or accessory. His Cromwell tells how Charles cheated, lied, equivocated, schemed against his people; but the two are never confronted, and thus the sensation which the Roundhead play excites depends in most literal entirety upon Mr. Rignold, and is not diverted from him for more than a few moments. He looks the part well, and plays it well, on the whole, but we cannot be reconciled to the convulsive passion of the Council-scene. Not with gnashing teeth, frantic cries, and wild gestures, did the man who presided over the awful deliberations which sent Charles to the scaffold, discharge his dread office. All the violence in that scene should be left to Ireton, very well played by Mr. Ryder, whose description of Cromwell's demeanour at the execution of Charles is a good bit of acting, and the words of it among the most effective in the play.

In each play there is a scene of bitter grief and parting. Its absolute untruth jars with the pathos of the fancied farewell between Charles and his wife. Its probability, its coherence with actual events, go far to deepen the pathos, and excuse the tedium of the parting between Cromwell and his broken-hearted daughter. The young lady who plays Elizabeth Cromwell has no easy task, for she is the heroine of the most unsatisfactory and puzzling story ever thrown in as an episode in a drama within our experience. The introduction of Florence Nevel (we never saw the name spelt otherwise than Nevil, or Neville before); her father, a frosty old man, like Arthur Gride in a fancy dress, with the principles of Trapbois the miser, and the politics of the Vicar of Bray; her lover, Arthur Walton; and host Garton, a comic landlord,—unusually dismal of the kind, which is dreary and diluted "Woodstock"—are mere interruptions and blemishes, weakening the effect of the really good and sometimes powerful drama, as the nonsensical Eleanor Davys weakens the effect of its rival. All this part of the play would read well, no doubt,—especially as the comic landlord might be skipped, and the love-and-money bits are very well written,—but acted, it is an utter mistake, introducing people in whom nobody can feel the slightest interest, and diluting the 'motive' of Elizabeth's character and fate, which ought to have been as single as her father's, and thus to have completed the contrast, which is now a dramatic harmony wantonly struck into discord. A consumptive taint, exaggerated loyalty, superstitious dread, and vicarious remorse on account of her father, would break the girl's heart thoroughly enough, without a piling-up of the agony at which we are forced to smile. The inevitable result of this error of judgment is that Miss Wallis plays the lovelorn maiden very ill, while she plays the agonised daughter admirably, except that like Charles II. she is "unconscionably slow about dying," and the effect of the words she has to speak, though they are eloquent, lofty, and impressive, is in growing peril throughout the death scene.

The part assigned to Cromwell's wife is so completely subordinate that there is little opportunity for the lady who plays it; but she makes something of it, on the one occasion when she is on the stage while the overwhelming General is not. Her dislike to the "big, draughty place" to which she has been transferred from her snug manor house at St. Ives, her weariness of her lofty state, her sense of unfitness for it, and alienation from her husband in consequence of it, the shocked submission with which she hears the tidings of her son's death in battle, her simple request to be taken to some quiet room, "the smallest they can find" (in Whitehall), where she may weep, is a careful, finished piece of acting, evincing self-repression and deference to the ideal of the part which indicate real artistic qualities.

The dresses are ridiculous. Mistress Cromwell would have worn rich sombre materials, in her manor-house days, of plain fashion indeed, but not hideous gear in which the severe parsimony, and spiteful ugliness, of the modern workhouse and charity-school are combined. Elizabeth would not have prowled about the council-chamber in a low-necked white satin gown, and the family who would certainly have worn mourning for the eldest son, are made to depute that observance to a waiting-maid who supports Elizabeth's tottering steps, arrayed in a black silk gown of the present fashion, with crape flounces, while Lady Cromwell wears purple velvet, ermine, and jewels. But these matters of detail,—in reality so important, especially where such stress is laid on the picturesque,—are never rightly managed in our theatres. Cromwell's Ironsides come 'on' with long hair streaming from under their morions—though the first outburst of Oliver's rage in the opening scene is induced by the mention of Prynne,—and in the rival play the King's children are clad in deep mourning in the last scene, though the Queen asks Huntley expressly whether they know about the event which is impending. A well-read Worth, with a quick eye for details, maintained upon the co-operative principle, would be a beneficial addition to the theatrical organisation of London. It might also be not impossible to get some one to teach 'supers' how to wear the clothes which are put on them in the grand tableaux. A more sorry spectacle than the finale to *Cromwell* it would be difficult to see; when all the ambassadors shamble up to present their sovereigns' compliments, with every variety of wobbling awkwardness, and the utmost conceivable unadaptedness to the costumes and the occasion.

In each of the rival plays, there is a scene which reproduces a well known picture; and in this there is again coincidence and contrast. The picture in *Charles the First* is of an incident of domestic happiness and royal state,—the King, the Queen, and their children in the barge upon the Long Water in Hampton Court. The picture in *Cromwell* is that grand and terrible conception of Paul Delaroche,—the only French artist who has ever seized the picturesque and tragic sides of English history—Cromwell beside the coffin of King Charles. The strain upon author and actor, the one that he may write, the other that he may play up to the level of the French painter's thought and portraiture, is very great. We cannot say we think that either is quite successful. The soliloquy is too didactic, and Mr. Rignold, when he departs from the pose of the picture, uses too much gesture and speaks *outward*,—not with the absorbed concentration with which one would address the still visible dead, looking not yet around and above, towards the boundless place of the spirit, but at, into, the mortal form. The scene is, however, exceedingly effective, and as an exhibition of character and complex mental emotion, is far beyond anything which Mr. Wills has done for *Charles the First*. But a dramatist has not yet arisen to give us the true Cromwell.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

NATURAL SELECTION.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—Any one interested in the subject to which you allude at p. 42 of your last number, namely, the relative importance in causing modifications of the body or mind, on the one hand of habit or of the direct action of external conditions, and on the other hand of natural or artificial selection, will find this subject briefly discussed in the second volume (pp. 301-315) of my "Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication." I have there given a considerable body of facts, chiefly in relation to acclimatisation, which presents the greatest difficulty in the present question; and it may be inferred from these facts, firstly, that variations of a directly opposite nature, which would be liable either to preservation or elimination through natural selection, not rarely arise in organisms long exposed to similar conditions; and secondly, that habit, independently of selection, has often produced a marked effect. But it is most difficult, as I have insisted in many of my works, though in some cases possible, to discriminate between the results of the two processes. Both tend to concur, for the individuals which inherit in the strongest manner any useful habit will commonly be preserved.

Take, as an instance, the fur of quadrupeds, which grows thickest in the individuals living far north; now there is reason to believe that weather acts directly on the skin with its appendages, but it is extremely difficult to judge how much of the effect ought to be attributed to the direct action of a low temperature, and how much to the best protected individuals of many generations having survived during the severest winters. I have made many observations and collected many facts, showing the potent influence of habit and of the use or disuse of parts on organic beings; but there are numberless peculiarities of structure and of instinct (as in the case of sterile neuter insects) which cannot be thus accounted for. He would be a bold man who would attempt to explain by these means the origin of the exsertile claws and great canine teeth of the tiger; or of the horny lamellæ on the beak of the duck, which are so well adapted for sifting water. Nor would anyone, I presume, even attempt to explain the development, for instance, of the beautifully plumed seeds of the dandelion, or of the endless contrivances which are necessary for the fertilisation of very many flowers by insects, through gradually acquired and inherited habit, or through the direct action of the external conditions of life.—I am, Sir, &c.,

Down, Beckenham, Kent, Jan. 11, 1873. Charles Darwin.

THE FARM LABOURERS OF THE WISBECH DISTRICT.

[To the Editor of the "Spectator."]

Sir,—I purpose in this letter to give you the result of careful local inquiries that I have recently made with respect to the condition