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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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action by so selfish a motive, and to do that out of a desire of Fame, which we could not be prompted to by a disinterested love to mankind, or by a generous passion for the glory of him that made us.

Thus is Fame a thing difficult to be obtained by all, but particularly by those who thirst after it, since most men have so much either of ill-nature or of wariness, as not to gratify and sooth the vanity of the ambitious man; and since this very thirst after Fame naturally betrays him into such indecencies as are a lessening to his reputation, and is it self looked upon as a weakness in the greatest characters.

In the next place, Fame is easily lost, and as difficult to be preserved as it was at first to be acquired. But this I shall make the subject of a following paper.

N° 256.

Monday, December 24.

Φήμη γὰρ τε κακὴ πείλεται κέρη μὲν αἰεταί
 Ρεῖα μάλ', ἀργαλέη δ' εἶρει

Hef.

THERE are many passions and tempers of mind which naturally dispose us to depress and vilifie the merit of one rising in the esteem of mankind. All those who made their entrance into the world with the same advantages, and were once looked on as his equals, are apt to think the fame of his merits a reflection on their own indeferts; and will therefore take care to reproach him with the scandal of some past action, or derogate from the worth of the present, that they may still keep him on the same level with themselves. The like kind of consideration often stirs up the envy of such as were once his superiors, who think it a detraction from their merit to see another get ground upon them and overtake them in the pursuits of glory; and will therefore endeavour to sink his reputation, that they may the better preserve their own. Those who were once his equals, envy and defame him, because they now see him their superior; and those who were once his superiors, because they look upon him as their equal.

VOL. III.

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But further, a man whose extraordinary reputation thus lifts him up to the notice and observation of mankind, draws a multitude of eyes upon him that will narrowly inspect every part of him, consider him nicely in all views, and not be a little pleas'd when they have taken him in the worst and most disadvantageous light. There are many who find a pleasure in contradicting the common reports of fame, and in spreading abroad the weakneses of an exalted character. They publish their ill-natured discoveries with a secret pride, and applaud themselves for the singularity of their judgment which has searched deeper than others, detected what the rest of the world have over-looked, and found a flaw in what the generality of mankind admire. Others there are who proclaim the errors and infirmities of a great man with an inward satisfaction and complacency, if they discover none of the like errors and infirmities in themselves; for while they are exposing another's weakneses, they are tacitly aiming at their own commendations who are not subject to the like infirmities, and are apt to be transported with a secret kind of vanity, to see themselves superior in some respects to one of a sublime and celebrated reputation. Nay it very often happens, that none are more industrious in publishing the blemishes of an extraordinary reputation, than such as lie open to the same censures in their own characters; as either hoping to excuse their own defects by the authority of so high an example, or raising an imaginary applause to themselves for resembling a person of an exalted reputation, though in the blameable parts of his character. If all these secret springs of detraction fail, yet very often a vain ostentation of wit sets a man on attacking an established name, and sacrificing it to the mirth and laughter of those about him. A satyr or a libel on one of the common stamp, never meets with that reception and approbation among its readers, as what is aimed at a person whose merit places him upon an eminence, and gives him a more conspicuous figure among men. Whether it be that we think it shews greater art to expose and turn to ridicule a man whose character seems so improper a subject for it, or that we are pleas'd by some implicit kind of revenge to see him taken down and humbled in his reputation, and in some measure reduced to our own rank, who had so far rais'd himself above us in the reports and opinions of mankind.

Thus we see how many dark and intricate motives there are to detraction and defamation, and how many malicious spies are searching into the actions of a great man, who is not always the best prepared for so narrow an inspection. For we may generally observe, that our admiration

ration of a famous man lessens upon our nearer acquaintance with him; and that we seldom hear the description of a celebrated person, without a catalogue of some notorious weaknesses and infirmities. The reason may be, because any little slip is more conspicuous and observable in his conduct than in another's, as it is not of a piece with the rest of his character, or because it is impossible for a man at the same time to be attentive to the more important part of his life, and to keep a watchful eye over all the inconsiderable circumstances of his behaviour and conversation; or because, as we have before observed, the same temper of mind which enclines us to a desire of Fame, naturally betrays us into such slips and unwarinesses as are not incident to men of a contrary disposition.

After all it must be confessed, that a noble and triumphant merit often breaks through and dissipates these little spots and sullies in its reputation; but if by a mistaken pursuit after Fame, or through humane infirmity, any false step be made in the more momentous concerns of life, the whole scheme of ambitious designs is broken and disappointed. The smaller stains and blemishes may die away and disappear amidst the brightness that surrounds them; but a blot of a deeper nature casts a shade on all the other beauties, and darkens the whole character. How difficult therefore is it to preserve a great name, when he that has acquired it is so obnoxious to such little weaknesses and infirmities as are no small diminution to it when discovered, especially when they are so industriously proclaimed, and aggravated by such as were once his superiors or equals; by such as would set to show their judgment or their wit; and by such as are guilty or innocent of the same slips or misconducts in their own behaviour.

But were there none of these dispositions in others to censure a famous man, nor any such miscarriages in himself, yet would he meet with no small trouble in keeping up his reputation in all its height and splendour. There must be always a noble train of actions to preserve his Fame in life and motion. For when it is once at a stand, it naturally flags and languishes. Admiration is a very short-liv'd passion, that immediately decays upon growing familiar with its object, unless it be still fed with fresh discoveries, and kept alive by a new perpetual succession of miracles rising up to its view. And even the greatest actions of a celebrated person labour under this disadvantage, that however surprizing and extraordinary they may be, they are no more than what are expected from him; but on the contrary, if they fall any thing below the opinion that is conceived of him, though they might raise the reputation of another, they are a diminution to his.

One would think there should be something wonderfully pleasing in the possession of Fame, that, notwithstanding all these mortifying considerations, can engage a man in so desperate a pursuit; and yet if we consider the little happiness that attends a great character, and the multitude of inquietudes to which the desire of it subjects an ambitious mind, one would be still the more surpris'd to see so many restless candidates for glory.

Ambition raises a secret tumult in the Soul, it inflames the mind, and puts it into a violent hurry of thought: It is still reaching after an empty imaginary good, that has not in it the power to abate or satisfy it. Most other things we long for, can allay the cravings of their proper sense, and for a while set the appetite at rest: but Fame is a good so wholly foreign to our natures, that we have no faculty in the Soul adapted to it, nor any organ in the body to relish it; an object of desire placed out of the possibility of fruition. It may indeed fill the mind for a while with a giddy kind of pleasure, but it is such a pleasure as makes a man restless and uneasy under it; and which does not so much satisfy the present thirst, as it excites fresh desires, and sets the Soul on new enterprises. For how few ambitious men are there, who have got as much Fame as they desired, and whose thirst after it has not been as eager in the very height of their reputation, as it was before they became known and eminent among men? There is not any circumstance in *Cæsar's* character which gives me a greater idea of him, than a saying which *Cicero* tells us he frequently made use of in private conversation, *That he was satisfied with his share of life and fame. Se satis vel ad naturam, vel ad gloriam vixisse.* Many indeed have given over their pursuits after Fame, but that has proceeded either from the disappointments they have met in it, or from their experience of the little pleasure which attends it, or from the better informations or natural coldness of old age; but seldom from a full satisfaction and acquiescence in their present enjoyments of it.

Nor is Fame only unsatisfying in it self, but the desire of it lays us open to many accidental troubles, which those are free from who have no such tender regard for it. How often is the ambitious man cast down and disappointed, if he receives no praise where he expected it? Nay, how often is he mortified with the very praises he receives, if they do not rise so high as he thinks they ought? which they seldom do, unless encreased by flattery, since few men have so good an opinion of us as we have of our selves. But if the ambitious man can be so much grieved

even with praise it self, how will he be able to bear up under scandal and defamation? For the same temper of mind which makes him desire Fame, makes him hate Reproach. If he can be transported with the extraordinary praises of men, he will be as much dejected by their censures. How little therefore is the happiness of an ambitious man, who gives every one a dominion over it, who thus subjects himself to the good or ill speeches of others, and puts it in the power of every malicious tongue to throw him into a fit of melancholy, and destroy his natural rest and repose of mind? Especially when we consider that the world is more apt to censure than applaud, and himself fuller of imperfections than virtues.

We may further observe, that such a man will be more grieved for the loss of Fame, than he could have been pleased with the enjoyment of it. For though the presence of this imaginary good cannot make us happy, the absence of it may make us miserable: because in the enjoyment of an object we only find that share of pleasure which it is capable of giving us, but in the loss of it we do not proportion our grief to the real value it bears, but to the value our fancies and imaginations set upon it.

So inconsiderable is the satisfaction that Fame brings along with it, and so great the disquietudes to which it makes us liable. The desire of it stirs up very uneasy motions in the mind, and is rather inflamed than satisfied by the presence of the thing desired. The enjoyment of it brings but very little pleasure, though the loss or want of it be very sensible and afflicting; and even this little happiness is so very precarious, that it wholly depends on the will of others. We are not only tortured by the reproaches which are offered us, but are disappointed by the silence of men when it is unexpected; and humbled even by their praises.



Tuesday,