

**THE FATHER: OR,
AMERICAN SHANDYISM,
A COMEDY**

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The Father: Or, American Shandyism, a Comedy by William Dunlap

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WILLIAM DUNLAP

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A Comedy

BY

WILLIAM DUNLAP

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THOMAS J. McKEE



NEW-YORK:
THE DUNLAP SOCIETY
1887

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STATE OF CALIFORNIA



INTRODUCTION.

THIS is the second American comedy; at least, that is the distinction claimed for it by its author, William Dunlap, to whom American dramatic literature and American dramatic history are both greatly indebted.

A love for the drama seems to have developed early in life with Dunlap, and this love was no doubt fostered by frequent visits to the theater while a boy. His father being a British soldier, and residing in New-York City after its occupation by the British during the Revolution, young Dunlap attended the theatrical performances given here by some of the English army officers during that period. In early youth he had attempted writing several dramas founded on stories in the 'Arabian Nights'; and between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, while in London as an art-student, his chief delight seems to have been visiting the theater, before and behind the scenes. While there he saw Henderson in his prime, the great Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, in their earlier efforts, Lewis, Palmer, Parsons and Edwin, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Abingdon, Miss Farren, Miss Pope, and others of the contemporaries and immediate successors of Garrick; and his account of them makes most delightful reading. On his return

home from his sojourn in England, in the summer of 1787, he learned of the production of the 'Contrast,' and a desire to emulate the success achieved by the author of that play completely changed the current of his life. His dramatic fervor burst forth anew, he abandoned his palette, and commenced his career as a playwright.

His first play never saw the foot-lights, was never printed, and, as the author says, "no traces remain of its merits or demerits." It was called the 'Modest Soldier, or Love in New-York'; and I deem it a misfortune that it should have been lost, as it would have been interesting, if only as the first of some sixty plays written, adapted, and translated by the industrious author. Not in the least discouraged by his first want of success, he soon produced the 'Father, or American Shandyism,' which was first performed at the John Street theater, New-York, on September 7, 1789, and achieved a great success. It was immediately printed in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, where it appears in the numbers for October and November, 1789,—from which publication it is now reprinted.

A second edition of the comedy, revised by the author, with some of the characters rechristened and otherwise slightly changed, and now entitled the 'Father of an only Child,' was published in 1807, and has since been performed under that title.

Dunlap's love for the theater and his success as a dramatic author led him, shortly after the production of his 'Father,' to become one of the managers of the New-York theater, at first jointly with Hallam and

Hodgkinson, and later assuming the sole management. After a brave struggle for fifteen years against misfortune, illness, and debt (the latter caused principally by losses incurred from repeated visits of yellow fever to New-York, thus causing the theater to be either closed or not frequented), he retired from the management, broken in health and fortune.

Dunlap's connection with the theater for so many years, and the knowledge he acquired from his intimate relations with all the prominent actors of his day, enabled him to give us, as he has done in his 'History of the American Theater' and his other theatrical works, a most interesting and truthful description of the personal appearances, the traits and characteristics of the players of that early period, and a graphic and minute account of numberless scenes and incidents that took place on the inside and behind the curtain, relating to the theater, which otherwise would have been wholly lost to us.

It is these little out-of-the-way and private scenes and incidents which, when related by one having personal knowledge and speaking of his own experience, make theatrical history so delightful to many readers, as it seems to afford a peculiar pleasure to the general public to have the heroes of the sock and buskin, whom they are accustomed to view at a distance, and through the glamour produced by the tinsel and buckram and other illusions of the stage, thus brought down to the level of common humanity.

The following is a list of the plays written, translated, and adapted by Dunlap, in their chronological order