

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

N° 339. Saturday, March 29.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53621](#)

N° 339. Saturday, March 29.

----- *Ut his exordia primis
Omnia, et ipse tener Mundi concreverit orbis.
Tum durare solum et discludere Nerea ponto
Cœperit, et rerum paullatim sumere formas.*

Virg.

LONGIN'US has observed, that there may be a loftiness in sentiments, where there is no passion, and brings instances out of ancient Authors to support this his opinion. The pathetic, as that great Critic observes, may animate and inflame the sublime, but is not essential to it. Accordingly, as he further remarks, we very often find that those who excel most in stirring up the passions, very often want the talent of writing in the great and sublime manner; and so on the contrary. *Milton* has shewn himself a Master in both these ways of writing. The seventh book, which we are now entering upon, is an instance of that sublime which is not mixt and worked up with passion. The Author appears in a kind of composed and sedate majesty; and though the sentiments do not give so great an emotion as those in the former book, they abound with as magnificent ideas. The sixth book, like a troubled ocean, represents greatness in confusion; the seventh affects the imagination like the ocean in a calm, and fills the mind of the Reader, without producing in it any thing like tumult or agitation.

The Critic above-mentioned, among the rules which he lays down for succeeding in the sublime way of writing, proposes to his Reader, that he should imitate the most celebrated Authors who have gone before him, and been engaged in works of the same nature; as in particular that if he writes on a poetical subject, he should consider how *Homer* would have spoken on such an occasion. By this means one great Genius often catches the flame from another, and writes in his spirit without copying servilely after him. There are a thousand shining passages in *Virgil*, which have been lighted up by *Homer*.

Milton.

Milton, though his own natural strength of Genius was capable of furnishing out a perfect work, has doubtless very much raised and ennobled his conceptions, by such an imitation as that which *Longinus* has recommended.

In this book, which gives us an account of the six days works, the Poet received but very few assistances from heathen writers, who were strangers to the wonders of Creation. But as there are many glorious strokes of Poetry upon this subject in holy Writ, the Author has numberless allusions to them through the whole course of this book. The great Critic I have before mentioned, though an heathen, has taken notice of the sublime manner in which the Law-giver of the *Jews* has described the Creation in the first chapter of *Genesis*; and there are many other passages in Scripture, which rise up in the same majesty, where this subject is touched upon. *Milton* has shown his judgment very remarkably, in making use of such of these as were proper for his Poem, and in duly qualifying those high strains of eastern Poetry, which were suited to Readers whose imaginations were set to an higher pitch, than those of colder climates.

Adam's Speech to the Angel, wherein he desires an account of what had passed within the Regions of Nature before the Creation, is very great and solemn. The following lines, in which he tells him, that the day is not too far spent for him to enter upon such a subject, are exquisite in their kind.

*And the great light of day yet wants to run
Much of his race though steep, suspense in Heav'n
Held by thy voice, thy potent voice he hears,
And longer will delay to hear thee tell
His generation, &c. —*

The Angel's encouraging our first Parents in a modest pursuit after Knowledge, with the causes which he assigns for the Creation of the world, are very just and beautiful. The *Messiah*, by whom, as we are told in Scripture, the worlds were made, comes forth in the power of his Father, surrounded with an Host of Angels, and cloathed with such a Majesty as becomes his entering upon a work, which, according to our conceptions, appears the utmost exertion of Omnipotence. What a beautiful description has our Author raised upon that hint in one of the Prophets; *And behold there came four Chariots out from between two Mountains, and the Mountains were Mountains of Brass.*

About

About his chariot numberless were pour'd
 Cherub and Seraph, potentates and thrones,
 And virtues, winged spirits, and chariots wing'd,
 From the armoury of God, where stand of old
 Myriads between two brazen mountains lodg'd
 Against a solemn day, baneless at hand;
 Celestial equipage; and now came forth
 Spontaneous, for within them spirit liv'd
 Attendant on their Lord: Heav'n open'd wide
 Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound
 On golden hinges moving —

I have before taken notice of these chariots of God, and of these gates of Heaven, and shall here only add, that Homer gives us the same idea of the latter as opening of themselves, though he afterwards takes off from it, by telling us, that the Hours first of all removed those prodigious heaps of clouds which lay as a barrier before them.

I do not know any thing in the whole Poem more sublime than the description which follows, where the Messiah is represented at the head of his Angels, as looking down into the *Chaos*, calming its confusion, riding into the midst of it, and drawing the first out-line of the Creation.

On heav'nly ground they stood, and from the shore
 They view'd the vast immeasurable abyss
 Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild,
 Up from the bottom turn'd by furious winds
 And surging waves, as mountains to assault
 Heav'n's height, and with the center mix the pole.

Silence ye troubled waves, and thou deep, peace,
 Said then th'omnisc. word, your discord end:

Nor staid, but on the wings of Cherubim
 Up-lifted, in paternal glory rode
 Far into Chaos, and the world unborn;
 For Chaos heard his voice: him all his train
 Follow'd in bright procession to behold
 Creation, and the wonders of his might.
 Then staid the fervid wheels, and in his hand
 He took the golden compasses, prepared
 In God's eternal store, to circumscribe

This

*This universe, and all created things:
One foot be center'd, and the other turn'd
Round through the vast profundity obscure,
And said, Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds,
This be thy just circumference, o World.*

The thought of the golden compasses is conceived altogether in *Homer's* spirit, and is a very noble incident in this wonderful description. *Homer*, when he speaks of the Gods, ascribes to them several arms and instruments with the same greatness of imagination. Let the Reader only peruse the description of *Minerva's* *Ægis*, or Buckler, in the fifth book of the *Iliad*, with her spear which would overturn whole squadrons, and her helmet that was sufficient to cover an army drawn out of an hundred cities: the golden compasses in the above-mentioned passage appear a very natural instrument in the hand of him, whom *Plato* somewhere calls the *Divine Geometrician*. As Poetry delights in cloathing abstracted Ideas in allegories and sensible images, we find a magnificent description of the Creation formed after the same manner in one of the Prophets, wherein he describes the Almighty Architect as measuring the waters in the hollow of his hand, meeting out the heavens with his span, comprehending the dust of the earth in a measure, weighing the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. Another of them describing the Supreme Being in this great work of Creation, represents him as laying the foundations of the earth, and stretching a line upon it. And in another place as garnishing the Heavens, stretching out the North over the empty place, and hanging the Earth upon nothing. This last noble thought *Milton* has expressed in the following verse.

And Earth self-balanc'd on her center hung.

The beauties of description in this book lie so very thick, that it is impossible to enumerate them in this paper. The Poet has employed on them the whole energy of our tongue. The several great scenes of the Creation rise up to view one after another, in such a manner, that the reader seems present at this wonderful work, and to assist among the choirs of Angels, who are the spectators of it. How glorious is the conclusion of the first day.

— Thus was the first day Ev'n and Morn.

Nor past uncelebrated, nor unsung

By the celestial choirs, when orient light

Exhaling

*Exhaling first from darkness they beheld;
Birth-day of Heav'n and Earth; with joy and shout
The hollow universal orb they fill'd.*

We have the same elevation of thought in the third day; when the mountains were brought forth, and the deep was made.

*Immediately the mountains huge appear
Emergent, and their broad bare backs upheave
Into the clouds, their tops ascend the sky:
So high as heav'd the tumid hills, so low
Down sunk a hollow bottom broad and deep,
Capacious bed of waters —*

We have also the rising of the whole vegetable world described in this day's work, which is filled with all the Graces that other Poets have lavished on their description of the Spring, and leads the reader's imagination into a Theatre equally surprizing and beautiful.

The several glories of the Heavens make their appearance on the fourth day.

*First in his East the glorious lamp was seen
Regent of day, and all the horizon round
Invested with bright rays, jocund to run
His longitude thro' Heav'n's high rode: the gray
Dawn, and the Pleiades before him danced
Shedding sweet influence: less bright the Moon,
But opposite in levell'd West was set,
His mirror, with full face borrowing her light
From him, for other light she needed none
In that aspect, and still the distance keeps
Till night; then in the East her turn she shines
Revolv'd on Heav'n's great axle, and her reign
With thousand lesser lights dividual holds,
With thousand thousand stars that then appear'd
Spangling the Hemisphere —*

One would wonder how the Poet could be so concise in his description of the Six days works, as to comprehend them within the bounds of an Episode, and at the same time so particular, as to give us a lively idea of them. This is still more remarkable in his account of the fifth and sixth days, in which he has drawn out to our view the whole animal creation,

creation, from the Reptil to the Behemoth. As the Lion and the Leviathan are two of the noblest productions in the world of living creatures, the Reader will find a most exquisite spirit of poetry in the account which our Author gives us of them. The sixth day concludes with the Formation of man, upon which the Angel takes occasion, as he did after the battel in heaven, to remind *Adam* of his obedience, which was the principal design of this his visit.

The Poet afterwards represents the Messiah returning into Heaven, and taking a survey of his great work. There is something inexpressibly sublime in this part of the Poem, where the Author describes that great period of time, filled with so many glorious circumstances; when the heavens and earth were finished; when the Messiah ascended up in triumph through the everlasting gates; when he looked down with pleasure upon this new creation; when every part of nature seemed to rejoice in its existence; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

*So ev'n and morn accomplish'd the sixth day:
Yet not till the Creator from his work
Desiring, tho' unwearied, up return'd,
Up to the Heav'n of Heav'ns his high abode,
Thence to behold this new created world
Th' addition of his Empire; how it shew'd
In prospect from his throne, how good, how fair,
Answering his great idea. Up he rode
Follow'd with acclamation and the sound
Symphonious of ten thousand harps that tuned
Angelic harmonies: the earth, the air
Resounding, (thou remember'st, for thou heard'st)
The Heavens and all the Constellations rung,
The Planets in their station list'ning stood,
While the bright pomp ascended jubilant.
Open ye everlasting gates, they sung,
Open ye Heav'ns, your living doors, let in
The great Creator from his work return'd
Magnificent, his six days work, a world.*

I cannot conclude this book upon the Creation, without mentioning a Poem which has lately appeared under that title. The work was undertaken with so good an intention, and is executed with so great a ma-

VOL. III.

XX

stry,

story, that it deserves to be looked upon as one of the most useful and noble productions in our *English* verse. The Reader cannot but be pleased to find the depths of Philosophy enlivened with all the charms of Poetry, and to see so great a strength of reason, amidst so beautiful a redundancy of the imagination. The Author has shewn us that design in all the works of Nature, which necessarily leads us to the knowledge of its first cause. In short, he has illustrated, by numberless and incontestable instances, that divine wisdom, which the son of *Sirach* has so nobly ascribed to the supreme Being in his formation of the world, when he tells us, that *he created her, and saw her, and numbered her, and pou-
red her out upon all his works.*

N° 345. Saturday, April 5.

*Sanctius hic animal, mentisque capacius altæ
Deérat adhuc, et quod dominari in cætera posset.
Natus homo est-----*

Ov. Met.

THE accounts which *Raphael* gives of the battel of Angels, and the Creation of the world, have in them those qualifications which the Critics judge requisite to an Episode. They are nearly related to the principal Action, and have a just connection with the Fable.

The eighth book opens with a beautiful description of the impression which this discourse of the Arch-angel made on our first Parents. *Adam* afterwards, by a very natural Curiosity, enquires concerning the motions of those Celestial bodies which make the most glorious appearance among the six days works. The Poet here, with a great deal of art, represents *Eve* as withdrawing from this part of their conversation to amusements more suitable to her sex. He well knew, that the Episode in this book, which is filled with *Adam's* account of his passion and esteem for *Eve*, would have been improper for her hearing, and has therefore devised very just and beautiful reasons for her retiring.