

Philander Doesticks, “Side Shows’ of the City,” 1855

(keywords: Q. K. Philander Doesticks, Mortimer Neal Thompson, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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Selected text published in:

Q. K. Philander Doesticks, P.B. [pseud. Mortimer Neal Thompson], *Doesticks: What He Says* (New York: Edward Livermore, 1855): 161–62. Chapter 19 discusses Chatham Street and the Bowery. Cited here are paragraphs four through eight.

Chapter XIX

“Side Shows” of the City.

Here abound those impassive wooden Indians of some tribe extinct, save in these civilized localities, who stand in the doors of seven by nine tobacco-factories, offering in persevering silence perpetual bunches of basswood cigars to the passer-by.

Here are plentifully sprinkled multitudes of three-cornered shops where patient and eager women, so sharp and shrewd at a bargain, that he who buys must have all his wits about him, offer for sale the most incongruous assortment of second-hand property; from a last year’s newspaper to a complete library, from a pint-cup to a seventy ton yacht, from a brass night-key to a steam-engine.

Here too, almost every other doorway is ornamented with daguerreotypes of distinguished personages—negro-dancers duly equipped with banjo, tamborine and clappers—militia officers rigged out in all the glory of feathers and tinsel—supreme rulers of Know-Nothing Lodges, resplendent in the full regalia of that astute and sapient order—and whole dozens of pictures of the beauteous model artists who exercise their modest calling in that vicinage; whose names are fanciful enough, but whose physical embellishments are not always the ones commonly attributed to the mythical characters they represent.

“Kitty Clover” with splay-feet and dirty silk tights as “Venus Rising from the Sea,” “Lilly Dale” cross-eyed and knock-kneed, as the “Greek Slave”—“Kate Kearney,” with eyes rolled up, mock-pearls in her hair, in an attitude which must be exceedingly trying, as “Morning Prayer,” or a trio of clumsy squaw-like damsels with smirking faces and stumpy limbs, as the “Three Graces.”

Not only are all these works of art exhibited gratis by the public-spirited habiters of Chatham Street and the Bowery, but they have an infinity of other exhibition, which cannot be classified as either gratuitous, theatrical, or amphitheatrical, to see which a fee is demanded, moderate but peremptory, trifling but inevitable.

[End of selected text.]

EDITOR’S NOTES:

For a view of the area described by Thompson, see the lithograph illustration, "General View of Chatham St. 1858," in Samuel J. Willis, D. T. Valentine, and others, *Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York* (New York: Common Council, 1858).¹ The view includes the exterior of the daguerreotype gallery of Treadwell Lewis.

Mortimer Neal Thompson (1832–1875) was an American journalist and humorist who wrote under the pseudonym, "Q. K. Philander Doesticks, P. B." Throughout 1854 and 1855 his pieces appear in the weekly, *Spirit of the Times; A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage* (New York). He joined the staff of the *New York Tribune* in 1855.

Other titles include, *The Witches of New York* (1859); *Nothing to say; a Slight Slap at Mobocratic Snobbery* (1857); *Plu-ri-bus-tah. A Song that's-by-no-author* (1856); *The History and Records of the Elephant Club* (1856); *What Became of the Slaves on a Georgia Plantation? Great Auction Sale of Slaves, at Savannah, Georgia, March 2d & 3d, 1859* (1859, 1863).

Additional information regarding Thompson and his character, "Doesticks," is found in Edward J. Piacentino, "'Doesticks' Assault on Slavery: Style and Technique in 'The Great Auction Sale, at Savannah, Georgia.'" *Phylon* 48:3 (Fall 1987): 196–203; Fred W. Lorch, "'Doesticks' and Innocents Abroad," *American Literature* 20:4 (January 1949): 446–49; J. Louis Kuethe, "Q. K. Philander Doesticks, P. B., Neologist," *American Speech* 12:2 (April 1937): 111–16.

Nearly all titles by Thompson are indexed in WorldCat *only* under his pseudonym.

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/graphics/P8580002_CHATHAM-SQUARE_MANUAL-CORP_1858.pdf

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