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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

N° 165. Saturday, September 8.

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Their tombs are still to be seen, with a short Latin inscription over them to the following purpose.

Here lie the bodies of father *Francis* and sister *Constance*. They were lovely in their lives, and in their deaths were not divided.

N^o 165. *Saturday, September 8.*

----- *Si forte necesse est,*

Fingere cinctutis non exaudita Cethegis,

Continget: dabiturque licentia sumpta pudenter.

Hor.

I Have often wished, that as in our constitution there are several persons whose business it is to watch over our laws, our liberties and commerce, certain men might be set apart as super-intendants of our language, to hinder any words of a foreign coin from passing among us; and in particular to prohibit any *French* phrases from becoming current in this kingdom, when those of our own stamp are altogether as valuable. The present war has so adulterated our tongue with strange words, that it would be impossible for one of our great-grand-fathers to know what his posterity have been doing, were he to read their exploits in a modern news-paper. Our warriors are very industrious in propagating the *French* language, at the same time that they are so gloriously successful in beating down their power. Our soldiers are men of strong heads for action, and perform such feats as they are not able to express. They want words in their own tongue to tell us what it is they achieve, and therefore send us over accounts of their performances in a jargon of phrases, which they learn among their conquered enemies. They ought however to be provided with Secretaries, and assisted by our foreign Ministers, to tell their story for them in plain *English*, and to let us know in our mother-tongue what it is our brave country-men are about. The *French* would indeed be in the right to publish the news of the present war in *English* phrases, and make their campaigns unintelligible. Their people might flatter themselves that things are not so bad as they really are, were they thus palliated with foreign terms, and thrown into shades and obscurity: but

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the *English* cannot be too clear in their narrative of those actions, which have raised their country to a higher pitch of glory than it ever yet arrived at, and which will be still the more admired, the better they are explained.

For my part, by that time a siege is carried on two or three days, I am altogether lost and bewildered in it, and meet with so many inexplicable difficulties, that I scarce know which side has the better of it, till I am informed by the Tower guns that the place is surrendered. I do indeed make some allowances for this part of the war, fortifications having been foreign inventions, and upon that account abounding in foreign terms. But when we have won battels which may be described in our own language, why are our papers filled with so many unintelligible exploits, and the *French* obliged to lend us a part of their tongue before we can know how they are conquered? They must be made accessary to their own disgrace, as the *Britains* were formerly so artificially wrought in the curtain of the *Roman* theatre, that they seemed to draw it up, in order to give the spectators an opportunity of seeing their own defeat celebrated upon the stage: For so Mr. *Dryden* has translated that verse in *Virgil*,

Atque intertexti tollant aulea Britanni.

*Which interwoven Britains seem to raise,
And shew the triumph that their shame displays.*

The histories of all our former wars are transmitted to us in our vernacular Idiom, to use the phrase of a great modern critick. I do not find in any of our chronicles, that *Edward* the Third ever reconnoitred the enemy, though he often discovered the posture of the *French*, and as often vanquished them in battel. The *Black Prince* passed many a river without the help of pontoons, and filled a ditch with faggots as successfully as the Generals of our times do it with Fascines. Our Commanders lose half their praise, and our people half their joy, by means of those hard words and dark expressions in which our news-papers do so much abound. I have seen many a prudent Citizen, after having read every article, enquire of his next neighbour what news the mail had brought.

I remember in that remarkable year when our country was delivered from the greatest fears and apprehensions, and raised to the greatest height of gladness it had ever felt since it was a nation; I mean the year
of

of *Blenheim*, I had the copy of a letter sent me out of the country, which was written from a young gentleman in the army to his father, a man of a good estate and plain sense: as the letter was very modishly chequered with this modern military eloquence, I shall present my Reader with a copy of it.

S I R,

“ UPON the junction of the *French* and *Bavarian* armies they took
 “ post behind a great morass which they thought impracticable.
 “ Our General the next day sent a party of horse to reconnoitre them
 “ from a little hauteur, at about a quarter of an hour’s distance from the
 “ army, who returned again to the camp unobserved through several de-
 “ files, in one of which they met with a party of *French* that had been
 “ marauding, and made them all prisoners at discretion. The day after
 “ a drum arrived at our camp, with a message which he would commu-
 “ nicate to none but the General; he was followed by a trumpet, who
 “ they say behaved himself very saucily, with a message from the Duke
 “ of *Bavaria*. The next morning our army being divided into two
 “ corps, made a movement towards the enemy: you will hear in the
 “ publick prints how we treated them, with the other circumstances of
 “ that glorious day. I had the good fortune to be in the regiment that
 “ pushed the *Gens d’Arms*. Several *French* battalions, who some say
 “ were a Corps de Reserve, made a show of resistance; but it only
 “ proved a gasconade, for upon our preparing to fill up a little Fossé,
 “ in order to attack them, they beat the Chamade, and sent us *Charte*
 “ *Blanche*. Their Commandant, with a great many other General Of-
 “ ficers, and troops without number, are made prisoners of war, and will
 “ I believe give you a visit in *England*, the Cartel not being yet settled.
 “ Not questioning but these particulars will be very welcome to you, I
 “ congratulate you upon them, and am your most dutiful son, &c.

The father of the young gentleman upon the perusal of the letter found it contained great news, but could not guess what it was. He immediately communicated it to the Curate of the parish, who upon the reading of it, being vexed to see any thing he could not understand, fell into a kind of passion, and told him, that his son had sent him a letter that was neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. I wish, says he, the Captain may be *compos mentis*, he talks of a saucy trumpet, and a drum that carries messages; then who is this *Charte Blanche*? he must either ban-

ter us, or he is out of his senses. The father, who always looked upon the Curate as a learned man, began to fret inwardly at his son's usage, and producing a letter which he had written to him about three posts afore, You see here, says he, when he writes for money, he knows how to speak intelligibly enough; there is no man in *England* can express himself clearer, when he wants a new furniture for his horse. In short, the old man was so puzzled upon the point, that it might have fared ill with his son, had he not seen all the prints about three days after filled with the same terms of art, and that *Charles* only writ like other men.

N^o 166. Monday, September 10.

----- *Quod nec Jovis ira, nec ignis,
Nec poterit ferrum, nec edax abolere vetustas.* Ovid.

A *Aristotle* tells us, that the world is a copy or transcript of those ideas which are in the mind of the first Being, and those ideas which are in the mind of man, are a transcript of the world: to this we may add, that words are the transcript of those ideas which are in the mind of man, and that writing or printing is the transcript of words.

As the supreme Being has expressed, and as it were printed his ideas in the Creation, men express their ideas in books, which by this great invention of these latter ages, may last as long as the Sun and Moon, and perish only in the general wreck of nature. Thus *Cowley* in his Poem on the Resurrection, mentioning the destruction of the universe, has those admirable lines.

*Now all the wide extended sky,
And all th' harmonious worlds on high,
And Virgil's sacred work shall die.*

There is no other method of fixing those thoughts which arise and disappear in the mind of man, and transmitting them to the last periods of time; no other method of giving a permanency to our ideas, and pre-