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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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art, something that elevates and astonishes the fancy, and gives a greatness of mind to the Reader, which few of the Critics besides *Longinus* have considered.

Our general taste in *England* is for epigram, turns of wit, and forced conceits, which have no manner of influence, either for the bettering or enlarging the mind of him who reads them, and have been carefully avoided by the greatest writers, both among the ancients and moderns. I have endeavoured in several of my Speculations to banish this *Gothic* taste, which has taken possession among us. I entertained the town, for a week together, with an Essay upon Wit, in which I endeavoured to detect several of those false kinds which have been admired in the different Ages of the world; and at the same time to shew wherein the nature of true wit consists. I afterwards gave an instance of the great force which lyes in a natural simplicity of thought to affect the mind of the Reader, from such vulgar pieces as have little else besides this single qualification to recommend them. I have likewise examined the works of the greatest Poet which our nation or perhaps any other has produced, and particularized most of those rational and manly beauties which give a value to that divine work. I shall next *Saturday* enter upon an Essay on the pleasures of the Imagination, which, though it shall consider that subject at large, will perhaps suggest to the Reader what it is that gives a beauty to many passages of the finest writers both in prose and verse. As an undertaking of this nature is entirely new, I question not but it will be received with candour.

N^o 411. *Saturday, June 21.*

*Avia Pieridum peragro loca, nullius ante
Trita solo; juvat integros accedere fonteis;
Atque haurire: -----*

Lucr.

OUR Sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses. It fills the mind with the largest variety of ideas, converses with its objects at the greatest distance, and continues the longest in
action

action without being tired or satiated with its proper enjoyments. The sense of Feeling can indeed give us a notion of extension, shape, and all other ideas that enter at the eye, except colours; but at the same time it is very much streightned and confined in its operations, to the number, bulk, and distance of its particular objects. Our Sight seems designed to supply all these defects, and may be considered as a more delicate and diffusive kind of touch, that spreads it self over an infinite multitude of bodies, comprehends the largest figures, and brings into our reach some of the most remote parts of the universe.

It is this sense which furnishes the Imagination with its ideas; so that by the pleasures of the Imagination or Fancy (which I shall use promiscuously) I here mean such as arise from visible objects, either when we have them actually in our view, or when we call up their ideas into our minds by Paintings, Statues, Descriptions, or any the like occasion. We cannot indeed have a single image in the fancy that did not make its first entrance through the sight; but we have the power of retaining, altering and compounding those images, which we have once received, into all the varieties of picture and vision that are most agreeable to the imagination; for by this faculty a man in a dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landskips more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of nature.

There are few words in the *English* language which are employed in a more loose and uncircumscribed sense than those of the *Fancy* and the *Imagination*. I therefore thought it necessary to fix and determine the notion of these two words, as I intend to make use of them in the thread of my following Speculations, that the Reader may conceive rightly what is the subject which I proceed upon. I must therefore desire him to remember, that by the pleasures of the imagination, I mean only such pleasures as arise originally from sight, and that I divide these pleasures into two kinds: my design being first of all to discourse of those primary pleasures of the imagination, which entirely proceed from such objects as are before our eyes; and in the next place to speak of those secondary pleasures of the imagination which flow from the ideas of visible objects, when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious.

The Pleasures of the Imagination, taken in their full extent, are not so gross as those of sense, nor so refined as those of the understanding. The last are, indeed, more preferable, because they are founded on some
new

new knowledge or improvement in the mind of man; yet it must be confest, that those of the imagination are as great and as transporting as the other. A beautiful prospect delights the soul, as much as a demonstration; and a Description in *Homer* has charmed more Readers than a Chapter in *Aristotle*. Besides, the pleasures of the imagination have this advantage, above those of the understanding, that they are more obvious, and more easie to be acquired. It is but opening the eye, and the scene enters. The colours paint themselves on the fancy, with very little attention of thought or application of mind in the beholder. We are struck, we know not how, with the symmetry of any thing we see, and immediately assent to the beauty of an object, without enquiring into the particular causes and occasions of it.

A man of a polite imagination is let into a great many pleasures, that the vulgar are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a picture, and find an agreeable companion in a statue. He meets with a secret refreshment in a description, and often feels a greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of property in every thing he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated parts of nature administer to his pleasures: So that he looks upon the world, as it were in another light, and discovers in it a multitude of charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of mankind.

There are, indeed, but very few who know how to be idle and innocent, or have a relish of any pleasures that are not criminal; every diversion they take is at the expence of some one virtue or another, and their very first step out of business is into vice or folly. A man should endeavour, therefore, to make the sphere of his innocent pleasures as wide as possible, that he may retire into them with safety, and find in them such a satisfaction as a wise man would not blush to take. Of this nature are those of the imagination, which do not require such a bent of thought as is necessary to our more serious employments, nor, at the same time, suffer the mind to sink into that negligence and remissness, which are apt to accompany our more sensual delights, but, like a gentle exercise to the faculties, awaken them from sloth and idleness, without putting them upon any labour or difficulty.

We might here add, that the pleasures of the fancy are more conducive to health, than those of the understanding, which are worked out by dint of thinking, and attended with too violent a labour of the brain. Delightful scenes, whether in nature, painting, or poetry, have

a kindly influence on the body, as well as the mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten the imagination, but are able to disperse grief and melancholy, and to set the animal spirits in pleasing and agreeable motions. For this reason Sir *Francis Bacon*, in his *Essay upon Health*, has not thought it improper to prescribe to his Reader a poem or a prospect, where he particularly dissuades him from knotty and subtile disquisitions, and advises him to pursue studies, that fill the mind with splendid and illustrious objects, as histories, fables, and contemplations of nature.

I have in this paper, by way of introduction, settled the notion of those pleasures of the imagination which are the subject of my present undertaking, and endeavoured, by several considerations, to recommend to my Reader the pursuit of those pleasures. I shall, in my next paper, examine the several sources from whence these pleasures are derived.

N^o 412. *Monday, June 23.*

----- *Divisum sic breve fiet opus.* Mart.

I shall first consider those pleasures of the imagination, which arise from the actual view and survey of outward objects: and these, I think, all proceed from the sight of what is *Great, Uncommon* or *Beautiful*. There may, indeed, be something so terrible or offensive, that the horror or loathsomeness of an object may over-bear the pleasure which results from its *Greatness, Novelty, or Beauty*; but still there will be such a mixture of delight in the very disgust it gives us, as any of these three qualifications are most conspicuous and prevailing.

By *Greatness*, I do not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a whole view, considered as one entire piece. Such are the prospects of an open champian country, a vast uncultivated desert, of huge heaps of mountains, high rocks and precipices, or a wide expanse of waters, where we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of the sight, but with that rude kind of magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature. Our imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp at any thing that is too big for its capacity.