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In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N^o 25. *Friday, March 17.*

Quid est sapientia? semper idem velle atque idem nolle. Senec.

IF we may believe the observation which is made of us by foreigners, there is no nation in *Europe* so much given to change as the *English*. There are some who ascribe this to the fickleness of our climate; and others to the freedom of our government. From one or both of these causes their writers derive that variety of humours which appears among the people in general, and that inconsistency of character which is to be found in almost every particular person. But as a man should always be upon his guard against the vices to which he is most exposed, so we should take a more than ordinary care not to lie at the mercy of the weather in our moral conduct, nor to make a capricious use of that liberty which we enjoy by the happiness of our civil constitution.

This instability of temper ought in a particular manner to be checked, when it shews itself in political affairs, and disposes men to wander from one scheme of government to another: since such a fickleness of behaviour in publick measures, cannot but be attended with very fatal effects to our country.

In the first place; it hinders any great undertaking, which requires length of time for its accomplishment, from being brought to its due perfection. There is not any instance in history which better confirms this observation, than that which is still fresh in every one's memory. We engaged in the late war with a design to reduce an exorbitant growth of power in the most dangerous enemy to *Great-Britain*. We gained a long and wonderful series of victories, and had scarce any thing left to do, but to reap the fruits of them: when on a sudden our patience failed us; we grew tired of our undertaking; and received terms from those, who were upon the point of giving us whatever we could have demanded of them.

This mutability of mind in the *English*, makes the ancient friends of our nation very backward to engage with us in such alliances as are necessary

cessary for our mutual defence and security. It is a common notion among foreigners, that the *English* are good confederates in an enterprize which may be dispatched within a short compass of time; but that they are not to be depended upon in a work which cannot be finished without constancy and perseverance. Our late measures have so blemished our national credit in this particular, that those Potentates who are entered into treaties with his present Majesty, have been solely encouraged to it by their confidence in his personal firmness and integrity.

I need not, after this, suggest to my Reader the ignominy and reproach that falls upon a nation, which distinguishes it self among its neighbours by such a wavering and unsettled conduct.

This our inconsistency in the pursuit of schemes which have been thoroughly digested, has as bad an influence on our domestick as on our foreign affairs. We are told, that the famous Prince of *Conde* used to ask the *English* Ambassador, upon the arrival of a mail, *Who was Secretary of State in England by that Post?* as a piece of raillery upon the fickleness of our politicks. But what has rendered this a misfortune to our country, is, that publick Ministers have no sooner made themselves masters of their business, than they have been dismissed from their employments; and that this disgrace has befallen very many of them, not because they have deserved it, but because the people love to see new faces in high posts of honour.

It is a double misfortune to a nation, which is thus given to change, when they have a Sovereign at the head of them, that is prone to fall in with all the turns and veerings of the people. *Sallust*, the gravest of all the *Roman* historians, who had formed his notions of regal authority from the manner in which he saw it exerted among the barbarous nations, makes the following remark: *Plerumque Regia voluntates, uti vehementes, sic mobiles, saepe ipsæ sibi adversæ.* *The Wills of Kings, as they are generally vehement, are likewise very fickle, and at different times opposite to themselves.* Were there any colour for this general observation, how much does it redound to the honour of such Princes who are exceptions to it!

The natural consequence of an unsteady government, is the perpetuating of strife and faction among a divided people. Whereas a King who persists in those schemes which he has laid, and has no other view in them but the good of his subjects, extinguishes all hopes of advancement in those who would grow great by an opposition to his measures, and insensibly unites the contending parties in their common interest.

Queen

Queen *Elizabeth*, who makes the greatest figure among our *English* Sovereigns, was most eminently remarkable for that steadiness and uniformity which ran through all her actions, during that long and glorious reign. She kept up to her chosen motto in every part of her life; and never lost sight of those great ends, which she proposed to herself on her accession to the throne, the happiness of her people, and the strengthening of the Protestant interest. She often interposed her Royal authority to break the cabals which were forming against her first Ministers, who grew old and died in those stations which they filled with so great abilities. By this means she baffled the many attempts of her foreign and domestick enemies, and entirely broke the whole force and spirit of that party among her subjects, which was popishly affected, and which was not a little formidable in the beginning of her reign.

The frequent changes and alterations in publick proceedings, the multiplicity of schemes introduced one upon another, with the variety of short-lived favourites, that prevailed in their several turns under the government of her successors, have by degrees broken us into those unhappy distinctions and parties, which have given so much uneasiness to our Kings, and so often endangered the safety of their people.

I question not but every impartial Reader hath been before-hand with me, in considering, on this occasion, the happiness of our country under the government of his present Majesty; who is so deservedly famous for an inflexible adherence to those counsels which have a visible tendency to the publick good, and to those persons who heartily concur with him in promoting these his generous designs.

A Prince of this character will be dreaded by his enemies, and served with courage and zeal by his friends; and will either instruct us by his example, to fix the unsteadiness of our politicks, or by his conduct, hinder it from doing us any prejudice.

Upon the whole, as there is no temper of mind more unmanly in a private person, nor more pernicious to the publick in a member of a community, than that changeableness with which we are too justly branded by all our neighbours, it is to be hoped that the sound part of the nation will give no farther occasion for this reproach, but continue steady to that happy establishment which has now taken place among us. And as obstinacy in prejudices which are detrimental to our country, ought not to be mistaken for that virtuous resolution and firmness of mind which is necessary to our preservation, it is to be wished that the enemies to our constitution would so far indulge themselves in this national humour, as

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to come into one change more, by falling in with that plan of government which at present they think fit to oppose. At least we may expect they will be so wise as to shew a legal obedience to the best of Kings, who profess the duty of Passive-obedience to the worst.

N^o 26. *Monday, March 19.*

Bella viri pacemque gerant, quis bella gerenda. Virg.

WHEN the *Athenians* had long contended against the power of *Philip*, he demanded of them to give up their orators, as well knowing their opposition would be soon at an end if it were not irritated from time to time by these tongue-warriors. I have endeavoured for the same reason to gain our female adversaries, and by that means to disarm the party of its principal strength. Let them give us up their women, and we know by experience how inconsiderable a resistance we are to expect from their men.

This sharp political humour has but lately prevailed in so great a measure as it now does among the beautiful part of our species. They used to employ themselves wholly in the scenes of a domestick life, and provided a woman could keep her house in order, she never troubled herself about regulating the Commonwealth. The eye of the Mistress was wont to make her pewter shine, and to inspect every part of her household furniture as much as her looking-glass. But at present our discontented matrons are so conversant in matters of State, that they wholly neglect their private affairs: for we may always observe that a Gossip in politics is a flattern in her family.

It is indeed a melancholy thing to see the disorders of a household that is under the conduct of an angry Stateswoman, who lays out all her thoughts upon the publick, and is only attentive to find out miscarriages in the Ministry. Several women of this turn are so earnest in contending for Hereditary right, that they wholly neglect the education of their sons and heirs; and are so taken up with their zeal for the church, that they cannot find time to teach their children their catechism. A Lady who thus intrudes