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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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*Dixerit e multis aliquis, Quid virus in angues
Adjicis? et rabide tradis ovile lupæ?* Ov. de Art. Am.

ONE of the Fathers, if I am rightly informed, has defined a woman to be ζῷον φιλοκόσμον, *an animal that delights in finery*. I have already treated of the sex in two or three papers, conformably to this definition, and have in particular observed, that in all ages they have been more careful than the men to adorn that part of the head, which we generally call the outside.

This observation is so very notorious, that when in ordinary discourse we say a man has a fine head, a long head, or a good head, we express our selves metaphorically, and speak in relation to his understanding; whereas when we say of a woman, she has a fine, a long or a good head, we speak only in relation to her commode.

It is observed among birds, that nature has lavished all her ornaments upon the male, who very often appears in a most beautiful head-dress: whether it be a crest, a comb, a tuft of feathers, or a natural little plume, erected like a kind of pinnacle on the very top of the head. As nature on the contrary has poured out her charms in the greatest abundance upon the female part of our species, so they are very assiduous in bestowing upon themselves the finest garnitures of art. The peacock, in all his pride, does not display half the colours that appear in the garments of a *British* Lady, when she is dressed either for a ball or a birthday.

But to return to our female heads. The Ladies have been for some time in a kind of *moulting season*, with regard to that part of their dress, having cast great quantities of ribbon, lace, and cambrick, and in some measure reduced that part of the humane figure to the beautiful globular form, which is natural to it. We have for a great while expected what kind of ornament would be substituted in the place of those antiquated commodes. But our female projectors were all the last summer so taken

up

up with the improvement of their petticoats, that they had not time to attend to any thing else; but having at length sufficiently adorned their lower parts, they now begin to turn their thoughts upon the other extremity, as well remembering the old kitchen proverb, that if you light a fire at both ends, the middle will shift for its self.

I am engaged in this Speculation by a sight which I lately met with at the Opera. As I was standing in the hinder part of the box, I took notice of a little cluster of women sitting together in the prettiest coloured hoods that I ever saw. One of them was blue, another yellow, and another philomot; the fourth was of a pink colour, and the fifth of a pale green. I looked with as much pleasure upon this little party-coloured assembly, as upon a bed of tulips, and did not know at first whether it might not be an embassie of *Indian* Queens; but upon my going about into the pit, and taking them in front, I was immediately undeceived, and saw so much beauty in every face, that I found them all to be *English*. Such eyes and lips, cheeks and foreheads, could be the growth of no other country. The complexion of their faces hindered me from observing any further the colour of their hoods, though I could easily perceive by that unspeakable satisfaction which appeared in their looks, that their own thoughts were wholly taken up on those pretty ornaments they wore upon their heads.

I am informed that this fashion spreads daily, infomuch that the Whig and Tory Ladies begin already to hang out different colours, and to shew their principles in their head-dress. Nay if I may believe my friend WILL HONEYCOMB, there is a certain old Coquette of his acquaintance, who intends to appear very suddenly in a rainbow hood, like the *Iris* in *Dryden's Virgil*, not questioning but that among such a variety of colours she shall have a charm for every heart.

My friend WILL, who very much values himself upon his great insights into gallantry, tells me, that he can already guess at the humour a Lady is in by her hood, as the courtiers of *Morocco* know the disposition of their present Emperor by the colour of the dress which he puts on. When *Melesinda* wraps her head in flame colour, her heart is set upon execution. When she covers it with purple, I would not, says he, advise her lover to approach her; but if she appears in white, it is peace, and he may hand her out of her box with safety.

WILL informs me likewise, that these hoods may be used as signals. Why else, says he, does *Cornelia* always put on a black hood when her husband is gone into the country?

Such

Such are my friend HONEYCOMB's dreams of gallantry. For my own part, I impute this diversity of colours in the hoods to the diversity of complexion in the faces of my pretty country women. *Ovid* in his *Art of Love* has given some precepts as to this particular, though I find they are different from those which prevail among the moderns. He recommends a red striped silk to the pale complexion; white to the brown, and dark to the fair. On the contrary my friend WILL, who pretends to be a greater master in this art than *Ovid*, tells me, that the palest features look the most agreeable in white farcenet; that a face which is overflushed appears to advantage in the deepest scarlet, and that the darkest complexion is not a little alleviated by a black hood. In short, he is for losing the colour of the face in that of the hood, as a fire burns dimly, and a candle goes half out, in the light of the Sun. This, says he, your *Ovid* himself has hinted, where he treats of these matters, when he tells us that the blue Water-nymphs are dressed in Sky-coloured garments; and that *Aurora*, who always appears in the light of the rising Sun, is robed in saffron.

Whether these his observations are justly grounded I cannot tell: but I have often known him, as we have stood together behind the Ladies, praise or dispraise the complexion of a face which he never saw, from observing the colour of her hood, and has been very seldom out in these his guesses.

As I have nothing more at heart than the honour and improvement of the fair sex, I cannot conclude this paper without an exhortation to the *British Ladies*, that they would excel the women of all other nations as much in virtue and good sense, as they do in beauty; which they may certainly do, if they will be as industrious to cultivate their minds, as they are to adorn their bodies; in the mean while I shall recommend to their most serious consideration the saying of an old *Greek Poet*,

Γυωζικὴ κλῶμα δ' ἄρβωμα, καὶ ἔχρυσά.

