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In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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*And with mysterious reverence I deem)
So much delights me as those graceful acts,
Those thousand decencies that daily flow
From all her words and actions mixt with love
And sweet compliance, which declare unfeign'd
Union of mind, or in us both one soul;
Harmony to behold in wedded pair.*

Adam's speech, at parting with the Angel, has in it a deference and gratitude agreeable to an inferior nature, and at the same time a certain dignity and greatness suitable to the Father of mankind in his state of Innocence.

N^o 351. *Saturday, April 12.*

----- *In te omnis domus inclinata recumbit.* Virg.

IF we look into the three great heroic Poems which have appeared in the world, we may observe that they are built upon very slight foundations. *Homer* lived near 300 years after the *Trojan* war, and, as the writing of history was not then in use among the *Greeks*, we may very well suppose, that the tradition of *Achilles* and *Ulysses* had brought down but very few particulars to his knowledge, though there is no question but he has wrought into his two Poems such of their remarkable adventures as were still talked of among his contemporaries.

The story of *Aeneas*, on which *Virgil* founded his Poem, was likewise very bare of circumstances, and by that means afforded him an opportunity of embellishing it with fiction, and giving a full range to his own invention. We find, however, that he has interwoven, in the course of his Fable, the principal particulars, which were generally believed among the *Romans*, of *Aeneas* his voyage and settlement in *Italy*.

The Reader may find an abridgment of the whole story as collected out of the antient Historians, and as it was received among the *Romans*, in *Dionysius Halicarnassens*.

Since none of the Critics have considered *Virgil's* Fable, with relation to this history of *Aeneas*; it may not, perhaps, be amiss to examine it in this light, so far as it regards my present purpose. Whoever looks into the abridgment above-mentioned, will find that the character of *Aeneas* is filled with piety to the Gods, and a superstitious observation of prodigies, oracles, and predictions. *Virgil* has not only preserved this character in the person of *Aeneas*, but has given a place in his Poem to those particular prophecies which he found recorded of him in history and tradition. The Poet took the matters of fact as they came down to him, and circumstanced them after his own manner, to make them appear the more natural, agreeable, or surprizing. I believe very many readers have been shocked at that ludicrous Prophecy, which one of the *Harpies* pronounces to the *Trojans* in the third book, namely, that before they had built their intended city, they should be reduced by hunger to eat their very Tables. But, when they hear this was one of the circumstances that had been transmitted to the *Romans* in the history of *Aeneas*, they will think the Poet did very well in taking notice of it. The historian above-mentioned acquaints us, a Prophetess had foretold *Aeneas*, that he should take his voyage westward, till his companions should eat their Tables; and that accordingly, upon his landing in *Italy*, as they were eating their flesh upon cakes of bread, for want of other conveniencies, they afterwards fed on the cakes themselves; upon which one of the company said merrily, *We are eating our Tables.* They immediately took the hint, says the Historian, and concluded the prophecy to be fulfilled. As *Virgil* did not think it proper to omit so material a particular in the history of *Aeneas*, it may be worth while to consider with how much judgment he has qualified it, and taken off every thing that might have appeared improper for a passage in an Heroic Poem. The Prophetess who foretells it is an hungry *Harpy*, as the Person who discovers it is young *Ascanius*.

Heus etiam mensas consumimus, inquit Iulus.

Such an observation, which is beautiful in the mouth of a boy, would have been ridiculous from any other in the company. I am apt to think that the changing of the *Trojan* Fleet into Water-Nymphs, which is the most violent Machine in the whole *Aeneid*, and has given offence to several Critics, may be accounted for the same way. *Virgil* himself, before he begins that relation, premises that what he was going to tell, appeared incredible, but that it was justified by tradition. What further confirms

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me that this change of the Fleet was a celebrated circumstance in the history of *Aeneas* is, that *Ovid* has given a place to the same *Metamorphosis* in his account of the heathen Mythology.

None of the Critics I have met with having considered the Fable of the *Aeneid* in this light, and taken notice how the tradition, on which it was founded, authorizes those parts in it which appear the most exceptionable; I hope the length of this reflection will not make it unacceptable to the curious part of my Readers.

The history, which was the basis of *Milton's* Poem, is still shorter than either that of the *Iliad* or *Aeneid*. The Poet has likewise taken care to insert every circumstance of it in the body of his Fable. The ninth book, which we are here to consider, is raised upon that brief account in Scripture, wherein we are told that the Serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field, that he tempted the Woman to eat of the forbidden fruit, that she was overcome by this temptation, and that *Adam* followed her example. From these few particulars *Milton* has formed one of the most entertaining Fables that Invention ever produced. He has disposed of these several circumstances among so many agreeable and natural fictions of his own, that his whole story looks only like a Comment upon sacred writ, or rather seems to be a full and compleat relation of what the other is only an Epitome. I have insisted the longer on this consideration, as I look upon the disposition and contrivance of the Fable to be the principal beauty of the ninth book, which has more Story in it, and is fuller of incidents, than any other in the whole Poem. *Satan's* traversing the globe, and still keeping within the shadow of the night, as fearing to be discovered by the Angel of the Sun, who had before detected him, is one of those beautiful imaginations with which he introduces this his second series of adventures. Having examined the nature of every creature, and found out one which was the most proper for his purpose, he again returns to Paradise; and, to avoid discovery, sinks by night with a river that ran under the Garden, and rises up again through a fountain that issued from it by the Tree of Life. The Poet, who, as we have before taken notice, speaks as little as possible in his own person, and, after the example of *Homer*, fills every part of his work with manners and characters, introduces a Soliloquy of this infernal agent, who was thus restless in the destruction of man. He is then described as gliding through the Garden under the resemblance of a mist, in order to find out that creature in which he designed to tempt our first Parents. This description has something in it very poetical and surprizing.

*So saying, through each thicket dank or dry
Like a black mist, low creeping, he held on
His midnight search, where soonest he might find
The Serpent: him fast sleeping soon he found
In labyrinth of many a round self-roll'd,
His head the midst, well stor'd with subtle wiles.*

The Author afterwards gives us a description of the Morning, which is wonderfully suitable to a divine Poem, and peculiar to that first season of nature: he represents the earth before it was curst as a great Altar breathing out its Incense from all parts, and sending up a pleasant favour to the nostrils of its Creator; to which he adds a noble idea of *Adam* and *Eve*, as offering their morning worship, and filling up the universal comfort of praise and adoration.

*Now when as sacred light began to dawn
In Eden on the humid flowers, that breathed
Their morning incense, when all things that breathe
From th' Earth's great Altar send up silent praise
To the Creator, and his nostrils fill
With grateful smell; forth came the human pair,
And join their vocal worship to the choir
Of creatures wanting voice——*

The dispute which follows between our two first Parents is represented with great art: it proceeds from a difference of judgment, not of passion, and is managed with reason, not with heat: it is such a dispute as we may suppose might have happened in *Paradise*, had man continued happy and innocent. There is great delicacy in the moralities which are interspersed in *Adam's* discourse, and which the most ordinary Reader cannot but take notice of. The force of love which the Father of mankind so finely describes in the eighth book, and which is inserted in the foregoing paper, shews it self here in many fine instances: as in those fond regards he cast towards *Eve* at her parting from him.

*Her long with ardent look his eye pursued
Delighted, but desiring more her stay.
Oft he to her his charge of quick return
Repeated; she to him as oft engaged
To be return'd by noon amid the bowre.*

In his impatience and amusement during her absence.

—— Adam

————— *Adam the while*
Waiting desirous her return, had wove
Of choicest flowers a garland to adorn
Her tresses and her rural labours crown,
As reapers oft are wont their harvest Queen.
Great joy he promised to his thoughts, and new
Solace in her return, so long delay'd.

But particularly in that passionate speech, where seeing her irrecoverably lost, he resolves to perish with her rather than to live without her.

————— *Some cursed fraud*
Or enemy hath beguil'd thee, yet unknown,
And me with thee hath ruin'd, for with thee
Certain my resolution is to die;
How can I live without thee, how forego
Thy sweet converse, and love so dearly join'd,
To live again in these wild woods forlorn?
Should God create another Eve, and I
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart; no, no, I feel
The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh,
Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe.

The beginning of this speech, and the preparation to it, are animated with the same spirit as the conclusion, which I have here quoted.

The several wiles which are put in practice by the tempter, when he found *Eve* separated from her husband, the many pleasing images of Nature which are intermixt in this part of the story, with its gradual and regular progress to the fatal Catastrophe, are so very remarkable, that it would be superfluous to point out their respective beauties.

I have avoided mentioning any particular Similitudes in my remarks on this great work, because I have given a general account of them in my paper on the first book. There is one, however, in this part of the Poem which I shall here quote, as it is not only very beautiful, but the closest of any in the whole Poem; I mean that where the Serpent is described as rolling forward in all his pride, animated by the evil spirit, and conducting *Eve* to her destruction, while *Adam* was at too great a distance from her to give her his assistance. These several particulars are all of them wrought into the following Similitude.

————— *Hope*

————— Hope elevates, and joy
 Brightens his crest; as when a wand'ring fire
 Compact of unctuous vapour, which the night
 Condenses, and the cold invirons round,
 Kindled through agitation to a flame,
 (Which oft, they say, some evil Spirit attends)
 Hovering and blazing with delusive light,
 Misleads th' amaz'd night-wanderer from his way
 To bogs and mires, and oft thro' pond or pool,
 There swallow'd up and lost, from succour far.

That secret intoxication of pleasure, with all those transient flushings of guilt and joy which the Poet represents in our first parents upon their eating the forbidden fruit, to those flaggings of spirit, damps of sorrow, and mutual accusations which succeed it, are conceived with a wonderful Imagination, and described in very natural Sentiments.

When *Dido* in the fourth *Aeneid* yielded to that fatal temptation which ruined her, *Virgil* tells us the Earth trembled, the Heavens were filled with flashes of lightning, and the Nymphs howled upon the mountain tops. *Milton*, in the same poetical Spirit, has described all Nature as disturbed upon *Eve's* eating the forbidden fruit.

So saying, her rash hand in evil hour
 Forth reaching to the fruit, she pluckt, she eat:
 Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
 Sighing thro' all her works gave signs of woe
 That all was lost

Upon *Adam's* falling into the same guilt, the whole Creation appears a second time in convulsions.

————— He scrupled not to eat
 Against his better knowledge, not deceiv'd,
 But fondly overcome with female charm.
 Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
 In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan,
 Sky lowred, and, muttering thunder, some sad drops
 Wept at completing of the mortal sin.

As all Nature suffered by the guilt of our first parents, these symptoms of trouble and consternation are wonderfully imagined, not only as Prodigies, but as marks of her sympathizing in the Fall of man.

Adam's

Adam's converse with *Eve*, after having eaten the forbidden fruit, is an exact copy of that between *Jupiter* and *Juno* in the fourteenth *Iliad*. *Juno* there approaches *Jupiter* with the girdle which she had received from *Venus*; upon which he tells her, that she appeared more charming and desirable than she had ever done before, even when their loves were at the highest. The Poet afterwards describes them as reposing on a summit of mount *Ida*, which produced under them a bed of flowers, the *Lotus*, the *Crocus*, and the *Hyacinth*, and concludes his description with their falling asleep.

Let the Reader compare this with the following passage in *Milton*, which begins with *Adam's* speech to *Eve*.

For never did thy beauty since the day
I saw thee first and wedded thee, adorn'd
With all perfections, so inflame my sense
With ardor to enjoy thee, fairer now
Than ever, bounty of this virtuous tree.
So said he, and forbore not glance or toy
Of amorous intent, well understood
Of *Eve*, whose eye darted contagious fire.
Her hand he seiz'd, and to a shady bank
Thick over-head with verdant roof embowr'd
He led her nothing loath: flow'rs were the couch,
Pansies, and Violets, and Asphodel,
And Hyacinth, earth's freshest softest lap.
There they their fill of love, and love's disport
Took largely, of their mutual guilt the seal,
The solace of their sin, till drowsy sleep
Oppress'd them

As no Poet seems ever to have studied *Homer* more, or to have resembled him in the greatness of genius than *Milton*, I think I should have given but a very imperfect account of his beauties, if I had not observed the most remarkable passages which look like parallels in these two great Authors. I might, in the course of these criticisms, have taken notice of many particular lines and expressions which are translated from the *Greek* Poet; but as I thought this would have appeared too minute and over-curious, I have purposely omitted them. The greater incidents, however, are not only set off by being shewn in the same light with several of the same nature in *Homer*, but by that means may be also guarded against the cavils of the tasteless or ignorant.

Saturday.