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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N° 207. Saturday, October 27.

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“ and that the word *Glass* should be *Bottle*; and therefore has ordered
 “ me to inform you of this mistake, and to desire you to publish the
 “ following *errata*: In the paper of *Saturday, October 13, Col. 3, Line*
 “ 11, for *Glass* read *Bottle*.

Yours, Robin Good-fellow.

N° 207. *Saturday, October 27.*

*Omnibus in terris, quæ sunt à Gadibus usque
 Auroram et Gangem, pauci dignoscere possunt
 Vera bona, atque illis multùm diversa, remotâ
 Erroris nebulâ-----*

Juv.

IN my last *Saturday's* paper I laid down some thoughts upon Devotion in general, and shall here shew what were the notions of the most refined heathens on this subject, as they are represented in *Plato's* dialogue upon prayer, entitled, *Alcibiades the Second*, which doubtless gave occasion to *Juvenal's* tenth Satyr, and to the second Satyr of *Perfius*; as the last of these Authors has almost transcribed the preceding dialogue, entitled, *Alcibiades the First*, in his fourth Satyr.

The Speakers in this dialogue upon prayer, are *Socrates* and *Alcibiades*; and the substance of it (when drawn together out of the intricacies and digressions) as follows.

Socrates meeting his Pupil *Alcibiades*, as he was going to his devotions, and observing his eyes to be fixed upon the earth with great seriousness and attention, tells him, that he had reason to be thoughtful on that occasion, since it was possible for a man to bring down evils upon himself by his own prayers, and that those things which the gods send him in answer to his petitions might turn to his destruction: this, says he, may not only happen when a man prays for what he knows is mischievous in its own nature, as *Oedipus* implored the gods to sow dissension between his sons; but when he prays for what he believes would be for his good, and against what he believes would be to his detriment. This the Philosopher

Iofopher shews muſt neceſſarily happen among us, ſince moſt men are blinded with ignorance, prejudice, or paſſion, which hinder them from ſeeing ſuch things as are really beneficial to them. For an inſtance, he asks *Alcibiades*, Whether he would not be thoroughly pleaſed if that God to whom he was going to addreſs himſelf, ſhould promiſe to make him the Sovereign of the whole earth? *Alcibiades* answers, That he ſhould doubtleſs look upon ſuch a promiſe as the greateſt favour that could be beſtowed upon him. *Socrates* then asks him, If after receiving this great favour he would be content to loſe his life? or if he would receive it though he was ſure he would make an ill uſe of it? To both which queſtions *Alcibiades* answers in the negative. *Socrates* then ſhews him from the examples of others, how theſe might very probably be the effects of ſuch a bleſſing. He then adds, that other reputed pieces of good fortune, as that of having a ſon, or procuring the higheſt poſt in a government, are ſubject to the like fatal conſequences; which nevertheleſs, ſays he, men ardently deſire, and would not fail to pray for, if they thought their prayers might be effectual for the obtaining of them.

Having eſtabliſhed this great point, That all the moſt apparent bleſſings in this life are obnoxious to ſuch dreadful conſequences, and that no man knows what in its events would prove to him a bleſſing or a curſe, he teaches *Alcibiades* after what manner he ought to pray.

In the firſt place, he recommends to him, as the Model of his devotion, a ſhort prayer, which a *Greek Poet* compoſed for the uſe of his friends, in the following words; *O Jupiter, give us thoſe things which are good for us, whether they are ſuch things as we pray for, or ſuch things as we do not pray for; and remove from us thoſe things which are hurtful, though they are ſuch things as we pray for.*

In the ſecond place, that his Diſciple may ask ſuch things as are expedient for him, he ſhews him, that it is abſolutely neceſſary to apply himſelf to the ſtudy of true wiſdom, and to the knowledge of that which is his chief good, and the moſt ſuitable to the excellency of his nature.

In the third and laſt place he informs him, that the beſt methods he could make uſe of to draw down bleſſings upon himſelf, and to render his prayers acceptable, would be to live in a conſtant practice of his duty towards the gods, and towards men. Under this head he very much recommends a form of prayer the *Lacedemonians* made uſe of, in which they petition the gods, *to give them all good things, ſo long as they are virtuous.* Under this head likewiſe he gives a very remarkable account of an Oracle to the following purpoſe.

When

When the *Athenians* in the war with the *Lacedemonians* received many defeats both by sea and land, they sent a message to the Oracle of *Jupiter Ammon*, to ask the reason why they who erected so many temples to the gods, and adorned them with such costly offerings; why they who had instituted so many festivals, and accompanied them with such pomps and ceremonies; in short, why they who had slain so many hecatombs at their Altars, should be less successful than the *Lacedemonians*, who fell so short of them in all these particulars. To this, says he, the Oracle made the following reply; *I am better pleased with the prayer of the Lacedemonians, than with all the oblations of the Greeks.* As this prayer implied and encouraged virtue in those who made it; the Philosopher proceeds to shew how the most vicious man might be devout, so far as victims could make him, but that his offerings were regarded by the gods as bribes, and his petitions as blasphemies. He likewise quotes on this occasion two verses out of *Homer*, in which the Poet says, that the scent of the *Trojan* sacrifices was carried up to heaven by the winds; but that it was not acceptable to the gods, who were displeas'd with *Priam* and all his people.

The conclusion of this dialogue is very remarkable. *Socrates* having deterred *Alcibiades* from the prayers and sacrifices which he was going to offer, by setting forth the above-mentioned difficulties of performing that duty as he ought, adds these words, *We must therefore wait till such time as we may learn how to behave our selves towards the gods, and towards men.* But when will that time come, says *Alcibiades*, and who is it that will instruct us? for I would fain see this man, whoever he is. It is one, says *Socrates*, who takes care of you; but as *Homer* tells us, that *Minerva* removed the Mist from *Diomedes* his eyes, that he might plainly discover both gods and men; so the darkness that hangs upon your mind must be removed, before you are able to discern what is good and what is evil. Let him remove from my mind, says *Alcibiades*, the darkness, and what else he pleases; I am determin'd to refuse nothing he shall order me, whoever he is, so that I may become the better man by it. The remaining part of this dialogue is very obscure: there is something in it that would make us think *Socrates* hinted at himself, when he spoke of this divine teacher who was to come into the world, did not he own that he himself was in this respect as much at a loss, and in as great distress as the rest of mankind.

Some learned men look upon this conclusion as a prediction of our Saviour, or at least that *Socrates*, like the High-priest, prophesied unknowingly,

ingly, and pointed at that divine teacher who was to come into the world some ages after him. However that may be, we find that this great Philosopher saw, by the light of reason, that it was suitable to the goodness of the divine nature, to send a person into the world who should instruct mankind in the duties of religion, and, in particular, teach them how to pray.

Whoever reads this abstract of *Plato's* discourse on prayer, will, I believe, naturally make this reflection, That the great Founder of our religion, as well by his own example, as in the form of prayer which he taught his Disciples, did not only keep up to those rules which the light of nature had suggested to this great Philosopher, but instructed his Disciples in the whole extent of this duty, as well as of all others. He directed them to the proper object of adoration, and taught them, according to the third rule above-mentioned, to apply themselves to him in their closets, without show or ostentation, and to worship him in Spirit and in Truth. As the *Lacedemonians* in their form of prayer implored the Gods in general to give them all good things so long as they were virtuous, we ask in particular *that our offences may be forgiven, as we forgive those of others*. If we look into the second rule which *Socrates* has prescribed, namely, That we should apply our selves to the knowledge of such things as are best for us, this too is explained at large in the doctrines of the Gospel, where we are taught in several instances to regard those things as curses, which appear as blessings in the eye of the world; and on the contrary, to esteem those things as blessings, which to the generality of mankind appear as curses. Thus in the form which is prescribed to us, we only pray for that happiness which is our chief good, and the great end of our existence, when we petition the supreme Being for *the coming of his kingdom*, being solicitous for no other temporal blessing but our *daily sustenance*. On the other side, we pray against nothing but sin, and against *evil* in general, leaving it with omniscience to determine what is really such. If we look into the first of *Socrates* his rules of Prayer, in which he recommends the above-mentioned form of the ancient Poet, we find that Form not only comprehended, but very much improved in the petition, wherein we pray to the supreme Being that *his Will may be done*: which is of the same force with that Form which our Saviour used, when he prayed against the most painful and most ignominious of deaths, *Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done*. This comprehensive petition is the most humble, as well as the most prudent, that can be offered up from the creature to his Creator, as it sup-

poses

poses the supreme Being wills nothing but what is for our good, and that he knows better than our selves what is so.

N^o 209. *Tuesday, October 30.*

Τυωακὸς ἐδὲ χρῆμι' ἀνὴρ λυλζεταε
Ἐδλῆς ἀμειων, ἐδὲ ῥίγιον κακῆς.

Simonides.

THERE are no Authors I am more pleased with, than those who shew humane nature in a variety of views, and describe the several ages of the world in their different manners. A Reader cannot be more rationally entertained, than by comparing the virtues and vices of his own times, with those which prevailed in the times of his fore-fathers; and drawing a parallel in his mind between his own private character, and that of other persons, whether of his own age, or of the ages that went before him. The contemplation of mankind under these changeable colours, is apt to shame us out of any particular vice, or animate us to any particular virtue; to make us pleased or displeased with our selves in the most proper points, to clear our minds of prejudice and prepossession, and rectify that narrowness of temper which inclines us to think amiss of those who differ from our selves.

If we look into the manners of the most remote ages of the world, we discover humane nature in her simplicity; and the more we come downward towards our own times, may observe her hiding her self in artifices and refinements, polished insensibly out of her original plainness, and at length entirely lost under form and ceremony, and (what we call) good breeding. Read the accounts of men and women as they are given us by the most ancient writers, both sacred and prophane, and you would think you were reading the history of another species.

Among the writers of antiquity, there are none who instruct us more openly in the manners of their respective times in which they lived, than those who have employed themselves in satyr, under what dress soever it may appear; as there are no other Authors whose province it is to enter