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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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at *Will's*; and as I frequently receive letters from the *fine Ladies* and *pretty Fellows*, I cannot but observe that the former are superior to the others not only in the sense but in the spelling. This cannot but have a good effect upon the female world, and keep them from being charmed by those empty coxcombs that have hitherto been admired among the women, though laughed at among the men.

I am credibly informed that *Tom Tattle* passes for an impertinent fellow, that *Will Trippit* begins to be smoked, and that *Frank Smoothly* himself is within a month of a coxcomb, in case I think fit to continue this paper. For my part, as it is my business in some measure to detect such as would lead astray weak minds by their false pretences to wit and judgment, humour and gallantry, I shall not fail to lend the best lights I am able to the fair sex for the continuation of these discoveries.

N^o 93. *Saturday, June 16.*

-----*Spatio brevi*

*Spe mlongam reseces: dum loquimur, fugerit invida
Ætas: carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero.* Hor.

WE all of us complain of the shortness of time, saith *Seneca*, and yet have much more than we know what to do with. Our lives, says he, are spent either in doing nothing at all, or in doing nothing to the purpose, or in doing nothing that we ought to do: we are always complaining our days are few, and acting as though there would be no end of them. That noble Philosopher has described our inconsistency with our selves in this particular, by all those various turns of expression and thought which are peculiar to his writings.

I often consider mankind as wholly inconsistent with it self in a point that bears some affinity to the former. Though we seem grieved at the shortness of life in general, we are wishing every period of it at an end. The minor longs to be at age, then to be a man of business, then to make up an estate, then to arrive at honours, then to retire. Thus although

the whole life is allowed by every one to be short, the several divisions of it appear long and tedious. We are for lengthening our span in general, but would fain contract the parts of which it is composed. The Usurer would be very well satisfied to have all the time annihilated that lies between the present moment and next quarter-day. The Politician would be contented to lose three years in his life, could he place things in the posture which he fancies they will stand in after such a revolution of time. The Lover would be glad to strike out of his existence all the moments that are to pass away before the happy meeting. Thus, as fast as our time runs, we should be very glad in most parts of our lives that it ran much faster than it does. Several hours of the day hang upon our hands, nay we wish away whole years; and travel through time as through a country filled with many wild and empty wastes, which we would fain hurry over, that we may arrive at those several little settlements or imaginary points of rest which are dispersed up and down in it.

If we divide the life of most men into twenty parts, we shall find that at least nineteen of them are meer gaps and chasms, which are neither filled with pleasure nor business. I do not however include in this calculation the life of those men who are in a perpetual hurry of affairs, but of those only who are not always engaged in scenes of action; and I hope I shall not do an unacceptable piece of service to these persons, if I point out to them certain methods for the filling up their empty spaces of life. The methods I shall propose to them are as follow.

The first is the exercise of Virtue, in the most general acceptation of the word. That particular scheme which comprehends the Social Virtues, may give employment to the most industrious temper, and find a man in business more than the most active station of life. To advise the ignorant, relieve the needy, comfort the afflicted, are duties that fall in our way almost every day in our lives. A man has frequent opportunities of mitigating the fierceness of a party; of doing justice to the character of a deserving man; of softning the envious, quieting the angry, and rectifying the prejudiced; which are all of them employments suited to a reasonable nature, and bring great satisfaction to the person who can busy himself in them with discretion.

There is another kind of Virtue that may find employment for those retired hours in which we are altogether left to our selves, and destitute of company and conversation; I mean that intercourse and communication which every reasonable creature ought to maintain with the great

Author

Author of his being. The man who lives under an habitual sense of the divine presence, keeps up a perpetual chearfulness of temper, and enjoys every moment the satisfaction of thinking himself in company with his dearest and best of friends. The time never lies heavy upon him: It is impossible for him to be alone. His thoughts and passions are the most busied at such hours, when those of other men are the most unactive: he no sooner steps out of the world but his heart burns with devotion, swells with hope, and triumphs in the consciousness of that presence which every where surrounds him; or, on the contrary, pours out its fears, its sorrows, its apprehensions, to the great supporter of its existence.

I have here only considered the necessity of a man's being virtuous, that he may have something to do; but if we consider further, that the exercise of Virtue is not only an amusement for the time it lasts, but that its influence extends to those parts of our existence which lie beyond the grave, and that our whole Eternity is to take its colour from those hours which we here employ in Virtue or in Vice, the argument redoubles upon us for putting in practice this method of passing away our time.

When a man has but a little stock to improve, and has opportunities of turning it all to good account, what shall we think of him if he suffers nineteen parts of it to lie dead, and perhaps employs even the twentieth to his ruine or disadvantage? But because the mind cannot be always in its fervours, nor strained up to a pitch of virtue, it is necessary to find out proper employments for it in its relaxations.

The next method therefore that I would propose to fill up our time, should be useful and innocent diversions. I must confess I think it is below reasonable creatures to be altogether conversant in such diversions as are merely innocent, and have nothing else to recommend them, but that there is no hurt in them. Whether any kind of gaming has even thus much to say for it self, I shall not determine; but I think it is very wonderful to see persons of the best sense passing away a dozen hours together in shuffling and dividing a pack of Cards, with no other conversation but what is made up of a few game phrases, and no other Ideas but those of black or red spots ranged together in different figures. Would not a man laugh to hear any one of this species complaining that life is short?

The *Stage* might be made a perpetual source of the most noble and useful entertainments, were it under proper regulations.

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But the mind never unbends it self so agreeably as in the conversation of a well-chosen friend. There is indeed no blessing of life that is any way comparable to the enjoyment of a discreet and virtuous friend. It eases and unloads the mind, clears and improves the understanding, engenders thoughts and knowledge, animates virtue and good resolutions, soothes and allays the passions, and finds employment for most of the vacant hours of life.

Next to such an intimacy with a particular person, one would endeavour after a more general conversation with such as are able to entertain and improve those with whom they converse, which are qualifications that seldom go asunder.

There are many other useful amusements of life, which one would endeavour to multiply, that one might on all occasions have recourse to something, rather than suffer the mind to lie idle, or run adrift with any passion that chances to rise in it.

A man that has a taste of musick, painting, or architecture, is like one that has another sense, when compared with such as have no relish of those arts. The florist, the planter, the gardiner, the husbandman, when they are only as accomplishments to the man of fortune, are great reliefs to a country life, and many ways useful to those who are possessed of them.

But of all the diversions of life, there is none so proper to fill up its empty spaces as the reading of useful and entertaining Authors. But this I shall only touch upon, because it in some measure interferes with the third method, which I shall propose in another paper for the employment of our dead unactive hours, and which I shall only mention in general to be, the pursuit of knowledge.



Monday,