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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

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N^o 542. *Friday, November 21.*

Et sibi præferri se gaudet-----

Ovid.

WHEN I have been present in assemblies where my paper has been talked of, I have been very well pleased to hear those who would detract from the Author of it observe, that the Letters which are sent to the *Spectator* are as good, if not better than any of his works. Upon this occasion many Letters of mirth are usually mentioned, which some think the *Spectator* writ to himself, and which others commend because they fancy he received them from his correspondents: such are those from the *Valetudinarian*; the inspector of the sign-posts; the master of the Fan-exercise; with that of the hooped petticoat; that of *Nicholas Hart* the annual sleeper; that of *Sir John Exvill*; that upon the *London* cries; with multitudes of the same nature. As I love nothing more than to mortify the ill-natured, that I may do it effectually, I must acquaint them, they have very often praised me when they did not design it, and that they have approved my writings when they thought they had derogated from them. I have heard several of these unhappy Gentlemen proving, by undeniable arguments, that I was not able to pen a Letter which I had written the day before. Nay, I have heard some of them throwing out ambiguous expressions, and giving the company reason to suspect that they themselves did me the honour to send me such and such a particular epistle, which happened to be talked of with the esteem or approbation of those who were present. These rigid Critics are so afraid of allowing me any thing which does not belong to me, that they will not be positive whether the Lion, the wild Boar, and the Flower-pots in the Play-house, did not actually write those Letters which came to me in their names. I must therefore inform these Gentlemen, that I often chuse this way of casting my thoughts into a Letter, for the following reasons: First, out of the policy of those who try their jest upon another, before they own it themselves. Secondly, because I would extort a little praise from such who will never applaud any thing whose

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Author

Author is known and certain. Thirdly, because it gave me an opportunity of introducing a great variety of characters into my work, which could not have been done, had I always written in the person of the *Spectator*. Fourthly, because the dignity spectatorial would have suffered, had I published as from my self those several ludicrous compositions which I have ascribed to fictitious names and characters. And lastly, because they often serve to bring in, more naturally, such additional reflections as have been placed at the end of them.

There are others who have likewise done me a very particular honour, though undesignedly. These are such who will needs have it, that I have translated or borrowed many of my thoughts out of books which are written in other languages. I have heard of a person, who is more famous for his library than his learning, that has asserted this more than once in his private conversation. Were it true, I am sure he could not speak it from his own knowledge; but had he read the books which he has collected, he would find this accusation to be wholly groundless. Those who are truly learned will acquit me in this point, in which I have been so far from offending, that I have been scrupulous perhaps to a fault in quoting the Authors of several passages which I might have made my own. But as this assertion is in reality an encomium on what I have published, I ought rather to glory in it, than endeavour to confute it.

Some are so very willing to alienate from me that small reputation which might accrue to me from any of my Speculations, that they attribute some of the best of them to those imaginary Manuscripts with which I have introduced them. There are others, I must confess, whose objections have given me a greater concern, as they seem to reflect, under this head, rather on my morality than on my invention. These are they who say an Author is guilty of falshood, when he talks to the publick of Manuscripts which he never saw, or describes scenes of action or discourse in which he was never engaged. But these Gentlemen would do well to consider, there is not a fable or parable which ever was made use of, that is not liable to this exception; since nothing, according to this notion, can be related innocently, which was not once matter of fact. Besides, I think the most ordinary Reader may be able to discover, by my way of writing, what I deliver in these occurrences as truth, and what as fiction.

Since I am unawares engaged in answering the several objections which have been made against these my works, I must take notice that there are some who affirm a paper of this nature should always turn upon diverting

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ing subjects, and others who find fault with every one of them that hath not an immediate tendency to the advancement of religion or learning. I shall leave these Gentlemen to dispute it out among themselves, since I see one half of my conduct patronized by each side. Were I serious on an improper subject, or trifling in a serious one, I should deservedly draw upon me the censure of my Readers; or were I conscious of any thing in my writings that is not innocent at least, or that the greatest part of them were not sincerely designed to discountenance vice and ignorance, and support the interest of true wisdom and virtue, I should be more severe upon my self than the publick is disposed to be. In the mean while I desire my Reader to consider every particular paper or discourse as a distinct tract by it self, and independent of every thing that goes before or after it.

I shall end this paper with the following letter, which was really sent me, as some others have been which I have published, and for which I must own my self indebted to their respective writers.

S I R,

“ I Was this morning in a company of your well-wishers, when we read
 “ over, with great satisfaction, *Tully's* observations on action adapted
 “ to the *British* theatre: though, by the way, we were very sorry to find
 “ that you have disposed of another member of your club. Poor *Sir Ro-*
 “ *ger* is dead, and the worthy Clergyman dying. Captain *Sentry* has
 “ taken possession of a fair estate; *Will. Honeycomb* has married a far-
 “ mer's daughter, and the *Templer* withdraws himself into the business
 “ of his own profession. What will all this end in? We are afraid it por-
 “ tends no good to the publick. Unless you very speedily fix a day for
 “ the election of new members, we are under apprehensions of losing the
 “ *British Spectator*. I hear of a party of Ladies who intend to address
 “ you on this subject, and question not, if you do not give us the slip
 “ very suddenly, that you will receive addresses from all parts of the king-
 “ dom to continue so useful a work. Pray deliver us out of this perple-
 “ xity, and among the multitude of your readers you will particularly
 “ oblige

Your most sincere friend and servant, Philo-Spec.

Saturday,