



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

N° 231. Saturday, November 24.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53621](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53621)

another in such an hurry of sentiments, notwithstanding they appear repugnant to each other, are really such as happen in the phrenzies of love.

I wonder that not one of the Critics or Editors, through whose hands this Ode has passed, has taken occasion from it to mention a circumstance related by *Plutarch*. That Author in the famous story of *Antiochus*, who fell in love with *Stratonice*, his Mother-in-law, and (not daring to discover his passion) pretended to be confined to his bed by his sickness, tells us, that *Erasistratus*, the physician, found out the nature of his distemper by those symptoms of love which he had learnt from *Sappho's* writings. *Stratonice* was in the room of the love-sick Prince, when these symptoms discovered themselves to his physician; and it is probable that they were not very different from those which *Sappho* here describes in a Lover sitting by his Mistress. This story of *Antiochus* is so well known, that I need not add the sequel of it, which has no relation to my present subject.

N^o 231. Saturday, November 24.

O Pudor! O Pietas! -----

Mart.

LOOKING over the Letters which I have lately received from my correspondents, I met with the following one, which is written with such a spirit of politeness, that I could not but be very much pleased with it my self, and question not but it will be as acceptable to the Reader.

Mr. SPECTATOR,

“ YOU, who are no stranger to public assemblies, cannot but have
 “ observed the awe they often strike on such as are obliged to
 “ exert any talent before them. This is a sort of elegant distress, to
 “ which ingenuous minds are the most liable, and may therefore deserve
 “ some remarks in your paper. Many a brave fellow, who has put his
 “ enemy to flight in the field, has been in the utmost disorder upon
 “ making a speech before a body of his friends at home: one would
 “ think

“ think there was some kind of fascination in the eyes of a large circle
 “ of people, when darting all together upon one person. I have seen a
 “ new actor in a tragedy so bound up by it, as to be scarce able to speak
 “ or move, and have expected he would have died above three acts be-
 “ fore the dagger or cup of poison were brought in. It would not be
 “ amiss, if such an one were at first introduced as a ghost, or a statue,
 “ till he recovered his spirits, and grew fit for some living part.

“ As this sudden desertion of one's self shews a diffidence, which is
 “ not displeasing, it implies at the same time the greatest respect to an
 “ audience that can be. It is a sort of mute eloquence, which pleads
 “ for their favour much better than words could do; and we find their
 “ generosity naturally moved to support those who are in so much per-
 “ plexity to entertain them. I was extremely pleased with a late instance
 “ of this kind at the Opera of *Almahide*, in the encouragement given to
 “ a young singer, whose more than ordinary concern on her first appear-
 “ ance, recommended her no less than her agreeable voice, and just per-
 “ formance. Meer bashfulness without merit is awkward; and merit with-
 “ out modesty, insolent. But modest merit has a double claim to accept-
 “ ance, and generally meets with as many patrons as beholders.

I am, &c.

It is impossible that a person should exert himself to advantage in an assembly, whether it be his part either to sing or speak, who lies under too great oppressions of modesty. I remember, upon talking with a friend of mine concerning the force of pronunciation, our discourse led us into the enumeration of the several organs of speech which an orator ought to have in perfection, as the tongue, the teeth, the lips, the nose, the palate, and the wind-pipe. Upon which says my friend, you have omitted the most material organ of them all, and that is the forehead.

But notwithstanding an excess of modesty obstructs the tongue, and renders it unfit for its offices, a due proportion of it is thought so requisite to an orator, that rhetoricians have recommended it to their disciples as a particular in their art. *Cicero* tells us, that he never liked an orator, who did not appear in some little confusion at the beginning of his speech, and confesses that he himself never entered upon an oration without trembling and concern. It is indeed a kind of deference which is due to a great assembly, and seldom fails to raise a benevolence in the audience towards the person who speaks. My correspondent has taken notice, that the bravest men often appear timorous on these occasions;

as indeed we may observe that there is generally no creature more impudent than a coward.

—*Lingua melior; sed frigida bello*
Dextera—

A bold tongue, and a feeble arm, are the qualifications of *Drauces* in *Virgil*; as *Homer*, to express a man both timorous and fawcy, makes use of a kind of point, which is very rarely to be met with in his writings; namely, that he had the eyes of a dog, but the heart of a deer.

A just and reasonable modesty does not only recommend eloquence, but sets off every great talent which a man can be possessed of. It heightens all the virtues which it accompanies; like the shades in paintings, it raises and rounds every figure, and makes the colours more beautiful, though not so glaring as they would be without it.

Modesty is not only an ornament, but also a guard to virtue. It is a kind of quick and delicate *Feeling* in the soul, which makes her shrink and withdraw her self from every thing that has danger in it. It is such an exquisite sensibility, as warns her to shun the first appearance of every thing which is hurtful.

I cannot at present recollect either the place or time of what I am going to mention; but I have read somewhere in the history of ancient *Greece*, that the women of the country were seized with an unaccountable melancholy, which disposed several of them to make away with themselves. The senate, after having tryed many expedients to prevent this self-murder, which was so frequent among them, published an edict, that if any woman whatever should lay violent hands upon her self, her corps should be exposed naked in the street, and dragged about the city in the most public manner. This edict immediately put a stop to the practice which was before so common. We may see in this instance the strength of female modesty, which was able to overcome the violence even of madness and despair. The fear of shame in the fair sex, was in those days more prevalent than that of death.

If Modesty has so great an influence over our actions, and is in many cases so impregnable a fence to virtue; what can more undermine morality than that politeness which reigns among the unthinking part of mankind, and treats as unfashionable the most ingenuous part of our behaviour; which recommends impudence as good breeding, and keeps a man always in countenance, not because he is innocent, but because he is shameless.

III. *Seneca*

Seneca thought Modesty so great a check to vice, that he prescribes to us the practice of it in secret, and advises us to raise it in our selves upon imaginary occasions, when such as are real do not offer themselves; for this is the meaning of his precept, that when we are by our selves, and in our greatest solitudes, we should fancy that *Cato* stands before us, and sees every thing we do. In short, if you banish Modesty out of the world, she carries away with her half the virtue that is in it.

After these reflections on Modesty, as it is a virtue; I must observe, that there is a vicious Modesty, which justly deserves to be ridiculed, and which those persons very often discover, who value themselves most upon a well bred confidence. This happens when a man is ashamed to act up to his reason, and would not upon any consideration be surpris'd in the practice of those duties, for the performance of which he was sent into the world. Many an impudent libertine would blush to be caught in a serious discourse, and would scarce be able to shew his head, after having disclosed a religious thought. Decency of behaviour, all outward show of virtue, and abhorrence of vice, are carefully avoided by this set of shame-faced people, as what would disparage their gayety of temper, and infallibly bring them to dishonour. This is such a poorness of spirit, such a despicable cowardise, such a degenerate abject state of mind as one would think humane nature incapable of, did we not meet with frequent instances of it in ordinary conversation.

There is another kind of vicious Modesty which makes a man ashamed of his person, his birth, his profession, his poverty, or the like misfortunes, which it was not in his choice to prevent, and is not in his power to rectify. If a man appears ridiculous by any of the aforementioned circumstances, he becomes much more so by being out of countenance for them. They should rather give him occasion to exert a noble spirit, and to palliate those imperfections which are not in his power, by those perfections which are; or to use a very witty allusion of an eminent author, he should imitate *Cesar*, who because his head was bald, covered that defect with lawrels.

