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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N^o 407. *Tuesday, June 17.*----- *abest facundis gratia dictis.* Ov.

MOST foreign writers who have given any character of the *English* nation, whatever vices they ascribe to it, allow in general, that the people are naturally modest. It proceeds perhaps from this our national virtue, that our Orators are observed to make use of less gesture or action than those of other countries. Our Preachers stand stock-still in the Pulpit, and will not so much as move a finger to set off the best Sermons in the world. We meet with the same speaking statues at our bars, and in all publick places of debate. Our words flow from us in a smooth continued stream, without those strainings of the voice, motions of the body, and majesty of the hand, which are so much celebrated in the Orators of *Greece* and *Rome*. We can talk of life and death in cold blood, and keep our temper in a discourse which turns upon every thing that is dear to us. Though our zeal breaks out in the finest tropes and figures, it is not able to stir a limb about us. I have heard it observed more than once by those who have seen *Italy*, that an untravelled *Englishman* cannot relish all the beauties of *Italian* pictures, because the postures which are expressed in them are often such as are peculiar to that country. One who has not seen an *Italian* in the Pulpit, will not know what to make of that noble gesture in *Raphael's* picture of *St. Paul* preaching at *Athens*, where the Apostle is represented as lifting up both his arms, and pouring out the thunder of his Rhetorick amidst an audience of pagan Philosophers.

It is certain that proper gestures and vehement exertions of the voice cannot be too much studied by a publick Orator. They are a kind of Comment to what he utters, and enforce every thing he says, with weak hearers, better than the strongest argument he can make use of. They keep the audience awake, and fix their attention to what is delivered to them, at the same time that they shew the speaker is in earnest, and affected himself with what he so passionately recom-

mends to others. Violent gesture and vociferation naturally shake the hearts of the ignorant, and fill them with a kind of religious horror. Nothing is more frequent than to see women weep and tremble at the sight of a moving preacher, though he is placed quite out of their hearing; as in *England* we very frequently see people lulled asleep with solid and elaborate discourses of piety, who would be warmed and transported out of themselves by the bellowings and distortions of Enthusiasm.

If nonsense, when accompanied with such an emotion of voice and body, has such an influence on mens minds, what might we not expect from many of those admirable discourses which are printed in our tongue, were they delivered with a becoming fervour, and with the most agreeable graces of voice and gesture?

We are told, that the great *Latin* Orator very much impaired his health by this *laterum contentio*, this vehemence of action, with which he used to deliver himself. The *Greek* Orator was likewise so very famous for this particular in Rhetorick, that one of his antagonists, whom he had banished from *Athens*, reading over the oration which had procured his banishment, and seeing his friends admire it, could not forbear asking them, if they were so much affected by the bare reading of it, how much more they would have been alarmed, had they heard him actually throwing out such a storm of eloquence?

How cold and dead a figure, in comparison of these two great men, does an Orator often make at the *British* bar, holding up his head with the most insipid serenity, and stroaking the sides of a long wig that reaches down to his middle? The truth of it is, there is often nothing more ridiculous than the gestures of an *English* speaker; you see some of them running their hands into their pockets as far as ever they can thrust them, and others looking with great attention on a piece of paper that has nothing written in it; you may see many a smart rhetorician turning his hat in his hands, moulding it into several different cocks, examining sometimes the lining of it, and sometimes the button, during the whole course of his harangue. A deaf man would think he was cheapning a beaver, when perhaps he is talking of the fate of the *British* nation. I remember, when I was a young man, and used to frequent *Westminster-hall*, there was a Counsellor who never pleaded without a piece of pack-thread in his hand, which he used to twist about a thumb, or a finger, all the while he was speaking: the wags of those days used to call it the thread of his discourse, for he was not able to utter a word without it. One of his Clients, who was more merry than wise, stole it from him one day

in the midst of his pleading, but he had better have let it alone, for he lost his cause by his jest.

I have all along acknowledged my self to be a dumb man, and therefore may be thought a very improper person to give rules for oratory; but I believe every one will agree with me in this, that we ought either to lay aside all kinds of gesture, (which seems to be very suitable to the genius of our nation) or at least to make use of such only as are graceful and expressive.

N^o 409. *Thursday, June 19.*

----- *Museo contingere cuncta lepore.* Lucr.

GRATIAN very often recommends *the fine taste*, as the utmost perfection of an accomplished man. As this word arises very often in conversation, I shall endeavour to give some account of it, and to lay down rules how we may know whether we are possessed of it, and how we may acquire that fine taste of writing, which is so much talked of among the polite world.

Most Languages make use of this metaphor, to express that faculty of the mind, which distinguishes all the most concealed faults and nicest perfections in writing. We may be sure this metaphor would not have been so general in all tongues, had there not been a very great conformity between that mental taste, which is the subject of this paper, and that sensitive taste which gives us a relish of every different flavour that affects the palate. Accordingly we find, there are as many degrees of refinement in the intellectual faculty, as in the sense, which is marked out by this common denomination.

I knew a person who possessed the one in so great a perfection, that after having tasted ten different kinds of tea, he would distinguish, without seeing the colour of it, the particular sort which was offered him; and not only so, but any two sorts of them that were mixt together in an equal proportion; nay, he has carried the experiment so far, as upon tasting the composition of three different sorts, to name the parcels from