lifeboat Institution.



THE Lifeboat! The Lifeboat!  
 Run her down to the beach;  
 See yonder ship's sinking,  
 She has just sprung a leak.  
 Who'll volunteer to make up a crew?  
 I will, and I will, said not a few.

The boat quickly was manned  
 And pulled from the shore,  
 She sped o'er the seas  
 As she had oft done before,  
 On an errand of mercy and duty  
 combined,  
 Firmly resolved to leave no one behind.

Come pull all together, send her along,  
 Ease not for a moment,  
 Should a storm, it come on,  
 Let the landsmen all see  
 What we sailors can do,  
 In risking our lives  
 To save yonder ship's crew.

On, on, then we pulled  
 Against a swift running tide;  
 Midnight, it was passed,  
 Ere we came alongside;  
 Come heave to my hearties,  
 For we are just in good time,  
 See how low she has sunk  
 O'er her deep water line.

Then off that doomed vessel  
 We took all her crew;  
 As the daylight was dawning,  
 The coast came in view  
 Thinking there nothing  
 For us to do more,  
 We boldly pulled from her,  
 And steered for the shore.

But scarce had we gone  
 Fifty yards on our way,

When a low- plaintive bark  
 Is heard through the gale;  
 Ave, aye, says the skipper,  
 She will sink like a log,  
 Who'll risk his life to save that of a dog?  
 Up sprang a young fisherman, stalwart  
 and bold,  
 I will, cries he, for it's down in the hold.

Then quickly throwing off part of his  
 clothes,  
 And taking a header, in the billows he  
 goes;  
 Brave lad ! See how manfully he  
 struggles on,  
 He is risking his life  
 To save that of a dog.

He reaches the vessel  
 By the aid of a chain,  
 Then slowly climbs up  
 On board her again;  
 He throws off the hatch,  
 Grasps the brute by the neck,  
 As quickly he lands him out on the  
 deck;  
 The ship at this moment went down on  
 her lee,  
 Dog and his rescuer are in the trough of  
 the sea.

Back, back, went the boat,  
 Every oar, it was strained,  
 Back o'er those rolling billows again,  
 As the voice of the skipper,  
 It rang out on high,  
 Let none of us leave  
 That brave lad to die.

Every muscle is set, each eye scans the  
 sea;  
 The first to come up is the dog  
 From the deep;

Quickly the brute takes a long look  
 around,  
 You can read his dumb mind - is my  
 rescuer found?  
 The moments flew by as the billows  
 they scanned,  
 But the eye of that dog was quicker than  
 man's,  
 For with a bark and a bound,  
 Straight as a red,  
 Quick ! Quick! Cries the skipper,  
 And follow that dog.

On, on, went the brute,  
 With the boat in the rear,  
 And from each manly heart  
 There came a loud cheer;  
 For on the crest of a wave,  
 He is seen all afloat ;  
 Though exhausted, he's struggling  
 To reach the lifeboat.

But a friend is not far in that hour of  
 need  
 As quickly towards him the dog it does  
 speed  
 And in the twink of an eye,  
 'Ere the waves could him swallow,  
 That faithful dumb brute  
 Grasped the lad by the collar.

And now for the lifeboat and its  
 Brave noble crew,  
 Who, fearless of danger,  
 Their duty will do;  
 They dash alongside,  
 And the dog gives a bark,  
 As the lad he is quickly  
 hauled into the ark.

The boat's put about,  
 And the dog took aboard;  
 Once more cries the skipper,

Let us pull for the shore.  
 Soon the sound of the rowlocks,  
 The land it does reach,  
 Willing hands by the dozen,  
 Haul her on to the beach.  
  
 Old England! Look after  
 Thy sons on the sea;  
 For the time it will come  
 When wanted they'll be,  
 To uphold the honour of Country and  
 Queen  
 On the sea, to the whole world,  
 Prove Britannia supreme.  
  
 Once more we're on land,  
 All safe and sound;  
 For the crew of the lifeboat,  
 Let your voices resound  
 And ring to the echo,  
 These words that shall rhyme,-  
 Thank God! All are saved.  
 No one's left behind.

*Composed by J. SMITH*

No. 53365 Hearts of Oak

## From "The Star", January 1881 (?)

(The exact date is not known, but a stock index in the paper is dated 4th January)

### **Basket to Chimney.**

*The True History of John Smith, Poetical Sweep. He Knew Not his Parents, but was Discovered a Foundling in a Basket - He was Sent to Sea to Hunt the Whale, but Settled on Shore to Sweep Chimneys and Woo the Muses.*

Once upon a time The Star had a poet of its own. But he got his hair cut, and we had to make him a sub-editor. It was with peculiar pleasure, therefore, that we received, simultaneously with the news that Alfred Austin was to be Poet Laureate, that little tribute of verse from "John Smith, poetical chimney sweep," about the brave lads of the Kingstown lifeboat. Wishing, therefore, to pay a graceful compliment to plain John Smith, poetical chimney sweep, we sent a Star man to interview him at his humble home in Little Randolph st., at Camden Town.

Little Randolph st., reports the Star man, is a byway of mean houses, with here a barber's shop and there a front parlour given over to the penny grocery trade; there a mouldy row of almshouses with the small coal man delivering full or short weight at the door, and "Mangling taken in here." I found my man at No. 20, and a very interesting man I found him. He is - I quote his business card - "A thing we often hear about, but very seldom see - a Clean Sweep." To permit him to continue the process of auto-description:

'Tis over forty years this week  
Since he became a chimney sweep,  
And many a chimney in his time  
Against his will he's had to climb.

Being now impaired in health, and of an uncertain age (of which more anon), John Smith entrusts the clean sweeping to his son and his journeyman, and himself conducts

### **A THRIVING LITTLE BUSINESS**

in "machines", as the bundles of rods with brushes at the ends, which constitute the sweep's implements of trade are technically termed. The brush business is transacted in the front parlour. Here John Smith busied himself, a frail, emaciated man with an intellectual face, sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought and of ill-health. In the back parlour Mrs. Smith, a comely, capable-looking woman, was making breakfast for several sooty young men who had just finished their grimy calling for the day. As John Smith truthfully says -

In the early hours of morn, before the break of day

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The chimney sweep he may be seen, wending on his way  
 No matter what the weather be - hail, rain, snow, or fog -  
 Give him your order overnight, and you'll find him on the job.

It was news in Randolph st. that Mr. Austin was "on the job". "Oh, it's him is it?" said John Smith when he was told about it. "Well, I never did think as Lewis Morris would get the place. It stands to reason they wouldn't have no Socialism and all that. Not but what I'm a broad-thinking man myself, and always have been,

### **THOUGH SELF-TAUGHT.**

No, I can't say as I can express any opinion of Alfred Austin's poetry. If you believe me, I never read other men's works. I've never read Shakespeare, nor none of these here. I just sit at home and thinks things out for myself. I sit at home on a Sunday and read Lloyd's. That's been all my books, and I wouldn't miss it for all the money in the world. I have my own thoughts about most things. As I said in a little bit of mine,

War has begun, fleets are sailing  
 Far away to distant shores;  
 Many a mother's heart is aching  
 For the son she'll see no more.  
 See the foe - "

"But," I interrupted, "what about yourself and your poetry, Mr Smith?"

"Well, I never gave a thought to poetry till I was turned 40. What am I now? Well, it's a queer thing, but I don't rightly know. There's a queer history belonging to me.

I never knew a father,  
 I never knew a mother  
 I never knew a sister,  
 I never knew a brother,  
 I never had an uncle,  
 I never had an aunt,

But I know where I was brought up." He abruptly dropped into prose. "As a matter of fact, if you believe me, I was found,

### **FOUND IN A BASKET,**

in a market garden, down where Pimlico now is. That was in '40 or '41. I was taken to the workhouse at Mount st. in what was called Petty France, and there they gave me a good schooling, so far as reading and writing goes, and learning to make my own boots and clothes, which they don't teach everybody now.

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Hark, I hear an angel's whisper,  
 In the stillness of the night:  
 "Though you never knew your mother  
 You shall see her in the land of light!"

That's another little thing o' mine."

"And they made you a chimney sweep?"

"Not at first. At the age of 13 they 'prenticed me to the North Sea fishing. Grimsby? No, Grimsby wasn't hardly known of then. Barking Creek I sailed out of. That was the place for fishing boats in them days. But after two months I poisoned my hand, and they sent me back to the workhouse, and I was 'prenticed to a chimney sweep, name of Hewitt, near the Foundling Hospital. In them days we swept chimneys by day and emptied cesspools by night. My food was what I had gave me at ladies' houses, and I slept on the floor. Consequence is, I'm suffering at this day from what I'd never ought to have had if I'd been tret fair.

As thro' my life I struggled on,  
 I had my troubles rather strong;  
 But I never will regret the day  
 That I learned the honest and truthful way.

"Yes, I've got on very well, don't owe a penny, has hundreds owing to me, and can lend a man a shilling and never ask for it. In the summer I go to Margate or Southend for a week or two, and just take a bundle of these little poems of mine as I've had printed as recitations. Then I put 'em round, on the marine parade or on a steamboat at a penny a time, and every penny goes in the lifeboat box.

The lifeboat! the lifeboat!  
 Run her down to the beach.  
 See, yonder ship's sinking.  
 She has just sprung a leak.  
 Who'll volunteer to make a crew?  
 I will, and I will, said not a few.

That's from a bit I wrote about the Aldeburgh lifeboat. And this,

Old England! Look after  
 Thy sons on the sea;  
 For the time it will come  
 When wanted they'll be,  
 To uphold the honour of Country and Queen  
 On the sea, to the whole world,  
 Prove Britannia supreme.

"I've got a son in the North Sea fishing now. He would go. He's served his time, and he likes it. As for me, I don't believe I shall never want, somehow. I wouldn't care if I'd got to go tomorrow. I'm ready."

The Star man combated this gloomy philosophy, which appeared to be due to ill health. It had inspired Mr. Smith to write of his death -

It comes to me a welcome friend  
To free me from all pain,  
And were the world laid at my feet  
I have no wish to live again.

And again -

When I am dead  
Bear me quickly down the street  
When no one is about.  
Lay me in a six-foot hole,  
And then my requiem shout,  
"Hurrah! hurrah!  
He's now at rest,  
Free from all pain and care;  
He envies no one; no, not he,  
There is no envy there."

His domestic philosophy is more cheerful. He says:

I envy not the rich man's gold  
If I on work can lay my hold  
With health and strength and energy  
I can keep myself and family.

Turning over his manuscript books I came again and again on revilings of the unscrupulous rich. For example:-

A millionaire, his name was gold,  
His earthly riches were untold:  
He ruined the widow, crushed the poor,  
And spread starvation from door to door;  
But at last that greed it found a level,  
For he's kicked the bucket and gone to the -----.  
Bad luck to him!

It is needless to tell in detail how Mr. Smith founded the first Sweeps' Society in London, or how his present thriving brush and machine business grew out of an unsuccessful attempt to get his unenterprising brother sweeps to join him in a co-operative alliance to supply themselves with the tools of their trade at something

less than the exorbitant prices charged by the old makers. He has succeeded better than some more pretentious poets in combining art with the faculty for paying his way, and is, in fact, a square man all round.

We wish him better health and a long life in which to woo the moody muse.



Picture that accompanied the Newspaper article