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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

No 34. Monday, April 16.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53597](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53597)

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-----*ſævus apertam*
In rabiem coepit verti jocus----- Hor.

IT is very juſtly, as well as frequently obſerved, that if our nation be ever ruined, it muſt be by itſelf. The parties and diviſions which reign among us may ſeveral ways bring deſtruction upon our country, at the ſame time that our united force would be ſufficient to ſecure us againſt all the attempts of a foreign enemy. Whatever expedients therefore can be found to allay thoſe heats and animoſities, which break us into different factions and intereſts, cannot but be uſeful to the publick, and highly tend to its ſafety, ſtrength, and reputation.

This dangerous diſſenſion among us diſcovers itſelf in all the moſt indifferent circumſtances of life. We keep it up, and cheriſh it with as much pains, as if it were a kind of national bleſſing. It inſinuates itſelf into all our diſcourſes, mixes in our parties of pleaſure, has a ſhare in our diverſions, and is an ingredient in moſt of our publick entertainments.

I was not long ago at the Play called *Sir Courtly Nice*, where to the eternal reproach of good ſenſe, I found the whole audience had very gravely ranged themſelves into two parties, under *Hot-head* and *Testimony*. *Hot-head* was the applauded Hero of the *Tories*, and *Testimony* no leſs the favourite of the *Whigs*. Each party followed their champion. It was wonderful to ſee ſo polite an aſſembly diſtinguiſhing themſelves by ſuch extraordinary representatives, and avowing their principles as conformable either to the zeal of *Hot-head*, or the moderation of *Testimony*. Thus the two parts which were deſigned to expoſe the faults of both ſides, and were accordingly received by our anceſtors in King *Charles* the Second's reign, meet with a kind of ſanction from the applauſes which are reſpectively beſtowed on them by their wiſe poſterity. We ſeem to imagine that they were written as patterns for imitation, not as objects of ridicule.

This

This humour runs so far, that most of our late Comedies owe their success to it. The audience listens after nothing else. I have seen little *Dicky* place himself with great approbation at the head of the *Tories* for five Acts together, and *Pinky* espouse the interest of the *Whigs* with no less success. I do not find that either party has yet thrown themselves under the patronage of *Scaramouch*, or that *Harlequin* has violated that neutrality, which, upon his late arrival in *Great-Britain*, he professed to both parties, and which it is thought he will punctually observe, being allowed on all sides to be a man of honour. It is true, that upon his first appearance, a violent *Whig* tradesman in the pit begun to compliment him with a clap, as overjoyed to see him mount a ladder, and fancying him to be dressed in a highland plad.

I question not but my Readers will be surprized to find me animadverting on a practice that has been always favourable to the cause which now prevails. The *British* Theatre was *Whig* even in the worst of times; and in the last reign did not scruple to testify its zeal for the good of our country, by many magnanimous claps in its lower regions, answered with loud huzzas from the upper gallery. This good disposition is so much heightened of late, that the whole neighbourhood of the *Drury-lane* Theatre very often shakes with the loyalty of the audience. It is said, that a young Author, who very much relies on this prevailing humour, is now writing a Farce to be called *A Match out of Newgate*, in allusion to the title of a Comedy called *A Match in Newgate*; and that his chief person is a round-shouldered man with a pretty large nose and a wide mouth, making his addresses to a lovely black woman that passes for a Peeress of *Great-Britain*. In short, the whole Play is built upon the late escape of General *Forster*, who is supposed upon the road to fall in love with my Lord *Nithisdale*, whom the ingenious Author imagines to be still in his riding-hood.

But notwithstanding the good principles of a *British* audience in this one particular, it were to be wished that every thing should be banished the Stage which has a tendency to exasperate men's minds, and inflame that party rage which makes us such a miserable and divided people. And that in the first place, because such a proceeding as this disappoints the very design of all publick diversions and entertainments. The institution of sports and shews was intended by all governments, to turn off the thoughts of the people from busying themselves in matters of state, which did not belong to them; to reconcile them to one another by the common participations of mirth and pleasure; and to wear out of their minds

minds that rancour which they might have contracted by the interfering views of interest and ambition. It would therefore be for the benefit of every society, that is disturbed by contending factions, to encourage such innocent amusements as may thus disembitter the minds of men, and make them mutually rejoice in the same agreeable satisfactions. When people are accustomed to sit together with pleasure, it is a step towards reconciliation: but as we manage matters, our politest assemblies are like boisterous clubs, that meet over a glass of wine, and before they have done, throw bottles at one another's heads. Instead of multiplying those desirable opportunities where we may agree in points that are indifferent, we let the spirit of contention into those very methods that are not only foreign to it, but should in their nature dispose us to be friends. This our anger in our mirth is like poison in a perfume, which taints the spirits instead of chearing and refreshing them.

Another manifest inconvenience which arises from this abuse of publick entertainments, is, that it naturally destroys the taste of an audience. I do not deny, but that several performances have been justly applauded for their wit, which have been written with an eye to this predominant humour of the town: but it is visible even in these, that it is not the excellence, but the application of the sentiment, that has raised applause. An Author is very much disappointed to find the best parts of his productions received with indifference, and to see the audience discovering beauties which he never intended. The Actors, in the midst of an innocent old Play, are often startled with unexpected claps or hisses; and do not know whether they have been talking like good subjects, or have spoken treason. In short, we seem to have such a relish for faction, as to have lost that of wit; and are so used to the bitterness of party rage, that we cannot be gratified with the highest entertainment that has not this kind of seasoning in it. But as no work must expect to live long which draws all its beauty from the colour of the times; so neither can that pleasure be of greater continuance, which arises from the prejudice or malice of its hearers.

To conclude; since the present hatred and violence of parties is so unspeakably pernicious to the community, and none can do a better service to their country than those who use their utmost endeavours to extinguish it, we may reasonably hope, that the more elegant part of the nation will give a good example to the rest; and put an end to so absurd and foolish a practice, which makes our most refined diversions detrimental to the publick, and, in a particular manner, destructive of all politeness.

Friday,