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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> 371. Tuesday, May 6.

*Jamne igitur laudas quod de sapientibus unus  
Ridebat?-----*

Juv.

I Shall communicate to my Reader the following letter for the entertainment of this day.

S I R,

“ YOU know very well that our nation is more famous for that sort  
“ of men who are called *Whims* and *Humorists*, than any other  
“ country in the world; for which reason it is observed that our *English*  
“ Comedy excels that of all other nations in the novelty and variety of  
“ its characters.

“ Among those innumerable sets of *Whims* which our country pro-  
“ duces, there are none whom I have regarded with more curiosity than  
“ those who have invented any particular kind of diversion for the en-  
“ tertainment of themselves or their friends. My letter shall single out  
“ those who take delight in forming a company that has something of  
“ burlesque and ridicule in its appearance. I shall make my self under-  
“ stood by the following example. One of the wits of the last age, who was  
“ a man of a good estate, thought he never laid out his money better than  
“ in a jest. As he was one year at the *Bath*, observing that in the great  
“ confluence of fine people, there were several among them with long  
“ chins, a part of the visage by which he himself was very much distin-  
“ guished, he invited to dinner half a score of these remarkable persons  
“ who had their mouths in the middle of their faces. They had no  
“ sooner placed themselves about the table, but they began to stare upon  
“ one another, not being able to imagine what had brought them toge-  
“ ther. Our *English* proverb says,

*'Tis merry in the hall,  
When beards wag all.*

“ It



“ It proved so in an assembly I am now speaking of, who seeing so many  
 “ peaks of faces agitated with eating, drinking, and discourse, and ob-  
 “ serving all the chins that were present meeting together very often  
 “ over the center of the table, every one grew sensible of the jest, and  
 “ came into it with so much good-humour, that they lived in strict friend-  
 “ ship and alliance from that day forward.

“ The same Gentleman some time after packed together a set of  
 “ Oglers, as he called them, consisting of such as had an unlucky cast in  
 “ their eyes. His diversion on this occasion was to see the cross bows,  
 “ mistaken signs, and wrong connivances that passed amidst so many  
 “ broken and refracted rays of sight.

“ The third feast which this merry Gentleman exhibited was to the  
 “ Stammerers, whom he got together in a sufficient body to fill his table.  
 “ He had ordered one of his servants, who was placed behind a skreen,  
 “ to write down their table-talk, which was very easy to be done with-  
 “ out the help of short-hand. It appears by the notes which were taken,  
 “ that though their conversation never fell, there were not above twenty  
 “ words spoken during the first course; that upon serving up the second,  
 “ one of the company was a quarter of an hour in telling them, that the  
 “ ducklins and sparrow-grass was very good; and that another took up  
 “ the same time in declaring himself of the same opinion. This jest did  
 “ not, however, go off so well as the former; for one of the guests be-  
 “ ing a brave man, and fuller of resentment than he knew how to ex-  
 “ press, went out of the room, and sent the facetious inviter a challenge  
 “ in writing, which though it was afterwards dropped by the interposi-  
 “ tion of friends, put a stop to these ludicrous entertainments.

“ Now, Sir, I dare say you will agree with me, that as there is no  
 “ moral in these jests, they ought to be discouraged, and looked upon  
 “ rather as pieces of unluckiness than wit. However, as it is natural for  
 “ one man to refine upon the thought of another, and impossible for  
 “ any single person, how great soever his parts may be, to invent an art,  
 “ and bring it to its utmost perfection; I shall here give you an account  
 “ of an honest Gentleman of my acquaintance, who upon hearing the  
 “ character of the Wit above-mentioned, has himself assumed it, and  
 “ endeavoured to convert it to the benefit of mankind. He invited  
 “ half a dozen of his friends one day to dinner, who were each of them  
 “ famous for inserting several redundant phrases in their discourse, as  
 “ *d'y bear me, d'y see, that is, and so Sir.* Each of the guests making  
 “ frequent use of his particular elegance, appeared so ridiculous to his  
 “ neigh-



“ neighbour, that he could not but reflect upon himself as appearing equally ridiculous to the rest of the company: by this means, before they had sat long together, every one talking with the greatest circumspection, and carefully avoiding his favourite expletive, the conversation was cleared of its redundancies, and had a greater quantity of sense, though less of sound in it.

“ The same well-meaning Gentleman took occasion, at another time, to bring together such of his friends as were addicted to a foolish habitual custom of swearing. In order to shew them the absurdity of the practice, he had recourse to the invention above-mentioned, having placed an *Amanuensis* in a private part of the room. After the second bottle, when men open their minds without reserve, my honest friend began to take notice of the many sonorous but unnecessary words that had passed in his house since their sitting down at table, and how much good conversation they had lost by giving way to such superfluous phrases. What a tax, says he, would they have raised for the poor, had we put the laws in execution upon one another? Every one of them took this gentle reproof in good part: upon which he told them, that knowing their conversation would have no secrets in it, he had ordered it to be taken down in writing, and for the humour-sake would read it to them if they pleased. There were ten sheets of it, which might have been reduced to two, had there not been those abominable interpolations I have before-mentioned. Upon the reading of it in cold blood, it looked rather like a conference of fiends than of men. In short, every one trembled at himself upon hearing calmly what he had pronounced amidst the heat and inadvertency of discourse.

“ I shall only mention another occasion wherein he made use of the same invention to cure a different kind of men, who are the pests of all polite conversation, and murder Time as much as either of the two former, though they do it more innocently; I mean that dull generation of Story-tellers. My friend got together about half a dozen of his acquaintance, who were infected with this strange malady. The first day one of them sitting down, entered upon the siege of *Namur*, which lasted till four a clock, their time of parting. The second day a *North-Briton* took possession of the discourse, which it was impossible to get out of his hands so long as the company staid together. The third day was engrossed after the same manner by a story of the same length. They at last began to reflect upon this barbarous way of treating one another, and by this means awaken'd out of that lethargy with which each of them had been seized for several years. “As



“ As you have somewhere declared, that extraordinary and uncommon characters of mankind are the game which you delight in, and  
 “ as I look upon you to be the greatest sportsman, or, if you please,  
 “ the *Nimrod* among this species of writers, I thought this discovery  
 “ would not be unacceptable to you.

*I am, SIR, &c.*

N<sup>o</sup> 377. *Tuesday, May 13.*

*Quid quisque vitet, nunquam homini satis  
 Cautum est in horas-----*

*Hor.*

**L**OVE was the mother of Poetry, and still produces, among the most ignorant and barbarous, a thousand imaginary distresses and poetical complaints. It makes a footman talk like *Oroondates*, and converts a brutal rustick into a gentle swain. The most ordinary Plebeian or Mechanic in love, bleeds and pines away with a certain elegance and tenderness of sentiments which this passion naturally inspires.

These inward languishings of a mind infected with this softness, have given birth to a phrase which is made use of by all the melting tribe, from the highest to the lowest, I mean that of *dying for Love*.

Romances, which owe their very Being to this passion, are full of these metaphorical deaths. Heroes and Heroines, Knights, Squires, and Damfels, are all of them in a dying condition. There is the same kind of mortality in our modern Tragedies, where every one gasps, faints, bleeds and dies. Many of the Poets, to describe the execution which is done by this passion, represent the fair sex as *Basilisks* that destroy with their eyes; but I think Mr. *Cowley* has with greater justness of thought compared a beautiful woman to a *Porcupine*, that sends an arrow from every part.

I have often thought, that there is no way so effectual for the cure of this general infirmity, as a man's reflecting upon the motives that produce it. When the passion proceeds from the sense of any virtue or perfection