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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

N° 105. Saturday, June 30.

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P. S. " I teach young Gentlemen the whole art of gallanting a Fan.

N. B. " I have several little plain Fans made for this use, to avoid
" expence.

N^o 105. Saturday, June 30.

-----*Id arbitror*

Adprime in vita esse utile, ne quid nimis.

Ter. And.

MY friend WILL. HONEYCOMB values himself very much upon what he calls the knowledge of mankind, which has cost him many disasters in his youth; for WILL. reckons every misfortune that he has met with among the women, and every rencounter among the men, as parts of his education, and fancies he should never have been the man he is, had not he broke windows, knocked down constables, disturbed honest people with his midnight serenades, and beat up a lewd woman's quarters, when he was a young fellow. The engaging in adventures of this nature WILL. calls the studying of mankind; and terms this knowledge of the town, the knowledge of the world. WILL. ingenuously confesses, that for half his life his head aked every morning with reading of men over-night; and at present comforts himself under certain pains which he endures from time to time, that without them he could not have been acquainted with the gallantries of the age. This WILL. looks upon as the learning of a Gentleman, and regards all other kinds of science as the accomplishments of one whom he calls a Scholar, a Bookish man, or a Philosopher.

For these reasons WILL. shines in mixed company, where he has the discretion not to go out of his depth, and has often a certain way of making his real ignorance appear a seeming one. Our Club however has frequently caught him tripping, at which times they never spare him. For as WILL. often insults us with the knowledge of the town, we sometimes take our revenge upon him by our knowledge of books.

He was last week producing two or three letters which he writ in his youth to a Coquette Lady. The raillery of them was natural, and well enough

enough for a meer man of the town; but, very unluckily, several of the words were wrong spelt. WILL. laught this off at first as well as he could, but finding himself pushed on all sides, and especially by the *Templer*, he told us, with a little passion, that he never liked pedantry in spelling, and that he spelt like a Gentleman, and not like a Scholar: upon this WILL had recourse to his old topick of shewing the narrow-spiritedness, the pride, and ignorance of pedants; which he carried so far, that upon my retiring to my lodgings, I could not forbear throwing together such reflections as occurred to me upon that subject.

A man who has been brought up among books, and is able to talk of nothing else, is a very indifferent companion, and what we call a Pedant. But, methinks, we should enlarge the title, and give it every one that does not know how to think out of his profession, and particular way of life.

What is a greater Pedant than a meer man of the town? barr him the play-houses, a catalogue of the reigning beauties, and an account of a few fashionable distempers that have befallen him, and you strike him dumb. How many a pretty Gentleman's knowledge lies all within the verge of the Court? he will tell you the names of the principal favourites, repeat the shrewd sayings of a man of quality, whisper an intreague that is not yet blown upon by common fame; or, if the sphere of his observations is a little larger than ordinary, will perhaps enter into all the incidents, turns, and revolutions in a game of Ombre. When he has gone thus far, he has shewn you the whole circle of his accomplishments, his parts are drained, and he is disabled from any further conversation. What are these but rank Pedants? and yet these are the men who value themselves most on their exemption from the pedantry of Colleges.

I might here mention the Military Pedant, who always talks in a camp, and is storming towns, making lodgments, and fighting battles from one end of the year to the other. Every thing he speaks smells of gunpowder; if you take away his artillery from him, he has not a word to say for himself. I might likewise mention the Law Pedant, that is perpetually putting cases, repeating the transactions of *Westminster-hall*, wrangling with you upon the most indifferent circumstances of life, and not to be convinced of the distance of a place, or of the most trivial point in conversation, but by dint of argument. The State Pedant is wrapt up in news, and lost in politicks. If you mention either of the Kings of *Spain* or *Poland*, he talks very notably; but if you go out of the *Gazette*, you drop him. In short, a meer Courtier, a meer Soldier, a meer Scholar,

Scholar, a meer any thing, is an insipid pedantick character, and equally ridiculous.

Of all the species of Pedants, which I have mentioned, the Book-pedant is much the most supportable; he has at least an exercised understanding, and a head which is full though confused, so that a man who converses with him may often receive from him hints of things that are worth knowing, and what he may possibly turn to his own advantage, though they are of little use to the owner. The worst kind of Pedants among learned men, are such as are naturally endued with a very small share of common sense, and have read a great number of books without taste or distinction.

The truth of it is, Learning, like travelling, and all other methods of improvement, as it finishes good sense, so it makes a silly man ten thousand times more insufferable, by supplying variety of matter to his impertinence, and giving him an opportunity of abounding in absurdities.

Shallow Pedants cry up one another much more than men of solid and useful learning. To read the titles they give an editor, or collator of a manuscript, you would take him for the glory of the common-wealth of letters, and the wonder of his age; when perhaps upon examination you find that he has only rectified a *Greek* particle, or laid out a whole sentence in proper commas.

They are obliged indeed to be thus lavish of their praises, that they may keep one another in countenance; and it is no wonder if a great deal of knowledge, which is not capable of making a man wise, has a natural tendency to make him vain and arrogant.



Monday,