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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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-----*Servetur ad imum*

Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi constet. Hor.

NOTHING that is not a real crime makes a man appear so contemptible and little in the eyes of the world as Inconstancy, especially when it regards religion or party. In either of these cases, though a man perhaps does but his duty in changing his side, he not only makes himself hated by those he left, but is seldom heartily esteemed by those he comes over to.

In these great articles of life therefore a man's conviction ought to be very strong, and if possible so well timed that worldly advantages may seem to have no share in it, or mankind will be ill-natured enough to think he does not change sides out of principle, but either out of levity of temper, or prospects of interest. Converts and renegadoes of all kinds should take particular care to let the world see they act upon honourable motives; or whatever approbations they may receive from themselves, and applauses from those they converse with, they may be very well assured that they are the scorn of all good men, and the publick marks of infamy and derision.

Irresolution on the schemes of life which offer themselves to our choice, and inconstancy in pursuing them, are the greatest and most universal causes of all our disquiet and unhappiness. When ambition pulls one way, interest another, inclination a third, and perhaps reason contrary to all, a man is likely to pass his time but ill who has so many different parties to please. When the mind hovers among such a variety of allurements, one had better settle on a way of life that is not the very best we might have chosen, than grow old without determining our choice, and go out of the world, as the greatest part of mankind do, before we have resolved how to live in it. There is but one method of setting our selves at rest in this particular, and that is by adhering steadfastly

fastly to one great end as the chief and ultimate aim of all our pursuits. If we are firmly resolv'd to live up to the dictates of reason, without any regard to wealth, reputation, or the like considerations, any more than as they fall in with our principal design, we may go through life with steadiness and pleasure; but if we act by several broken views, and will not only be virtuous, but wealthy, popular, and every thing that has a value set upon it by the world, we shall live and die in misery and repentance.

One would take more than ordinary care to guard ones self against this particular imperfection, because it is that which our nature very strongly inclines us to; for if we examine our selves thoroughly, we shall find that we are the most changeable Beings in the universe. In respect of our understanding, we often embrace and reject the very same opinions; whereas Beings above and beneath us have probably no opinions at all, or at least no waverings and uncertainties in those they have. Our superiors are guided by intuition, and our inferiors by instinct. In respect of our wills, we fall into crimes, and recover out of them, are amiable or odious in the eyes of our great Judge, and pass our whole life in offending and asking pardon. On the contrary, the Beings underneath us are not capable of sinning, nor those above us of repenting. The one is out of the possibilities of duty, and the other fixed in an eternal course of sin, or an eternal course of virtue.

There is scarce a state of life, or stage in it, which does not produce changes and revolutions in the mind of man. Our schemes of thought in infancy are lost in those of youth; these too take a different turn in manhood, 'till old age often leads us back into our former infancy. A new title or an unexpected success throws us out of our selves, and in a manner destroys our identity. A cloudy day or a little sun-shine have as great an influence on many constitutions, as the most real blessings or misfortunes. A dream varies our being, and changes our condition while it lasts; and every passion, not to mention health and sickness, and the greater alterations in body and mind, makes us appear almost different creatures. If a man is so distinguished among other Beings by this infirmity, what can we think of such as make themselves remarkable for it even among their own species? It is a very trifling character to be one of the most variable Beings of the most variable kind, especially if we consider that he who is the great standard of perfection, has in him no shadow of change, but is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever.

As

As this mutability of temper and inconsistency with our selves is the greatest weakness of human nature, so it makes the Person who is remarkable for it, in a very particular manner more ridiculous than any other infirmity whatsoever, as it sets him in a greater variety of foolish lights, and distinguishes him from himself by an opposition of party-coloured characters. The most humorous character in *Horace* is founded upon this unevenness of temper and irregularity of conduct,

— *Sardus habebat*

*Ille Tigellius hoc. Cæsar qui cogere posset,
Si peteret per amicitiam patris, atque suam, non
Quidquam proficeret: Si collibisset, ab ovo
Usque ad mala citaret, Iō Bacche, modo summâ
Voce, modo hâc resonat que chordis quatuor ima.
Nil æquale homini fuit illi: Sæpe velut qui
Currebat fugiens hostem: Persæpe velut qui
Junonis sacra ferret. Habebat sæpe ducentos,
Sæpe decem servos. Modò, reges atque tetrarchas,
Omnia magna loquens. Modò sit mihi mense tripes, et
Concha salis puri, et toga, quæ defendere frigus,
Quamvis crassa, queat. Decies centena dedisses
Huic parco paucis contento, quinque diebus
Nil erat in oculis. Noctes vigilabat ad ipsum
Mane: Diem totam stertebat. Nil fuit unquam
Sic impar sibi———* Hor. Sat. 3. Lib. 1.

Instead of translating this passage in *Horace*, I shall entertain my *English* Reader with the description of a parallel character, that is wonderfully well finished by Mr. *Dryden*, and raised upon the same foundation.

*In the first rank of these did Zimri stand:
A man so various, that he seem'd to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;
Was every thing by starts, and nothing long;
But, in the course of one revolving moon,
Was Chymist, Fidler, Statesman, and Buffoon:
Then all for women, painting, rhiming, drinking:
Besides ten thousand freaks that dy'd in thinking.
Blest madman, who cou'd every hour employ,
With something new to wish, or to enjoy!*

Thurf-