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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Nulla venenato littera mista joco est.

Ovid.

I Think my self highly obliged to the public for their kind acceptance of a paper which visits them every morning, and has in it none of those *Seasonings* that recommend so many of the writings which are in vogue among us.

As, on the one side, my paper has not in it a single word of news, a reflection in politics, nor a stroke of party; so, on the other, there are no fashionable touches of infidelity, no obscene ideas, no satyrs upon priesthood, marriage, and the like popular topics of ridicule; no private scandal, nor any thing that may tend to the defamation of particular persons, families, or societies.

There is not one of these above-mentioned subjects that would not sell a very indifferent paper, could I think of gratifying the public by such mean and base methods: but notwithstanding I have rejected every thing that favours of party, every thing that is loose and immoral, and every thing that might create uneasiness in the minds of particular persons, I find that the demand of my papers has encreased every month since their first appearance in the world. This does not perhaps reflect so much honour upon my self, as on my Readers, who give a much greater attention to discourses of virtue and morality, than ever I expected, or indeed could hope.

When I broke loose from that great body of writers who have employed their wit and parts in propagating of vice and irreligion, I did not question but I should be treated as an odd kind of fellow that had a mind to appear singular in my way of writing: but the general reception I have found, convinces me that the world is not so corrupt as we are apt to imagine; and that if those men of parts who have been employed in vitiating the Age, had endeavoured to rectifie and amend it, they needed not have sacrificed their good sense and virtue to their fame and reputation. No man is so sunk in vice and ignorance, but there are still
some

some hidden seeds of goodness and knowledge in him; which give him a relish of such reflections and speculations as have an aptness to improve the mind, and to make the heart better.

I have shewn in a former paper, with how much care I have avoided all such thoughts as are loose, obscene, or immoral; and I believe my Reader would still think the better of me, if he knew the pains I am at in qualifying what I write after such a manner, that nothing may be interpreted as aimed at private persons. For this reason when I draw any faulty character, I consider all those persons to whom the malice of the world may possibly apply it, and take care to dash it with such particular circumstances as may prevent all such ill-natured applications. If I write any thing on a black man, I run over in my mind all the eminent persons in the nation who are of that complexion: when I place an imaginary name at the head of a character, I examine every syllable and letter of it, that it may not bear any resemblance to one that is real. I know very well the value which every man sets upon his reputation, and how painful it is to be exposed to the mirth and derision of the publick, and should therefore scorn to divert my Reader at the expence of any private man.

As I have been thus tender of every particular person's reputation, so I have taken more than ordinary care not to give offence to those who appear in the higher figures of life. I would not make my self merry even with a piece of pastboard that is invested with a publick character; for which reason I have never glanced upon the late designed procession of his Holiness and his attendants, notwithstanding it might have afforded matter to many ludicrous Speculations. Among those advantages, which the publick may reap from this paper, it is not the least, that it draws mens minds off from the bitterness of party, and furnishes them with subjects of discourse that may be treated without warmth or passion. This is said to have been the first design of those Gentlemen who set on foot the Royal Society; and had then a very good effect, as it turned many of the greatest genius's of that age to the disquisitions of natural knowledge, who, if they had engaged in politicks, with the same parts and application, might have set their country in a flame. The Air-pump, the Barometer, the Quadrant, and the like inventions, were thrown out to those busie spirits, as tubs and barrels are to a whale, that he may let the ship sail on without disturbance, while he diverts himself with those innocent amusements.

I have been so very scrupulous in this particular of not hurting any man's reputation, that I have forbore mentioning even such Authors as I could not name with honour. This I must confess to have been a piece of very great self-denial: for as the public relishes nothing better than the ridicule which turns upon a writer of any eminence, so there is nothing which a man that has but a very ordinary talent in ridicule may execute with greater ease. One might raise laughter for a quarter of a year together upon the works of a person who has published but a very few volumes. For which reason I am astonished, that those who have appeared against this paper have made so very little of it. The criticisms which I have hitherto published, have been made with an intention rather to discover beauties and excellencies in the writers of my own time, than to publish any of their faults and imperfections. In the mean while I should take it for a very great favour from some of my underhand detractors, if they would break all measures with me so far, as to give me a pretence for examining their performances with an impartial eye: nor shall I look upon it as a breach of charity to criticize the Author, so long as I keep clear of the Person.

In the mean while, 'till I am provoked to such hostilities, I shall from time to time endeavour to do justice to those who have distinguished themselves in the politer parts of learning, and to point out such beauties in their works as may have escaped the observation of others.

As the first place among our *English* Poets is due to *Milton*; and as I have drawn more quotations out of him than from any other, I shall enter into a regular criticism upon his *Paradise Lost*, which I shall publish every *Saturday*, 'till I have given my thoughts upon that Poem. I shall not however presume to impose upon others my own particular judgment on this Author, but only deliver it as my private opinion. Criticism is of a large extent, and every particular master in this art has his favourite passages in an Author, which do not equally strike the best judges. It will be sufficient for me if I discover many beauties or imperfections which others have not attended to, and I should be very glad to see any of our eminent writers publish their discoveries on the same subject. In short, I would always be understood to write my papers of criticism in the spirit which *Horace* has expressed in those two famous lines;

— *Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum.*

If you have made any better remarks of your own, communicate them with candour; if not, make use of these I present you with.