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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N^o 42. *Wednesday, April 18.*

*Garganum mugire putes nemus aut mare Thuscum,
Tanto cum strepitu ludi spectantur, et artes,
Divitiæque peregrinæ; quibus oblitus actor
Cum stetit in scena, concurrat dextera lævæ.
Dixit adhuc aliquid? Nil sane. Quid placet ergo?
Lana Tarentino violas imitata veneno.*

Hor.

A *Ristotle* has observed, that ordinary writers in Tragedy endeavour to raise Terror and Pity in their audience, not by proper sentiments and expressions, but by the dresses and decorations of the Stage. There is something of this kind very ridiculous in the *English* Theatre. When the Author has a mind to terrify us, it thunders; when he would make us melancholy, the Stage is darkened. But among all our tragick Artifices, I am the most offended at those which are made use of to inspire us with magnificent ideas of the persons that speak. The ordinary method of making an Hero, is to clap a huge Plume of feathers upon his head, which rises so very high, that there is often a greater length from his chin to the top of his head, than to the sole of his foot. One would believe, that we thought a Great man and a Tall man the same thing. This very much embarrasses the Actor, who is forced to hold his neck extremely stiff and steady all the while he speaks; and notwithstanding any anxieties which he pretends for his Mistress, his Country or his Friends, one may see by his action, that his greatest care and concern is to keep the Plume of feathers from falling off his head. For my own part, when I see a man uttering his complaints under such a mountain of feathers, I am apt to look upon him rather as an unfortunate Lunatick, than a distressed Hero. As these superfluous ornaments upon the head make a Great man, a Princess generally receives her grandeur from those

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additional incumbrances that fall into her tail: I mean the broad sweeping train that follows her in all her motions, and finds constant employment for a boy who stands behind her to open and spread it to advantage. I do not know how others are affected at this sight, but, I must confess, my eyes are wholly taken up with the Page's part; and as for the Queen, I am not so attentive to any thing she speaks, as to the right adjusting of her train, lest it should chance to trip up her heels, or incommode her, as she walks to and fro upon the Stage. It is, in my opinion, a very odd spectacle, to see a Queen venting her passion in a disordered motion, and a little boy taking care all the while that they do not ruffle the tail of her Gown. The parts that the two persons act on the Stage at the same time, are very different: The Princess is afraid lest she should incur the displeasure of the King her father, or lose the Hero her lover, whilst her attendant is only concerned lest she should entangle her feet in her Petticoat.

We are told, that an ancient tragick Poet, to move the pity of his audience for his exiled Kings and distressed Heroes, used to make the Actors represent them in dresses and cloaths that were thread-bare and decayed. This artifice for moving pity, seems as ill-contrived, as that we have been speaking of to inspire us with a great idea of the persons introduced upon the Stage. In short, I would have our conceptions raised by the dignity of thought and sublimity of expression, rather than by a train of robes or a plume of feathers.

Another mechanical method of making Great men, and adding dignity to Kings and Queens, is to accompany them with Halberts and Battle-axes. Two or three shifters of scenes, with the two candle-snuffers, make up a compleat body of Guards upon the *English* stage; and by the addition of a few Porters dressed in red coats, can represent above a dozen legions. I have sometimes seen a couple of armies drawn up together upon the stage, when the Poet has been disposed to do honour to his Generals. It is impossible for the reader's imagination to multiply twenty men into such prodigious multitudes, or to fancy that two or three hundred thousand Soldiers are fighting in a room of forty or fifty yards in compass. Incidents of such nature should be told, not represented.

Non tamen intus

*Digna geri promes in scenam: multaque tolles
Ex oculis, quæ mox narret facundia præsens.*

Hor.

Tet

*Yet there are things improper for a scene,
Which men of judgment only will relate.*

Ld. ROSCOMMON.

I should therefore, in this particular, recommend to my countrymen the example of the *French Stage*, where the Kings and Queens always appear unattended, and leave their Guards behind the scenes. I should likewise be glad if we imitated the *French* in banishing from our stage the noise of drums, trumpets, and huzzas; which is sometimes so very great, that when there is a battel in the *Hay-Market Theatre*, one may hear it as far as *Charing-Cross*.

I have here only touched upon those particulars which are made use of to raise and aggrandize the persons of a Tragedy; and shall shew in another paper the several expedients which are practised by Authors of a vulgar genius, to move terror, pity, or admiration, in their hearers.

The Taylor and the Painter often contribute to the success of a Tragedy more than the Poet. Scenes affect ordinary minds as much as speeches; and our Actors are very sensible, that a well-dressed Play has sometimes brought them as full audiences, as a well-written one. The *Italians* have a very good phrase to express this art of imposing upon the spectators by appearances: They call it the *Fourberia della scena*, the *knavery or trickish part of the drama*. But however the show and outside of the Tragedy may work upon the vulgar, the more understanding part of the audience immediately see through it, and despise it.

A good Poet will give the reader a more lively idea of an army or a battel in a description, than if he actually saw them drawn up in squadrons and battalions, or engaged in the confusion of a fight. Our minds should be opened to great conceptions, and inflamed with glorious sentiments, by what the Actor speaks, more than by what he appears. Can all the trappings or equipage of a King or Heroe, give *Brutus* half that pomp and majesty which he receives from a few lines in *Shakepear*?



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Friday,