# LETTERS

OF

# JONATHAN OLDSTYLE, GENT.



BY THE AUTHOR OF

# THE SKETCH BOOK.

WITH A

## Biographical Notice.

Washington Irving

*FIFTH EDITION.*

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# BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE.

When a writer has acquired great renown by his productions, and has established his reputation as a man of genius, we naturally feel a curiosity to become acquainted not only with his personal but his intellectual history. We like to trace up the current of his mind to its first tricklings, as it were, and to listen to its prattlings among the pebbles, as it is hurrying along to its broader and bolder channel.

The author of the Sketch Book has become more distinguished than perhaps any other American writer; and even England has been constrained to acknowledge that his productions are among the most elegant specimens of English composition.

In the year 1802, Mr. Irving first attracted public notice by publishing in the Morning Chronicle a series of sportive pieces under the signature of *Jonathan Oldstyle.* To the new generation of readers produced by the

lapse of twenty-two years, we trust that their republication will be peculiarly acceptable.

It is in these specimens that we may perceive the germ of that genius which soon after blossomed in Salmagundi, shot forth in wild luxuriance in Knickerbocker, and finally displayed its rich fruit in the Sketch Book, and Bracebridge Hall.

A brief account of the life and writings of Mr. Irving will, perhaps, not be deemed superfluous by the readers of this little publication.

The city of New York has the honour of being the birth-place of this distinguished author, who has given such *eclat* to the literary reputation of our country. He was a student in Columbia College, in the year 1800, but by reason of his infirm health, was under the necessity of relinquishing his classical studies, and of devoting his attention to pursuits less compulsory and severe. By way of recreation, he was advised to take lessons in drawing; and for this purpose he put himself under the tuition of a gentleman, whose Drawing Academy still maintains a high reputation in our city. What proficiency he made in this art, we have not the

means of ascertaining. It is presumable, however, that this kind of sketching was not that which best accorded with his genius, nor probably consisted with his health; for he soon afterwards began to turn his thoughts to travel, and a voyage across the Atlantic was recommended by his physician, and encouraged by his kindred and friends. In the interim, however, and indeed before this determination had been taken, his elder brother, now in England, was editing a newspaper in this city; and although a political paper, and devoted to the views and interests of a party, yet some portions of its columns were occasionally embellished "by hands unseen," with the flowers of poetry and literature, and sometimes enlivened by flashes of wit and humour. An inviting opportunity here presented itself, for trying the scarcely fledged wings of our juvenile author: and a two-fold benefit could be conferred—credit to himself, and relief to the care-worn and harassed editor, whose political conflicts did not allow him leisure to woo the muses to his aid; and he knew, that without some contributions from the Pierian district, his

paper, even in this "bank-note-world," would soon decline, for the want of contributions of a more substantial quality.

It was at this period, that the light pieces now republished, first made their appearance. They attracted a good deal of notice, and the Morning Chronicle was eagerly sought for by the lovers of genuine native humour. Mr. Irving then embarked for France, from whence he proceeded to Italy, and went as far as Rome and Naples. His travels and residence abroad enabled him to entertain his friends at home with the most amusing accounts of his various adventures, and the most picturesque descriptions of every thing that presented itself to his ready and lively apprehension. His letters are, no doubt, yet to be found within the circle of his relatives and correspondents, and the hope may be indulged, that they will not suffer them to be lost.

Our author returned to America, we believe, some time in the year 1805 or 1806; and his health being much improved, he commenced the study of the law, in the office of an eminent counsellor in New York. Coke, however, "delighted him not—nor

Blackstone neither." What progress he made in his juridical pursuits, we know not; but that he read more than he understood, and understood more than he remembered, there can be but little doubt.

In the year 1807, he amused the town with his *Salmagundi*, which was published in numbers, commencing in January, and continuing till the beginning of the next year. Several of the numbers are ascribed to a gentleman who has since distinguished himself both in poetry and prose, and whose copious, chaste, and vigorous style, as well as his satirical wit, sarcastic humour, and biting irony, render all his attempts at concealment unavailing. The poetical pieces which embellish Salmagundi, are well known to be the production of the eldest brother of our author, and who is since deceased. Salmagundi is now publishing in London, as Knickerbocker's History has already been; for such is Mr. Irving's reputation and popularity in England, that John Bull is now quite willing to ask for, and to read, an American book; though, according to a learned coxcomb, (critic, we meant to say,)

in the Edinburgh Review a few years ago, such a thing was then never thought of.

In the year 1810, an edition of Campbell's Poems being about to be published in Philadelphia, Mr. Irving was applied to for a biographical sketch of that sweet and sublime bard. This task he executed in a most masterly manner; and the forty pages of which it consists, form, in our humble opinion, the most beautiful and finished piece of serious composition that ever came from his pen. In point of style, refined sentiment, and generous and spirited effusion, we venture to assert, that it is not surpassed by any piece of prose in the English language.

The *History of New York, by Deidrich Knickerbocker*, was his next production; and in this he seems to have exerted all his powers of good-natured burlesque, playful wit, and facetious fancy. He prepared himself for this work by a course of diligent research into the antiquities of New Amsterdam; and the libraries of New York and Philadelphia were ransacked for materials, or rather subjects, for his wizard pencil. It is a broad caricature from beginning to end; and, like a

magic lantern, exhibits the most fantastic combinations, the most ludicrous distortions, and unlicensed exaggerations, that a mirthful fancy can create. Though sport to many, it was not so to all; and some of the descendants of our Dutch aborigines were not a little offended at the liberty which the author has taken with the names and manners of those whom they had been accustomed to remember with reverence and respect. A gentleman whose name bespeaks his Dutch lineage, and whose talents entitle his observations to very high regard, in his Discourse before the New York Historical Society in 1818, makes the following animadversions on the subject, with peculiar elegance and feeling:—

"It is more 'in sorrow than in anger,' that I feel myself compelled to add to these gross instances of national injustice, a recent work of a writer of our own, who is justly considered one of the brightest ornaments of American literature. I allude to the burlesque history of New York, in which it is painful to see a mind, as admirable for its exquisite perception of the beautiful, as it is for its quick sense of the ridiculous, wasting the

riches of its fancy on an ungrateful theme, and its exuberant humour in a coarse caricature.

"This writer has not yet fulfilled all the promise he has given to his country. It is his duty, because it is in his power, to brush away the pretenders who may at any time infest her society, her science, or her politics; or if he aspires, as I trust that he does, to strains of a higher mood, the deeds of his countrymen, and the undescribed beauties of his native land, afford him many a rich subject, and he may deck the altar of his country's glory with the garlands of his taste and fancy.

"How dangerous a gift is the power of ridicule! It is potent to unmask the pretender, and to brand the hypocrite; yet how often has it dissipated those gay illusions which beguile the rough path of life—how often has it chilled the glow of genius and invention—how often, at its dread presence, have the honest boasts of patriotism, the warm expression of piety, the generous purpose of beneficence, faltered on the lips, and died away in the heart."

About the year 1812, Mr. Irving went to

England, and became a partner in a commercial concern, of which two of his brothers were also partners, and one of whom remained in this country. The correspondence department, which was extensive, was allotted to the literary member of the house; and the business of the establishment had become so profitable, that each one, soon after the peace of 1815, had a prospect of sharing a handsome dividend. Our author enjoyed the expectation of retiring from the irksome drudgery of the counting-house to the sweets of literary leisure, with a competence for life, when the failure of a commercial adventure, in a moment convinced him of the vanity and delusiveness of human anticipations, and reduced him to a state of almost life-loathing despondency. What a trial for a sensitive mind—and yet for his credit and his fame what a fortunate reverse! His pen and his ledger are exchanged for his pencil and his sketch-book; and Geoffrey's drafts are more highly honoured, than those of any merchant in the land.

# LETTERS

OF

# JONATHAN OLDSTYLE, GENT.

WRITTEN IN 1802.

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## LETTER I.

SIR,

NOTHING is more intolerable to an old person than innovation on old habits. The customs that prevailed in our youth become dear to us as we advance in years; and we can no more bear to see them abolished, than we can to behold the trees cut down under which we have sported in the happy days of infancy.

Even I myself, who have floated down the stream of life with the tide—who have hu-

moured it in all its turnings—who have conformed in a great measure to all its fashions,—cannot but feel sensible of this prejudice. I often sigh when I draw a comparison between the present and the past; and though I cannot but be sensible that, in general, times are altered for the better, yet there is something even in the *imperfections* of the manners which prevailed in my youthful days, that is inexpressibly endearing.

There is nothing that seems more strange and preposterous to me, than the manner in which modern marriages are conducted. The parties keep the matter as secret as if there was something disgraceful in the connexion. The lady positively denies that any thing of the kind is to happen; will laugh at her intended husband, and even lay bets against the event, the very day before it is to take place. They sneak into matrimony as quietly as possible, and seem to pride themselves on the cunning and ingenuity they have displayed in their manœuvres.

How different is this from the manners of former times! I recollect when my *Aunt Barbara* was addressed by *'Squire Stylish*; no-

thing was heard of during the whole courtship, but consultations and negociations between her friends and relatives; the matter was considered and re-considered, and at length the time set for a final answer. Never, Mr. Editor, shall I forget the awful solemnity of the scene. The whole family of the Oldstyles assembled in awful conclave: my aunt Barbara, dressed out as fine as hands could make her—high cushion, enormous cap, long waist, prodigious hoop, ruffles that reached to the end of her fingers, and a gown of flame-coloured brocade, figured with poppies, roses, and sun-flowers. Never did she look so sublimely handsome. The 'Squire entered the room with a countenance suited to the solemnity of the occasion. He was arrayed in a full suit of scarlet velvet, his coat decorated with a profusion of large silk buttons, and the skirts stiffened with a yard or two of buckram: a long pig-tailed wig, well powdered, adorned his head; and stockings of deep blue silk, rolled over the knees, graced his extremities; the flaps of his vest reached to his knee-buckles, and the ends of his cravat, tied with the most

precise neatness, twisted through every button-hole. Thus accoutred, he gravely walked into the room, with his ivory-headed ebony cane in one hand, and gently swaying his three-cornered beaver with the other. The gallant and fashionable appearance of the 'Squire, the gracefulness and dignity of his deportment, occasioned a general smile of complacency through the room; my aunt Barbara modestly veiled her countenance with her fan; but I observed her contemplating her admirer with great satisfaction through the sticks.

The business was opened with the most formal solemnity, but was not long in agitation. The Oldstyles were moderate—their articles of capitulation few: the 'Squire was gallant, and acceded to them all. In short, the blushing Barbara was delivered up to his embraces with due ceremony. Then, Mr. Editor—then were the happy times: such oceans of arrack—such mountains of plum-cake—such feasting and congratulating—such fiddling and dancing:—ah me! who can think of those days, and not sigh when he sees the degeneracy of the present: no

eating of cake nor throwing of stockings—not a single skin filled with wine on the joyful occasion—nor a single pocket edified by it but the parson's.

It is with the greatest pain I see those customs dying away, which served to awaken the hospitality and friendship of my ancient comrades—that strewed with flowers the path to the altar, and shed a ray of sunshine on the commencement of the matrimonial union.

The deportment of my aunt Barbara and her husband was as decorous after marriage as before; *her* conduct was always regulated by *his*—her sentiments ever accorded with his opinions; she was always eager to tie on his neckcloth of a morning—to tuck a napkin under his chin at meal times—to wrap him up warm of a winter's day, and to spruce him up as smart as possible of a Sunday. The 'Squire was the most attentive and polite husband in the world; would hand his wife in and out of church with the greatest ceremony—drink her health at dinner with particular emphasis, and ask her advice on every subject—though I must confess he invariably adopted his own:—nothing was heard from

both sides, but dears, sweet loves, doves, &c. The 'Squire could never stir out of a winter's day, without his wife calling after him from the window to button up his waistcoat carefully. Thus, all things went on smoothly; and my relations *Stylish* had the name, and, as far as I know, deserved it, of being the most happy and loving couple in the world.

A modern married pair will, no doubt, laugh at all this; they are accustomed to treat one another with the utmost carelessness and neglect. No longer does the wife tuck the napkin under her husband's chin, nor the husband attend to heaping her plate with dainties; no longer do I see those little amusing fooleries in company, where the lady would pat her husband's cheek, and he chuck her under the chin; when dears and sweets were as plenty as cookies on a new-year's day. The wife now considers herself as totally independent—will advance her own opinions without hesitation, though directly opposite to his—will carry on accounts of her own, and will even have secrets of her own, with which she refuses to intrust him.

Who can read these facts, and not lament

with me the degeneracy of the present times; —what husband is there but will look back with regret to the happy days of female subjection.

JONATHAN OLDSTYLE.

## LETTER II.

SIR,

THERE is no place of public amusement of which I am so fond as the Theatre. To enjoy this with the greater relish I go but seldom; and I find there is no play, however poor or ridiculous, from which I cannot derive some entertainment.

I was very much taken with a play bill of last week, announcing, in large capitals, "*The Battle of Hexham, or, Days of Old.*" Here, said I to myself, will be something grand—*Days of old*—my fancy fired at the words. I pictured to myself all the gallantry of chivalry. Here, thought I, will be a display of court manners, and true politeness; the play will, no doubt, be garnished with tilts and tournaments; and as to those *banditti*, whose names make such a formidable appearance on the bills, they will be hung up, every mother's son, for the edification of the gallery.

With such impressions I took my seat in

the pit, and was so impatient that I could hardly attend to the music, though I found it very good.

The curtain rose—out walked the Queen with great majesty; she answered my ideas—she was dressed well, she looked well, and she acted well. The Queen was followed by a pretty gentleman, who, from his winking and grinning, I took to be the court fool; I soon found out my mistake. He was a courtier "*high in trust,*" and either general, colonel, or something of *martial* dignity. They talked for some time, though I could not understand the drift of their discourse, so I amused myself with eating pea-nuts.

In one of the scenes I was diverted with the stupidity of a corporal and his men, who sung a dull song, and talked a great deal about nothing: though I found by their laughing, there was a great deal of fun in the corporal's remarks. What this scene had to do with the rest of the piece, I could not comprehend; I suspect it was a part of some other play, thrust in here *by accident.*

I was then introduced to a cavern, where there were several hard looking fellows, sit-

ting around a table carousing. They told the audience they were banditti. They then sung a *gallery song,* of which I could understand nothing but two lines:

"The Welshman lik'd to have been chok'd by a mouse,
But he pull'd him out by the tail."

Just as they had ended this elegant song, their banquet was disturbed by the *melodious sound* of a horn, and in marched a *portly gentleman,* who, I found, was their captain. After this worthy gentleman had fumed his hour out, after he had slapped his breast and drawn his sword half a dozen times, the act ended.

In the course of the play, I learnt that there had been, or was, or would be, a battle; but how, or when, or where, I could not understand. The banditti once more made their appearance, and frightened the wife of the portly gentleman, who was dressed in man's clothes, and was seeking her husband. I could not enough admire the dignity of her deportment, the sweetness of her countenance, and the unaffected gracefulness of her action; but who the captain really was, or why he ran away from his spouse, I could

not understand. However, they seemed very glad to find one another again; and so at last the play ended, by the falling of the curtain.

I wish the manager would use a *drop scene* at the close of the acts; we might then always ascertain the termination of the piece by the *green* curtain. On this occasion, I was indebted to the polite bows of the actors for this pleasing information. I cannot say that I was entirely satisfied with the play, but I promised myself ample entertainment in the after-piece, which was called the *Tripolitan Prize.* Now, thought I, we shall have some *sport* for our money; we will, no doubt, see a few of those Tripolitan scoundrels spitted like turkeys, for our amusement. Well, sir, the curtain rose—the trees waved in front of the stage, and the sea rolled in the rear—all things looked very pleasant and smiling. Presently I heard a bustling behind the scenes—here, thought I, comes a band of fierce Tripolitans, with whiskers as long as my arm. No such thing—they were only a party of village masters and misses, taking a walk for exercise, and very pretty

behaved young gentry they were, I assure you; but it was cruel in the manager to dress them in *buckram*, as it deprived them entirely of the use of their limbs. They arranged themselves very orderly on each side of the stage, and sung something, doubtless very affecting, for they all looked pitiful enough. By and by came up a most tremendous storm: the lightning flashed, the thunder roared, and the rain fell in torrents: however, our pretty rustics stood gaping quietly at one another, until they must have been wet to the skin. I was surprised at their torpidity, till I found they were each one afraid to move first, for fear of being laughed at for their awkwardness. How they got off I do not recollect: but I advise the manager, in a similar case, to furnish every one with a *trap-door*, through which to make his exit. Yet this would deprive the audience of much amusement; for nothing can be more laughable than to see a body of guards with their spears, or courtiers with their long robes, *get* across the stage at our theatre.

Scene passed after scene. In vain I strained

my eyes to catch a glimpse of a Mahometan phiz. I once heard a great bellowing behind the scenes, and expected to see a strapping Mussulman come bouncing in; but was miserably disappointed, on distinguishing his voice, to find out by his *swearing* that he was only a *Christian*. In he came—an American navy officer. Worsted stockings—olive velvet small clothes—scarlet vest—pea-jacket, and *gold-laced hat*—dressed quite *in character*. I soon found out, by his talk, that he was an American prize-master; that, returning through the *Mediterranean* with his Tripolitan prize, he was driven by a storm on the *coast of England*. The honest gentleman seemed, from his actions, to be rather intoxicated: which I could account for in no other way than his having drank a great deal of salt water, as he swam ashore.

Several following scenes were taken up with hallooing and huzzaing, between the captain, his crew, and the gallery, with several amusing tricks of the captain and his son, a very funny, mischievous little fellow. Then came the cream of the joke: the captain wanted to put to sea, and the young fel-

low, who had fallen desperately in love, to stay ashore. Here was a contest between love and honour—such piping of eyes, such blowing of noses, such slapping of pocket-holes! But *old Junk* was inflexible—What! an American tar desert his duty! (three cheers from the gallery,) impossible! American tars for ever!! True blue will never stain, &c. &c. (a continual thundering among the gods). Here was a scene of distress—here was bathos. The author seemed as much puzzled to know how to dispose of the young tar, as old Junk was. It would not do to leave an American seaman on foreign ground, nor would it do to separate him from his mistress.

Scene the last opened.—It seems that another Tripolitan cruiser had bore down on the prize, as she lay about a mile off shore. How a Barbary corsair had got in this part of the world—whether she had been driven there by the same storm, or whether she was cruising to pick up a few English first rates, I could not learn. However, here she was. Again were we conducted to the sea-shore, where we found all the village gentry, in

their buckram suits, ready assembled, to be entertained with the rare show of an American and Tripolitan engaged yard-arm and yard-arm. The battle was conducted with proper decency and decorum, and the Tripolitan very politely gave in—as it would be indecent to conquer in the face of an American audience.

After the engagement the crew came ashore, joined with the captain and gallery in a few more huzzas, and the curtain fell. How old Junk, his son, and his son's sweetheart, settled it, I could not discover.

I was somewhat puzzled to unders l the meaning and necessity of this engagen t between the ships, till an honest old c ntryman at my elbow said, he supposed *t* was *the Battle of Hexham,* as he recolle ed no fighting in the first piece. With this explanation I was perfectly satisfied.

My remarks upon the audience, I shall postpone to another opportunity.

JONATHAN OLDSTYLE.

## LETTER III.

SIR,

MY last communication mentioned my visit to the theatre; the remarks it contained were chiefly confined to the play and the actors; I shall now extend them to the audience, who, I assure you, furnish no inconsiderable part of the entertainment.

As I entered the house some time before the curtain rose, I had sufficient leisure to make some observations. I was much amused with the waggery and humour of the gallery, which, by the way, is kept in *excellent* order by the constables who are stationed there. The noise in this part of the house is somewhat similar to that which prevailed in Noah's ark; for we have an imitation of the whistles and yells of every kind of animal. This, in some measure, compensates for the want of music, as the gentlemen of our orchestra are very economic of their favours. Somehow or another, the anger of the gods seemed to

be aroused all of a sudden, and they commenced a discharge of apples, nuts, and gingerbread, on the heads of the honest folks in the pit, who had no possibility of retreating from this new kind of thunderbolts. I can't say but I was a little irritated at being saluted aside of my head with a rotten pippin; and was going to shake my cane at them, but was prevented by a decent looking man behind me, who informed me that it was useless to threaten or expostulate. They are only *amusing themselves* a little at our expense, said he; sit down quietly and bend your back to it. My kind neighbour was interrupted by a hard green apple that hit him between the shoulders—he made a wry face, but knowing it was all a joke, bore the blow like a philosopher. I soon saw the wisdom of this determination; a stray thunderbolt happened to light on the head of a little sharp faced Frenchman, dressed in a white coat and small cocked hat, who sat two or three benches ahead of me, and seemed to be an irritable little animal. Monsieur was terribly exasperated; he jumped upon his seat, shook his fist at the gallery, and swore vio-

lently in bad English. This was all nuts to his merry persecutors; their attention was wholly turned on him, and he formed their *target* for the rest of the evening.

I found the ladies in the boxes, as usual, studious to please; their charms were set off to the greatest advantage; each box was a little battery in itself, and they all seemed eager to outdo each other in the havoc they spread around. An arch glance in one box was rivalled by a smile in another, that smile by a simper in a third, and in a fourth a most bewitching languish carried all before it.

I was surprised to see some persons reconnoitring the company through spy-glasses; and was in doubt whether these machines were used to remedy deficiencies of vision, or whether this was another of the eccentricities of fashion. Jack Stylish has since informed me, that glasses were lately all *the go;* though hang it, says Jack, it is quite *out* at present; we used to mount our glasses in *great snuff*, but since so many *tough jockies* have followed the lead, the bucks have all *cut* the custom. I give you, Mr. Editor, the account in my dashing cousin's

own language. It is from a vocabulary I do not well understand.

I was considerably amused by the queries of the countryman mentioned in my last, who was now making his first visit to the theatre. He kept constantly applying to me for information, and I readily communicated, as far as my own ignorance would permit.

As this honest man was casting his eye round the house, his attention was suddenly arrested. And pray, who are these? said he, pointing to a cluster of young fellows. These, I suppose, are the critics, of whom I have heard so much. They have, no doubt, got together to communicate their remarks, and compare notes; these are the persons through whom the audience exercise their judgments, and by whom they are told when they are to applaud or to hiss. Critics! ha! ha! my dear sir, they trouble themselves as little about the elements of criticism, as they do about other departments of science and belles-lettres. These are the beaux of the present day, who meet here to lounge away an idle hour, and play off their little impertinences for the entertainment of the public. They

no more regard the merits of the play, nor of the actors, than my cane. They even *strive* to appear inattentive; and I have seen one of them perched on the front of the box with his back to the stage, sucking the head of his stick, and staring vacantly at the audience, insensible to the most interesting specimens of scenic representation, though the tear of sensibility was trembling in every eye around him. I have heard that some have even gone so far in search of amusement, as to propose a game of cards in the theatre, during the performance. The eyes of my neighbour sparkled at this information—his cane shook in his hand—the word *puppies* burst from his lips. Nay, says I, I don't give this for absolute fact: my cousin Jack was, I believe, *quizzing* me (as he terms it) when he gave me the information. But you seem quite indignant, said I, to the decent looking man in my rear. It was from him the exclamation came: the honest *countryman* was gazing in gaping wonder on some new attraction. Believe me, said I, if you had them daily before your eyes, you would get quite used to them. Used to them, replied

he; how is it possible for people of sense to relish such conduct? Bless you, my friend, people of sense have nothing to do with it; they merely endure it in silence. These young gentlemen live in an indulgent age. When I was a young man, such tricks and follies were held in proper contempt. Here I went a little too far; for, upon better recollection, I must own that a lapse of years has produced but little alteration in this department of folly and impertinence. But do the ladies admire these manners! Truly, I am not as conversant in female circles as formerly; but I should think it a poor compliment to my fair countrywomen, to suppose them pleased with the stupid stare and cant phrases with which these votaries of fashion add affected to real ignorance.

Our conversation was here interrupted by the ringing of a bell. Now for the play, said my companion. No, said I, it is only for the musicians. These worthy gentlemen then came crawling out of their holes, and began, with very solemn and important phizzes, strumming and tuning their instruments in the usual style of discordance, to the great

*entertainment* of the audience. What tune is that? asked my neighbour, covering his ears. This, said I, is no tune; it is only a pleasing *symphony*, with which we are regaled, as a preparative. For my part, though I admire the effect of contrast, I think they might as well play it in their cavern under the stage. The bell rung a second time—and then began the tune in reality; but I could not help observing, that the countryman was more diverted with the queer grimaces and contortions of countenance exhibited by the musicians, than their melody. What I heard of the music, I liked very well; (though I was told by one of my neighbours, that the same pieces have been played every night for these three years;) but it was often overpowered by the gentry in the gallery, who vociferated loudly for *Moll in the Wad, Tally ho the Grinders*, and several other *airs* more suited to their tastes.

I observed that every part of the house has its different department. The good folks of the gallery have all the trouble of ordering the music; (their directions, however, are not more frequently followed than they deserve).

The mode by which they issue their mandates is stamping, hissing, roaring, whistling; and, when the musicians are refractory, groaning in cadence. They also have the privilege of demanding a *bow* from *John*, (by which name they designate every servant at the theatre, who enters to move a table or snuff a candle); and of detecting those cunning dogs who peep from behind the curtain.

By the by, my honest friend was much puzzled about the curtain itself. He wanted to know why that *carpet* was hung up in the theatre? I assured him it was no carpet, but a very fine curtain. And what, pray, may be the meaning of that gold head, with the nose cut off, that I see in front of it? The meaning—why, really, I can't tell exactly—though my cousin, Jack Stylish, says there is a great deal of meaning in it. But surely you like the *design* of the curtain? The design,—why really I can see no design about it, unless it is to be brought down about our ears by the weight of those gold heads, and that heavy *cornice* with which it is garnished. I began now to be uneasy for the credit of our curtain, and was afraid he would per-

ceive the mistake of the painter, in putting a *harp* in the middle of the curtain, and calling it a *mirror;* but his attention was *happily* called away by the *candle-grease* from the chandelier, over the centre of the pit, dropping on his clothes. This he loudly complained of, and declared his coat was *bran-new.* How, my friend? said I; we must put up with a few trifling inconveniences, when in the pursuit of pleasure. True, said he; but I think I pay pretty dear for it;—first to give six shillings at the door, and then to have my head battered with rotten apples, and my coat spoiled by candle-grease; by and by I shall have my other clothes dirtied by sitting down, as I perceive every body mounted on the benches. I wonder if they could not see as well if they were all to stand upon the floor.

Here I could no longer defend our customs, for I could scarcely breathe while thus surrounded by a host of strapping fellows, standing with their dirty boots on the seats of the benches. The little Frenchman, who thus found a temporary shelter from the missive compliments of his gallery friend,

was the only person benefitted. At last the bell again rung, and the cry of *down, down —hats off*, was the signal for the commencement of the play.

If, Mr. Editor, the garrulity of an old fellow is not tiresome, and you choose to give this *view of a New-York Theatre* a place in your paper, you may, perhaps, hear further from your friend,

JONATHAN OLDSTYLE.

## LETTER IV.

SIR,

I SHALL now conclude my remarks on the Theatre, which I am afraid you will think are spun out to an unreasonable length; for this I can give no other excuse, than that it is the privilege of old folks to be tiresome, and so I shall proceed.

I had chosen a seat in the pit, as least subject to annoyance from a habit of talking loud that has lately crept into our theatres, and which particularly prevails in the boxes. In old times, people went to the theatre for the sake of the play and acting; but I now find that it begins to answer the purpose of a coffee-house, or fashionable lounge, where many indulge in loud conversation, without any regard to the pain it inflicts on their more attentive neighbours. As this conversation is generally of the most trifling kind, it seldom repays the latter for the inconvenience they suffer, of not hearing one half of the play. I found, however, that I had

not much bettered my situation; but that every part of the house has its share of evils. Besides those I had already suffered, I was yet to undergo a new kind of torment. I had got in the neighbourhood of a very obliging personage, who had seen the play before, and was kindly anticipating every scene, and informing those that were about him what was to take place; to prevent, I suppose, any *disagreeable* surprise to which they would otherwise have been liable. Had there been any thing of a plot to the play, this might have been a serious inconvenience; but, as the piece was entirely *innocent* of every thing of the kind, it was not of so much importance. As I generally contrive to extract amusement from every thing that happens, I now entertained myself with remarks on the self-important air with which he delivered his information, and the distressed and impatient looks of his unwilling auditors. I also observed, that he made several mistakes in the course of his communications. "Now you'll see," said he, "the queen in all her glory, surrounded with her courtiers, fine as fiddles, and ranged on each side of the stage,

like rows of pewter dishes." On the contrary, we were presented with the portly gentleman and his *ragged regiment* of banditti. Another time he promised us a regale from the fool; but we were presented with a *very fine speech* from the queen's *grinning counsellor*.

My country neighbour was exceedingly delighted with the performance, though he did not half the time understand what was going forward. He sat staring, with open mouth, at the portly gentleman, as he strode across the stage, and in furious rage drew his sword on the *white lion*. "By George, but that's a brave fellow," said he, when the act was over; "that's what you call first-rate acting, I suppose."

Yes, said I, it is what the critics of the present day admire, but it is not altogether what I like; you should have seen an actor of the *old school* do this part; he would have given it to some purpose; you would have had such ranting and roaring, and stamping and storming; to be sure, this honest man gives us a *bounce* now and then in the true old style, but in the main he seems to prefer

walking on plain ground to strutting on the *stilts* used by the tragic heroes of my day.

This is the chief of what passed between me and my companion during the play and entertainment, except an observation of his, that it would be well if the manager was to drill his nobility and gentry now and then, to enable them to go through their evolutions with more grace and spirit. This put me in mind of something my cousin Jack said to the same purpose, though he went too far in his zeal for reformation. He declared, "he wished sincerely one of the critics of the day would take all the *slab-shabs* of the theatre, (like *cats in a bag*,) and *twig* the whole bunch." I can't say but I like Jack's idea well enough, though it is rather a severe one.

He might have remarked another fault that prevails among our performers (though I don't know whether it occurred this evening,) of dressing for the same piece in the fashions of different ages and countries, so that while one actor is strutting about the stage in the cuirass and helmet of Alexander, another, dressed up in a gold-laced coat and bag-wig,

with a chapeau de bras under his arm, is taking snuff in the fashion of one or two centuries back, and perhaps a third figures in Suwarrow boots, in the true style of modern buckism.

But what, pray, has become of the noble Marquis of Montague, and Earl of Warwick? (said the countryman, after the entertainment was concluded). Their names make a great appearance on the bill, but I do not recollect having seen them in the course of the evening. Very true—I had quite forgot those worthy personages; but I suspect they have been behind the scenes, smoking a pipe with our other friends *incog.*, the Tripolitans. We must not be particular now-a-days, my friend. When we are presented with a battle of Hexham *without fighting*, and a Tripolitan afterpiece without even a *Mahometan whisker*, we need not be surprised at having an *invisible* marquis or two thrown into the bargain. —"But what is your opinion of the house?" said I; "don't you think it a very substantial, *solid-looking* building, both inside and out? Observe what a fine effect the dark co-

louring of the wall has upon the white faces of the audience, which glare like the stars in a dark night. And then, what can be more pretty than the paintings in the front of the boxes, those little masters and misses sucking their thumbs, and making mouths at the audience?"

"Very fine, upon my word. And what, pray, is the use of that chandelier, as you call it, that is hung up among the clouds, and has showered down its favours upon my coat?"

"Oh, that is to illumine the heavens, and set off to advantage the little periwig'd cupids, tumbling head over heels, with which the painter has decorated the *dome*. You see we have no need of the chandelier below, as here the house is *perfectly well* illuminated; but I think it would have been a great saving of candle-light, if the manager had ordered the painter, among his other pretty designs, to paint a moon up there, or if he was to hang up that sun with whose *intense light* our eyes were greatly annoyed in the beginning of the after-piece?"

"But don't you think, after all, there is ra-

ther a—sort of a—kind of a *heavyishness* about the house? Don't you think it has a little of an *under groundish* appearance?"

To this I could make no answer. I must confess I have often thought myself the house had a *dungeon-like* look; so I proposed to him to make our exit, as the candles were putting out, and we should be left in the dark. Accordingly, groping our way through the dismal *subterraneous* passage that leads from the pit, and passing through the ragged bridewell-looking ante-chamber, we once more emerged into the purer air of the park, when bidding my honest countryman good night, I repaired home, considerably pleased with the amusements of the evening.

Thus, Mr. Editor, have I given you an account of the chief incidents that occurred in my visit to the Theatre. I have shown you a few of its accommodations and its imperfections. Those who visit it more frequently may be able to give you a better statement.

I shall conclude with a few words of advice for the benefit of every department of it. I would recommend—

To the actors—less etiquette, less fustian, less buckram.

To the orchestra—new music, and more of it.

To the pit—patience, clean benches, and umbrellas.

To the boxes—less affectation, less noise, less coxcombs.

To the gallery—less grog, and better constables;—and,

To the whole house, inside and out, a total reformation.

And so much for the Theatre.

JONATHAN OLDSTYLE.

## LETTER V.

SIR,

As I was sitting quietly by my fire-side the other morning, nursing my wounded shin, and reading to my cousin, Jack Stylish, a chapter or two from Chesterfield's Letters, I received the following epistle from my friend Andrew Quoz; who, hearing that I talked of paying the actors a visit, and shaking my cane over their heads, has written the following letter, part of which is strongly in their defence.

*To* JONATHAN OLDSTYLE, *Gent.*

My Dear Friend,

I perceive by the late papers, you have been entertaining the town with remarks on the Theatre. As you do not seem from your writings to be much of an adept in the Thespian arcana, permit me to give you a few hints for your information.

The Theatre, you observe, begins to answer all the purposes of a coffee-house. Here

you are right; it is the polite lounge, where the idle and curious resort, to pick up the news of the fashionable world, to meet their acquaintances, and to show themselves off to advantage. As to the dull souls who go for the sake of the play, why, if their attention is interrupted by the conversation of their neighbours, they must bear it with patience; it is a custom authorized by fashion. Persons who go for the purpose of chatting with their friends are not to be deprived of their amusement; *they have paid their dollar*, and have a right to entertain themselves as well as they can. As to those who are annoyed by their talking, why they need not listen to it; *let them mind their own business.*

You are surprised at so many persons using opera-glasses, and wish to know whether they were all near-sighted. Your cousin, Jack Stylish, has not explained that matter sufficiently, for though many *mount* glasses because it is *the go*, yet I am told that several do it to enable them to distinguish the countenances of their friends across our scantily illuminated Theatre. I was considerably amused the other evening with an honest tar,

who had stationed himself in front of the gallery, and with an air of affected foppishness, was reconnoitring the house through a pocket telescope. I could not but like his notion, for really the gods are so elevated among the clouds, that unless they are unusually strong of vision, I can't tell how they manage to discern with the naked eye what is passing in the little painted world below them.

I think you complain of the deficiency of the music; and say that we want a greater variety, and more of it. But you must know that, though this might have been a grievance in old times, when people attended to the musicians, it is a thing of but little moment at present; our orchestra is kept principally for form sake. There is such a continual noise and bustle between the acts, that it is difficult to hear a note; and if the musicians were to get up a new piece of the finest melody, so nicely tuned are the ears of their auditors, that I doubt whether nine hearers out of ten would not complain on leaving the house, that they had been bored to death with the same old pieces they have heard two or

three years back. Indeed, many who go to the theatre carry their own music with them; and we are so often delighted with the crying of children by way of glee, and such coughing and sneezing from various parts of the house by way of chorus, not to mention the regale of a sweet symphony from a sweep or two in the gallery, and occasionally a full piece, in which nasal, vocal, *whistling and thumping* powers are admirably exerted and blended, that what want we of an orchestra?

In your remarks on the actors, my dear friend, let me beg of you to be cautious. I would not for the world that you should *degenerate* into a critic. The critics, my dear Jonathan, are the very pests of society; they rob the actor of his reputation—the public of their amusement; they open the eyes of their readers to a full perception of the faults of our performers, they reduce our feelings to a state of miserable refinement, and destroy entirely all the enjoyments in which our coarser sensations delighted. I can remember the time when I could hardly keep my seat through laughing at the wretched buffoonery, the merry-andrew tricks, and the unnatural

grimaces played off by one of our theatric Jack Puddings; when I was struck with awful admiration at the roaring and ranting of a buskined hero, and hung with rapture on every word, while he was "tearing a passion to tatters—to very rags!" I remember the time when he who could make the queerest mouth, roll his eyes, and twist his body with the most hideous distortions, was surest to please. Alas! how changed the times, or rather how changed the taste; I can now sit with the gravest countenance, and look without a smile on all such *mimicry;* their skipping, their squinting, their shrugging, their snuffling, delight not me; and as to their ranting and roaring,

> "I'd rather hear a brazen candlestick turned,
> Or a dry wheel grate on the axletree,"

than any such fustian efforts to attain a shallow gallery applause.

Now, though I confess these critics have reformed the manners of the actors, as well as the tastes of the audience, so that these absurdities are almost banished from the New York stage, yet do I think they have employed a most unwarrantable liberty.

A critic, my dear sir, has no more right to expose the faults of an actor, than he has to detect the deceptions of a juggler, or the impositions of a quack. All trades must live; and as long as the public are satisfied to admire the tricks of the juggler, to swallow the drugs of the quack, or to applaud the fustian of the actor, whoever attempts to undeceive them, does but curtail the pleasures of the latter, and deprive the former of their bread.

Ods-bud! hath not an actor eyes, and shall he not *wink?*—hath not an actor teeth, and shall he not grin?—feet, and shall he not stamp?—lungs, and shall he not roar?—breast, and shall he not slap it?—hair, and shall he not *club* it? Is he not fed with plaudits from the gods? delighted with thumpings from the groundlings? annoyed by hisses from the boxes?

You censure his follies, does he not complain? If you take away his bread, will he not starve? If you starve him, will he not die? And if you kill him, will not his wife and seven small infants, six at her back and one at her breast, rise up and cry vengeance against you? Ponder these things seriously

my friend Oldstyle, and you will agree with me that, as the actor is the most meritorious and faultless, so is the critic the most cruel and sanguinary character in the world—"as I will show you more fully in my next." Your loving friend,

ANDREW QUOZ.

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From the tenor and conclusion of these remarks of my friend, Mr. Andrew Quoz, they may not improperly be called the "Rights of Actors;" his arguments are, I confess, very forcible, but, as they are entirely *new* to me, I shall not hastily make up my mind. In the mean time, as my leg is much better, I believe I shall hobble to the theatre on Monday evening, borrow a seat in a side box, and observe how the actors conduct themselves.

JONATHAN OLDSTYLE.

## LETTER VI.

SIR,

I MENTIONED in my last my intention of visiting the Theatre on Monday night. I accordingly reached there, with the assistance of Jack Stylish, who procured for me in one of the boxes an uncomfortable and dirty seat, which, however, I found as good as any of my neighbours. In the pit I was determined never again to venture. The little Frenchman, mentioned in my former remarks, had adopted the same resolution; for, on casting my eyes around the Theatre, I recognised his sharp phiz, and pinched up cocked hat, peering over the ledge of the Shakspeare. The poor little fellow had not changed his place for the better; a brawny Irishman was leaning with his arms a-kimbo on his shoulders, and coolly surveying the audience, unmindful of the writhings and expostulations of the irritated little Gaul, whose chin was pressed hard upon the front of the box, and his small black eyes twinkling with fury and suffoca-

tion. How he disengaged himself I do not know, for my attention was just then called away by a different object; and on turning around some time afterwards, Monsieur had disappeared.

I found every thing wore its old appearance. The same *silence, order*, and *regularity* prevailed, as on my former visit. The central chandelier hung unmolested in the heavens, setting off to advantage the picture of Mr. Anybody, with which it is adorned, and shedding a melancholy ray into that den in which (if we may judge from the sounds that issue thence) so many troubled spirits are confined.

I had marched into the Theatre through rows of tables heaped up with delicacies of every kind—here, a pyramid of apples or oranges, invited the playful palate of the dainty; while there, a regiment of mince pies and custards, promised a more substantial regale to the hungry. I entered the box, and looked around with astonishment—not a grinder but had its employment. The crackling of nuts, and the craunching of apples, saluted my ears on every side. Surely,

thought I, never was an employment followed up with more assiduity, than that of gormandizing; already it pervades every public place of amusement; nay, it even begins to steal into our churches, where many a mouthful is munched in private; and few have any more objection to eat than laugh *in their sleeves.*

The eating mania prevails through every class of society; not a soul but has caught the infection. Eating clubs are established in every street and alley, and it is impossible to turn a corner without hearing the hissing of frying-pans, winding the savoury steams of roast and boiled, or seeing some hungry genius bolting raw oysters in the middle of the street. I expect we shall shortly carry our knives and forks, like the Chinese do their chop-sticks, in our pockets.

I was interrupted in my meditations by Jack Stylish, who proposed that we might take a peep into the *lounging-room*, the dashing appearance of which Jack described in high terms; I willingly agreed to his proposal.

The room perfectly answered my expecta-

tions, and was a-piece with the rest of the Theatre: the high finish of the walls, the windows fancifully decorated with red baize and painted canvas, and the *sumptuous* wooden benches placed around it, had a most inviting appearance.

I drew the end of one of them near to an elegant stove that stood in the centre of the room, and seating myself on it, stretched my lame leg over a chair; placing my hands on the head of my cane, and resting my chin upon them, I began to amuse myself by reconnoitring the company, and snuffing up the delightful perfume of French brandy, Holland gin, and Spanish segars.

I found myself in a circle of young gentry, who appeared to have something in agitation, by their winking and nodding; at the same time I heard a confused whispering around me, and could distinguish the words, smoke his wig—twig his silver buckles—old quiz—cane—cock'd hat—queer phiz—and a variety of others, by which I soon found I was in bad quarters. Jack Stylish seemed equally uneasy with myself, for though he is fond of fun himself, yet I believe the young

dog has too much love for his old relation, to make him the object of his mirth. To get me away, he told me my friend Quoz was at the lower end of the room, and seemed, by his looks, anxious to speak with me; we accordingly joined him, and finding that the curtain was about rising, we adjourned to the box together.

In our way, I exclaimed against the indecorous manner of the young men of the present day; the impertinent remarks on the company in which they continually indulge; and the cant phrases with which their shallow conversation is continually interlarded. Jack observed, that I had popp'd among a set of *hard boys;* yes, master Stylish, said I, turning round to him abruptly, and I observed by your winks and grins, that you are better acquainted with them than I could wish. Let me tell you, honest friend, if ever I catch you indulging in such despicable fopperies, and hankering after the company of these disrespectful youngsters, I will discard you from my affections entirely. By this time we had reached our box, so I left my cousin Jack to digest what I had just

said; and I hope it may have weight with him; though I fear, from the thoughtless gaiety of his disposition, and his knowledge of the strong hold he has in my foolish old heart, my menaces will make but little impression.

We found the play already commenced. I was particularly delighted with the appearance and manners of one of the female performers. What ease, what grace, what elegance of deportment—this is not acting, cousin Jack, said I—this is reality.

After the play, this lady again came forward, and delivered a ludicrous epilogue. I was extremely sorry to find her step so far out of that graceful line of character, in which she is calculated to shine; and I perceived, by the countenances around me, that the sentiment was universal.

Ah! said I, how much she forgets what is due to her dignity. That charming countenance was never made to be so unworthily distorted; nor that graceful person and carriage to represent the awkward movements of hobbling decrepitude. Take this word of advice, fair lady, from an old man, and a

*friend:* Never, if you wish to retain that character of elegance you so deservedly possess—never degrade yourself by assuming the part of a mimic.

The curtain rose for the afterpiece. Out skipped a *jolly Merry Andrew.* Aha! said I, here is the *Jack-pudding.* I see he has forgot his broomstick and gridiron; he'll compensate for these wants, I suppose, by his wit and humour. But where is his master, the Quack? He'll be here presently, said Jack Stylish; he's a queer old codger; his name 's Puffaway; here 's to be a rare roasting match, and this quizzical looking fellow turns the spit. The Merry Andrew now began to deal out his speeches with great rapidity; but, on a sudden, pulling off a black hood that covered his face, who should I recognize but my old acquaintance, the *portly gentleman.*

I started back with astonishment. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* exclaimed I, with a melancholy shake of the head. Here is a *dreary,* but true picture, of the vicissitudes of life—one night paraded in regal robes, surrounded with a *splendid train* of nobility; the next,

degraded to a poor *Jack-pudding*, and without even a *gridiron* to help himself. What think you of this, my friend Quoz? said I; think you an actor has any right to sport with the *feelings* of his audience, by presenting them with such *distressing* contrasts. Honest Quoz, who is of the melting mood, shook his head ruefully, and said nothing. I, however, saw the tear of *sympathy* tremble in his eye, and honoured him for his *sensibility*.

The *Merry Andrew* went on with his part, and my pity increased as he progressed; when, all of a sudden, he exclaimed, "And as to *Oldstyle*, I wish him to old Nick." My blood mounted into my cheeks at this insolent mention of my name. And what think you of *this*, friend Quoz? exclaimed I, vehemently: I presume this is one of your "rights of actors." I suppose we are now to have the stage a vehicle for lampoons and slanders; on which our fellow citizens are to be caricatured by the clumsy hand of every dauber who can hold a brush! Let me tell you, Mr. Andrew Quoz, I have known the time when such insolence would have been hooted from the stage.

After some persuasion, I resumed my seat, and attempted to listen patiently to the rest of the afterpiece; but I was so disgusted with the Merry Andrew, that in spite of all his skipping, and jumping, and turning on his heel, I could not yield him a smile.

Among the other original characters of the dramatis personæ, we were presented with an ancient maiden; and entertained with jests and remarks from the buffoon and his associates, containing equal *wit* and *novelty*. But jesting apart, I think these attempts to injure female happiness, at once cruel and unmanly. I have ever been an enthusiast in my attachment to the fair sex—I have ever thought them possessed of the strongest claims to our admiration, our tenderness, and our protection. But when to these are added still stronger claims—when we see them aged and infirm, solitary and neglected, without a partner to support them down the descent of life—cold indeed must be that heart, and unmanly that spirit, that can point the shafts of ridicule at their defenceless bosoms—that can poison the few drops of comfort heaven has poured into their cup.

The form of my sister Dorothy presented itself to my imagination; her hair silvered by time, but her face unwrinkled by sorrow or care. She "hath borne her faculties so meekly," that age has marked no traces on her forehead. Amiable sister of my heart! cried I, who hast jogged with me through so many years of existence, is this to be the recompense of all thy virtues; art thou, who never, in thought or deed, injured the feelings of another, to have thy own massacred, by the jarring insults of those to whom thou shouldst look for honour and protection?

Away with such despicable trumpery—such shallow, worn-out attempts to obtain applause from the unfeeling. I'll no more of it; come along, friend Quoz; if we stay much longer, I suppose we shall find our courts of justice insulted, and attempts to ridicule the characters of private persons! Jack Stylish entreated me to stay, and see the addition the manager had made to his live stock, of an ass, a goose, and a monkey. Not I, said I, I'll see no more. I accordingly hobbled off with my friend, Mr. Andrew Quoz. Jack declared he would stay behind and see the end

of the joke. On our way home, I asked friend Quoz, how he could justify such clumsy attempts at personal satire. He seemed, however, rather reserved in his answers, and informed me, he would write his sentiments on the subject.

The next morning, Jack Stylish related to me the conclusion of the piece. How several actors went into a wheel one after another, and after a little grinding, were converted into asses, geese, and monkeys, except the *Merry Andrew,* who was found such a *tough jockey,* that the wheel could not digest him, so he came out as much a Jack-pudding as ever.

JONATHAN OLDSTYLE.

## LETTER VII.

SIR,

I HAD just put on my spectacles, and mended my pen, to give you an account of a visit I made some time since, with friend Quoz and my sister Dorothy, to a ball, when I was interrupted by the following letter from the former.

My friend Quoz, who is what the world calls a *knowing man*, is extremely fond of giving his opinion in every affair. He displays in this epistle more than usual knowledge of his subject, and seems to exert all his argumentative talents to enforce the importance of his advice. I give you his letter without further comment, and shall postpone my description of the ball to another opportunity.

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*To* JONATHAN OLDSTYLE, *Gent.*

My Dear Friend,

I once more address you on a subject that I fear will be found irksome, and may

chafe that testy disposition (forgive my freedom) with which you are afflicted. Exert, however, the good humour of which, at bottom, I know you to have a plentiful stock, and hear me patiently through. It is the anxious fear I entertain of your sinking into the gloomy abyss of criticism, on the brink of which you are at present tottering, that urges me to write.

I would set before you the rights and wrongs of an *actor;* and by painting in strong colours the peculiarity of his situation, call your good sense into action.

The world, my friend Oldstyle, has ever been prone to consider the theatrical profession in a degraded point of view. What first gave rise to this opinion, I am at loss to conceive; but I consider it as the relic of one of those ancient prejudices which the good sense of the world is daily discarding; and I flatter myself it will in a little time be totally exploded. Why the actor should be considered inferior in point of respectability to the poet, the painter, or any other person who exerts his talents in delineating character, or in exhibiting the various operations of the human

mind, I cannot imagine. I know you, friend Oldstyle, to be a man of too liberal sentiments not to be superior to these little prejudices; and also one who regards an actor, provided his private character be good, with equal respect as the member of any other profession. Yet you are not quite aware of the important privileges solely attached to the dramatic performer. These I will endeavour to point out.

The works of a poet or painter you may freely criticise—nay, they offer them for that purpose—they listen attentively to your observations, and profit by your censures. But beware how you exercise such conduct towards an actor: he needs no instruction—his own *impartial* judgment is sufficient to detect and amend all his imperfections. Attempt to correct his errors, and you ruin him at once—he'll *starve* to spite you; he is like a decayed substance, that crumbles at the touch.

No, Sir—when an actor is on the stage, he is in his own house—it is his castle—he then has you in his power—he may there *bore* you with his buffoonery, or insult you with his pointed remarks, with perfect impunity.

You, my friend, who are rather apt to be dissatisfied, may call it hard treatment to be thus annoyed, and yet compensate the annoyer for his trouble. You may say, that as you pay an equivalent for your amusement, you should have the liberty of directing the actor in his attempts; and as the Chinese does his ear-tickler, tell him when his instrument offends, and how he overdoes himself in the operation. This is an egregious mistake: you are obliged to him for his *condescension* in exerting his talents for your instruction; and as to your money, why he only takes it to lessen *in part* the weight of your obligation.

An actor is, as I before observed, competent to judge of his own abilities; he may undertake whatever character he pleases, tragedy, comedy, or pantomime, however ill adapted his audience may think him to sustain it. He may rant and roar, and wink and grin, and fret and fume his hour upon the stage, and "who shall say nay?" He is paid by the manager for using his lungs and limbs, and the more he exerts them, the better does he fulfil the engagement, and the

harder does he *work* for his living—and who shall deprive him of his "*hard-earned* bread?"

How many an honest, lazy genius, has been flogged by these unfeeling critics into a cultivation of his talents, and attention to his profession!—how have they doomed him to hard study and unremitting exertion!—how have they prejudiced the public mind, so that what might once have put an audience in convulsions of laughter, now excites nothing but a slight pattering from the hands of the little shavers who are rewarded with seats in the gallery, for their trouble in keeping the boxes. Oh! Mr. Oldstyle, it cuts me to the soul to see a poor actor stamp and storm, and slap his forehead, his breast, his pocket holes, all in vain; to see him throw himself in some attitude of distraction or despair, and there wait in fruitless expectation the applauses of his friends in the gallery. In such cases, I always take care and clap him myself, to enable him to quit his posture, and resume his part with credit.

You was much irritated the other evening, at what you termed an ungenerous and un-

manly attempt to bring forward an ancient maiden in a ridiculous point of view. But I don't see why that should be made a matter of complaint. Has it not been done time out of mind? Is it not sanctioned by daily custom in private life? Is not the character of Aunt Tabitha, in the farce, the same we have laughed at in hundreds of dramatic pieces? Since, then, the author has but travelled in the same *beaten track* of character so many have trod before him, I see not why he should be blamed as severely as if he had all the *guilt of originality* upon his shoulders.

You may say that it is cruel to sport with the feelings of any class of society; that folly affords sufficient field for wit and satire to work upon, without resorting to misfortune for matter of ridicule; that female sensibility should ever be sacred from the lash of sarcasm, &c. But this is all stuff—all cant.

If an author is too indolent or too stupid to seek new sources for remark, he is surely excusable in employing the ideas of others for his own use and benefit. But I find I have digressed imperceptibly into the "rights of *authors*," so let us return to our subject.

An actor, when he "holds the mirror up to nature," may, by his manœuvres, twist and turn it so as to represent the object in any shape he pleases—nay, even give a caricature where the author intended a resemblance; he may blur it with his breath, or soil it with his dirty fingers, so that the object may have a colouring from the glass in which it is viewed, entirely different from its natural appearance. To be plain, my friend, an actor has a right, whenever he thinks his author not sufficiently explicit, to assist him by his own *wit* and *abilities;* and if by these means the character should become quite different from what was originally intended, and in fact belong more to the *actor* than the *author*, the actor deserves high credit for his ingenuity. And even though his additions are *quaint* and fulsome, yet his *intention* is highly praiseworthy, and deserves ample encouragement.

Only think, my dear sir, how many snug little domestic arrangements are destroyed by the officious interference of these ever dissatisfied critics. The honest *King of Scotland,* who used to dress for market and theatre at the same time, and wear with his kelt

and plaid his half boots and black breeches, looking half king, half cobbler, has been obliged totally to dismiss the former from his royal service; yet I am happy to find, so obstinate is his attachment to *old habits*, that all their efforts have not been sufficient to dislodge him from the strong hold he has in the latter. They may force him from the boots — but nothing shall drive him out of the breeches.

Consider, my friend, the puerile nature of such remarks. Is it not derogating from the elevated character of a critic, to take notice of clubbed wigs, red coats, black breeches, and half boots! Fie! fie upon it! I blush for the critics of the day, who consider it a matter of importance whether a Highlander should appear in breeches and boots, or an Otaheitan in the dress of a New York coxcomb. Trust me, friend Oldstyle, it is to the *manner*, not the *appearance* of an actor, we are to look; and as long as he performs his part well, (to use the words of my friend Sterne,) "it shall not be inquired whether he did it in a black coat or a red."

Believe me, friend Oldstyle, few of our modern critics can shew any substantial claim

to the character they assume. Let me ask them one question—Have they ever been in Europe? Have they ever seen a Garrick, a Kemble, or a Siddons? If they have not, I can assure you, (upon the words of two or three of my friends, *the actors*,) they have no right to the title of critics.

They may talk as much as they please about judgment, and taste, and feeling, but this is all nonsense. It has lately been determined, *(at the Theatre,)* that any one who attempts to decide upon such ridiculous principles, is an arrant *goose*, and deserves to be *roasted*.

Having thus, friend Oldstyle, endeavoured in a feeble manner to show you a few of the rights of an actor, and of his wrongs; having mentioned his constant and *disinterested* endeavours to please the public, and how much better he knows what will please them, than they do themselves; having also depicted the cruel and persecuting nature of a critic; the continual restraint he lays on the harmless irregularity of the performer, and the relentless manner in which he obliges him to attend sedulously to his professional duty,

through fear of censure—let me entreat you to pause! Open your eyes to the precipice on which you are tottering, and hearken to the earnest warning of

Your loving friend,

ANDREW QUOZ.

My friend Quoz certainly writes with *feeling;* every line evinces that *acute sensibility* for which he has ever been remarked. I am, however, perfectly at a loss to conceive on what grounds he suspects me of a disposition to turn critic. My remarks hitherto have rather been the result of immediate impression than of critical examination. With my friend, Mr. Andrew Quoz, I begin to doubt the motives of our New-York critics; especially since I have, in addition to these arguments, the assurances of two or three doubtless *disinterested* actors, and an editor, who, Mr. Quoz tells me, is remarkable for his *candour* and *veracity*, that the critics are the most 'presumptuous,' 'arrogant,' 'malevolent,' 'illiberal,' 'ungentlemanlike,' 'malignant,' 'rancorous,' 'villanous,' 'ungrateful,' 'crippled,' 'invidious,' 'detracting,' 'fabricating,' 'per-

sonal,' 'dogmatical,' 'illegitimate,' 'tyrannical,' 'distorting,' 'spindle-shanked moppets, designing villains, and upstart ignorants.'

These, I say, and many other equally *high polished* appellations, have awakened doubts in my mind respecting the sincerity and justice of the critics; and lest my pen should unwittingly draw upon me the suspicion of having a hankering after criticism, I now wipe it carefully, lock it safely up, and promise not to draw it forth again till some new department of folly calls for my attention.

JONATHAN OLDSTYLE.

## LETTER VIII.

SIR,

I WAS calmly enjoying my toast and coffee some mornings ago, with my sister Dorothy and Jack Stylish, when we were surprised by the abrupt entrance of my friend, Mr. Andrew Quoz. By the particular expression of his *knowing phiz*, as cousin Jack calls it, I immediately perceived he was labouring with some important intelligence.

In one hand he held the Morning Chronicle, and with the fore-finger of the other, pointed to a particular paragraph. I hastily put on my spectacles, and seized the paper with eager curiosity. Judge my surprise, Mr. Editor, on reading an act of our legislature, pronouncing any citizen of this State who shall send, bear, or accept a challenge, either verbal or written, disqualified from holding any office of honour or confidence, or of voting at any election within this State, &c. &c.

The paper fell from my hands—I turned

my eyes to friend Andrew in mute astonishment. Quoz put his finger on his nose, and winking significantly, cried, "what do you think of this, my friend Jonathan?"

"Here is a catastrophe," exclaimed I, in a melancholy tone. "Here is a damper for the mettlesome youths of the age. Spirit of chivalry, whither hast thou flown! Shade of Don Quixote, dost thou not look down with contempt on the degeneracy of the times!"

My sister Dorothy caught a sympathetic spark of enthusiasm;—deep read in all the volumes of ancient romance, and delighted with the glowing description of the heroic age, she had learned to admire the gallantry of former days, and mourned to see the last spark of chivalric fire thus rudely extinguished.

Alas! my brother, said she, to what a deplorable state are our young men reduced! how piteous must be their situation—with sensibilities so *easily injured,* and bosoms so *tremblingly alive* to the calls of honour and etiquette!

Indeed, my dear Dorothy, said I, I feel most deeply for their melancholy situation.

Deprived, in these dull, monotonous, peaceable times, of all opportunities of evincing, in the hardy contest of the tented field, that heroic flame that burns within their breasts; they were happy to vent the lofty fumings of their souls, in the more domestic and *less dangerous* encounters of the duel:—like the warrior in the fable, who, deprived of the pleasure of slaughtering armies, contented himself with cutting down cabbages.

Here a solemn pause ensued. I called to mind all the tales I had heard or read of ancient knights; their amours, their quarrels, and their combats; how, on a fair summer's morning, the knight of the Golden Goose met the knight of the Fiery Fiddle; how the knight of the Fiery Fiddle exclaimed in lofty tones, "whoever denies that Donna Fiddleosa is the most peerless beauty in the universe, must brave the strength of this arm!" how they both engaged with dreadful fury, and, after fighting till sunset, the knight of the Fiery Fiddle fell a martyr to his constancy; murmuring, in melodious accents, with his latest breath, the beloved name of Fiddleosa.

From these ancient engagements, I descended to others more modern in their dates, but equally important in their origins. I recalled the genuine politeness and polished ceremony with which duels were conducted in my youthful days; when that gentlemanly weapon, the *small sword,* was in highest vogue. A challenge was worded with the most particular complaisance; and one that I have still in my possession, ends with the words, "*your friend and affectionate servant, Nicholas Stubbs.*" When the parties met on the field, the same decorum was observed; they pulled off their hats, wished one another a good day, and helped to draw off each other's coats and boots, with the most respectful civility. Their fighting, too, was so handsomely conducted; no awkward movements; no eager and angry pushes; all cool, elegant, and graceful. Every thrust had its *sa-sa;* and a *ha-hah* lunged you gently through the body. Then nothing could equal the tenderness and attention with which a wounded antagonist was treated; his adversary, after wiping his sword deliberately, kindly supported him in his arms, examined his pulse,

and inquired, with the most affectionate solicitude, " how he felt himself now?" Thus every thing was conducted in a well-bred, gentlemanly manner.

Our present customs, I cannot say I much admire;—*a twelve inch barrel pistol,* and *ounce ball,* are blunt, unceremonious affairs, and prevent that display of grace and elegance allowed by the small sword; besides, there is something so awkward, in having the muzzle of a pistol staring one full in the face, that I should think it might be apt to make some of our youthful heroes feel rather disagreeable; unless, as I am told has been sometimes the case, the duel was fought by twilight.

The ceremony of loading, priming, cocking, &c. has not the most soothing effects on a person's feelings; and I am told that some of our warriors have been known to tremble, and make wry faces, during these preparations; though this has been attributed, and doubtless with much justice, to the violence of their wrath, and fierceness of their courage.

I had thus been musing for some time, when I broke silence at last, by hinting to friend

Quoz, some of my objections to the mode of fighting with pistols.

Truly, my friend Oldstyle, said Quoz, I am surprised at your ignorance of modern customs; trust me, I know of no amusement that is, generally speaking, more harmless. To be sure, there may now and then a couple of determined fellows take the field, who resolve to do the thing in good earnest; but, in general, our fashionable duellists are content with only one discharge; and then, either they are poor shots, or their triggers pull hard, or they shut the wrong eye, or some other cause intervenes, so that it is ten, ay, twenty chances to one in their favour.

Here I begged leave to differ from friend Andrew. I am well convinced, said I, of the valour of our young men, and that they determine, when they march forth to the field, either to conquer or die; but it generally happens, that their seconds are of a more peaceable mind, and interpose after the first shot; but I am informed, that they come often very near being killed, having bullet holes through their hats and coats; which, like Falstaff's hacked sword, are strong

proofs of the serious nature of their encounters.

My sister Dorothy, who is of a humane and benevolent disposition, would, no doubt, detest the idea of duels, did she not regard them as the last gleams of those days of chivalry, to which she looks back with a degree of romantic enthusiasm. She now considered them as having received their death-blow; for how can even the challenges be conveyed, said she, when the very messengers are considered as principals in the offence?

Nothing more easy, said friend Quoz;—a man gives me the lie—very well; I tread on his toes in token of challenge;—he pulls my nose by way of acceptance; thus, you see, the challenge is safely conveyed without a third party. We then settle the mode in which satisfaction is to be given; as, for instance, we draw lots which of us must be slain to satisfy the demands of honour. Mr. A. or Mr. B., my antagonist, is to fall: well, madam, he stands below in the street; I run up to the garret window, and drop a brick upon his head; if he survives, well and good

—if he falls, why nobody is to blame, it was purely accidental. Thus, the affair is settled, according to the common saying, to our mutual satisfaction.

Jack Stylish observed, that, as to Mr. Quoz's project of dropping bricks on people's heads, he considered it a vulgar substitute. For his part, he thought it would be well for the legislature to amend their law respecting duels, and license them under proper restrictions;—That no persons should be allowed to fight, without taking out a regular license from what might be called the *Blood and Thunder Office*;—That they should be obliged to give two or three weeks notice of the intended combat in the newspapers;—That the contending parties should fight, till one of them fell;—and that the public should be admitted to *the show*. This, he observed, would, in some degree, be reviving the *spectacles* of antiquity, when the populace were regaled with the combats of gladiators. We have, at present, no games resembling those of the ancients, except, now and then, a bull

or bear bait; and this would be a valuable addition to the list of our refined amusements.

I listened to their discourse in silence: yet I cannot but think, Mr. Editor, that this plan is entitled to some attention. Our young men fight, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, through *fear* of being branded with the epithet of *coward;* and since they fight to please the world, the world, being thus interested in their encounters, should be permitted to attend and judge in person of their conduct.

As I think the subject of importance, I take the liberty of requesting a corner in the Morning Chronicle, to submit it to the consideration of the public.

JONATHAN OLDSTYLE.

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