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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

N° 355. Thursday, April 17.

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Non ego mordaci distinxī carmine quēquam. Ovid.

I Have been very often tempted to write invectives upon those who have detracted from my works, or spoken in derogation of my person; but I look upon it as a particular happiness, that I have always hindred my resentments from proceeding to this extremity. I once had gone through half a satire, but found so many motions of humanity rising in me towards the persons whom I had severely treated, that I threw it into the fire without ever finishing it. I have been angry enough to make several little epigrams and lampoons; and after having admired them a day or two, have likewise committed them to the flames. These I look upon as so many sacrifices to humanity, and have received much greater satisfaction from the suppressing such performances, than I could have done from any reputation they might have procured me, or from any mortification they might have given my enemies, in case I had made them public. If a man has any talent in writing, it shews a good mind to forbear answering calumnies and reproaches in the same spirit of bitterness with which they are offered: But when a man has been at some pains in making suitable returns to an enemy, and has the instruments of revenge in his hands, to let drop his wrath, and stifle his resentments, seems to have something in it great and heroical. There is a particular merit in such a way of forgiving an enemy; and the more violent and unprovoked the offence has been, the greater still is the merit of him who thus forgives it.

I never met with a consideration that is more finely spun, and what has better pleased me, than one in *Epictetus*, which places an enemy in a new light, and gives us a view of him altogether different from that in which we are used to regard him. The sense of it is as follows: Does a man reproach thee for being proud or ill-natured, envious or conceited, ignorant or detracting? consider with thy self whether his reproaches are true; if they are not, consider that thou art not the person whom he reproaches,

proaches, but that he reviles an imaginary Being, and perhaps loves what thou really art, though he hates what thou appearest to be. If his reproaches are true, if thou art the envious ill-natured man he takes thee for, give thy self another turn, become mild, affable and obliging, and his reproaches of thee naturally cease: his reproaches may indeed continue, but thou art no longer the person whom he reproaches.

I often apply this rule to my self; and when I hear of a satirical speech or writing that is aimed at me, I examine my own heart, whether I deserve it or not. If I bring in a verdict against my self, I endeavour to rectify my conduct for the future in those particulars which have drawn the censure upon me; but if the whole invective be grounded upon a falsehood, I trouble my self no further about it, and look upon my name at the head of it to signify no more than one of those fictitious names made use of by an Author to introduce an imaginary character. Why should a man be sensible of the sting of a reproach, who is a stranger to the guilt that is implied in it? or subject himself to the penalty, when he knows he has never committed the crime? This is a piece of fortitude, which every one owes to his own innocence, and without which it is impossible for a man of any merit or figure, to live at peace with himself in a country that abounds with wit and liberty.

The famous Monsieur *Balzac*, in a Letter to the Chancellor of *France*, who had prevented the publication of a book against him, has the following words, which are a lively picture of the greatness of mind so visible in the works of that Author. *If it was a new thing, it may be I should not be displeas'd with the suppression of the first libel that should abuse me; but since there are enough of them to make a small Library, I am secretly pleas'd to see the number increased, and take delight in raising a heap of stones that Envy has cast at me without doing me any harm.*

The Author here alludes to those monuments of the eastern nations, which were mountains of stones raised upon the dead body by travellers, that used to cast every one his stone upon it as they pass'd by. It is certain that no monument is so glorious as one which is thus raised by the hands of Envy. For my part, I admire an Author for such a temper of mind as enables him to bear an undeserv'd reproach without resentment, more than for all the wit of any the finest satirical reply.

Thus far I thought necessary to explain my self in relation to those who have animadverted on this paper, and to shew the reasons why I have not thought fit to return them any formal answer. I must further add, that the work would have been of very little use to the public, had it

been filled with personal reflections and debates; for which reason I have never once turned out of my way to observe those little cavils which have been made against it by Envy or Ignorance. The common fry of scribblers, who have no other way of being taken notice of but by attacking what has gain'd some reputation in the world, would have furnished me with business enough, had they found me disposed to enter the Lists with them.

I shall conclude with the Fable of *Boccalini's* traveller, who was so pestered with the noise of grasshoppers in his ears, that he alighted from his horse in great wrath to kill them all. This, says the Author, was troubling himself to no manner of purpose: had he pursued his journey without taking notice of them, the troublesome insects would have died of themselves in a very few weeks, and he would have suffered nothing from them.

N^o 361. *Thursday, April 24.*

*Tartaream intendit vocem, qua protinus omnis
Contremuit domus-----* Virg.

I Have lately received the following Letter from a country Gentleman.

Mr. SPECTATOR,

“ THE night before I left *London* I went to see a Play, called, *The*
 “ *Humorous Lieutenant*. Upon the rising of the curtain I was
 “ very much surprized with the great Confort of Cat-calls which was
 “ exhibited that evening, and began to think with my self that I had
 “ made a mistake, and gone to a Musick-meeting, instead of the Play-
 “ house. It appeared indeed a little odd to me to see so many persons
 “ of quality of both sexes assembled together at a kind of Catterwawling;
 “ for I cannot look upon that performance to have been any thing bet-
 “ ter, whatever the Musicians themselves might think of it. As I had
 “ no acquaintance in the house to ask questions of, and was forced to go
 “ out