

Sunnyside Feb 12th - 1851

You must excuse me, my good friend Merwin, for
suffering your letter to remain so long unanswered;
you can have no idea how many letters I have
to answer, beside tagging with my pen at my
own literary tasks, so that it is impossible for
me to avoid being behind hand in my correspondence.

Your letter was indeed most welcome, calling up as
it did recollections of pleasant scenes and pleasant
days passed together in times long since at Judge
Van Ness, at Kinderhook. Your mention of the death
of good old Dominie Van Nest recalls the apostolic
zeal with which he took our little sinful community
in hand, when he put up for a day or two at the
judges; and the wholesome castigation he gave us
all one Sunday, beginning with the two Country

belles who came blustering into the school house during the sermon, decked out in their city finery, and ending with the judge himself, in the strong hold of his own mansion. How soundly he gave it to us! how he peeled off every rag of self righteousness with which we tried to cover ourselves, and laid the rod on the bare backs of our consciences! The good plain spoken, honest old man! How I honored him for his simple, straight forward earnestness; his homely sincerity. ^{he certainly} ~~with what~~ he handled us without mittens, but I trust we were all the better for it. How different he was ~~from~~ the brisk, dapper, self-sufficient little apostle who centered up to the judges door a day or two after; who was so full of himself that he had no thought to bestow on our religious delinquencies; who did nothing but boast of his public trials of skill in argument with rival preachers of other denominations, and how he had driven them off the field and craved over them...

You must remember the bustling self-confident little man with a tin trumpet in the handle of his riding whip, with which I presume he blew the trumpet in Zion!

Do you remember our fishing expedition in company with congress man Van Allen to the little lake a few miles from Kinderhook; and John Moore the vagabond admiral of the lake who sat crouched in a heap in the middle of his canoe in the centre of the lake, with fishing rods stretching out in every direction like the long legs of a spider. And do you remember our piratical prank, when we made up for our own bad luck in fishing by plundering, plundering his canoe of its fish when we found it adrift, and do you remember how John Moore came splashing along the marsh on the opposite border of the lake, roaring at us, and how we finished our frolic by driving off and leaving the congress man to John Moores mercy; tickling ourselves with the idea of his being scalped at least. Ah well adieu, friend Merwin; there were the days of our youth and folly, I trust we have grown wiser and better men than; we certainly have grown older. I dont think we could rob John Moores fishing canoe now. By the way that same ^{and the anecdote you told of him,} John Moore, gave me the idea of a vagabond character, Diver Schuyler, in my Knickerbocker history of New York, which I was then writing.

You tell me the old school house is torn down and a nice one built in its place. I am sorry for it. I should have liked to see the old school house once more; where I used after my morning's literary task was over, I used to come and wait for you occasionally until school was dismissed; and you used to promise to keep back the punishment of some little tough broad bottomed Dutch boy until I should come, for my amusement - but never kept your promise. I don't think I should look with a friendly eye at the new school house, however nice it might be.

Since I saw you in New York I have had a attack of bilious intermittent fever which shook me terribly; but they cleared out my system, and I have since been in my usual excellent health; able to mount my horse and gallop about the country almost as briskly as when I was a youngster. Wishing you the enjoyment of the same inestimable blessing and begging you to remember me to your daughter who perused your letter and to your son whom out of old kindness and companionship, you have named after me

I remain ever, my good friend,

Yours very truly and cordially

Washington Irving

Jesse Merwin Esq.