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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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----- *Nunc augur Apollo,
Nunc Lyciæ sortes, nunc et Jove missus ab ipso
Interpres divûm fert horrida jussa per auras.
Scilicet is superis labor -----*

Virg.

I Am always highly delighted with the discovery of any rising genius among my countrymen. For this reason I have read over, with great pleasure, the late Miscellany published by Mr. *Pope*, in which there are many excellent compositions of that ingenious Gentleman. I have had a pleasure of the same kind, in perusing a Poem that is just published *on the Prospect of Peace*, and which, I hope, will meet with such a reward from its patrons, as so noble a performance deserves. I was particularly well-pleased to find that the Author had not amused himself with fables out of the Pagan Theology, and that when he hints at any thing of this nature, he alludes to it only as to a fable.

Many of our modern Authors, whose learning very often extends no farther than *Ovid's Metamorphosis*, do not know how to celebrate a great man, without mixing a parcel of school-boy tales with the recital of his actions. If you read a poem on a fine woman, among the authors of this class, you shall see that it turns more upon *Venus* or *Helen*, than on the party concerned. I have known a copy of verses on a great hero highly commended; but upon asking to hear some of the beautiful passages, the admirer of it has repeated to me a speech of *Apollo*, or description of *Polypheme*. At other times when I have searched for the actions of a great man who gave a subject to the writer, I have been entertained with the exploits of a River-god, or have been forced to attend a Fury in her mischievous progress, from one end of the poem to the other. When we are at school, it is necessary for us to be acquainted with the system of Pagan Theology, and may be allowed to enliven a theme, or point an epigram with a heathen god; but when we would
write

write a manly Panegyrick, that should carry in it all the colours of truth, nothing can be more ridiculous than to have recourse to our *Jupiters* and *Junos*.

No thought is beautiful which is not just, and no thought can be just which is not founded in Truth, or at least in that which passes for such.

In mock-heroick Poems, the use of the heathen mythology is not only excusable but graceful, because it is the design of such compositions to divert, by adapting the fabulous machines of the ancients to low subjects, and at the same time by ridiculing such kinds of machinery in modern writers. If any are of opinion, that there is a necessity of admitting these classical legends into our serious compositions, in order to give them a more poetical turn; I would recommend to their consideration the Pastorals of Mr. *Philips*. One would have thought it impossible for this kind of poetry to have subsisted without Fauns and Satyrs, wood-nymphs and water-nymphs, with all the tribe of rural deities. But we see he has given a new life, and a more natural beauty to this way of writing, by substituting in the place of these antiquated fables, the superstitious Mythology which prevails among the shepherds of our own country.

Virgil and *Homer* might compliment their heroes, by interweaving the actions of deities with their achievements; but for a christian Author to write in the pagan Creed, to make Prince *Eugene* a favourite of *Mars*, or to carry on a correspondence between *Bellona* and the Marshal *de Villars*, would be downright puerility, and unpardonable in a Poet that is past sixteen. It is want of sufficient elevation in a genius to describe realities, and place them in a shining light, that makes him have recourse to such trifling antiquated fables; as a man may write a fine description of *Bacchus* or *Apollo*, that does not know how to draw the character of any of his contemporaries.

In order therefore to put a stop to this absurd practice, I shall publish the following Edict, by virtue of that spectatorial authority with which I stand invested.

“ **W** Hereas the time of a general peace is, in all appearance, drawing near, being informed that there are several ingenious persons who intend to shew their talents on so happy an occasion, and being willing, as much as in me lies, to prevent that effusion of nonsense, which we have good cause to apprehend; I do hereby strictly require every person, who shall write on this subject, to remember that
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" he is a christian, and not to sacrifice his catechism to his poetry. In
 " order to it, I do expect of him in the first place, to make his own poem,
 " without depending upon *Phœbus* for any part of it; or calling out for
 " aid upon any one of the Muses by name. I do likewise positively for-
 " bid the sending of *Mercury* with any particular message or dispatch re-
 " lating to the peace, and shall by no means suffer *Minerva* to take upon
 " her the shape of any Plenipotentiary concerned in this great work. I
 " do further declare, that I shall not allow the Destinies to have had a
 " hand in the deaths of the several thousands who have been slain in the
 " late war, being of opinion that all such deaths may be very well account-
 " ed for by the christian system of powder and ball. I do therefore strict-
 " ly forbid the Fates to cut the thread of man's life upon any pretence
 " whatsoever, unless it be for the sake of the rhyme. And whereas I
 " have good reason to fear, that *Neptune* will have a great deal of busi-
 " ness on his hands, in several poems which we may now suppose are up-
 " on the anvil, I do also prohibit his appearance, unless it be done in me-
 " taphor, simile, or any very short allusion, and that even here he be not
 " permitted to enter, but with great caution and circumspection. I de-
 " sire that the same rule may be extended to his whole fraternity of hea-
 " then Gods, it being my design to condemn every poem to the flames
 " in which *Jupiter* thunders, or exercises any other act of authority which
 " does not belong to him: in short, I expect that no pagan agent shall be
 " introduced, or any fact related which a man cannot give credit to with
 " a good conscience. Provided always, that nothing herein contained
 " shall extend, or be construed to extend, to several of the female Poets
 " in this nation, who shall be still left in full possession of their Gods
 " and Goddesses, in the same manner as if this paper had never been
 " written.'



Thursday,

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