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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N^o 179. Tuesday, September 25:

*Centuriae seniorum agitant expertia frugis:
Celsi prætereunt austera poemata Rhannes.
Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,
Lectorem delectando, pariterque monendo.*

Hor.

I May cast my Readers under two general divisions, the *Mercurial* and the *Saturnine*. The first are the gay part of my disciples, who require Speculations of wit and humour; the others are those of a more solemn and sober turn, who find no pleasure but in papers of Morality and sound sense. The former call every thing that is serious Stupid; the latter look upon every thing as impertinent that is ludicrous. Were I always grave, one half of my Readers would fall off from me: were I always merry, I should lose the other. I make it therefore my endeavour to find out entertainments for both kinds, and by that means perhaps consult the good of both, more than I should do, did I always write to the particular taste of either. As they neither of them know what I proceed upon, the sprightly Reader, who takes up my paper in order to be diverted, very often finds himself engaged unawares in a serious and profitable course of thinking; as on the contrary, the thoughtful man, who perhaps may hope to find something solid, and full of deep reflection, is very often insensibly betrayed into a fit of mirth. In a word, the Reader sits down to my entertainment without knowing his bill of fare, and has therefore at least the pleasure of hoping there may be a dish to his palate.

I must confess, were I left to my self, I would rather aim at instructing than diverting; but if we will be useful to the world, we must take it as we find it. Authors of professed severity discourage the looser part of mankind from having any thing to do with their writings. A man must have virtue in him, before he will enter upon the reading of a *Seneca* or an *Epictetus*. The very title of a moral treatise has something in it austere and shocking to the careless and inconsiderate. For

For this reason several unthinking persons fall in my way, who would give no attention to lectures delivered with a religious seriousness, or a philosophick gravity. They are insnared into sentiments of wisdom and virtue when they do not think of it; and if by that means they arrive only at such a degree of consideration as may dispose them to listen to more studied and elaborate discourses, I shall not think my Speculations useless. I might likewise observe, that the gloominess in which sometimes the minds of the best men are involved, very often stands in need of such little incitements to mirth and laughter as are apt to disperse melancholy, and put our faculties in good humour. To which some will add, that the *British* climate more than any other makes entertainments of this nature in a manner necessary.

If what I have here said does not recommend, it will at least excuse, the variety of my Speculations. I would not willingly laugh but in order to instruct, or if I sometimes fail in this point, when my mirth ceases to be instructive, it shall never cease to be innocent. A scrupulous conduct in this particular, has, perhaps, more merit in it than the generality of readers imagine; did they know how many thoughts occur in a point of humour, which a discreet author in modesty suppresses; how many strokes of raillery present themselves, which could not fail to please the ordinary taste of mankind, but are stifled in their birth by reason of some remote tendency which they carry in them to corrupt the minds of those who read them; did they know how many glances of ill-nature are industriously avoided for fear of doing injury to the reputation of another, they would be apt to think kindly of those writers who endeavour to make themselves diverting without being immoral. One may apply to these authors that passage in *Waller*,

Poets lose half the praise they would have got,

Were it but known what they discreetly blot.

As nothing is more easy than to be a wit with all the above-mentioned liberties, it requires some genius and invention to appear such without them.

What I have here said is not only in regard to the public, but with an eye to my particular correspondent who has sent me the following letter, which I have castrated in some places upon these considerations.

S I R,

“ HAVING lately seen your discourse upon a match of Grinning, I
 “ cannot forbear giving you an account of a Whistling match,
 S 2 “ which,

“ which, with many others, I was entertained with about three years since at
 “ the *Bath*. The prize was a guinea, to be conferred upon the ablest whist-
 “ ler, that is, on him who could whistle clearest, and go through his tune
 “ without laughing, to which at the same time he was provoked by the
 “ antic postures of a *Merry-Andrew*, who was to stand upon the stage
 “ and play his tricks in the eye of the performer. There were three
 “ competitors for the guinea. The first was a plow-man of a very promi-
 “ sing aspect; his features were steady, and his muscles composed in so
 “ inflexible a stupidity, that upon his first appearance every one gave the
 “ guinea for lost. The pickled-herring however found the way to shake
 “ him, for upon his whistling a country jig, this unlucky wagg danced
 “ to it with such variety of distortions and grimaces, that the country-
 “ man could not forbear smiling upon him, and by that means spoiled
 “ his whistle and lost the prize.

“ The next that mounted the stage was an under-citizen of the *Bath*,
 “ a person remarkable among the inferior people of that place for his
 “ great wisdom and his broad band. He contracted his mouth with
 “ much gravity, and, that he might dispose his mind to be more serious
 “ than ordinary, begun the tune of *the children in the wood*, and went
 “ through part of it with good success; when on a sudden the wit at his
 “ elbow, who had appeared wonderfully grave and attentive for some
 “ time, gave him a touch upon the left shoulder, and stared him in the
 “ face with so bewitching a grin, that the whistler relaxed his fibres
 “ into a kind of simper, and at length burst out into an open laugh. The
 “ third who entered the lists was a foot-man, who in defiance of the *Mer-
 “ ry-Andrew*, and all his arts, whistled a *Scotch* tune and an *Italian So-
 “ nata*, with so settled a countenance, that he bore away the prize, to
 “ the great admiration of some hundreds of persons, who, as well as my
 “ self, were present at this trial of skill. Now, Sir, I humbly conceive,
 “ whatever you have determined of the grinners, the whistlers ought to
 “ be encouraged, not only as their art is practised without distortion, but
 “ as it improves country music, promotes gravity, and teaches ordinary
 “ people to keep their countenances, if they see any thing ridiculous in
 “ their betters; besides that, it seems an entertainment very particular-
 “ ly adapted to the *Bath*, as it is usual for a rider to whistle to his horse
 “ when he would make his waters pass.

I am, SIR, &c.

P O S T-

POSTSCRIPT.

“ After you have dispatched these two important points of Grinning and Whistling, I hope you will oblige the world with some reflections upon Yawning, as I have seen it practised on a twelfth-night among other Christmas gambols, at the house of a very worthy gentleman, who always entertains his tenants at that time of the year. They yawn for a *Cheshire* cheese, and begin about mid-night, when the whole company is disposed to be drowsy. He that yawns widest, and at the same time so naturally as to produce the most yawns among the spectators, carries home the cheese. If you handle this subject as you ought, I question not but your paper will fet half the kingdom yawning, though I dare promise you it will never make any body fall asleep.

N^o 181.*Thursday, September 27.*

His lacrymis vitam damus, et miserescimur ultrò. Virg.

I Am more pleased with a letter that is filled with touches of nature than of wit. The following one is of this kind.

S I R,

“ AMONG all the distresses which happen in families, I do not remember that you have touched upon the marriage of children without the consent of their parents. I am one of these unfortunate persons. I was about fifteen when I took the liberty to chuse for my self; and have ever since languished under the displeasure of an inexorable father, who, though he sees me happy in the best of husbands, and blessed with very fine children, can never be prevailed upon to forgive me. He was so kind to me before this unhappy accident, that indeed it makes my breach of duty, in some measure, inexcusable; and at the same time creates in me such a tendernefs towards him, that I love him above all things, and would die to be reconciled to him. I have thrown my self at his feet, and besought him with tears to par-

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