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

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

**London, 1721**

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Πᾶσιν γὰρ ὑπερβῆσαι συμμαχεῖ τύχη.

Frag. Vet. Po.

**T**HE famous *Gratian*, in his little book wherein he lays down maxims for a man's advancing himself at Court, advises his Reader to associate himself with the fortunate, and to shun the company of the unfortunate; which notwithstanding the baseness of the precept to an honest mind, may have something useful in it for those who push their interest in the world. It is certain a great part of what we call good or ill fortune, rises out of right or wrong measures and schemes of life. When I hear a man complain of his being unfortunate in all his undertakings, I shrewdly suspect him for a very weak man in his affairs. In conformity with this way of thinking, Cardinal *Richlieu* used to say, that unfortunate and imprudent were but two words for the same thing. As the Cardinal himself had a great share both of prudence and good-fortune, his famous antagonist, the Count *d'Olivarez*, was disgraced at the Court of *Madrid*, because it was alledged against him that he had never any success in his undertakings. This, says an eminent Author, was *indirectly* accusing him of imprudence.

*Cicero* recommended *Pompey* to the *Romans* for their General upon three accounts, as he was a man of courage, conduct, and good-fortune. It was, perhaps, for the reason above-mentioned, namely, that a series of good-fortune supposes a prudent management in the person whom it befalls, that not only *Sylla* the Dictator, but several of the *Roman Emperors*, as is still to be seen upon their Medals, among their other titles, gave themselves that of *Felix* or Fortunate. The heathens, indeed, seem to have valued a man more for his good-fortune than for any other quality, which I think is very natural for those who have not a strong belief of another world. For how can I conceive a man crowned with many distinguishing blessings, that has not some extraordinary fund of merit and perfection in him, which lies open to the supream eye, though perhaps it is not discovered by my observation? What is the reason *Homer's* and

*Virgil's*

*Virgil's* Heroes do not form a resolution, or strike a blow, without the conduct and direction of some Deity? doubtless because the Poets esteem'd it the greatest honour to be favoured by the Gods, and thought the best way of praising a man was, to recount those favours which naturally implied an extraordinary merit in the person on whom they descended.

Those who believe a future state of rewards and punishments, act very absurdly, if they form their opinions of a man's merit from his successes. But certainly, if I thought the whole circle of our Being was concluded between our births and deaths, I should think a man's good-fortune the measure and standard of his real merit, since Providence would have no opportunity of rewarding his virtue and perfections, but in the present life. A virtuous unbeliever, who lies under the pressure of misfortunes, has reason to cry out, as they say *Brutus* did a little before his death, *O Virtue, I have worshipped thee as a substantial good, but I find thou art an empty name.*

But to return to our first point. Though prudence does undoubtedly in a great measure produce our good or ill fortune in the world, it is certain there are many unforeseen accidents and occurrences, which very often pervert the finest schemes that can be laid by human wisdom. The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Nothing less than infinite wisdom can have an absolute command over fortune; the highest degree of it which man can possess, is by no means equal to fortuitous events, and to such contingencies as may rise in the prosecution of our affairs. Nay, it very often happens, that prudence, which has always in it a great mixture of caution, hinders a man from being so fortunate as he might possibly have been without it. A person who only aims at what is likely to succeed, and follows closely the dictates of human prudence, never meets with those great and unforeseen successes, which are often the effect of a sanguine temper, or a more happy rashness; and this perhaps may be the reason, that according to the common observation, Fortune, like other Females, delights rather in favouring the young than the old.

Upon the whole, since man is so short-sighted a creature, and the accidents which may happen to him so various, I cannot but be of *Dr. Tillotson's* opinion in another case, that were there any doubt of a Providence, yet it certainly would be very desirable there should be such a Being of infinite wisdom and goodness, on whose direction we might rely in the conduct of humane life.

It is a great presumption to ascribe our successes to our own management, and not to esteem our selves upon any blessing, rather as it is the bounty of heaven, than the acquisition of our own prudence. I am very well pleased with a Medal which was struck by Queen *Elizabeth* a little after the defeat of the invincible Armada, to perpetuate the memory of that extraordinary event. It is well known how the King of *Spain*, and others who were enemies of that great Princess, to derogate from her glory, ascribed the ruin of their fleet rather to the violence of storms and tempests, than to the bravery of the *English*. Queen *Elizabeth*, instead of looking upon this as a diminution of her honour, valued herself upon such a signal favour of Providence, and accordingly in the reverse of the Medal above-mentioned, has represented a fleet beaten by a tempest, and falling foul upon one another, with that religious inscription, *Afflavit Deus & dissipantur. He blew with his Wind, and they were scattered.*

It is remarked of a famous *Grecian* General, whose name I cannot at present recollect, and who had been a particular favourite of Fortune, that upon recounting his victories among his friends, he added at the end of several great actions, *And in this Fortune had no share.* After which it is observed in history, that he never prospered in any thing he undertook.

As arrogance, and a conceitedness of our own abilities, are very shocking and offensive to men of sense and virtue, we may be sure they are highly displeasing to that Being who delights in an humble mind, and by several of his dispensations seems purposely to shew us, that our own schemes or prudence have no share in our advancements.

Since on this subject I have already admitted several quotations which have occurred to my memory upon writing this Paper, I will conclude it with a little *Persian* Fable. A drop of water fell out of a cloud into the sea, and finding it self lost in such an immensity of fluid matter, broke out into the following reflection: "Alas! what an inconsiderable creature am I in this prodigious ocean of waters! my existence is of no concern to the universe, I am reduced to a kind of nothing, and am less than the least of the works of God." It so happened, that an oyster, which lay in the neighbourhood of this drop, chanced to gape and swallow it up in the midst of this his humble soliloquy. The drop, says the Fable, lay a great while hardening in the shell, until by degrees it was ripened into a pearl, which falling into the hands of a diver, after a long series of adventures, is at present that famous pearl which is fixed on the top of the *Persian* Diadem.

Thursday,