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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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----- *Quos ille timorum*

*Maximus haud urget lethi metus: inde ruendi
In ferrum mens prona viris, animaque capaces
Mortis-----*

Lucan.

I Am very much pleas'd with a consolatory letter of *Phalaris*, to one who had lost a son that was a young man of great merit. The thought with which he comforts the afflicted father, is, to the best of my memory, as follows; that he should consider death had set a kind of seal upon his son's character, and placed him out of the reach of vice and infamy: that while he lived he was still within the possibility of falling away from virtue, and losing the fame of which he was possessed. Death only closes a man's reputation, and determines it as good or bad.

This, among other motives, may be one reason why we are naturally averse to the launching out into a man's praise till his head is laid in the dust. Whilst he is capable of changing, we may be forced to retract our opinions. He may forfeit the esteem we have conceived of him, and some time or other appear to us under a different light from what he does at present. In short, as the life of any man cannot be called happy or unhappy, so neither can it be pronounced vicious or virtuous, before the conclusion of it.

It was upon this consideration that *Epaminondas*, being asked whether *Chabrias*, *Iphicrates*, or he himself deserved most to be esteemed? You must first see us die, said he, before that question can be answered.

As there is not a more melancholy consideration to a good man than his being obnoxious to such a change, so there is nothing more glorious than to keep up an uniformity in his actions, and preserve the beauty of his character to the last.

The end of a man's life is often compared to the winding up of a well-written Play, where the principal persons still act in character, whatever the

the fate is which they undergo. There is scarce a great person in the *Grecian* or *Roman* history, whose death has not been remarked upon by some writer or other, and censured or applauded according to the Genius or principles of the person who has descanted on it. *Monfieur de St. Evremont* is very particular in setting forth the constancy and courage of *Petronius Arbitrator* during his last moments, and thinks he discovers in them a greater firmness of mind and resolution than in the death of *Seneca*, *Cato*, or *Socrates*. There is no question but this polite Author's affectation of appearing singular in his remarks, and making discoveries which had escaped the observation of others, threw him into this course of reflection. It was *Petronius's* merit, that he died in the same gaiety of temper in which he lived; but as his life was altogether loose and dissolute, the indifference which he shewed at the close of it is to be looked upon as a piece of natural carelessness and levity, rather than fortitude. The resolution of *Socrates* proceeded from very different motives, the consciousness of a well-spent life, and the prospect of a happy eternity. If the ingenious Author above-mentioned was so pleased with gaiety of humour in a dying man, he might have found a much nobler instance of it in our countryman *Sir Thomas More*.

This great and learned man was famous for enlivening his ordinary discourses with wit and pleasantry; and, as *Erasmus* tells him in an epistle dedicatory, acted in all parts of life like a second *Democritus*.

He died upon a point of religion, and is respected as a Martyr by that side for which he suffered. That innocent mirth which had been so conspicuous in his life, did not forsake him to the last: he maintained the same cheerfulness of heart upon the scaffold, which he used to shew at his table; and upon laying his head on the block, gave instances of that good-humour with which he had always entertained his friends in the most ordinary occurrences. His death was of a piece with his life. There was nothing in it new, forced or affected. He did not look upon the severing of his head from his body as a circumstance that ought to produce any change in the disposition of his mind; and as he died under a fixed and settled hope of immortality, he thought any unusual degree of sorrow and concern improper on such an occasion, as had nothing in it which could deject or terrify him.

There is no great danger of imitation from this example. Mens natural fears will be a sufficient guard against it. I shall only observe, that what was philosophy in this extraordinary man, would be frenzy in one who does not resemble him as well in the cheerfulness of his temper, as in the sanctity of his life and manners. I

I shall conclude this paper with the instance of a person who seems to me to have shewn more intrepidity and greatness of soul in his dying moments, than what we meet with among any of the most celebrated *Greeks* and *Romans*. I meet with this instance in the history of the revolutions in *Portugal*, written by the Abbot *de Vertot*.

When Don *Sebastian*, King of *Portugal*, had invaded the territories of *Muly Moluc*, Emperor of *Morocco*, in order to dethrone him, and set his Crown upon the head of his Nephew, *Moluc* was wearing away with a distemper which he himself knew was incurable. However, he prepared for the reception of so formidable an enemy. He was indeed so far spent with his sickness, that he did not expect to live out the whole day, when the last decisive battel was given; but knowing the fatal consequences that would happen to his children and people, in case he should die before he put an end to the war, he commanded his principal Officers that if he died during the engagement, they should conceal his death from the army, and that they should ride up to the Litter in which his corps was carried, under pretence of receiving orders from him as usual. Before battel begun he was carried through all the ranks of his army in an open Litter, as they stood drawn up in array, encouraging them to fight valiantly in defence of their religion and country. Finding afterwards the battel to go against him, though he was very near his last agonies, he threw himself out of his litter, rallied his army, and led them on to the charge; which afterwards ended in a compleat victory on the side of the *Moors*. He had no sooner brought his men to the engagement, but finding himself utterly spent, he was again replaced in his litter, where laying his finger on his mouth, to enjoyn secrecy to his Officers, who stood about him, he died a few moments after in that posture.



Thursday,