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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Natio Comœda est-----

Juv.

THERE is, nothing which I more desire than a safe and honourable Peace, though at the same time I am very apprehensive of many ill consequences that may attend it. I do not mean in regard to our Politicks, but to our Manners. What an inundation of Ribbons and Brocades will break in upon us? What peals of laughter and impertinence shall we be exposed to? For the prevention of these great evils, I could heartily wish that there was an Act of Parliament for prohibiting the importation of *French Fopperies*.

The Female Inhabitants of our Island have already received very strong impressions from this ludicrous nation, though by the length of the War (as there is no evil which has not some good attending it) they are pretty well worn out and forgotten. I remember the time when some of our well-bred Country-women kept their *Valet de Chambre*, because, forsooth, a man was much more handy about them than one of their own sex. I myself have seen one of these male *Abigails* tripping about the room with a Looking-glass in his hand, and combing his Lady's hair a whole morning together. Whether or no there was any truth in the story of a Lady's being got with child by one of these her Handmaids, I cannot tell; but I think at present the whole race of them is extinct in our own country.

About the time that several of our Sex were taken into this kind of service, the Ladies likewise brought up the fashion of receiving visits in their beds. It was then looked upon as a piece of ill breeding for a woman to refuse to see a man, because she was not stirring; and a Porter would have been thought unfit for his place, that could have made so awkward an excuse. As I love to see every thing that is new, I once prevailed upon my friend WILL. HONEYCOMB to carry me along with him to one of these travelled Ladies, desiring him, at the same time, to present me as

a foreigner who could not speak *English*, that so I might not be obliged to bear a part in the discourse. The Lady, though willing to appear undrest, had put on her best looks, and painted her self for our reception. Her hair appeared in a very nice disorder, as the night-gown which was thrown upon her shoulders was ruffled with great care. For my part, I am so shocked with every thing which looks immodest in the Fair sex, that I could not forbear taking off my eye from her when she moved in her bed, and was in the greatest confusion imaginable every time she stirred a leg or an arm. As the Coquets, who introduced this custom, grew old, they left it off by degrees; well knowing that a woman of three-score may kick and tumble her heart out, without making any impressions.

Sempronia is at present the most profest admirer of the *French* nation, but is so modest as to admit her visitants no farther than her Toilet. It is a very odd sight that beautiful creature makes, when she is talking Politicks with her tresses flowing about her shoulders, and examining that face in the glass, which does such execution upon all the Male standers-by. How prettily does she divide her discourse between her woman and her visitants? What sprightly transitions does she make from an Opera or a Sermon, to an Ivory comb or a Pin-cushion? How have I been pleased to see her interrupted in an account of her travels, by a message to her Footman? and holding her tongue in the midst of a moral reflection, by applying the tip of it to a patch?

There is nothing which exposes a woman to greater dangers, than that gaiety and airiness of temper, which are natural to most of the sex. It should be therefore the concern of every wise and virtuous woman, to keep this sprightliness from degenerating into levity. On the contrary, the whole discourse and behaviour of the *French* is to make the sex more fantastical, or (as they are pleased to term it) *more awakened*, than is consistent either with virtue or discretion. To speak loud in publick Assemblies, to let every one hear you talk of things that should only be mentioned in private, or in whisper, are looked upon as parts of a refined education. At the same time, a blush is unfashionable, and silence more ill-bred than any thing that can be spoken. In short, discretion and modesty, which in all other Ages and Countries have been regarded as the greatest ornaments of the Fair sex, are considered as the ingredients of narrow conversation, and family behaviour.

Some years ago I was at the Tragedy of *Mackbeth*, and unfortunately placed my self under a woman of Quality that is since dead; who, as I found by the noise she made, was newly returned from *France*. A little

before

before the rising of the curtain, she broke out into a loud soliloquy, *When will the dear Witches enter?* and immediately upon their first appearance, asked a Lady that sat three boxes from her, on her right hand, if those Witches were not charming creatures. A little after, as *Betterton* was in one of the finest speeches of the Play, she shook her fan at another Lady, who sat as far on the left hand, and told her with a whisper, that might be heard all over the pit, We must not expect to see *Balloon* to night. Not long after, calling out to a young Baronet by his name, who sat three seats before me, she asked him whether *Macbeth's* Wife was still alive; and before he could give an answer, fell a talking of the Ghost of *Banquo*. She had by this time formed a little audience to her self, and fixed the attention of all about her. But as I had a mind to hear the Play, I got out of the sphere of her impertinence, and planted my self in one of the remotest corners of the pit.

This pretty childishness of behaviour is one of the most refined parts of Coquetry, and is not to be attained in perfection, by Ladies that do not travel for their improvement. A natural and unconstrained behaviour has something in it so agreeable, that it is no wonder to see people endeavouring after it. But at the same time, it is so very hard to hit, when it is not born with us, that people often make themselves ridiculous in attempting it.

A very ingenious *French* Author tells us, that the Ladies of the Court of *France*, in his time, thought it ill breeding, and a kind of female pedantry, to pronounce an hard word right; for which reason they took frequent occasion to use hard words, that they might shew a politeness in murdering them. He further adds, that a Lady of some Quality at Court, having accidentally made use of an hard word in a proper place, and pronounced it right, the whole assembly was out of countenance for her.

I must however be so just to own, that there are many Ladies who have travelled several thousands of miles without being the worse for it, and have brought home with them all the modesty, discretion, and good sense, that they went abroad with. As on the contrary, there are great numbers of *travelled* Ladies, who have lived all their days within the smoak of *London*. I have known a woman that never was out of the parish of *St. James's* betray as many foreign fopperies in her carriage, as she could have gleaned up in half the countries of *Europe*.