

THE UNIVERSAL
LETTER-WRITER;

OR, WHOLE ART OF
POLITE CORRESPONDENCE :
A GREAT VARIETY OF PLAIN, EASY, ENTERTAINING,
AND FAMILIAR

ORIGINAL LETTERS,
ADAPTED TO EVERY AGE AND SITUATION
IN LIFE,
BUT MORE PARTICULARLY ON
BUSINESS, EDUCATION, AND LOVE:

Together with
VARIOUS FORMS AND PETITIONS,
Suitable to the different Wants and Exigencies of Life :
PROPER METHODS OF ADDRESSING SUPERIORS AND PERSONS
OF ALL RANKS, BOTH IN WRITING AND DISCOURSE ;
AND VALUABLE HINTS FOR GRAMMATICAL
CORRECTNESS ON ALL OCCASIONS.

To which is added,
A MODERN COLLECTION OF
GENTEEL COMPLIMENTARY CARDS.

Likewise,
USEFUL FORMS IN LAW, SUCH AS WILLS,
BONDS, &c.

TO WHICH IS SUBJOINED AN INDEX,
To enable the reader immediately to find out any particular
Letter or Article wanted.

A NEW EDITION CORRECTED AND ENLARGED.

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PREFACE.

THE several editions which have recently been printed of the following pages are the best eulogium upon the selection here presented to the Public. To render it as complete as possible, consistently with its brevity in size and price, the Editor has endeavored to introduce the greatest variety of useful and applicable matter. Elaborate letters upon general or natural history, learned criticisms, or long extracts, are rejected; as they tend rather to swell the size of the book, than promote the improvement of the practical correspondent, whose aim is to compress his subject, and who seeks the easiest model of placing his thoughts in the most simple and intelligible dress. In persuing the different styles of authors, the young student will form a judgment upon their comparative merits, and be led readily to adopt that which is most suitable to the occasion, whether it be the detail of facts or of fancy, of pleasure or business, of gaiety or solemnity. For the express purpose of instructing the youthful and uninformed mind in the art of easy and familiar correspon-

dence, we have added the following brief and indispensable rules, which, if attended to, will place the epistolary writer in a respectable view; an important consideration when it is reflected, that words pass the ear, and are quickly forgotten, or excused in the hurry of business or argument, while on the contrary, our written thoughts are preserved for years, mark the inattention or ability of the writer, and frequently are the foundations of his good or bad fortune.

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INTRODUCTION.

TO give weight and respectability to our epistolary production, four things are indispensably necessary, viz. Orthography, Grammar, Style and Pronunciation.

A correct *Orthography* is absolutely of the highest importance; ignorance in this particular is always considered a mark of ill-breeding, vulgar education, and stupidity. To obtain this perfection, it is absolutely necessary to depend on memory, and a knowledge of the etymology of words, but chiefly the former; which is to be acquired in reading elegant and classical authors. Sometimes, indeed, words are spelled differently by these, but such instances are rare, and where there is but one way of spelling a word, should it be mis-spelled, ridicule would deservedly follow. It is now usual to dismiss the *u* from the final syllable of words ending in *our*, as *honour*, *labour*, &c. and the concluding *k* from words ending *ck*, as *almanack*, *traggick*, *comick*; *compleat*, is now more properly written *complete*, &c. In such cases, it is no error to adhere to the old orthography, though it is more polite, more correct, and has less appearance of singularity, to conform to the new.

Grammar is deduced from certain rules which give every word its due force and form; these rules are nearly similar in all countries, subject to the exception of such idiomatic phrases as can be taken only collectively, and which, when separated, convey no meaning; false grammar, either in writing or speaking, throws a strong sarcasm on the education of the defaulter, and in many instances might make his composition unintelligible, or at least dubious.

As the titles of ~~the~~ ~~works~~ ~~are~~ ~~mentioned~~ ~~in~~ ~~a~~ ~~work~~, of this brief nature, and they are accurately extant in many excellent books, we shall endeavor to point out some of those errors which the unlearned but too frequently fall into.

I comes, I goes, &c. for *I come, I go, &c.* *Learn* is frequently used for *teach*, *set* for *sit*, *laid* for *lay*, *mistaken* for *mistaking*, &c. *Was* is used for *were*, and the power of conjunctions is little attended to, viz. if *he was* instead of if *he were*. Adjectives are commonly used for adverbs; *he wrote agreeable to your order*, should be *he wrote agreeably*. Indeed, it were to be wished, that the numerous instances of false grammar, to be met with in the most esteemed authors, and pointed out in the works of writers on Grammar, were collected, and exhibited in a cheap shape, as they more palpably impose false syntax, &c. to the unlearned, than whole pages of abstruse deductions.

Style. Vulgarism in language or writing is a certain characteristic of bad company, a bad education, or being little read in good authors. Proverbial expressions and trite sayings are the flowers of the rhetoric of a low-bred man; instead of saying, *My friend was compelled by necessity*, he would say, *Needs must when the devil drives*, or *Necessity has no law*; such vulgar aphorisms ought to be rejected which are common and in familiar use. An attentive writer would not say, *It was all-through you it happened*, but *It happened from your inattention*. An affectation of learning is also one of the greatest blemishes of style; there are two distinct modes of speaking the English language, so different from each other, that a person using the superior, may render himself unintelligible to one accustomed only to the inferior, phraseology; the reason is, that many words and phrases are to be expressed by Saxon as well as Roman derivatives; the former are in common use, the latter are more peculiarly in the possession of the learned. The medium, however, ought constantly to be kept in view.

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Too frequent quotations is a vice in style which is always sure to draw on the person using it the imputation of the grossest pedantry. Ladies are apt to introduce into their letters the prevailing French and Italian phrases, sprigs of poetry, and scraps of plays. A quotation or happy phrase, judiciously introduced, certainly is an elegance in style; but the too frequent introduction of them is an unpardonable affectation, and renders our letter little more than a copy of another author.

It is of the greatest consequence in writing, to avoid all expletives; to refrain from the insertion of long parenthesis; to use periods of moderate length; and to avoid as much as possible terminating a sentence with an unimportant word, or an indeclinable part of speech.

Tautology is so great a fault in composition, that too much care cannot be taken to avoid the use of words exactly synonymous. There is also a species of literal tautology, called alliteration, which consists in forming sentences with many words beginning with the same letter. It should be used very sparingly, and with great taste, as the abuse of it is very frequent.

The use of figures of rhetoric must always be moderate and judicious. No blemish in style exceeds what is termed a *broken metaphor*; for example, it is very proper to say, "He who would *climb* to the highest eminence must *step* with caution;" but if it were said, *He who would soar*, &c. it would be nonsense. In short to acquire a genteel style, little more is necessary than to *follow nature and ease*, to use the most polished and best-turned sentiments the subject admits of, to avoid pedantry, affectation, and the adoption of phrases in common use with the *beau monde*, on the one hand, and vulgarity, cant words, and want of orthographical or grammatical accuracy, on the other.

Punctuation, inasmuch as it is necessary to the proper division of sentences, is of very great importance to perspicuity. It may easily be acquired by looking at the position of points in books, and by consulting good treatises. In general, points are the pauses which

a correct orator would use in speaking, and as a knowledge of their powers is to be acquired with very *little care*, the neglect of them is unpardonable.

Among the secondary attainments to finishing our epistolary communications handsomely, is the art of writing well.

An idea that it is not *genteel* to write a good hand is very prevalent, and industriously circulated by the indolent; but we may quote, in contradiction to their judgment, the opinion of the accomplished Lord Chesterfield. Daily experience also proves, that many are solely indebted to the perspicuity and elegance of their hand-writing for their elevation in the world.

Various opinions prevail respecting the use of *capital letters*; but all writers agree that every sentence should begin with one, and that proper names, and the emphatical words in a sentence, should only be distinguished by them.

Several other little matters ought to be attended to, to make a letter appear like the production of a well-bred person; such as *the leaving a margin* on the left hand, *the distance from the top of the sheet*, where the letter ought to begin, and *the place for the date*; but these being regulated entirely by fashion, written rules would only puzzle the reader.

Regard to the straightness of your lines ought to be strictly attended to; and, if you rule lines with a lead pencil, take care to efface them before your letter is sent away.

In making up a letter fold it so as to leave room to conceal the wafer, or display the seal intended for it, the folds ought to be strongly pressed with an ivory folder, or the hand, so as to lie flat, and make the corners sharp; that, when they are sealed, they may not show an uneven surface, or unhandsome shape.

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THE
UNIVERSAL LETTER-WRITER;

OR,
COMPLETE ART OF
POLITE CORRESPONDENCE:

Containing
A GREAT VARIETY OF LETTERS,
ON THE MOST FAMILIAR, USEFUL, INSTRUCTIVE, AND
ENTERTAINING OCCURRENCES IN LIFE.

INFANTILE LETTERS
ON
FILIAL DUTIES, &c.

EXCEPT the correspondence that may pass between children, these must, generally, consist of requests on the one side, and permission on the other. The matter contained in them should be of the most simple and undorned style. Great care should be taken that the composition of children be not too formal or stiff, nor should their faults be corrected without a satisfactory explanation. Parents and Friends should prevent them from writing in a loose and ungrammatical manner, much of the epistolatory inaccuracy of younger years arising from our want of timely explanation, and the ignorant communications of nurses and inferior servants.

Letter from a young Lady to her Parents.

I HOPE that my dear papa and mamma will excuse the badness of the writing of this Letter, when they shall be pleased to recollect, that this is my first attempt since I have learned to join my letters together. I have long been anxious to have the pleasure of being able to write to you, and beg you will be pleased to accept this my first humble offering. As my constant study ever has been, so shall it continue to be, to convince you how much I am, my dearest parents,

Your most affectionate and dutiful daughter.

Letter from the same to her parents on another occasion.

MY dear papa and mamma will be pleased to accept of my most respectful compliments, on the close of the old and commencement of the new year. As it has pleased God to give you good health during the course of the last year, I beseech him to grant you the same to the end of the present, and many more. This is a happiness your family have most earnestly to wish for, and in particular,

Your most humble and dutiful daughter.

Letter from the same to her Mamma.

GIVE me leave, my dear mamma, to tell you, as well as my pen will permit me, or rather as well as my unexperienced hand is capable of directing it, how truly sensible I am of all your favours, and that I will endeavour by my conduct to merit the continuance of them. My prayers are, morning and night, offered up to heaven for your preservation, nor are you ever in the day, absent from my thoughts. May God preserve you, and grant you every thing you can wish for, from the good behaviour of

Your dutiful and affectionate daughter.

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Letter from a young Gentleman to his Companion, recovered from a Fit of Sickness.

IT gives me the most sincere pleasure to hear that my dear Henry is recovering his health so rapidly.— Had you died, it would have been to me a most terrible loss: but it has pleased God to preserve my friend. I will take the first opportunity that offers, to call and tell you how valuable your life is to

Your sincere friend and playfellow.

Answer to the preceding Letter.

YOUR obliging letter, my dear Billy, is a fresh proof of your friendship and esteem for me. I thank God I am now perfectly recovered. I am in some doubt, whether I ought not to consider my late illness as a just punishment for my crime of robbing Mr. Goodman's orchard, breaking his boughs, and spoiling his hedges. However, I am fully determined that no such complaint shall ever more come against

Your sincere friend and playfellow.

Letter from a young Gentleman to his afflicted Friend.

I CANNOT fail, my dear Harry, most sensibly to feel the loss you have sustained in the death of a good and indulgent father. It pierces me to the heart: for I know how great was your affection for him, and how feelingly you must bemoan his loss. I will call upon you to-morrow, and we will cry together; for, as we always mutually enjoyed our sports, why should we be separated in our griefs: they tell me you do not cry, but sit in gloomy silence. I do not like that; for I have somewhere read, that tears ease the heart, and open a passage for the anguish of the soul. That God may give you patience under this terrible calamity, is the most fervent prayer of

Your disconsolate friend.

Answer to the preceding Letter.

I KNOW of nothing in this world but a letter from my dear Billy, that could have so soon awakened me

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lar sentiments from you, and may every wish of your heart be as completely gratified as I trust this will be, the 21st being fixed for the day of our going home, respectful remembrances to my relations and friends, and believe me,

Dear mamma,

Your most dutiful and affectionate daughter.

From a Preceptor to his Scholar during Vacation Time.

DEAR CHARLES,

I AM unwilling to omit the first opportunity that offered, of commencing a correspondence with my young friend, for fear, during this leisure time, the advice I have given and the rules I have set down, in respect to writing letters may be either forgotten or neglected. I think it my duty, therefore, to remind you of these observations, and by insisting on regular answers oblige you to practise, as well as to observe. You may remember that my first advice was to be careful of your spelling, and not to make use of pompous language in addressing your friends; a simplicity of style always recommends itself, and displays far more learning than rhapsodical bombast: be also as brief as possible, for a prolix writer exhausts the patience of its reader. Avoid repetitions, for they offend the ear; except they are *artfully* introduced, to mark some *artful* point. I disapprove of parenthesis (*except they be absolutely necessary*) for they generally create confusion: some masters are very fond of recommending long s's, and appropriating the round one to the final letter of a word. Never send a letter to any one with an interlineation: it is an affront, for it betokens both laziness and carelessness; there is no excuse for an interlineation, except it is a piece which you wish to prove an original, and of which there should be no duplicate. Avoid capital letters, which should only be appropriated to proper names or particular nouns. When you introduce a word which requires more than common notice, or on

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which the reader should lay a great accent, put a *dash* under it *with your pen*: such words, when printed, are put in *italics*; but do not be too fond of this, for I have known many puzzled by these dashes, which have frequently intimated wit where there was none. Never let me see you write *you was*, or I shall deny *you were* ever a pupil of mine. Be attentive to the time, and do not jumble the present, past, and future, as many writers do. Use the conditional mood, provided the sentence *be* conditional: this, I confess, is not a general observation, but if a man *pretend* to write, he ought to be correct. Do not crowd us with monosyllables, for they are very significant creatures, nor use many long words, for fear you may exceed comprehension. I hate particles when they are avoidable; be, therefore, sparing in your *fors*, your *buts*, and your *ands*. Quotations, when not made too common, display, both a variety, and some knowledge of authors; but beware of misapplying them, for you not only insult the author you borrow from, but expose yourself to ridicule. Do not arrogate the power of making words, for we have sufficient in our own language to express our meaning, and there are very few who possess competent abilities for the task. Avoid cant and obsolete phrases; nor insert a word that you do not perfectly comprehend. These hints, I hope, will be sufficient; let me, therefore, see they are observed, while I remain, with compliments to your father,

Your sincere friend.

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