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

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

**London, 1721**

N° 405. Saturday, June 14.

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just come in, with advice that the King was in good health, and was gone out a hunting the very morning the Post came away: upon which the haberdasher stole off his hat that hung upon a wooden peg by him, and retired to his shop with great confusion. This intelligence put a stop to my travels, which I had prosecuted with much satisfaction; not being a little pleased to hear so many different opinions upon so great an event, and to observe how naturally upon such a piece of news every one is apt to consider it with a regard to his own particular interest and advantage.

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N<sup>o</sup> 405. Saturday, June 14.

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Οἱ ᾗ πανμέριοι μολῶν θεὸν ἰλάσκοντο,  
 Καλὸν αἰδόντες παῖσινα κέροι Ἀχαιῶν,  
 Μέλποντες Ἐκάεργον. δ ᾗ φρένα τέρπετ' ἀκίαν.

Hom.

I Am very sorry to find, by the Opera-bills for this day, that we are likely to lose the greatest performer in dramatic music that is now living, or that perhaps ever appeared upon a stage. I need not acquaint my Reader, that I am speaking of *Signior Nicolini*. The town is highly obliged to that excellent artist, for having shewn us the *Italian* music in its perfection, as well as for that generous approbation he lately gave to an Opera of our own country, in which the composer endeavoured to do justice to the beauty of the words, by following that noble example, which has been set him by the greatest foreign masters in that art. I could heartily wish there was the same application and endeavours to cultivate and improve our Church-music, as have been lately bestowed on that of the stage. Our Composers have one very great incitement to it: they are sure to meet with excellent words, and, at the same time, a wonderful variety of them. There is no passion that is not finely expressed in those parts of the inspired writings, which are proper for divine Songs and Anthems.

There is a certain coldness and indifference in the phrases of our *European* languages, when they are compared with the oriental forms of speech;

speech; and it happens very luckily, that the *Hebrew* Idioms run into the *English* tongue with a particular grace and beauty. Our language has received innumerable elegancies and improvements, from that infusion of *Hebraisms*, which are derived to it out of the poetical passages in holy Writ. They give a force and energy to our expressions, warm and animate our language, and convey our thoughts in more ardent and intense phrases, than any that are to be met with in our own tongue. There is something so pathetick in this kind of diction, that it often sets the mind in a flame, and makes our hearts burn within us. How cold and dead does a prayer appear, that is composed in the most elegant and polite forms of speech, which are natural to our tongue, when it is not heightened by that solemnity of phrase, which may be drawn from the sacred writings. It has been said by some of the ancients, that if the Gods were to talk with men, they would certainly speak in *Plato's* stile; but I think we may say, with justice, that when mortals converse with their Creator, they cannot do it in so proper a stile as in that of the holy Scriptures.

If any one would judge of the beauties of poetry that are to be met with in the divine writings, and examine how kindly the *Hebrew* manners of speech mix and incorporate with the *English* language; after having perused the book of Psalms, let him read a literal translation of *Horace* or *Pindar*. He will find in these two last such an absurdity and confusion of stile with such a comparative poverty of Imagination, as will make him very sensible of what I have been here advancing.

Since we have therefore such a treasury of words, so beautiful in themselves, and so proper for the airs of Musick, I cannot but wonder that persons of distinction should give so little attention and encouragement to that kind of Musick, which would have its foundation in Reason, and which would improve our virtue in proportion as it raised our delight. The passions that are excited by ordinary compositions, generally flow from such silly and absurd occasions, that a man is ashamed to reflect upon them seriously: but the fear, the love, the sorrow, the indignation that are awakened in the mind by Hymns and Anthems, make the heart better, and proceed from such causes as are altogether reasonable and praise-worthy. Pleasure and duty go hand in hand, and the greater our satisfaction is, the greater is our religion.

Musick among those who were stiled the chosen people, was a religious art. The songs of *Sion*, which we have reason to believe were in high repute among the Courts of the eastern Monarchs, were nothing else but Psalms and pieces of poetry that adored or celebrated the supreme Being.

Being. The greatest Conqueror in this holy nation, after the manner of the old *Grecian* Lyricks, did not only compose the words of his divine Odes, but generally set them to musick himself: after which, his works, though they were consecrated to the Tabernacle, became the national entertainment, as well as the devotion of his people.

The first original of the Drama was a religious worship consisting only of a Chorus, which was nothing else but an hymn to a Deity. As luxury and voluptuousness prevailed over innocence and religion, this form of worship degenerated into Tragedies; in which however the Chorus so far remembered its first office, as to brand every thing that was vicious, and recommend every thing that was laudable, to intercede with Heaven for the innocent, and to implore its vengeance on the criminal.

*Homer* and *Hesiod* intimate to us how this art should be applied, when they represent the Muses as surrounding *Jupiter*, and warbling their Hymns about his throne. I might shew, from innumerable passages in ancient writers, not only that vocal and instrumental Musick were made use of in their religious worship, but that their most favourite diversions were filled with songs and hymns to their respective Deities. Had we frequent entertainments of this nature among us, they would not a little purifie and exalt our passions, give our thoughts a proper turn, and cherish those divine impulses in the soul, which every one feels that has not stifled them by sensual and immoderate pleasures.

Musick, when thus applied, raises noble hints in the mind of the hearer, and fills it with great conceptions. It strengthens devotion, and advances praise into rapture. It lengthens out every act of worship, and produces more lasting and permanent impressions in the mind, than those which accompany any transient form of words that are uttered in the ordinary method of religious worship.



Tuesday,