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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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----*Procul O! Procul este profani!* Virg.

Sheer-Lane, December 23.

THE Watchman, who does me particular Honours, as being the chief man in the Lane, gave so very great a thump at my door last night, that I awakened at the knock, and heard my self complimented with the usual Salutation of, *Good Morrow Mr. Bickerstaffe, Good Morrow my Masters all.* The silence and darkness of the night disposed me to be more than ordinarily serious; and as my attention was not drawn out among exterior objects, by the avocations of sense, my thoughts naturally fell upon my self. I was considering, amidst the stillness of the night, What was the proper employment of a Thinking being? What were the Perfections it should propose to it self? And, What the End it should aim at? My Mind is of such a particular Cast, that the falling of a shower of rain, or the whistling of wind, at such a time, is apt to fill my thoughts with something awful and solemn. I was in this disposition, when our Bellman began his midnight Homily (which he has been repeating to us every winter night for these twenty years) with the usual Exordium.

Oh! mortal Man, thou that art born in Sin!

Sentiments of this nature, which are in themselves just and reasonable, however debased by the circumstances that accompany them, do not fail to produce their natural effect in a mind that is not perverted and depraved by wrong notions of Gallantry, Politeness, and Ridicule. The temper which I now found my self in, as well as the time of the year, put me in mind of those lines in *Shakespear*, wherein, according to his agreeable wildness of Imagination, he has wrought a country Tradition into a beautiful piece of Poetry. In the Tragedy of *Hamlet*, where the Ghost vanishes

vanishes upon the Cock's crowing, he takes occasion to mention its crowing all hours of the night about *Christmas* time, and to insinuate a kind of religious veneration for that season.

*It faded on the crowing of the Cock.
Some say, That ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's Birth is celebrated,
The Bird of Dawning singeth all night long;
And then, say they, no Spirit dares walk abroad:
The nights are wholesom, then no Planets strike,
No Fairy takes, no Witch has power to charm;
So hallowed, and so gracious is the time.*

This admirable Author, as well as the best and greatest men of all ages, and of all nations, seems to have had his mind thoroughly seasoned with Religion, as is evident by many passages in his plays, that would not be suffered by a modern audience; and are therefore certain Instances, that the age he lived in had a much greater sense of Virtue than the present.

It is indeed a melancholy reflection to consider, That the *British* nation, which is now at a greater height of glory for its Councils and Conquests than it ever was before, should distinguish it self by a certain Looseness of Principles, and a falling off from those Schemes of Thinking, which conduce to the happiness and perfection of humane nature. This evil comes upon us from the works of a few solemn Blockheads, that meet together with the zeal and seriousness of Apostles, to extirpate common sense, and propagate Infidelity. These are the wretches, who, without any show of Wit, Learning, or Reason, publish their crude conceptions with the ambition of appearing more wise than the rest of mankind, upon no other pretence, than that of dissenting from them. One gets by heart a Catalogue of Title Pages and Editions; and immediately to become conspicuous, declares that he is an Unbeliever. Another knows how to write a Receipt, or cut up a Dog, and forthwith argues against the Immortality of the Soul. I have known many a little Wit, in the ostentation of his parts, rally the truth of the Scripture, who was not able to read a chapter in it. These poor wretches talk Blasphemy for want of discourse, and are rather the objects of Scorn or Pity, than of our Indignation; but the grave Disputant, that reads, and writes, and spends all his time in convincing himself and the world that he is no better than a Brute, ought to be whipped out of a Government, as a Blot

to a civil Society, and a Defamer of Mankind. I love to consider an Infidel, whether distinguished by the title of Deist, Atheist, or Free-thinker, in three different lights, in his Solitudes, his Afflictions, and his last Moments.

A wise man, that lives up to the principles of Reason and Virtue, if one considers him in his Solitude, as taking in the System of the Universe, observing the mutual dependance and harmony, by which the whole frame of it hangs together, beating down his Passions, or swelling his thoughts with magnificent Idea's of Providence, makes a nobler figure in the eye of an intelligent being, than the greatest Conqueror amidst the pomps and solemnities of a Triumph. On the contrary, there is not a more ridiculous animal than an Atheist in his Retirement. His Mind is incapable of Rapture or Elevation: He can only consider himself as an insignificant Figure in a Landskip, and wandering up and down in a Field or a Meadow, under the same terms as the meanest Animals about him, and as subject to as total a Mortality as they, with this aggravation, That he is the only one amongst them who lies under the Apprehension of it.

In Distresses, he must be of all creatures the most helpless and forlorn; he feels the whole pressure of a present calamity, without being relieved by the memory of any thing that is passed, or the prospect of any thing that is to come. Annihilation is the greatest Blessing that he proposes to himself, and an Halter or a Pistol the only Refuge he can fly to. But if you would behold one of these gloomy Miscreants in his poorest figure, you must consider him under the terrors, or at the approach, of Death.

About thirty years ago I was a shipboard with one of these Vermin, when there arose a brisk Gale, which could frighten no body but himself. Upon the rowling of the Ship he fell upon his knees, and confessed to the Chaplain, that he had been a vile Atheist, and had denied a Supreme Being ever since he came to his Estate. The good man was astonished, and a report immediately ran through the ship, That there was an Atheist upon the Upper-deck. Several of the common Seamen, who had never heard the word before, thought it had been some strange Fish; but they were more surprized when they saw it was a Man, and heard out of his own mouth, That he never believed till that day that there was a God. As he lay in the agonies of Confession, one of the honest Tarrs whispered to the Boatswain, That it would be a good deed to heave him over board. But we were now within sight of Port, when of a sudden the wind fell, and the Penitent relapsed, begging all of us

that were present, as we were Gentlemen, not to say any thing of what had passed.

He had not been ashore above two days, when one of the company began to rally him upon his Devotion on Shipboard, which the other denied in so high terms, that it produced the Lie on both sides, and ended in a Duel. The Atheist was run through the body, and after some loss of blood became as good a Christian as he was at Sea, till he found that his wound was not mortal. He is at present one of the Free-thinkers of the Age, and now writing a Pamphlet against several received opinions concerning the Existence of Fairies.

As I have taken upon me to censure the faults of the age, and country which I live in, I should have thought my self inexcusable to have passed over this crying one, which is the subject of my present discourse. I shall therefore from time to time give my countrymen particular cautions against this distemper of the mind, that is almost become fashionable, and by that means more likely to spread. I have somewhere either read or heard a very memorable sentence, That a man would be a most insupportable Monster, should he have the faults that are incident to his Years, Constitution, Profession, Family, Religion, Age, and Country; and yet every man is in danger of them all. For this reason, as I am an Old man, I take particular care to avoid being Covetous, and telling long stories: As I am Cholerick, I forbear not only Swearing, but all Interjections of Fretting, as Pugh! Pish! and the like. As I am a Layman, I resolve not to conceive an aversion for a wise and good man, because his Coat is of a different colour from mine. As I am descended of the ancient family of the *Bickerstaffes*, I never call a man of Merit an Upstart. As a Protestant, I do not suffer my zeal so far to transport me, as to name the Pope and the Devil together. As I am fallen into this degenerate age, I guard my self particularly against the folly I have been now speaking of. And as I am an *Englishman*, I am very cautious not to hate a Stranger, or despise a poor *Palatine*.

Sir Richard Steele assisted in this paper.

Saturday,