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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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*Respicere exemplar vitæ morumque jubebo
Doctum imitatore, et veras hinc ducere voces.* Hor.

MY friend Sir ROGER DE COVERLY, when we last met together at the club, told me, that he had a great mind to see the new Tragedy with me, assuring me at the same time, that he had not been at a play these twenty years. The last I saw, said Sir ROGER, was the *Committee*, which I should not have gone to neither, had not I been told before-hand that it was a good Church-of-England Comedy. He then proceeded to enquire of me who this Distressed Mother was; and upon hearing that she was *Hector's* widow, he told me, that her husband was a brave man, and that when he was a school-boy he had read his life at the end of the Dictionary. My friend asked me, in the next place, if there would not be some danger in coming home late, in case the *Mobocks* should be abroad. I assure you, says he, I thought I had fallen into their hands last night; for I observed two or three lusty black men that followed me half way up *Fleetstreet*, and mended their pace behind me, in proportion as I put on to go away from them. You must know, continued the Knight with a smile, I fancied they had a mind to *bunt* me: for I remember an honest Gentleman in my neighbourhood, who was served such a trick in King *Charles* the Second's time; for which reason he has not ventured himself in town ever since. I might have shown them very good sport, had this been their design; for as I am an old Fox-hunter, I should have turned and dodged, and have played them a thousand tricks they had never seen in their lives before. Sir ROGER added, that if these Gentlemen had any such intention, they did not succeed very well in it; for I threw them out, says he, at the end of *Norfolkstreet*, where I doubled the corner, and got shelter in my lodgings before they could imagine what was become of me. However, says the Knight, if Captain SENTRY will make one with us to-morrow night, and

and if you will both of you call upon me about four a-clock, that we may be at the house before it is full, I will have my own coach in readiness to attend you, for *John* tells me he has got the fore-wheels mended.

The Captain, who did not fail to meet me there at the appointed hour, bid Sir ROGER fear nothing, for that he had put on the same sword which he made use of at the battle of *Steenkirk*. Sir ROGER's servants, and among the rest my old friend the Butler, had, I found, provided themselves with good oaken plants, to attend their master upon this occasion. When we had placed him in his coach, with my self at his left hand, the Captain before him, and his Butler at the head of his Footmen in the rear, we convoy'd him in safety to the play-house; where, after having marched up the entry in good order, the Captain and I went in with him, and seated him betwixt us in the pit. As soon as the house was full, and the candles lighted, my old friend stood up and looked about him with that pleasure, which a mind seasoned with humanity naturally feels in it self, at the sight of a multitude of people who seem pleased with one another, and partake of the same common entertainment. I could not but fancy to my self, as the old man stood up in the middle of the pit, that he made a very proper center to a tragick audience. Upon the entering of *Pyrrhus*, the Knight told me, that he did not believe the King of *Franco* himself had a better strut. I was indeed very attentive to my old friend's remarks, because I looked upon them as a piece of natural criticism, and was well pleased to hear him at the conclusion of almost every Scene, telling me that he could not imagine how the Play would end. One while he appeared much concerned for *Andromache*; and a little while after as much for *Hermione*: and was extremely puzzled to think what would become of *Pyrrhus*.

When Sir ROGER saw *Andromache's* obstinate refusal to her lover's importunities, he whispered me in the ear, that he was sure she would never have him; to which he added, with a more than ordinary vehemence, you cannot imagine, Sir, what it is to have to do with a widow. Upon *Pyrrhus* his threatenng afterwards to leave her, the Knight shook his head, and muttered to himself, Ay, do if you can. This part dwelt so much upon my friend's imagination, that at the close of the third Act, as I was thinking of something else, he whispered in my ear, These widows, Sir, are the most perverse creatures in the world. But pray, says he, you that are a Critick, is this Play according to your Dramatick rules, as you call them? Should your people in Tragedy always talk to be
under

understood? Why, there is not a single sentence in this Play that I do not know the meaning of.

The fourth Act very luckily begun before I had time to give the old Gentleman an answer; Well, says the Knight, sitting down with great satisfaction, I suppose we are now to see *Hector's* Ghost. He then renewed his attention, and, from time to time, fell a praising the widow. He made, indeed, a little mistake as to one of her pages, whom at his first entring, he took for *Astyanax*; but he quickly set himself right in that particular, though, at the same time, he owned he should have been very glad to have seen the little boy, who, says he, must needs be a very fine child by the account that is given of him. Upon *Hermione's* going off with a menace to *Pyrrhus*, the audience gave a loud clap; to which Sir ROGER added, On my word, a notable young baggage!

As there was a very remarkable silence and stillness in the audience during the whole action, it was natural for them to take the opportunity of the intervals between the Acts, to express their opinion of the Players, and of their respective parts. Sir ROGER hearing a cluster of them praise *Orestes*, struck in with them, and told them, that he thought his friend *Pylades* was a very sensible man; as they were afterwards applauding *Pyrrhus*, Sir ROGER put in a second time, And let me tell you, says he, though he speaks but little, I like the old fellow in whiskers as well as any of them. Captain SENTRY, seeing two or three wags who sat near us, lean with an attentive ear towards Sir ROGER, and fearing lest they should smoke the Knight, plucked him by the elbow, and whispered something in his ear, that lasted till the opening of the fifth Act. The Knight was wonderfully attentive to the account which *Orestes* gives of *Pyrrhus* his death, and at the conclusion of it, told me it was such a bloody piece of work, that he was glad it was not done upon the stage. Seeing afterwards *Orestes* in his raving fit, he grew more than ordinary ferious, and took occasion to moralize (in his way) upon an evil conscience, adding, that *Orestes, in his madness, looked as if he saw something*.

As we were the first that came into the house, so we were the last that went out of it; being resolved to have a clear passage for our old friend, whom we did not care to venture among the jostling of the crowd. Sir ROGER went out fully satisfied with his entertainment, and we guarded him to his lodgings in the same manner that we brought him to the Playhouse; being highly pleased, for my own part, not only with the performance of the excellent piece which had been presented, but with the satisfaction which it had given to the good old man.

Thursday,