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**The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.**

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

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the Vassals of some powerful Baron, negotiating like Princes for greater sums of money than were formerly to be met with in the royal treasury! Trade, without enlarging the *British* territories, has given us a kind of additional Empire: It has multiplied the number of the rich, made our landed Estates infinitely more valuable than they were formerly, and added to them an accession of other Estates as valuable as the lands themselves.

N<sup>o</sup> 70.

Monday, May 21.

*Interdum vulgus rectum videt.*

Hor.

WHEN I travelled, I took a particular delight in hearing the Songs and Fables that are come from Father to Son, and are most in vogue among the common people of the countries through which I passed; for it is impossible that any thing should be universally tasted and approved by a multitude, though they are only the rabble of a nation, which hath not in it some peculiar aptness to please and gratifie the mind of man. Human nature is the same in all reasonable creatures; and whatever falls in with it, will meet with admirers amongst Readers of all qualities and conditions. *Moliere*, as we are told by *Monsieur Boileau*, used to read all his Comedies to an old woman who was his House-keeper, as she sat with him at her work by the chimney-corner; and could foretel the success of his Play in the Theatre, from the reception it met at his fire-side: for he tells us the Audience always followed the old woman, and never failed to laugh in the same place.

I know nothing which more shews the essential and inherent perfection of simplicity of thought, above that which I call the Gothick manner in writing, than this; the first pleases all kinds of palates, and the latter only such as have formed to themselves a wrong artificial taste upon little fanciful Authors and writers of Epigram. *Homer*, *Virgil*, or *Milton*, so far as the Language of their Poems is understood, will please a Reader of plain common sense, who would neither relish nor comprehend an Epigram of *Martial*, or a Poem of *Cowley*: So, on the contrary, an ordinary Song

or

or Ballad that is the delight of the common people, cannot fail to please all such Readers as are not unqualified for the entertainment by their affectation of Ignorance; and the reason is plain, because the same paintings of Nature which recommend it to the most ordinary Reader, will appear beautiful to the most refined.

The old Song of *Chevy-Chase* is the favourite Ballad of the common people of *England*, and *Ben. Johnson* used to say he had rather have been the Author of it than of all his works. Sir *Philip Sidney* in his discourse of Poetry speaks of it in the following words; *I never heard the old Song of Piercy and Douglas, that I found not my heart more moved than with a Trumpet; and yet it is sung by some blind Crowder with no rougher voice than rude stile; which being so evil apparelled in the dust and cobweb of that uncivil age, what would it work trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar?* For my own part I am so professed an admirer of this antiquated Song, that I shall give my Reader a Critick upon it, without any further apology for so doing.

The greatest modern Criticks have laid it down as a rule, That an heroic Poem should be founded upon some important precept of Morality, adapted to the constitution of the country in which the Poet writes. *Homer* and *Virgil* have formed their plans in this view. As *Greece* was a collection of many Governments, who suffered very much among themselves, and gave the *Persian* Emperor, who was their common enemy, many advantages over them by their mutual jealousies and animosities, *Homer*, in order to establish among them an union, which was so necessary for their safety, grounds his Poem upon the discords of the several *Grecian* Princes who were engaged in a confederacy against an *Asiatick* Prince, and the several advantages which the enemy gained by such their discords. At the time the Poem we are now treating of was written, the dissensions of the Barons, who were then so many petty Princes, ran very high, whether they quarrelled among themselves, or with their neighbours, and produced unspeakable calamities to the country: The Poet, to deter men from such unnatural contentions, describes a bloody battel and dreadful scene of death, occasioned by the mutual feuds which reigned in the families of an *English* and *Scotch* Nobleman: That he designed this for the instruction of his Poem, we may learn from his four last lines, in which, after the example of the modern Tragedians, he draws from it a precept for the benefit of his Readers.

God

*God save the King, and bless the land  
In plenty, joy, and peace;  
And grant henceforth that foul debate  
'Twi'x Noblemen may cease.*

The next point observed by the greatest heroic Poets, hath been to celebrate persons and actions which do honour to their country: Thus *Virgil's* Hero was the Founder of *Rome*, *Homer's* a Prince of *Greece*; and for this reason *Valerius Flaccus* and *Statius*, who were both *Romans*, might be justly derided for having chosen the expedition of the *Golden Fleece* and the wars of *Thebes*, for the subjects of their Epic writings.

The Poet before us, has not only found out an Hero in his own country, but raises the reputation of it by several beautiful incidents. The *English* are the first who take the field, and the last who quit it. The *English* bring only fifteen hundred to the battel, and the *Scotch* two thousand. The *English* keep the field with fifty three: the *Scotch* retire with fifty five: all the rest on each side being slain in battel. But the most remarkable circumstance of this kind, is the different manner in which the *Scotch* and *English* Kings receive the news of this fight, and of the great mens deaths who commanded in it.

*This news was brought to Edinburgh,  
Where Scotland's King did reign,  
That brave Earl Douglas suddenly  
Was with an arrow slain.*

*Oh heavy news, King James did say,  
Scotland can witness be,  
I have not any Captain more  
Of such account as he.*

*Like tidings to King Henry came  
Within as short a space,  
That Piercy of Northumberland  
Was slain in Chevy-Chase.*

*Now God be with him, said our King,  
Sith'twill no better be,  
I trust I have within my Realm  
Five hundred as good as he.*

*Yet shall not Scot nor Scotland say  
But I will vengeance take,  
And be revenged on them all  
For brave Lord Piercy's sake.*

*This Vow full well the King perform'd  
After on Humble-down,  
In one day fifty Knights were slain,  
With Lords of great renown.  
And of the rest of small account  
Did many thousands dye, &c.*

At the same time that our Poet shews a laudable partiality to his Country-men, he represents the Scots after a manner not unbecoming so bold and brave a people.

*Earl Douglas on a milk-white steed,  
Most like a Baron bold,  
Rode foremost of the company,  
Whose armour shone like Gold.*

His sentiments and actions are every way suitable to an Hero. One of us two, says he, must dye: I am an Earl as well as your self, so that you can have no pretence for refusing the combat: However, says he, 'tis pity, and indeed would be a sin, that so many innocent men should perish for our sakes, rather let you and I end our quarrel in single fight.

*E'er thus I will out-braved be,  
One of us two shall dye;  
I know thee well, an Earl thou art,  
Lord Piercy, so am I.*

*But trust me, Piercy, pity it were,  
And great offence, to kill  
Any of these our harmless men,  
For they have done no ill.*

*Let thou and I the battel try,  
And set our men aside;  
Accurst be he, Lord Piercy said,  
By whom this is deny'd.*

When

When these brave men had distinguished themselves in the battel, and in single combat with each other, in the midst of a generous party, full of heroic sentiments, the *Scotch* Earl falls; and with his dying words encourages his men to revenge his death, representing to them, as the most bitter circumstances of it, that his rival saw him fall.

*With that there came an arrow keen  
Out of an English bow,  
Which struck Earl Douglas to the heart  
A deep and deadly blow.*

*Who never spoke more words than these,  
Fight on my merry men all,  
For why, my life is at an end,  
Lord Piercy sees my fall.*

*Merry Men*, in the language of those times, is no more than a cheerful word for companions and fellow-soldiers. A passage in the eleventh book of *Virgil's Æneids* is very much to be admired, where *Camilla* in her last agonies instead of weeping over the wound she had received, as one might have expected from a warrior of her sex, considers only (like the Heroe of whom we are now speaking) how the battel should be continued after her death.

*Tum sic expirans, &c.*

*A gathering mist o'erclouds her chearful eyes;  
And from her cheeks the rose colour flies.  
Then turns to her, whom, of her female train,  
She trusted most, and thus she speaks with pain.  
Acca, 'tis past! he swims before my sight,  
Inexorable death; and claims his right.  
Bear my last words to Turnus, fly with speed,  
And bid him timely to my charge succeed:  
Repel the Trojans, and the Town relieve:  
Farewel.——*

*Turnus* did not die in so heroic a manner; though our Poet seems to have had his eye upon *Turnus's* speech in the last verse,

*Lord Piercy sees my fall.*

—*Vicisti, et victum tendere palmas*  
*Aufonii videre*—

Earl *Piercy's* lamentation over his enemy is generous, beautiful, and passionate; I must only caution the Reader not to let the simplicity of the stile, which one may well pardon in so old a Poet, prejudice him against the greatness of the thought.

*Then leaving life, Earl Piercy took*  
*The dead man by the hand,*  
*And said, Earl Douglas for thy life*  
*Would I had lost my land.*

*O Christ! my very heart doth bleed*  
*With sorrow for thy sake;*  
*For sure a more renowned Knight*  
*Miscbance did never take.*

That beautiful line, *Taking the dead man by the hand* will put the Reader in mind of *Aeneas's* behaviour towards *Lausus*, whom he himself had slain as he came to the rescue of his aged father.

*At vero ut vultum vidit morientis, et ora,*  
*Ora modis Anchisiades pallentia miris:*  
*Ingemuit miserans graviter, dextramque tetendit, &c.*

*The pious Prince beheld young Lausus dead;*  
*He griev'd, he wept; then grasp'd his hand, and said,*  
*Poor hapless youth! what praises can be paid*  
*To worth so great——!*

I shall take another opportunity to consider the other parts of this old Song.



*Wednesday,*