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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Before I dismiss this paper, I must inform my reader, that I hear there is a treaty on foot with *London* and *Wife* (who will be appointed gardeners of the Play-house) to furnish the Opera of *Rinaldo* and *Armida* with an orange-grove; and that the next time it is acted, the singing birds will be personated by Tom-tits: The Undertakers being resolved to spare neither pains nor money for the gratification of the audience.

N^o 7. *Thursday, March 8.*

*Somnia, terrores magicos, miracula, Sagas,
Nocturnos lemures, portentaque Thessala rides?* Hor.

GOING yesterday to dine with an old acquaintance, I had the misfortune to find his whole family very much dejected. Upon asking him the occasion of it, he told me that his wife had dreamt a strange dream the night before, which they were afraid portended some misfortune to themselves or to their children. At her coming into the room I observed a settled melancholy in her countenance, which I should have been troubled for, had I not heard from whence it proceeded. We were no sooner set down but, after having looked upon me a little while, *My dear*, (says she, turning to her husband) *you may now see the stranger that was in the candle last night.* Soon after this, as they began to talk of family affairs, a little boy at the lower end of the table told her, that he was to go into join-hand on *Thursday*. *Thursday?* (says she) *no child if it please God, you shall not begin upon Childermas-day: tell your writing-master that Friday will be soon enough.* I was reflecting with my self on the oddness of her fancy, and wondering that any body would establish it as a rule to lose a day in every week. In the midst of these my musings, she desired me to reach her a little salt upon the point of my Knife, which I did in such a trepidation and hurry of obedience, that I let it drop by the way; at which she immediately startled,

startled, and said it fell towards her. Upon this I looked very blank; and, observing the concern of the whole table, began to consider my self, with some confusion, as a person that had brought a disaster upon the family. The Lady however recovering her self, after a little space, said to her husband, with a sigh, *My Dear, Misfortunes never come single.* My friend, I found, acted but an under-part at his table, and being a man of more good-nature than understanding, thinks himself obliged to fall in with all the passions and humours of his Yoke-fellow: *Do not you remember, Child, (says she) that the Pigeon-house fell the very afternoon that our careless wench spilt the salt upon the table? Yes, (says he) My Dear, and the next post brought us an account of the battle of Almanza.* The reader may guess at the figure I made, after having done all this mischief. I dispatched my dinner as soon as I could, with my usual taciturnity; when, to my utter confusion, the Lady seeing me quitting my Knife and Fork, and laying them across one another upon my plate, desired me that I would humour her so far as to take them out of that figure, and place them side by side. What the absurdity was which I had committed I did not know, but I suppose there was some traditionary superstition in it; and therefore, in obedience to the Lady of the house, I disposed of my Knife and Fork in two parallel lines, which is the figure I shall always lay them in for the future, though I do not know any reason for it.

It is not difficult for a man to see that a person has conceived an aversion to him. For my own part, I quickly found, by the Lady's looks, that she regarded me as a very odd kind of fellow, with an unfortunate aspect. For which reason I took my leave immediately after dinner, and withdrew to my own lodgings. Upon my return home, I fell into a profound contemplation of the evils that attend these superstitious follies of mankind; how they subject us to imaginary afflictions, and additional sorrows, that do not properly come within our lot. As if the natural calamities of life were not sufficient for it, we turn the most indifferent circumstances into misfortunes, and suffer as much from trifling accidents, as from real evils. I have known the shooting of a Star spoil a night's rest; and have seen a man in love grow pale and lose his appetite, upon the plucking of a Merry-thought. A Screech-owl at midnight has alarmed a family more than a band of Robbers; nay, the voice of a Cricket hath struck more terror than the roaring of a Lion. There is nothing so inconsiderable, which may not appear dreadful to an imagination that is filled with Omens and Prognosticks. A rusty nail, or a crooked pin, shoot up into prodigies. I

I remember I was once in a mixt assembly, that was full of noise and mirth, when on a sudden an old woman unluckily observed there were thirteen of us in company. This remark struck a panick terror into several who were present, insomuch that one or two of the Ladies were going to leave the room; but a friend of mine taking notice that one of our female companions was big with child, affirmed there were fourteen in the room, and that, instead of portending one of the company should die, it plainly foretold one of them should be born. Had not my friend found this expedient to break the Omen, I question not but half the women in the company would have fallen sick that very night.

An old maid, that is troubled with the Vapours, produces infinite disturbances of this kind among her friends and neighbours. I know a maiden Aunt of a great family, who is one of these antiquated *Sibyls*, that forebodes and prophesies from one end of the year to the other. She is always seeing Apparitions, and hearing Death-watches; and was the other day almost frighted out of her wits by the great house-dog, that howled in the stable at a time when she lay ill of the tooth-ach. Such an extravagant cast of mind engages multitudes of people, not only in impertinent terrors, but in supernumerary duties of life; and arises from that fear and ignorance which are natural to the Soul of man. The horror with which we entertain the thoughts of death (or indeed of any future evil) and the uncertainty of its approach, fill a melancholy mind with innumerable apprehensions and suspicions, and consequently dispose it to the observation of such groundless Prodiges and Predictions. For as it is the chief concern of wise-men to retrench the evils of life by the reasonings of Philosophy; it is the employment of fools to multiply them by the sentiments of Superstition.

For my own part, I should be very much troubled were I endowed with this divining quality, though it should inform me truly of every thing that can befall me. I would not anticipate the relish of any happiness, nor feel the weight of any misery, before it actually arrives.

I know but one way of fortifying my Soul against these gloomy prefaces and terrors of mind, and that is, by securing to my self the friendship and protection of that Being who disposes of events, and governs futurity. He sees, at one view, the whole thread of my Existence, not only that part of it which I have already passed through, but that which runs forward into all the depths of Eternity. When I lay me down to sleep, I recommend my self to his care; when I awake, I give my self up to his direction. Amidst all the evils that threaten me, I will look up

to him for help, and question not but he will either avert them, or turn them to my advantage. Though I know neither the time nor the manner of the death I am to die, I am not at all solicitous about it; because I am sure that he knows them both, and that he will not fail to comfort and support me under them.

N^o 8. Friday, March 9.

*At Venus obscuro gradientes aëre sepsit,
Et multo Nebula circum Dea fudit amictu,
Cernere ne quis eos-----*

Virg.

I Shall here communicate to the world a couple of Letters, which I believe will give the Reader as good an entertainment as any that I am able to furnish him with, and therefore shall make no apology for them.

To the SPECTATOR, &c.

SIR,

I Am one of the Directors of the Society for the Reformation of manners, and therefore think my self a proper person for your correspondence. I have thoroughly examined the present state of Religion in *Great Britain*, and am able to acquaint you with the predominant vice of every Market-town in the whole Island. I can tell you the progress that Virtue has made in all our Cities, Boroughs, and Corporations; and know as well the evil practices that are committed in *Berwick* or *Exeter*, as what is done in my own family. In a word, Sir, I have my correspondents in the remotest parts of the nation, who send me up punctual accounts from time to time of all the little irregularities that fall under their notice in their several districts and divisions.

I am no less acquainted with the particular quarters and regions of this great town, than with the different parts and distributions of