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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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scribed his Nightingale, that is, *vox et præterea nihil*, a sound, and nothing but a sound. On the contrary, one may represent true Wit by the description which *Aristinetus* makes of a fine woman, when she is *dressed* she is beautiful, when she is *undressed* she is beautiful: Or, as *Mercurus* has translated it more emphatically, *Induitur, formosa est: Exuitur, ipsa forma est.*

N^o 62. *Friday, May 11.*

Scribendi recte sapere est et principium et fons. Hor.

MR. *Lock* has an admirable reflection upon the difference of Wit and Judgment, whereby he endeavours to shew the reason why they are not always the talents of the same person. His words are as follow: *And hence, perhaps, may be given some reason of that common observation, That men who have a great deal of wit and prompt memories, have not always the clearest judgment, or deepest reason. For Wit lying most in the assemblage of Ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; Judgment on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully one from another, Ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity, to take one thing for another. This is a way of proceeding quite contrary to Metaphor and Allusion; wherein, for the most part, lies that entertainment and pleasantry of Wit which strikes so lively on the fancy, and is therefore so acceptable to all people.*

This is, I think, the best and most philosophical account that I have ever met with of Wit, which generally, though not always, consists in such a resemblance and congruity of Ideas as this Author mentions. I shall only add to it, by way of explanation, That every resemblance of Ideas is not that which we call Wit, unless it be such an one that gives *Delight* and *Surprize* to the Reader: These two properties seem essential to Wit, more particularly the last of them. In order therefore that
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the resemblance in the Ideas be Wit, it is necessary that the Ideas should not lie too near one another in the nature of things; for where the likeness is obvious, it gives no surprize. To compare one man's singing to that of another, or to represent the whiteness of any object by that of Milk and Snow, or the variety of its colours by those of the Rainbow, cannot be called Wit, unless, besides this obvious resemblance, there be some further congruity discovered in the two Ideas that is capable of giving the Reader some surprize. Thus when a Poet tells us, the bosom of his Mistress is as white as snow, there is no Wit in the comparison; but when he adds, with a sigh, that it is as cold too, it then grows into Wit. Every Reader's memory may supply him with innumerable instances of the same nature. For this reason, the similitudes in heroick Poets, who endeavour rather to fill the mind with great conceptions, than to divert it with such as are new and surprizing, have seldom any thing in them that can be called Wit. Mr. *Lock's* account of Wit, with this short explanation, comprehends most of the species of Wit, as Metaphors, Similitudes, Allegories, Ænigmas, Mottos, Parables, Fables, Dreams, Visions, Dramatick writings, Burlesque, and all the methods of Allusion: as there are many other pieces of Wit, (how remote soever they may appear at first sight from the foregoing description) which upon examination will be found to agree with it.

As *true Wit* generally consists in this resemblance and congruity of Ideas, *false Wit* chiefly consists in the resemblance and congruity sometimes of single Letters, as in Anagrams, Chronograms, Lipograms, and Acrosticks: sometimes of Syllables, as in Echos and Doggerel Rhymes: sometimes of Words, as in Puns and Quibbles; and sometimes of whole Sentences or Poems, cast into the figures of *Eggs, Axes* or *Altars*: Nay, some carry the notion of Wit so far, as to ascribe it even to external Mimickry; and to look upon a man as an ingenious person, that can resemble the tone, posture, or face of another.

As *true Wit* consists in the resemblance of Ideas, and *false Wit* in the resemblance of Words, according to the foregoing instances; there is another kind of Wit which consists partly in the resemblance of Ideas, and partly in the resemblance of Words; which, for distinction sake, I shall call *mixt Wit*. This kind of Wit is that which abounds in *Cowley*, more than in any Author that ever wrote. Mr. *Waller* has likewise a great deal of it. Mr. *Dryden* is very sparing in it. *Milton* had a genius much above it. *Spencer* is in the same Class with *Milton*. The *Italians*, even in their Epic Poetry, are full of it. Monsieur *Boileau*, who formed him-
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self upon the ancient Poets, has every where rejected it with scorn. If we look after mixt Wit among the *Greek* writers, we shall find it no where but in the Epigrammatists. There are indeed some strokes of it in the little Poem ascribed to *Museus*, which by that, as well as many other marks, betrays it self to be a modern composition. If we look into the *Latin* writers, we find none of this mixt Wit in *Virgil*, *Lucretius* or *Catullus*; very little in *Horace*, but a great deal of it in *Ovid*, and scarce any thing else in *Martial*.

Out of the innumerable branches of *mixt Wit*, I shall chuse one instance which may be met with in all the writers of this Class. The passion of Love in its nature has been thought to resemble fire; for which reason the words Fire and Flame are made use of to signify Love. The witty Poets therefore have taken an advantage from the doubtful meaning of the word Fire, to make an infinite number of Witticisms. *Cowley* observing the cold regard of his Mistress's eyes, and at the same time their power of producing love in him, considers them as Burning-glasses made of ice; and finding himself able to live in the greatest extremities of Love, concludes the torrid Zone to be habitable. When his Mistress has read his letter written in juice of Lemmon by holding it to the fire, he desires her to read it over a second time by Love's flames. When she weeps, he wishes it were inward heat that distilled those drops from the Limbeck. When she is absent, he is beyond eighty, that is, thirty degrees nearer the Pole than when she is with him. His ambitious Love is a fire that naturally mounts upwards; his happy Love is the beams of Heaven, and his unhappy Love flames of Hell. When it does not let him sleep, it is a flame that sends up no smoke; when it is opposed by counsel and advice, it is a fire that rages the more by the wind's blowing upon it. Upon the dying of a tree in which he had cut his loves, he observes that his written flames had burnt up and withered the tree. When he resolves to give over his passion, he tells us that one burnt like him, for ever dreads the fire. His heart is an *Ætna*, that instead of *Vulcan's* shop incloses *Cupid's* forge in it. His endeavouring to drown his love in wine, is throwing oil upon the fire. He would insinuate to his Mistress, that the fire of Love, like that of the Sun (which produces so many living creatures) should not only warm but beget. Love in another place cooks Pleasure at his fire. Sometimes the Poet's heart is frozen in every breast, and sometimes scorched in every eye. Sometimes he is drowned in tears, and burnt in love, like a ship set on fire in the middle of the sea.

The Reader may observe in every one of these instances, that the Poet mixes the qualities of fire with those of love; and in the same sentence speaking of it both as a passion, and as real fire, surprizes the Reader with those seeming resemblances or contradictions that make up all the Wit in this kind of writing. Mixt Wit therefore is a composition of Punn and true Wit, and is more or less perfect as the resemblance lies in the Ideas, or in the Words: its foundations are laid partly in falsehood and partly in truth: reason puts in her claim for one half of it, and extravagance for the other. The only province therefore for this kind of Wit, is Epigram, or those little occasional Poems that in their own nature are nothing else but a tissue of Epigrams. I cannot conclude this head of *mixt Wit*, without owning that the admirable Poet out of whom I have taken the examples of it, had as much true Wit as any Author that ever writ; and indeed all other talents of an extraordinary genius.

It may be expected, since I am upon this subject, that I should take notice of Mr. *Dryden's* definition of Wit; which, with all the deference that is due to the judgment of so great a man, is not so properly a definition of Wit, as of good writing in general. Wit, as he defines it, is "a propriety of words and thoughts adapted to the subject." If this be a true definition of Wit, I am apt to think that *Euclid* was the greatest Wit that ever set pen to paper: it is certain there never was a greater propriety of words and thoughts adapted to the subject, than what that Author has made use of in his *Elements*. I shall only appeal to my Reader, if this definition agrees with any notion he has of Wit: if it be a true one, I am sure Mr. *Dryden* was not only a better Poet, but a greater Wit than Mr. *Cowley*; and *Virgil* a much more facetious man than either *Ovid* or *Martial*.

Bouhours, whom I look upon to be the most penetrating of all the *French* Criticks, has taken pains to shew, that it is impossible for any thought to be beautiful which is not just, and has not its foundation in the nature of things: that the basis of all wit is truth; and that no thought can be valuable, of which good sense is not the ground-work. *Boileau* has endeavoured to inculcate the same notion in several parts of his writings, both in prose and verse. This is that natural way of writing, that beautiful simplicity, which we so much admire in the compositions of the ancients; and which no body deviates from, but those who want strength of genius to make a thought shine in its own natural beauties. Poets who want this strength of genius to give that majestic simplicity to nature, which we so much admire in the works of the ancients, are forced

to hunt after foreign ornaments, and not to let any piece of Wit of what kind soever escape them. I look upon these writers as *Goths* in Poetry, who, like those in Architecture, not being able to come up to the beautiful simplicity of the old *Greeks* and *Romans*, have endeavoured to supply its place with all the extravagances of an irregular fancy. Mr. *Dryden* makes a very handsome observation on *Ovid's* writing a letter from *Dido* to *Aeneas*, in the following words: "*Ovid* (says he, speaking of *Virgil's* fiction of *Dido* and *Aeneas*) "takes it up after him, even in the "same age, and makes an ancient Heroine of *Virgil's* new-created *Di-*
 "do; dictates a letter for her just before her death to the ungrateful fu-
 "gitive; and, very unluckily for himself, is for measuring a sword with
 "a man so much superior in force to him on the same subject. I think
 "I may be judge of this, because I have translated both. The famous
 "Author of the *Art of Love* has nothing of his own; he borrows all
 "from a greater master in his own profession, and, which is worse, im-
 "proves nothing which he finds: nature fails him, and being forced to
 "his old shift, he has recourse to witticism. This passes indeed with
 "his soft admirers, and gives him the preference to *Virgil* in their
 "esteem.

Were not I supported by so great an authority as that of Mr. *Dryden*, I should not venture to observe, that the taste of most of our *English* Poets, as well as Readers, is extremely *Gothick*. He quotes Monsieur *Segrais* for a threefold distinction of the Readers of Poetry: in the first of which he comprehends the rabble of Readers, whom he does not treat as such with regard to their quality, but to their numbers and the coarseness of their taste. His words are as follow: "*Segrais* has distin-
 "guished the Readers of Poetry, according to their capacity of judging,
 "into three Classes. [He might have said the same of writers too, if he
 "had pleased.] In the lowest form he places those whom he calls *Les*
 "*Petits Esprits*, such things as are our upper-gallery audience in a
 "Play-house; who like nothing but the husk and rind of Wit, prefer a
 "Quibble, a Conceit, an Epigram, before solid sense, and elegant ex-
 "pression: these are Mob-readers. If *Virgil* and *Martial* stood for Par-
 "liament-men, we know already who would carry it. But though they
 "make the greatest appearance in the field, and cry the loudest, the best
 "on't is they are but a sort of *French* Huguenots, or *Dutch* Boors,
 "brought over in herds, but not naturalized; who have not lands of
 "two Pounds *per Annum* in *Parnassus*, and therefore are not priviledg-
 "ed to Poll. Their Authors are of the same level, fit to represent them

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“ on a Mountebank’s stage, or to be masters of the ceremonies in a Bear-garden: yet these are they who have the most admirers. But it often happens, to their mortification, that as their Readers improve their stock of sense, (as they may by reading better books, and by conversation with men of judgment) they soon forsake them.

I must not dismiss this subject without observing, that as Mr. *Lock* in the passage above-mentioned has discovered the most fruitful source of Wit, so there is another of a quite contrary nature to it, which does likewise branch it self out into several kinds. For not only the *Resemblance* but the *Opposition* of Ideas does very often produce Wit; as I could shew in several little points, turns, and antitheses, that I may possibly enlarge upon in some future Speculation.

N^o 63. Saturday, May 12.

*Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam
Jungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas
Undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum
Desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne;
Spectatum admissi risum teneatis amici?
Credite, Pisones, isti tabula fore librum
Persimilem, cujus, velut ægri somnia, vane
Finguntur species-----*

Hor.

IT is very hard for the mind to disengage it self from a subject in which it has been long employed. The thoughts will be rising of themselves from time to time, though we give them no encouragement; as the tossings and fluctuations of the sea continue several hours after the winds are laid.

It is to this that I impute my last night’s Dream or Vision, which formed into one continued allegory the several schemes of Wit, whether