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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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And as the supreme Being is the only proper Judge of our perfections, so is he the only fit Rewarder of them. This is a consideration that comes home to our interest, as the other adapts it self to our ambition. And what could the most aspiring, or the most selfish man desire more, were he to form the notion of a Being to whom he would recommend himself, than such a knowledge as can discover the least appearance of perfection in him, and such a goodness as will proportion a reward to it?

Let the ambitious man therefore turn all his desire of Fame this way; and, that he may propose to himself a Fame worthy of his ambition, let him consider that if he employs his abilities to the best advantage, the time will come when the supreme Governor of the world, the great Judge of mankind, who sees every degree of perfection in others, and possesses all possible perfection in himself, shall proclaim his worth before men and angels, and pronounce to him in the presence of the whole creation that best and most significant of applauses, *Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into thy Master's joy.*

N^o 261. *Saturday, December 29.*

Γάμος ἢ ἀνθρώποισι συνταῖον καλόν.

Frag. vet. Po.

MY Father, whom I mentioned in my first Speculation, and whom I must always name with honour and gratitude, has very frequently talked to me upon the subject of Marriage. I was in my younger years engaged, partly by his advice, and partly by my own inclinations, in the courtship of a person who had a great deal of beauty, and did not at my first approaches seem to have any aversion to me; but as my natural taciturnity hindered me from shewing my self to the best advantage, she by degrees began to look upon me as a very silly fellow, and being resolved to regard Merit more than any thing else in the persons who made their applications to her, she married a Captain of Dragoons who happened to be beating up for recruits in those parts.

VOL. III.

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This unlucky accident has given me an aversion to pretty fellows ever since, and discouraged me from trying my fortune with the fair sex. The observations which I made in this conjuncture, and the repeated advices which I received at that time from the good old man above-mentioned, have produced the following Essay upon Love and Marriage.

The pleasantest part of a man's life is generally that which passes in courtship, provided his passion be sincere, and the party beloved kind with discretion. Love, Desire, Hope, all the pleasing motions of the soul rise in the pursuit.

It is easier for an artful man, who is not in love, to persuade his Mistress he has a passion for her, and to succeed in his pursuits, than for one who loves with the greatest violence. True love hath ten thousand griefs, impatiences and resentments, that render a man unamiable in the eyes of the person whose affection he solicites; besides, that it sinks his figure, gives him fears, apprehensions and poorness of spirit, and often makes him appear ridiculous where he has a mind to recommend himself.

Those marriages generally abound most with love and constancy, that are preceded by a long courtship. The passion should strike root, and gather strength before marriage be grafted on it. A long course of hopes and expectations fixes the idea in our minds, and habituates us to a fondness of the person beloved.

There is nothing of so great importance to us, as the good qualities of one to whom we join our selves for life; they do not only make our present state agreeable, but often determine our happiness to all eternity. Where the choice is left to friends, the chief point under consideration is an Estate: where the parties chuse for themselves, their thoughts turn most upon the Person. They have both their reasons. The first would procure many conveniencies and pleasures of life to the party whose interests they espouse; and at the same time may hope that the wealth of their friend will turn to their own credit and advantage. The others are preparing for themselves a perpetual feast. A good person does not only raise, but continue love, and breeds a secret pleasure and complacency in the beholder, when the first heats of desire are extinguished. It puts the wife or husband in countenance both among friends and strangers, and generally fills the family with a healthy and beautiful race of children.

I should prefer a woman that is agreeable in my own eye, and not deformed in that of the world, to a celebrated beauty. If you marry one remarkably

remarkably beautiful, you must have a violent passion for her, or you have not the proper taste of her charms; and if you have such a passion for her, it is odds but it will be imbittered with fears and jealousies.

Good-nature, and evenness of temper, will give you an easie companion for life; virtue and good sense, an agreeable friend; love and constancy, a good wife or husband. Where we meet one person with all these accomplishments, we find an hundred without any one of them. The world, notwithstanding, is more intent on trains and equipages, and all the showy parts of life; we love rather to dazzle the multitude, than consult our proper interest; and, as I have elsewhere observed, it is one of the most unaccountable passions of humane nature, that we are at greater pains to appear easie and happy to others, than really to make our selves so. Of all disparities, that in humour makes the most unhappy marriages, yet scarce enters into our thoughts at the contracting of them. Several that are in this respect unequally yoked, and uneasie for life, with a person of a particular character, might have been pleased and happy with a person of a contrary one, notwithstanding they are both perhaps equally virtuous and laudable in their kind.

Before marriage we cannot be too inquisitive and discerning in the faults of the person beloved, nor after it too dim-sighted and superficial. However perfect and accomplished the person appears to you at a distance, you will find many blemishes and imperfections in her humour, upon a more intimate acquaintance, which you never discovered or perhaps suspected. Here therefore discretion and good-nature are to shew their strength; the first will hinder your thoughts from dwelling on what is disagreeable, the other will raise in you all the tenderness of compassion and humanity, and by degrees soften those very imperfections into beauties.

Marriage enlarges the scene of our happiness and miseries. A marriage of love is pleasant; a marriage of interest easie; and a marriage, where both meet, happy. A happy marriage has in it all the pleasures of friendship, all the enjoyments of sense and reason, and indeed, all the sweets of life. Nothing is a greater mark of a degenerate and vitious Age, than the common ridicule which passes on this state of life. It is, indeed, only happy in those who can look down with scorn or neglect on the impieties of the times, and tread the paths of life together in a constant uniform course of virtue.