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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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that I discover the seeds of a Civil War in these our divisions: and therefore cannot but bewail, as in their first principles, the miseries and calamities of our children.

N^o 127. Thursday, July 26.

-----Quantum est in rebus inane? Perf.

IT is our custom at Sir ROGER's, upon the coming in of the Post, to sit about a pot of coffee, and hear the old Knight read *Dyer's* letter; which he does with his spectacles upon his nose, and in an audible voice, smiling very often at those little strokes of Satyr, which are so frequent in the writings of that Author. I afterwards communicate to the Knight such packets as I receive under the quality of SPECTATOR. The following letter chancing to please him more than ordinary, I shall publish it at his request.

Mr. SPECTATOR,

“ YOU have diverted the town almost a whole month at the expence
 “ of the country; it is now high time that you should give
 “ the country their revenge. Since your withdrawing from this place,
 “ the fair sex are run into great extravagancies. Their petticoats, which
 “ began to heave and swell before you left us, are now blown up into a
 “ most enormous concave, and rise every day more and more: in short,
 “ Sir, since our women know themselves to be out of the eye of the
 “ SPECTATOR, they will be kept within no compass. You praised
 “ them a little too soon, for the modesty of their head-dresses: for as
 “ the humour of a sick person is often driven out of one limb into ano-
 “ ther, their superfluity of ornaments, instead of being entirely banish-
 “ ed, seems only fallen from their heads upon their lower parts. What
 “ they have lost in height they make up in breadth, and contrary to all
 “ rules of architecture widen the foundations at the same time that they
 “ shorten the superstructure. Were they, like *Spanish* jennets, to im-
 “ pregnate by the wind, they could not have thought on a more proper
 “ invention.

“ invention. But as we do not yet hear any particular use in this petticoat, or that it contains any thing more than what was supposed to be in those of scantier make, we are wonderfully at a loss about it.

“ The women give out, in defence of these wide bottoms, that they are airy, and very proper for the season; but this I look upon to be only a pretence, and a piece of art, for it is well known we have not had a more moderate summer these many years, so that it is certain the heat they complain of cannot be in the weather: besides, I would fain ask these tender-constituted Ladies, why they should require more cooling than their mothers before them.

“ I find several speculative persons are of opinion that our sex has of late years been very faucy, and that the hoop-petticoat is made use of to keep us at a distance. It is most certain that a woman's honour cannot be better entrenched than after this manner, in circle within circle, amidst such a variety of out-works and lines of circumvallation. A female who is thus invested in whale-bone, is sufficiently secured against the approaches of an ill-bred fellow, who might as well think of Sir *George Etheridge's* way of making love in a tub, as in the midst of so many hoops.

“ Among these various conjectures, there are men of superstitious tempers, who look upon the hoop-petticoat as a kind of prodigy. Some will have it that it portends the downfall of the *French King*, and observe that the farthingale appeared in *England* a little before the ruine of the *Spanish* monarchy. Others are of opinion that it foretels battel and blood-shed, and believe it of the same prognostication as the tail of a blazing star. For my part, I am apt to think it is a sign that multitudes are coming into the world, rather than going out of it.

“ The first time I saw a Lady dressed in one of these petticoats, I could not forbear blaming her in my own thoughts for walking abroad when she was *so near her time*; but soon recovered my self out of my error, when I found all the modish part of the sex as *far gone* as her self. It is generally thought some crafty women have thus betrayed their companions into hoops, that they might make them accessary to their own concealments, and by that means escape the censure of the world; as wary generals have sometimes dressed two or three dozen of their friends in their own habit, that they might not draw upon themselves any particular attacks from the enemy. The strutting petticoat smooths all distinctions, levels the mother with the daughter, and

“ and sets maids and matrons, wives and widows, upon the same bottom.
“ In the mean while, I cannot but be troubled to see so many well shaped
“ innocent virgins bloated up, and waddling up and down like big-bel-
“ lied women.

“ Should this fashion get among the ordinary people, our publick
“ ways would be so crouded that we should want street-room. Several
“ congregations of the best fashion find themselves already very much
“ streightned, and if the mode encrease, I wish it may not drive many
“ ordinary women into meetings and conventicles. Should our sex at
“ the same time take it into their heads to wear trunk breeches (as who
“ knows what their indignation at this female treatment may drive them
“ to) a man and his wife would fill a whole pew.

“ You know, Sir, it is recorded of *Alexander* the Great, that in his
“ *Indian* expedition he buried several suits of armour which by his di-
“ rections were made much too big for any of his soldiers, in order to
“ give posterity an extraordinary Idea of him, and make them believe
“ he had commanded an army of Giants. I am persuaded that if one
“ of the present petticoats happens to be hung up in any repository of
“ curiosities, it will lead into the same error the generations that lie some
“ removes from us; unless we can believe our posterity will think so
“ disrespectfully of their great grand-mothers, that they made themselves
“ monstrous to appear amiable.

“ When I survey this new-fashioned *Rotonda* in all its parts, I cannot
“ but think of the old Philosopher, who after having entered into an *Æ-*
“ *gyptian* Temple, and looked about for the Idol of the place, at length
“ discovered a little black Monkey enshrined in the midst of it; upon
“ which he could not forbear crying out, (to the great scandal of the
“ worshippers,) What a magnificent Palace is here for such a ridiculous
“ inhabitant!

“ Though you have taken a resolution, in one of your papers, to avoid
“ descending to particularities of dress, I believe you will not think it
“ below you on so extraordinary an occasion, to unhoop the Fair sex,
“ and cure this fashionable tympany that is got among them. I am apt
“ to think the petticoat will shrink of its own accord at your first co-
“ ming to town; at least a touch of your pen will make it contract it
“ self, like the sensitive plant, and by that means oblige several who are
“ either terrified or astonished at this portentous novelty, and among the
“ rest,

Your humble Servant, &c.

Friday,