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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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on the face of this ancient workman, and immediately, by the long lock of hair upon his forehead, discovered him to be TIME.

Whether it were because the thread of my dream was at an end, I cannot tell, but upon my taking a survey of this imaginary old man, my sleep left me.

N^o 85. Thursday, June 7.

*Interdum speciosa locis, morataque recte
Fabula nullius Veneris, sine pondere et arte,
Valdius oblectat populum, meliusque moratur,
Quam versus inopes rerum, nugæque canoræ.*

Hor.

IT is the custom of the *Mahometans*, if they see any printed or written paper upon the ground, to take it up and lay it aside carefully, as not knowing but it may contain some piece of their *Alcoran*. I must confess I have so much of the *Mussulman* in me, that I cannot forbear looking into every printed paper which comes in my way, under whatsoever despicable circumstances it may appear: for as no mortal Author, in the ordinary fate and vicissitude of things, knows to what use his works may, some time or other, be applied, a man may often meet with very celebrated names in a paper of tobacco. I have lighted my pipe more than once with the writings of a Prelate; and know a friend of mine, who, for these several years, has converted the *Essays* of a man of quality into a kind of fringe for his candlesticks. I remember in particular, after having read over a Poem of an eminent Author on a victory, I met with several fragments of it upon the next rejoicing day, which had been employed in squibs and crackers, and by that means celebrated its subject in a double capacity. I once met with a page of Mr. *Baxter* under a *Christmas Pye*. Whether or no the pastry-cook had made use of it through chance or waggery, for the defence of that superstitious *Viande*, I know not; but upon the perusal of it, I conceived so good an Idea of the Author's piety, that I bought the whole book. I have

have often profited by these accidental readings, and have sometimes found very curious pieces, that are either out of print, or not to be met with in the shops of our *London* booktellers. For this reason, when my friends take a survey of my library, they are very much surprized to find, upon the shelf of folios, two long band-boxes standing upright among my books, till I let them see that they are both of them lined with deep erudition and abstruse literature. I might likewise mention a paper kite, from which I have received great improvement; and a hat-case, which I would not exchange for all the beavers in *Great-Britain*. This my inquisitive temper, or rather impertinent humour of prying into all sorts of writing, with my natural aversion to loquacity, gives me a good deal of employment when I enter any house in the country; for I cannot for my heart leave a room, before I have thoroughly studied the walls of it, and examined the several printed papers which are usually pasted upon them. The last piece that I met with upon this occasion, gave me a most exquisite pleasure. My Reader will think I am not serious, when I acquaint him that the piece I am going to speak of was the old Ballad of the *Two Children in the Wood*, which is one of the darling Songs of the common people, and has been the delight of most *Englishmen* in some part of their age.

This Song is a plain simple copy of nature, destitute of all the helps and ornaments of art. The tale of it is a pretty tragical story, and pleases for no other reason but because it is a copy of nature. There is even a despicable simplicity in the verse; and yet, because the sentiments appear genuine and unaffected, they are able to move the mind of the most polite Reader with inward meltings of humanity and compassion. The incidents grow out of the subject, and are such as are the most proper to excite pity; for which reason the whole narration has something in it very moving, notwithstanding the Author of it (whoever he was) has delivered it in such an abject phrase and poorness of expression, that the quoting any part of it would look like a design of turning it into ridicule. But though the language is mean, the thoughts, as I have before said, from one end to the other are natural, and therefore cannot fail to please those who are not judges of language, or those who, notwithstanding they are judges of language, have a true and unprejudiced taste of nature. The condition, speech, and behaviour of the dying parents, with the age, innocence, and distress of the children, are set forth in such tender circumstances, that it is impossible for a Reader of common humanity not to be affected with them. As for the circumstance of the

Robin-

Robin-red-breast, it is indeed a little poetical ornament; and to shew the genius of the Author amidst all his simplicity, it is just the same kind of fiction which one of the greatest of the *Latin* Poets has made use of upon a parallel occasion; I mean that passage in *Horace*, where he describes himself when he was a child, fallen asleep in a desert wood, and covered with leaves by the Turtles that took pity on him.

*Me fabulosa Vulture in Appulo,
Altricis extra limen Apuliae,
Ludo fatigatumque somno
Fronde novâ puerum palumbes
Texere ———*

I have heard that the late Lord *Dorset*, who had the greatest wit tempered with the greatest candour, and was one of the finest Criticks as well as the best Poets, of his age, had a numerous collection of old *English* Ballads, and took a particular pleasure in the reading of them. I can affirm the same of Mr. *Dryden*, and know several of the most refined writers of our present age who are of the same humour.

I might likewise refer my Reader to *Moliere's* thoughts on this subject, as he has expressed them in the character of the *Misanthrope*; but those only who are endowed with a true greatness of Soul and Genius, can divest themselves of the little Images of Ridicule, and admire nature in her simplicity and nakedness. As for the little conceited Wits of the age, who can only shew their judgment by finding fault, they cannot be supposed to admire these productions which have nothing to recommend them but the beauties of nature, when they do not know how to relish even those compositions that, with all the beauties of Nature, have also the additional advantages of Art.



Friday,