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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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ledge of our selves, and consequently to recover our souls out of the vices ignorance, and prejudice which naturally cleave to them. I have all along profess'd my self in this paper a promoter of these great ends; and I flatter my self that I do from day to day contribute something to the polishing of men's minds; at least my design is laudable, whatever the execution may be. I must confess I am not a little encouraged in it by many letters which I receive from unknown hands, in approbation of my endeavours; and must take this opportunity of returning my thanks to those who write them, and excusing my self for not inserting several of them in my papers, which I am sensible would be a very great ornament to them. Should I publish the praises which are so well penned, they would do honour to the persons who write them, but my publishing of them would I fear be a sufficient instance to the world, that I did not deserve them.

N^o 219. *Saturday, November 10.*

Vix ea nostra voco-----

Ov.

THERE are but few men who are not ambitious of distinguishing themselves in the nation or country where they live, and of growing considerable among those with whom they converse. There is a kind of grandeur and respect, which the meanest and most insignificant part of mankind endeavour to procure in the little circle of their friends and acquaintance. The poorest mechanick, nay, the man who lives upon common alms, gets him his set of admirers, and delights in that superiority which he enjoys over those who are in some respects beneath him. This ambition, which is natural to the soul of man, might methinks receive a very happy turn; and, if it were rightly directed, contribute as much to a person's advantage, as it generally does to his uneasiness and disquiet.

I shall therefore put together some thoughts on this subject, which I have not met with in other writers; and shall set them down as they have occurred to me, without being at the pains to connect or methodize them.

All

All superiority and preeminence that one man can have over another, may be reduced to the notion of *Quality*, which, considered at large, is either that of fortune, body, or mind. The first is that which consists in birth, title, or riches; and is the most foreign to our natures, and what we can the least call our own of any of the three kinds of *Quality*. In relation to the body, *Quality* arises from health, strength, or beauty; which are nearer to us, and more a part of our selves than the former. *Quality*, as it regards the mind, has its rise from knowledge or virtue; and is that which is more essential to us, and more intimately united with us than either of the other two.

The *Quality* of fortune, though a man has less reason to value himself upon it than on that of the body or mind, is however the kind of *Quality* which makes the most shining figure in the eye of the world.

As *Virtue* is the most reasonable and genuine source of honour, we generally find in titles an intimation of some particular merit that should recommend men to the high stations which they possess. Holiness is ascribed to the Pope; Majesty to Kings; Serenity or mildness of temper to Princes; Excellence or perfection to Ambassadors; Grace to Archbishops; Honour to Peers; Worship or venerable behaviour to Magistrates; Reverence, which is of the same import as the former, to the inferior Clergy.

In the Founders of great families, such attributes of honour are generally correspondent with the virtues of that person to whom they are applied; but in the descendants they are too often the marks rather of Grandeur than of Merit. The stamp and denomination still continues, but the intrinsic value is frequently lost.

The death-bed shews the emptiness of titles in a true light. A poor dispirited sinner lies trembling under the apprehensions of the state he is entering on; and is asked by a grave attendant how his Holiness does? Another hears himself addressed to under the title of Highness or Excellency, who lies under such mean circumstances of mortality as are the disgrace of humane nature. Titles at such a time look rather like insults and mockery than respect.

The truth of it is, honours are in this world under no regulation; true *Quality* is neglected, *Virtue* is oppressed, and *Vice* triumphant. The last day will rectify this disorder, and assign to every one a station suitable to the dignity of his character; Ranks will be then adjusted, and Precedency set right.

Metinks

Methinks we should have an ambition, if not to advance our selves in another world, at least to preserve our Post in it, and outshine our inferiours in virtue here, that they may not be put above us in a state which is to settle the distinction for eternity.

Men in Scripture are called *Strangers* and *Sojourners upon earth*, and life a *Pilgrimage*. Several heathen, as well as christian Authors, under the same kind of metaphor, have represented the world as an Inn, which was only designed to furnish us with accommodations in this our passage. It is therefore very absurd to think of setting up our Rest before we come to our journey's end, and not rather to take care of the reception we shall there meet with, than to fix our thoughts on the little conveniences and advantages which we enjoy one above another in the way to it.

Epictetus makes use of another kind of allusion, which is very beautiful, and wonderfully proper to incline us to be satisfied with the post in which Providence has placed us. We are here, says he, as in a Theatre, where every one has a part allotted to him. The great duty which lies upon a man is, to act his part in perfection. We may indeed say, that our part does not suit us, and that we could act another better. But this (says the Philosopher) is not our business. All that we are concerned in, is, to excell in the part which is given us. If it be an improper one, the fault is not in us, but in him who has *cast* our several parts, and is the great disposer of the Drama.

The part which was acted by this Philosopher himself was but a very indifferent one, for he lived and died a slave. His motive to contentment in this particular receives a very great inforcement from the above-mentioned consideration, if we remember that our parts in the other world will be *new cast*, and that mankind will be there ranged in different stations of superiority and preeminence, in proportion as they have here excelled one another in virtue, and performed in their several posts of life the duties which belong to them.

There are many beautiful passages in the little Apocryphal book, entitled, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, to set forth the vanity of honour, and the like temporal blessings, which are in so great repute among men, and to comfort those who have not the possession of them. It represents in very warm and noble terms this advancement of a good man in the other world, and the great surprize which it will produce among those who are his superiours in this. "Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness
" before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of
" his

“ his labours. When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible
 “ fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far be-
 “ yond all that they looked for. And they repenting and groaning for
 “ anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves ; This was he whom we
 “ had some time in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools ac-
 “ counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he
 “ numbred among the children of God, and his lot is among the Saints!

If the Reader would see the description of a life that is passed away
 in vanity, and among the shadows of pomp and greatness, he may see it
 very finely drawn in the same place. In the mean time, since it is ne-
 cessary in the present constitution of things, that order and distinction
 should be kept up in the world, we should be happy, if those who en-
 joy the upper stations in it, would endeavour to surpass others in virtue,
 as much as in rank, and by their humanity and condescension make their
 superiority easy and acceptable to those who are beneath them ; and if,
 on the contrary, those who are in the meaner posts of life, would consi-
 der how they may better their condition hereafter, and by a just defe-
 rence and submission to their superiors, make them happy in those blef-
 sings with which Providence has thought fit to distinguish them.

N° 221. *Tuesday, November 13.*

----- *Ab ovo*

Usque ad mala-----

Hor.

WHEN I have finished any of my Speculations, it is my method
 to consider which of the ancient Authors have touched upon
 the subject that I treat of. By this means I meet with some cele-
 brated thought upon it, or a thought of my own expressed in better
 words, or some similitude for the illustration of my subject. This is what
 gives birth to the motto of a Speculation, which I rather chuse to take
 out of the Poets than the Prose-writers, as the former generally give a
 finer turn to a thought than the latter, and by couching it in few words,
 and in harmonious numbers, make it more portable to the memory.

My