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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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“ pose you would make us a parcel of poor-spirited tame infipid crea-
 “ tures; but, Sir, I would have you to know, we have as good passions
 “ in us as your self, and that a woman was never designed to be a milk-
 “ sop.

MARTHA TEMPEST.

N^o 213. *Saturday, November 3.*

----- *Mens sibi conscia recti.*

Virg.

IT is the great art and secret of Christianity, if I may use that phrase, to manage our actions to the best advantage, and direct them in such a manner, that every thing we do may turn to account at that great day, when every thing we have done will be set before us.

In order to give this consideration its full weight, we may cast all our actions under the division of such as are in themselves either good, evil, or indifferent. If we divide our intentions after the same manner, and consider them with regard to our actions, we may discover that great art and secret of religion which I have here mentioned.

A good intention joined to a good action, gives it its proper force and efficacy; joined to an evil action, extenuates its malignity, and in some cases may take it wholly away; and joined to an indifferent action, turns it to virtue, and makes it meritorious as far as humane actions can be so.

In the next place, to consider in the same manner the influence of an evil intention upon our actions. An evil intention perverts the best of actions, and makes them in reality what the fathers with a witty kind of zeal have termed the virtues of the heathen world, so many *shining sins*. It destroys the innocence of an indifferent action, and gives an evil action all possible blackness and horror, or in the emphatical language of sacred Writ, makes *sin exceeding sinful*.

If, in the last place, we consider the nature of an indifferent intention, we shall find that it destroys the merit of a good action; abates, but never takes away, the malignity of an evil action; and leaves an indifferent action in its natural state of indifference. It

It is therefore of unspeakable advantage to possess our minds with an habitual good intention, and to aim all our thoughts, words and actions at some laudable end, whether it be the glory of our Maker, the good of mankind, or the benefit of our own souls.

This is a sort of thrift or good-husbandry in moral life, which does not throw away any single action, but makes every one go as far as it can. It multiplies the means of Salvation, encreases the number of our virtues, and diminishes that of our vices.

There is something very devout, though not so solid, in *Acosta's* answer to *Limborch*, who objects to him the multiplicity of ceremonies in the *Jewish* religion, as washings, dresses, meats, purgations, and the like. The reply with the *Jew* makes upon this occasion, is, to the best of my remembrance, as follows: "There are not duties enough (says he) in the essential parts of the law for a zealous and active obedience. Time, place, and person are requisite, before you have an opportunity of putting a moral virtue into practice. We have therefore, says he, enlarged the sphere of our duty, and made many things which are in themselves in different a part of our religion, that we may have more occasion of shewing our love to God, and in all the circumstances of life be doing something to please him.

Monsieur St. Evremont has endeavoured to palliate the superstitions of the Roman-catholick religion with the same kind of apology, where he pretends to consider the different spirit of the Papists and the Calvinists, as to the great points wherein they disagree. He tells us, that the former are actuated by love, and the other by fear; and that in their expressions of duty and devotion towards the supreme Being, the former seem particularly careful to do every thing which may possibly please him, and the other to abstain from every thing that may possibly displease him.

But notwithstanding this plausible reason with which both the Jew and the Roman-catholick would excuse their respective superstitions, it is certain there is something in them very pernicious to mankind, and destructive to religion; because the injunction of superfluous ceremonies makes such actions duties, as were before indifferent, and by that means renders religion more burthensome and difficult than it is in its own nature, betrays many into sins of Omission which they would not otherwise be guilty of, and fixes the minds of the vulgar to the shadowy unessential points, instead of the more weighty and more important matters of the law.

This

This zealous and active obedience however takes place in the great point we are recommending; for if, instead of prescribing to our selves indifferent actions as duties, we apply a good intention to all our most indifferent actions, we make our very existence one continued act of obedience; we turn our diversions and amusements to our eternal advantage, and are pleasing him (whom we are made to please) in all the circumstances and occurrences of life.

It is this excellent frame of mind, this *holy officiousness* (if I may be allowed to call it such) which is recommended to us by the Apostle in that uncommon precept, wherein he directs us to propose to our selves the glory of our Creator in all our most indifferent actions, *whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do.*

A person therefore who is possessed with such an habitual good intention, as that which I have been here speaking of, enters upon no single circumstance of life, without considering it as well pleasing to the great Author of his Being, conformable to the dictates of reason, suitable to human nature in general, or to the particular station in which Providence has placed him. He lives in a perpetual sense of the divine presence, regards himself as acting, in the whole course of his existence, under the observation and inspection of that Being, who is privy to all his motions and all his thoughts, who knows his *down-sitting and his up-rising, who is about his path, and about his bed, and spieth out all his ways.* In a word, he remembers that the eye of his Judge is always upon him, and in every action he reflects that he is doing what is commanded or allowed by Him who will hereafter either reward or punish it. This was the character of those holy men of old, who in that beautiful phrase of scripture are said to have *walked with God.*

When I employ my self upon a paper of morality, I generally consider how I may recommend the particular virtue which I treat of, by the precepts or examples of the ancient heathens; by that means, if possible, to shame those who have greater advantages of knowing their duty, and therefore greater obligations to perform it, into a better course of life: besides that, many among us are unreasonably disposed to give a fairer hearing to a pagan philosopher, than to a christian writer.

I shall therefore produce an instance of this excellent frame of mind in a speech of *Socrates*, which is quoted by *Erasmus*. This great Philosopher on the day of his execution, a little before the draught of poison was brought to him, entertaining his friends with a discourse on the immortality of the Soul, has these words: *Whether or no God will ap-*

prove of my actions, I know not; but this I am sure of, that I have at all times made it my endeavour to please him, and I have a good hope that this my endeavour will be accepted by him. We find in these words of that great man the habitual good intention which I would here inculcate, and with which that divine Philosopher always acted. I shall only add, that *Erasmus*, who was an unbigotted Roman Catholick, was so much transported with this passage of *Socrates*, that he could scarce forbear looking upon him as a Saint, and desiring him to pray for him; or as that ingenious and learned writer has expressed himself in a much more lively manner, *When I reflect on such a speech pronounced by such a person, I can scarce forbear crying out, Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis. O holy Socrates, pray for us.*

N^o 215. Tuesday, November 6.

----- *Ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes*
Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros.

Ov.

I Consider an humane Soul without education like marble in the quarry, which shews none of its inherent beauties, till the skill of the polisher fetches out the colours, makes the surface shine, and discovers every ornamental cloud, spot and vein that runs through the body of it. Education, after the same manner, when it works upon a noble mind, draws out to view every latent virtue and perfection, which without such helps are never able to make their appearance.

If my Reader will give me leave to change the allusion so soon upon him, I shall make use of the same instance to illustrate the force of education, which *Aristotle* has brought to explain his doctrine of substantial forms, when he tells us that a statue lies hid in a block of marble; and that the art of the statuary only clears away the superfluous matter, and removes the rubbish. The figure is in the stone, the Sculptor only finds it. What Sculpture is to a block of marble, Education is to an humane Soul. The Philosopher, the Saint, or the Hero, the wise, the good, or the