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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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-----*Quis enim bonus, aut face dignus
Arcanâ, qualem Cereris vult esse sacerdos,
Ulla aliena sibi credat mala ?-----*

Juv.

IN one of my last week's papers I treated of Good-nature, as it is the effect of constitution; I shall now speak of it as it is a moral virtue. The first may make a man easy in himself and agreeable to others, but implies no merit in him that is possessed of it. A man is no more to be praised upon this account, than because he has a regular pulse or a good digestion. This Good-nature however in the constitution, which Mr. *Dryden* somewhere calls a *Milkiness of Blood*, is an admirable ground-work for the other. In order therefore to try our Good-nature, whether it arises from the body or the mind, whether it be founded in the animal or rational part of our Nature, in a word, whether it be such as is entitled to any other reward, besides that secret satisfaction and contentment of mind which is essential to it, and the kind reception it procures us in the world, we must examine it by the following rules.

First, Whether it acts with steadiness and uniformity in sickness and in health, in prosperity and in adversity; if otherwise, it is to be looked upon as nothing else but an irradiation of the mind from some new supply of spirits, or a more kindly circulation of the blood. Sir *Francis Bacon* mentions a cunning Solicitor, who would never ask a favour of a Great man before dinner; but took care to prefer his petition at a time when the party petitioned had his mind free from care, and his appetites in good humour. Such a transient temporary Good-nature as this, is not that *Philanthropic*, that love of mankind, which deserves the title of a moral virtue.

The next way of a man's bringing his Good-nature to the test, is, to consider whether it operates according to the rules of reason and duty:

For

For if, notwithstanding its general benevolence to mankind, it makes no distinction between its objects, if it exerts it self promiscuously towards the deserving and the undeserving, if it relieves alike the idle and the indigent, if it gives it self up to the first petitioner, and lights upon any one rather by accident than choice, it may pass for an amiable instinct, but must not assume the name of a moral virtue.

The third trial of Good-nature will be, the examining our selves, whether or no we are able to exert it to our own disadvantage, and employ it on proper objects, notwithstanding any little pain, want, or inconvenience which may arise to our selves from it: in a word, whether we are willing to risque any part of our fortune, or reputation, our health or ease, for the benefit of mankind. Among all these expressions of Good-nature, I shall single out that which goes under the general name of Charity, as it consists in relieving the indigent; that being a trial of this kind which offers it self to us almost at all times and in every place.

I should propose it as a rule to every one, who is provided with any competency of fortune more than sufficient for the necessaries of life, to lay aside a certain proportion of his income for the use of the poor. This I would look upon as an offering to him who has a right to the whole, for the use of those whom, in the passage hereafter mentioned, he has described as his own representatives upon earth. At the same time we should manage our charity with such prudence and caution, that we may not hurt our own friends or relations whilst we are doing good to those who are strangers to us.

This may possibly be explained better by an example than by a rule.

Eugenius is a man of universal Good-nature, and generous beyond the extent of his fortune; but withal so prudent in the oeconomy of his affairs, that what goes out in charity is made up by good management. *Eugenius* has what the world calls two hundred pounds a year; but never values himself above ninescore, as not thinking he has a right to the tenth part, which he always appropriates to charitable uses. To this sum he frequently makes other voluntary additions, insomuch that in a good year, for such he accounts those in which he has been able to make greater bounties than ordinary, he has given above twice the sum to the sickly and indigent. *Eugenius* prescribes to himself many particular days of fasting and abstinence, in order to encrease his private-bank of charity and sets aside what would be the current expences of those times for the poor. He often goes afoot where his business calls him, and at the end of his walk has given a shilling, which in his ordinary methods of expence

pence would have gone for coach-hire, to the first necessitous person that has fallen in his way. I have known him, when he has been going to a Play or an Opera, divert the money which was designed for that purpose, upon an object of charity whom he has met with in the street; and afterwards pass his evening in a coffee-house, or at a friend's fireside, with much greater satisfaction to himself than he could have received from the most exquisite entertainments of the Theatre. By these means he is generous without impoverishing himself, and enjoys his estate by making it the property of others.

There are few men so cramped in their private affairs, who may not be charitable after this manner, without any disadvantage to themselves, or prejudice to their families. It is but sometimes sacrificing a diversion or convenience to the poor, and turning the usual course of our expences into a better channel. This is, I think, not only the most prudent and convenient, but the most meritorious piece of charity, which we can put in practice. By this method we in some measure share the necessities of the poor at the same time that we relieve them, and make our selves not only their patrons, but their fellow-sufferers.

Sir *Thomas Brown*, in the last part of his *Religio Medici*, in which he describes his charity in several heroick instances, and with a noble heat of sentiments mentions that verse in the Proverbs of *Solomon*, *He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord*: "There is more Rhetorick in that one sentence, says he, than in a Library of Sermons; and indeed if those sentences were understood by the Reader with the same emphasis as they are delivered by the Author, we needed not those volumes of instructions, but might be honest by an epitome.

This passage of scripture is indeed wonderfully perswasive; but I think the same thought is carried much further in the New Testament, where our Saviour tells us in a most pathetick manner, that he shall hereafter regard the cloathing of the naked, the feeding of the hungry, and the visiting of the imprisoned as offices done to himself, and reward them accordingly. Pursuant to those passages in holy Scripture, I have somewhere met with the epitaph of a charitable man, which has very much pleased me. I cannot recollect the words, but the sense of it is to this purpose: What I spent I lost; what I possessed is left to others; what I gave away remains with me.

Since I am thus insensibly engaged in sacred Writ, I cannot forbear making an extract of several passages which I have always read with great delight in the book of *Job*. It is the account which that holy man gives
of

of his behaviour in the days of his prosperity, and if considered only as a humane composition, is a finer picture of a charitable and good-natured man than is to be met with in any other Author.

Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me: when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness: when the Almighty was yet with me; when my children were about me: when I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured out rivers of oyl.

When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me it gave witness to me. Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widows heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame; I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not, I searched out. Did I not weep for him that was in trouble, was not my soul grieved for the poor? Let me be weighed in an even ballance, that God may know mine integrity. If I did despise the cause of my man-servant or of my maid-servant when they contended with me: what then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb, make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel my self alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof: If I have seen any perish for want of cloathing, or any poor without covering: If his loyns have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep: If I have lift up my hand against the fatherless when I saw my help in the gate; then let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone. If I have rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lift up my self when evil found him: (neither have I suffered my mouth to sin, by wishing a curse to his soul.) The stranger did not lodge in the street; but I opened my doors to the traveller. If my land cry against me, or that the furrows likewise thereof complain: If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life: Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley.