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

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

**London, 1721**

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N<sup>o</sup> 287. *Tuesday, January 29.*

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Ω φιλότατη γῆ μήτηρ, ὡς σεμνὸν σφόδρ' εἶ  
Τοῖς νῦν ἐχέσι κτήμα;

Menand.

**I** Look upon it as a peculiar happiness, that were I to chuse of what religion I would be, and under what government I would live, I should most certainly give the preference to that form of religion and government which is established in my own country. In this point I think I am determin'd by reason and conviction; but if I shall be told that I am act'd by prejudice, I am sure it is an honest prejudice, it is a prejudice that arises from the love of my country, and therefore such an one as I will always indulge. I have in several papers endeavour'd to express my duty and esteem for the Church of *England*, and design this as an Essay upon the civil part of our Constitution, having often entertain'd my self with reflections on this subject, which I have not met with in other writers.

That form of government appears to me the most reasonable, which is most conformable to the equality that we find in human nature, provided it be consistent with publick peace and tranquillity. This is what may properly be call'd Liberty, which exempts one man from subjection to another, so far as the order and oeconomy of government will permit.

Liberty should reach every individual of a people, as they all share one common nature; if it only spreads among particular branches, there had better be none at all, since such a liberty only aggravates the misfortune of those who are deprived of it, by setting before them a disagreeable subject of comparison.

This liberty is best preserv'd, where the Legislative power is lodg'd in several persons, especially if those persons are of different ranks and interests; for where they are of the same rank, and consequently have an interest to manage peculiar to that rank, it differs but little from a Despotical government in a single person. But the greatest security a people can have for their liberty, is when the Legislative power is in the hands

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of persons so happily distinguished, that by providing for the particular interest of their several ranks, they are providing for the whole body of the people; or in other words, when there is no part of the people that has not a common interest with at least one part of the Legislators.

If there be but one body of Legislators, it is no better than a Tyranny; if there are only two, there will want a casting voice, and one of them must at length be swallowed up by disputes and contentions that will necessarily arise between them. Four would have the same inconvenience as two, and a greater number would cause too much confusion. I could never read a passage in *Polybius*, and another in *Cicero*, to this purpose, without a secret pleasure in applying it to the *English* constitution, which it suits much better than the *Roman*. Both these great Authors give the Pre-eminence to a mixt government consisting of three branches, the Regal, the Noble, and the Popular. They had doubtless in their thoughts the constitution of the *Roman* Commonwealth, in which the Consul represented the King; the Senate, the Nobles; and the Tribunes the people. This division of the three powers in the *Roman* constitution was by no means so distinct and natural, as it is in the *English* form of government. Among several objections that might be made to it, I think the chief are those that affect the Consular power, which had only the ornaments without the force of the regal authority. Their number had not a casting voice in it; for which reason, if one did not chance to be employed abroad, while the other sat at home, the publick business was sometimes at a stand, while the Consuls pulled two different ways in it. Besides, I do not find that the Consuls had ever a negative voice in the passing of a law, or decree of Senate, so that indeed they were rather the chief body of the Nobility, or the first Ministers of State, than a distinct branch of the Sovereignty, in which none can be looked upon as a part, who are not a part of the Legislature. Had the Consuls been invested with the regal authority to as great a degree as our Monarchs, there would never have been any occasions for a Dictatorship, which had in it the power of the three orders, and ended in the subversion of the whole constitution.

Such an history as that of *Suetonius*, which gives us a succession of absolute Princes, is to me an unanswerable argument against Despotick power. Where the Prince is a man of wisdom and virtue, it is indeed happy for his people that he is absolute; but since in the common run of mankind, for one that is wise and good you find ten of a contrary character, it is very dangerous for a nation to stand to its chance, or to have its publick happiness or misery to depend on the virtues or vices of a single person

Person. Look into the historian I have mentioned, or into any series of absolute Princes, how many Tyrants must you read through, before you come at an Emperor that is supportable? But this is not all; an honest private man often grows cruel and abandoned, when converted into an absolute Prince. Give a man power of doing what he pleases with impunity, you extinguish his fear, and consequently overturn in him one of the great pillars of morality. This too we find confirmed by matter of fact. How many hopeful heirs apparent to great Empires, when in the possession of them, have become such monsters of lust and cruelty as are a reproach to human nature?

Some tell us we ought to make our governments on earth like that in heaven, which, say they, is altogether monarchical and unlimited. Was man like his Creator in goodness and justice, I should be for following this great model; but where goodness and justice are not essential to the ruler, I would by no means put my self into his hands to be disposed of according to his particular will and pleasure.

It is odd to consider the connection between Despotic government and Barbarity, and how the making of one person more than-man, makes the rest less. Above nine parts of the world in ten are in the lowest state of slavery, and consequently sunk into the most gross and brutal ignorance. *European* slavery is indeed a state of liberty, if compared with that which prevails in the other three divisions of the world; and therefore it is no wonder that those who grovel under it have many tracks of light among them, of which the others are wholly destitute.

Riches and plenty are the natural fruits of liberty, and where these abound, learning and all the liberal arts will immediately lift up their heads and flourish. As a man must have no slavish fears and apprehensions hanging upon his mind, who will indulge the flights of fancy or speculation, and push his researches into all the abstruse corners of truth; so it is necessary for him to have about him a competency of all the conveniencies of life.

The first thing every one looks after, is to provide himself with necessaries. This point will engross our thoughts 'till it be satisfied. If this is taken care of to our hands, we look out for pleasures and amusements; and among a great number of idle people, there will be many whose pleasures will lie in reading and contemplation. These are the two great sources of knowledge, and as men grow wise they naturally love to communicate their discoveries; and others seeing the happiness of such a learned life, and improving by their conversation, emulate, imitate, and surpass one another, 'till a nation is filled with races of wise and  
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understanding persons. Ease and plenty are therefore the great cherishers of knowledge; and as most of the despotic governments of the world have neither of them, they are naturally over-run with ignorance and barbarity. In *Europe*, indeed, notwithstanding several of its Princes are absolute, there are men famous for knowledge and learning, but the reason is because the subjects are many of them rich and wealthy; the Prince not thinking fit to exert himself in his full tyranny like the Princes of the Eastern nations, lest his subjects should be invited to new-mould their constitution, having so many prospects of liberty within their view. But in all despotic governments, though a particular Prince may favour arts and letters, there is a natural degeneracy of mankind, as you may observe from *Augustus's* reign, how the *Romans* lost themselves by degrees till they fell to an equality with the most barbarous nations that surrounded them. Look upon *Greece* under its free States, and you would think its inhabitants lived in different climates, and under different heavens, from those at present; so different are the Genius's which are formed under *Turkish* slavery, and *Grecian* liberty.

Besides poverty and want, there are other reasons that debase the minds of men, who live under slavery, though I look on this as the principal. This natural tendency of despotic power to ignorance and barbarity, though not insisted upon by others, is, I think, an unanswerable argument against that form of government, as it shews how repugnant it is to the good of mankind and the perfection of human nature, which ought to be the great ends of all civil institutions.

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N<sup>o</sup> 289. Thursday, January 31.

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*Vite summa brevis spem nos vetat inchoare longam.* Hor.

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UPON taking my seat in a Coffee-house I often draw the eyes of the whole room upon me, when in the hottest seasons of News, and at a time that perhaps the *Dutch* mail is just come in, they hear me ask the Coffee-man for his last week's bill of mortality: I find that I have been sometimes taken on this occasion for a Parish Sexton, some-