



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

N° 169. Thursday, September 13.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53621](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53621)

grew desperate. The Author however recovered, and has since written two or three other tracts with the same spirit, and very luckily for his poor soul with the same success.

N^o 169. *Thursday, September 13.*

*Sic vita erat : facile omnes perferre ac pati :
 Cum quibus erat cunq̄ue una, his sese dedere,
 Eorum obsequi studiis : adversus nemini ;
 Nunquam præponens se aliis. Ita facillime
 Sine invidia invenias laudem.-----*

Ter. And.

MAN is subject to innumerable pains and sorrows by the very condition of humanity, and yet, as if Nature had not sown evils enough in life, we are continually adding grief to grief, and aggravating the common calamity by our cruel treatment of one another. Every man's natural weight of affliction is still made more heavy by the envy, malice, treachery or injustice of his neighbour. At the same time that the storm beats on the whole Species, we are falling foul upon one another.

Half the misery of human life might be extinguished, would men alleviate the general curse they lye under, by mutual offices of compassion, benevolence and humanity. There is nothing therefore which we ought more to encourage in our selves and others, than the disposition of mind which in our language goes under the title of Good-nature, and which I shall chuse for the subject of this day's Speculation.

Good-nature is more agreeable in conversation than Wit, and gives a certain air to the countenance which is more amiable than Beauty. It shews virtue in the fairest light, takes off in some measure from the deformity of vice, and makes even folly and impertinence supportable.

There is no society or conversation to be kept up in the world without Good-nature, or something which must bear its appearance, and supply its place. For this reason mankind have been forced to invent a kind
of

of artificial humanity, which is what we express by the word *Good Breeding*. For if we examine thoroughly the idea of what we call so, we shall find it to be nothing else but an imitation and mimickry of Good-nature, or in other terms, affability, complaisance and easiness of temper reduced into an art.

These exterior shows and appearances of humanity render a man wonderfully popular and beloved, when they are founded upon a real Good-nature; but without it are like Hypocrisie in Religion, or a bare form of holiness, which when it is discovered makes a man more detestable than professed Impiety.

Good-nature is generally born with us; health, prosperity and kind treatment from the world are great cherishers of it where they find it, but nothing is capable of forcing it up, where it does not grow of it self. It is one of the blessings of a happy constitution, which education may improve but not produce.

Xenophon in the life of his imaginary Prince, whom he describes as a pattern for real ones, is always celebrating the (*Philanthropy* or) Good-nature of his Hero, which he tells us he brought into the world with him, and gives many remarkable instances of it in his childhood, as well as in all the several parts of his life. Nay, on his death-bed, he describes him as being pleased, that while his Soul returned to him who made it, his Body should incorporate with the Great Mother of all things, and by that means become beneficial to mankind. For which reason he gives his sons a positive order not to enshrine it in gold or silver, but to lay it in the earth as soon as the life was gone out of it.

An instance of such an overflowing of humanity, such an exuberant love to mankind, could not have entred into the imagination of a writer, who had not a soul filled with great ideas, and a general benevolence to mankind.

In that celebrated passage of *Salust*, where *Cæsar* and *Cato* are placed in such beautiful, but opposite lights; *Cæsar's* character is chiefly made up of Good-nature, as it shewed it self in all its forms towards his friends or his enemies, his servants or dependants, the guilty or the distressed. As for *Cato's* character, it is rather awful than amiable. Justice seems most agreeable to the nature of God, and Mercy to that of Man. A Being who has nothing to pardon in himself, may reward every man according to his works; but he whose very best actions must be seen with grains of allowance, cannot be too mild, moderate and forgiving. For this reason, among all the monstrous characters in human nature, there is

is none so odious, nor indeed so exquisitely ridiculous, as that of a rigid severe temper in a worthless man.

This part of Good-nature, however, which consists in the pardoning and over-looking of faults, is to be exercised only in doing our selves Justice, and that too in the ordinary commerce and occurrences of life; for in the publick administrations of Justice, Mercy to one may be Cruelty to others.

It is grown almost into a maxim, that Good-natured men are not always men of the most wit. The observation, in my opinion, has no foundation in Nature. The greatest Wits I have conversed with are men eminent for their Humanity. I take therefore this remark to have been occasioned by two reasons. First, because Ill-nature among ordinary observers passes for Wit. A spiteful saying gratifies so many little passions in those who hear it, that it generally meets with a good reception. The laugh rises upon it, and the man who utters it is looked upon as a shrewd Satyrist. This may be one reason, why a great many pleasant companions appear so surprizingly dull, when they have endeavoured to be merry in print; the publick being more just than private clubs or assemblies, in distinguishing between what is Wit and what is Ill-nature.

Another reason why the Good-natured man may sometimes bring his wit in question, is perhaps, because he is apt to be moved with compassion for those misfortunes and infirmities, which another would turn into ridicule, and by that means gain the reputation of a Wit. The Ill-natured man, though but of equal parts, gives himself a larger field to expatiate in, he exposes the failings in human nature which the other would cast a veil over, laughs at vices which the other either excuses or conceals, gives utterance to reflections which the other stifles, falls indifferently upon friends or enemies, exposes the person who has obliged him, and in short sticks at nothing that may establish his character as a Wit. It is no wonder therefore he succeeds in it better than the man of humanity, as a person who makes use of indirect methods is more likely to grow rich than the fair trader.

