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**The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.**

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

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N<sup>o</sup> 273. Saturday, January 12.----- *Notandi sunt tibi Mores.*

Hor.

HAVING examined the Action of *Paradise Lost*, let us in the next place consider the Actors. This is *Aristotle's* method of considering, first the fable, and secondly the manners; or, as we generally call them in *English*, the fable and the characters.

*Homer* has excelled all the Heroic Poets that ever wrote, in the Multitude and Variety of his characters. Every God that is admitted into his Poem, acts a part which would have been suitable to no other Deity. His Princes are as much distinguished by their manners as by their dominions; and even those among them, whose characters seem wholly made up of courage, differ from one another as to the particular kinds of courage in which they excel. In short, there is scarce a speech or action in the *Iliad*, which the reader may not ascribe to the person that speaks or acts, without seeing his name at the head of it.

*Homer* does not only out-shine all other Poets in the Variety, but also in the Novelty of his characters. He hath introduced among his *Grecian* Princes a person who had lived thrice the age of man, and conversed with *Theseus*, *Hercules*, *Polyphemus*, and the first race of Heroes. His principal actor is the son of a Goddess, not to mention the Off-spring of other deities, who have likewise a place in his Poem, and the venerable *Trojan* Prince, who was the father of so many Kings and Heroes. There is in these several characters of *Homer*, a certain Dignity as well as Novelty, which adapts them in a more peculiar manner to the nature of an heroic poem. Though at the same time, to give them the greater Variety, he has described a *Vulcan*, that is a buffoon among his Gods, and a *Thersites* among his mortals.

*Virgil* falls infinitely short of *Homer* in the Characters of his Poem, both as to their Variety and Novelty. *Aeneas* is indeed a perfect character, but as for *Achates*, though he is stiled the Hero's friend, he does nothing in the whole poem which may deserve that title. *Gyas*, *Mnestheus*, *Sergestus*,

*gestus* and *Cloanthus*, are all<sup>o</sup> of them men of the same stamp and character,

— *fortemque Gyan, fortemque Cloanthum:* Virg.

There are indeed several natural incidents in the part of *Ascanius*; as that of *Dido* cannot be sufficiently admired. I do not see any thing new or particular in *Turnus*. *Pallas* and *Evander* are remote copies of *Hector* and *Priam*, as *Lausus* and *Mezentius* are almost parallels to *Pallas* and *Evander*. The characters of *Nisus* and *Euryalus* are beautiful, but common. We must not forget the parts of *Sinon*, *Camilla*, and some few others, which are fine improvements on the Greek Poet. In short, there is neither that Variety nor Novelty in the persons of the *Aeneid*, which we meet with in those of the *Iliad*.

If we look into the Characters of *Milton*, we shall find that he has introduced all the Variety his fable was capable of receiving. The whole species of mankind was in two persons at the time to which the subject of his Poem is confined. We have, however, four distinct characters in these two persons. We see man and woman in the highest innocence and perfection, and in the most abject state of guilt and infirmity. The two last characters are, indeed, very common and obvious, but the two first are not only more Magnificent, but more New than any characters either in *Virgil* or *Homer*, or indeed in the whole circle of nature.

*Milton* was so sensible of this defect in the subject of his Poem, and of the few Characters it would afford him, that he has brought into it two actors of a shadowy fictitious nature, in the persons of *Sin* and *Death*; by which means he has wrought into the body of his fable a very beautiful and well-invented Allegory. But notwithstanding the fineness of this Allegory may atone for it in some measure; I cannot think that persons of such a chimerical existence are proper actors in an Epic Poem; because there is not that measure of probability annexed to them, which is requisite in writings of this kind, as I shall shew more at large hereafter.

*Virgil* has, indeed, admitted *Fame* as an actress in the *Aeneid*, but the part she acts is very short, and none of the most admired circumstances in that divine work. We find in *Mock-heroic* poems, particularly in the *Dispensary* and the *Lutrin*, several allegorical persons of this nature, which are very beautiful in those compositions, and may, perhaps, be used as an argument, that the authors of them were of opinion, such characters might have a place in an Epic work. For my own part, I should

be.

be glad the reader would think so, for the sake of the Poem I am now examining; and must further add, that if such empty unsubstantial Beings may be ever made use of on this occasion, never were any more nicely imagined, and employed in more proper actions, than those of which I am now speaking.

Another principal actor in this poem is the great enemy of mankind. The part of *Ulysses* in *Homer's Odyssey* is very much admired by *Aristotle*, as perplexing that fable with very agreeable plots and intricacies, not only by the many adventures in his voyage, and the subtilty of his behaviour, but by the various concealments and discoveries of his person in several parts of that Poem. But the crafty Being I have now mentioned makes a much longer voyage than *Ulysses*, puts in practice many more wiles and stratagems, and hides himself under a greater variety of shapes and appearances, all of which are severally detected, to the great delight and surprize of the reader.

We may likewise observe with how much art the Poet has varied several characters of the persons that speak in his infernal assembly. On the contrary, how has he represented the whole Godhead exerting it self towards man in its full benevolence under the three-fold distinction of a Creator, a Redeemer, and a Comforter!

Nor must we omit the person of *Raphael*, who, amidst his tenderness and friendship for man, shews such a dignity and condescension in all his speech and behaviour, as are suitable to a superior nature. The Angels are indeed as much diversified in *Milton*, and distinguished by their proper parts, as the Gods are in *Homer* or *Virgil*. The reader will find nothing ascribed to *Uriel*, *Gabriel*, *Michael*, or *Raphael*, which is not in a particular manner suitable to their respective characters.

There is another circumstance in the principal actors of the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, which gives a peculiar beauty to those two Poems, and was therefore contrived with very great judgment. I mean the authors having chosen for their Heroes persons who were so nearly related to the people for whom they wrote. *Achilles* was a *Greek*, and *Aeneas* the remote founder of *Rome*. By this means their countrymen (whom they principally proposed to themselves for their readers) were particularly attentive to all the parts of their story, and sympathized with their Heroes in all their adventures. A *Roman* could not but rejoice in the escapes, successes, and victories of *Aeneas*, and be grieved at any defeats, misfortunes, or disappointments that befell him; as a *Greek* must have had the same regard for *Achilles*. And it is plain, that each of those poems have

have lost this great advantage, among those readers to whom their Heroes are as strangers, or indifferent persons.

*Milton's* Poem is admirable in this respect, since it is impossible for any of its readers, whatever nation, country or people he may belong to, not to be related to the persons who are the principal actors in it; but what is still infinitely more to its advantage, the principal actors in this poem are not only our progenitors, but our representatives. We have an actual interest in every thing they do, and no less than our utmost happiness is concerned, and lies at stake in their behaviour.

I shall subjoin as a corollary to the foregoing remark, an admirable observation out of *Aristotle*, which hath been very much misrepresented in the quotations of some modern Critics. "If a man of perfect and consummate virtue falls into a misfortune, it raises our pity, but not our terror, because we do not fear that it may be our own case, who do not resemble the suffering person. But as that great Philosopher adds, "If we see a man of virtue, mixt with infirmities, fall into any misfortune, it does not only raise our pity, but our terror; because we are afraid that the like misfortune may happen to our selves, who resemble the character of the suffering person.

I shall only remark in this place, that the foregoing observation of *Aristotle*, though it may be true in other occasions, does not hold in this; because in the present case, though the persons who fall into misfortune are of the most perfect and consummate virtue, it is not to be considered as what may possibly be, but what actually is our own case; since we are embarked with them on the same bottom, and must be partakers of their happiness or misery.

In this, and some other very few instances, *Aristotle's* rules for Epic poetry (which he had drawn from his reflections upon *Homer*) cannot be supposed to square exactly with the Heroic poems which have been made since his time; since it is evident to every impartial Judge his rules would still have been more perfect, could he have perused the *Aeneid* which was made some hundred years after his death.

In my next, I shall go through other parts of *Milton's* Poem; and hope that what I shall there advance, as well as what I have already written, will not only serve as a comment upon *Milton*, but upon *Aristotle*.