



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

No 154. Tuesday, April 4. 1710.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53633](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53633)

N^o 154. Tuesday, April 4. 1710.

Obscuris vera involvens.

Virg. Æn. L. 6.

From my own Apartment, April 3.

WE have already examined *Homer's* description of a Future State, and the condition in which he hath placed the Souls of the deceased. I shall in this paper make some observations on the account which *Virgil* hath given us of the same subject, who, besides a greatness of Genius, had all the lights of Philosophy and humane Learning to assist and guide him in his discoveries.

Aeneas is represented as descending into the Empire of Death, with a Prophetess by his side, who instructs him in the secrets of those lower regions.

Upon the confines of the dead, and before the very gates of this infernal world, *Virgil* describes several inhabitants, whose natures are wonderfully suited to the situation of the place, as being either the occasions or resemblances of Death. Of the first kind are the Shadows of *Sickness*, *Old age*, *Fear*, *Famine*, and *Poverty* (Apparitions very terrible to behold;) with several others, as *Toil*, *War*, *Contention*, and *Discord*, which contribute all of them to people this common receptacle of humane Souls. As this was likewise a very proper residence for every thing that resembles *Death*, the Poet tells us, that *Sleep*, whom he represents as a near relation to *Death*, has likewise his habitation in these quarters, and describes in them a huge gloomy Elm-tree, which seems a very proper ornament for the place, and is possessed by an innumerable swarm of *Dreams*, that hang in clusters under every leaf of it. He then gives us a list of imaginary persons, who very naturally lie within the shadow of the *Dream-tree*, as being of the same kind of make in themselves, and the materials or (to use *Shakespeare's* phrase) the stuff of which dreams are made. Such are the Shades of the Giant with a hundred hands, and of his Brother with three bodies; of the double-shaped *Cen-*

Q q 2

taur,

taur, and *Scylla*; the *Gorgon* with snakey hair; the *Harpy* with a Woman's face and Lion's talons; the seven-headed *Hydra*; and the *Chimæra*, which breaths forth a flame, and is a compound of three Animals. These several mixed natures, the creatures of imagination, are not only introduced with great art after the Dreams; but as they are planted at the very entrance, and within the very gates of those regions, do probably denote the wild deliriums and extravagancies of Fancy, which the Soul usually falls into when she is just upon the verge of Death.

Thus far *Aeneas* travels in an Allegory. The rest of the description is drawn with great exactness, according to the religion of the Heathens, and the opinions of the Platonick Philosophy. I shall not trouble my Reader with a common dull Story, that gives an account why the Heathens first of all supposed a Ferryman in Hell, and his name to be *Charon*; but must not pass over in silence the point of doctrine which *Virgil* hath very much insisted upon in this book, that the Souls of those who are unburied, are not permitted to go over into their respective places of rest, till they have wandered a hundred years upon the banks of *Styx*. This was probably an invention of the Heathen Priesthood, to make the people extremely careful of performing proper Rites and Ceremonies to the Memory of the dead. I shall not however, with the infamous Scribblers of the age, take an occasion from such a circumstance, to run into declamations against Priestcraft, but rather look upon it even in this light as a religious artifice, to raise in the minds of men an esteem for the memory of their Forefathers, and a desire to recommend themselves to that of Posterity; as also to excite in them an ambition of imitating the Virtues of the deceased, and to keep alive in their thoughts the sense of the Soul's Immortality. In a word, we may say in defence of the severe opinions relating to the Shades of unburied persons, what hath been said by some of our Divines in regard to the rigid Doctrines concerning the Souls of such who die without being initiated into our Religion, that supposing they should be erroneous, they can do no hurt to the dead, and will have a good effect upon the living, in making them cautious of neglecting such necessary solemnities.

Charon is no sooner appeas'd, and the triple-headed Dog laid asleep, but *Aeneas* makes his entrance into the Dominions of *Pluto*. There are three kinds of persons described, as being situated on the Borders; and I can give no reason for their being stationed there in so particular a manner, but because none of them seem to have had a proper right to a place among the dead, as not having run out the whole thread of their days,

days, and finished the term of life that had been allotted them upon Earth. The first of these are the Souls of Infants, who are snatched away by untimely ends: The second, are of those who are put to death wrongfully, and by an unjust sentence; and the third, of those who grew weary of their lives, and laid violent hands upon themselves. As for the second of these, *Virgil* adds with great beauty, that *Minos*, the Judge of the dead, is employed in giving them a rehearing, and assigning them their several quarters suitable to the parts they acted in life. The Poet, after having mentioned the Souls of those unhappy men who destroyed themselves, breaks out into a fine exclamation; *Oh! how gladly, says he, would they now endure life with all its miseries! But the Destinies forbid their return to earth, and the waters of Styx surround them with nine streams that are unpassable.* It is very remarkable, that *Virgil*, notwithstanding Self-murder was so frequent among the Heathens, and had been practis'd by some of the Greatest Men in the very age before him, hath here represented it as so heinous a Crime. But in this particular he was guided by the Doctrines of his Great Master *Plato*, who says on this subject, that a Man is placed in his station of life like a Soldier in his proper Post, which he is not to quit whatever may happen, until he is called off by his Commander who planted him in it.

There is another point in the Platonick Philosophy, which *Virgil* has made the ground-work of the greatest part in the piece we are now examining, having with wonderful art and beauty Materialized (if I may so call it) a scheme of abstracted Notions, and cloathed the most nice refined conceptions of Philosophy in sensible Images, and Poetical Representations. The Platonists tell us, That the Soul, during her residence in the Body, contracts many virtuous and vicious Habits, so as to become a beneficent, mild, charitable, or an angry, malicious, revengeful Being; a substance inflamed with Lust, Avarice, and Pride; or, on the contrary, brightened with pure, generous, and humble dispositions: That these and the like Habits of virtue and vice growing into the very essence of the Soul, survive and gather strength in her after her dissolution: That the torments of a vicious Soul in a future State, arise principally from those importunate Passions which are not capable of being gratified without a Body; and that on the contrary, the happiness of virtuous minds very much consists in their being employed in sublime Speculations, innocent Diversions, sociable Affections, and all the ecstasies of Passion and Rapture which are agreeable to reasonable Natures, and of which they gained a relish in this life.

Upon

Upon this foundation, the Poet raises that beautiful description of the secret Haunts and Walks, which he tells us are inhabited by deceased Lovers.

Not far from hence, says he, lyes a great waste of plains, that are called the *Fields of Melancholy*. In these there grows a Forest of Myrtle, divided into many shady retirements and covered walks, and inhabited by the Souls of those who pined away with Love. The Passion, says he, continues with them after death. He then gives a list of this languishing tribe, in which his own *Dido* makes the principal figure, and is described as living in this soft romantick Scene, with the Shade of her first Husband *Sichæus*.

The Poet in the next place mentions another Plain that was peopled with the Ghosts of Warriors, as still delighting in each other's company, and pleased with the exercise of arms. He there represents the *Grecian* Generals and common Soldiers who perished in the Siege of *Troy* as drawn up in Squadrons, and terrified at the approach of *Aeneas*, which renewed in them those impressions of fear they had before received in battle with the *Trojans*. He afterwards likewise, upon the same notion, gives a view of the *Trojan* Heroes who lived in former ages, amidst a visionary Scene of Chariots and Arms, flowry Meadows, shining Spears, and generous Steeds, which he tells us were their pleasures upon Earth, and now make up their happiness in *Elysium*. For the same reason also, he mentions others as singing Pæans, and Songs of Triumph, amidst a beautiful Grove of Laurel. The chief of the consort was the Poet *Museus*, who stood inclosed with a circle of admirers, and rose by the head and shoulders above the throng of Shades that surrounded him. The habitations of unhappy Spirits, to shew the duration of their torments, and the desperate condition they are in, are represented as guarded by a Fury, moated round with a Lake of fire, strengthened with towers of Iron, encompassed with a triple Wall, and fortified with Pillars of Adamant, which all the Gods together are not able to heave from their foundations. The noise of Stripes, the clank of Chains, and the Groans of the tortured, strike the pious *Aeneas* with a kind of horror. The Poet afterwards divides the Criminals into two Classes: The first and blackest Catalogue consists of such as were guilty of Outrages against the Gods; and the next, of such who were convicted of Injustice between man and man: The greatest number of whom, says the Poet, are those who followed the dictates of Avarice.

It was an opinion of the Platonists, That the Souls of men having contracted in the body great stains and pollutions of Vice and Ignorance, there were several purgations and cleansings necessary to be passed through both here and hereafter, in order to refine and purify them.

Virgil, to give this thought likewise a cloathing of Poetry, describes some Spirits as bleaching in the winds, others as cleansing under great falls of waters, and others as purging in fire, to recover the primitive beauty and purity of their Natures.

It was likewise an opinion of the same sect of Philosophers, that the Souls of all men exist in a separate state long before their Union with their bodies; and that upon their immersion into flesh, they forget every thing which passed in the state of Pre-existence; so that what we here call Knowledge, is nothing else but Memory, or the recovery of those things which we knew before.

In pursuance of this scheme, *Virgil* gives us a view of several Souls, who, to prepare themselves for living upon earth, flock about the banks of the river *Lethe*, and swill themselves with the waters of Oblivion.

The same scheme gives him an opportunity of making a noble compliment to his countrymen, where *Anchises* is represented taking a survey of the long train of Heroes that are to descend from him, and giving his Son *Aeneas* an account of all the Glories of his race.

I need not mention the Revolution of the Platonick year, which is but just touched upon in this book; and as I have consulted no Authors thoughts in this explication, shall be very well pleased, if it can make the noblest piece of the most accomplished Poet more agreeable to my Female Readers, when they think fit to look into *Dryden's* Translation of it.



Thursday,