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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Quatenus hoc simile est oculis, quod mente videmus. Lucr.

I At first divided the pleasures of the imagination, into such as arise from objects that are actually before our eyes, or that once entered in at our eyes, and are afterwards called up into the mind either barely by its own operations, or on occasion of something without us, as statues or descriptions. We have already considered the first division, and shall therefore enter on the other, which, for distinction sake, I have called the secondary pleasures of the imagination. When I say the ideas we receive from statues, descriptions, or such like occasions, are the same that were once actually in our view, it must not be understood that we had once seen the very place, action, or person which are carved or described. It is sufficient, that we have seen places, persons, or actions, in general, which bear a resemblance, or at least some remote analogy with what we find represented. Since it is in the power of the imagination, when it is once stocked with particular ideas, to enlarge, compound, and vary them at her own pleasure.

Among the different kinds of representation, *Statuary* is the most natural, and shews us something *likest* the object that is represented. To make use of a common instance, let one who is born blind take an image in his hands, and trace out with his fingers the different furrows and impressions of the chissel, and he will easily conceive how the shape of a man, or beast, may be represented by it; but should he draw his hand over a *Picture*, where all is smooth and uniform, he would never be able to imagine how the several prominencies and depressions of a human body could be shewn on a plain piece of canvas, that has in it no unevenness or irregularity. *Description* runs yet further from the things it represents than *Painting*; for a picture bears a real resemblance to its original, which letters and syllables are wholly void of. Colours speak all languages, but words are understood only by such a people or nation. For this reason, though mens necessities quickly put them on finding out speech,

speech, Writing is probably of a later invention than Painting; particularly we are told, that in *America* when the *Spaniards* first arrived there, expresses were sent to the Emperor of *Mexico* in Paint, and the news of his country delineated by the strokes of a pencil, which was a more natural way than that of writing, though at the same time much more imperfect, because it is impossible to draw the little connexions of speech, or to give the picture of a conjunction or an adverb. It would be yet more strange, to represent visible objects by sounds that have no ideas annexed to them, and to make something like description in *Musick*. Yet it is certain, there may be confused, imperfect notions of this nature raised in the imagination by an artificial composition of notes; and we find that great Masters in the art are able, sometimes, to set their hearers in the heat and hurry of a battel, to overcast their minds with melancholy scenes and apprehensions of deaths and funerals, or to lull them into pleasing dreams of groves and elysiums.

In all these instances, this secondary pleasure of the Imagination proceeds from that action of the mind, which compares the ideas arising from the original objects, with the ideas we receive from the statue, picture, description, or sound that represents them. It is impossible for us to give the necessary reason, why this operation of the mind is attended with so much pleasure, as I have before observed on the same occasion; but we find a great variety of entertainments derived from this single principle: for it is this that not only gives us a relish of statuary, painting and description, but makes us delight in all the actions and arts of mimicry. It is this that makes the several kinds of wit pleasant, which consists, as I have formerly shewn, in the affinity of ideas: and we may add, it is this also that raises the little satisfaction we sometimes find in the different sorts of false wit; whether it consists in the affinity of letters, as in Anagram, Acrostick; or of syllables, as in Doggerel rhimes, Echos; or of words, as in Puns, Quibbles; or of a whole sentence or Poem, to Wings, and Altars. The *final Cause*, probably, of annexing pleasure to this operation of the mind, was to quicken and encourage us in our searches after truth, since the distinguishing one thing from another, and the right discerning betwixt our ideas, depends wholly upon our comparing them together, and observing the congruity or disagreement that appears among the several works of Nature.

But I shall here confine my self to those pleasures of the Imagination, which proceed from ideas raised by *words*, because most of the observations that agree with descriptions, are equally applicable to Painting and Statuary.

Words,

Words, when well chosen, have so great a force in them, that a description often gives us more lively ideas than the sight of things themselves. The Reader finds a scene drawn in stronger colours, and painted more to the life in his Imagination, by the help of words, than by an actual survey of the scene which they describe. In this case, the Poet seems to get the better of Nature; he takes, indeed, the Landskip after her, but gives it more vigorous touches, heightens its beauty, and so enlivens the whole piece, that the images which flow from the objects themselves appear weak and faint, in comparison of those that come from the expressions. The reason, probably, may be, because in the survey of any object we have only so much of it painted on the Imagination, as comes in at the eye; but in its description, the Poet gives us as free a view of it as he pleases, and discovers to us several parts, that either we did not attend to, or that lay out of our sight when we first beheld it. As we look on any object, our idea of it is, perhaps, made up of two or three simple ideas; but when the Poet represents it, he may either give us a more complex idea of it, or only raise in us such ideas as are most apt to affect the Imagination.

It may be here worth our while to examine how it comes to pass that several readers, who are all acquainted with the same language, and know the meaning of the words they read, should nevertheless have a different relish of the same descriptions. We find one transported with a passage, which another runs over with coldness and indifference, or finding the representation extremely natural, where another can perceive nothing of likeness and conformity. This different taste must proceed, either from the *perfection of Imagination* in one more than another, or from the *different ideas* that several Readers affix to the same words. For, to have a true relish, and form a right judgment of a description, a man should be born with a good imagination, and must have well weighed the force and energy that lyes in the several words of a language, so as to be able to distinguish which are most significant and expressive of their proper ideas, and what additional strength and beauty they are capable of receiving from conjunction with others. The fancy must be warm, to retain the print of those images it hath received from outward objects; and the judgment discerning, to know what expressions are most proper to cloath and adorn them to the best advantage. A man who is deficient in either of these respects, though he may receive the general notion of a description, can never see distinctly all its particular beauties: as a person, with a weak sight, may have the confused prospect of a place that
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eyes before him, without entering into its several parts, or discerning the variety of its colours in their full glory and perfection.

N^o 417. *Saturday, June 28.*

*Quem tu Melpomene semel
Nascentem placido lumine videris,
Non illum labor Isthmius
Clarabit pugilem, non equus impiger, &c.
Sed quæ Tibur aquæ fertile perfluunt,
Et spissæ nemorum comæ
Fingent Æolio carmine nobilem.* Hor.

WE may observe, that any single circumstance of what we have formerly seen, often raises up a whole scene of imagery, and awakens numberless Ideas that before slept in the Imagination; such a particular smell or colour is able to fill the mind, on a sudden, with the picture of the fields or gardens where we first met with it, and to bring up into view all the variety of images that once attended it. Our Imagination takes the hint, and leads us unexpectedly into cities or theatres, plains or meadows. We may further observe, when the fancy thus reflects on the scenes that have past in it formerly, those, which were at first pleasant to behold, appear more so upon reflection, and that the memory heightens the delightfulness of the original. A *Cartesian* would account for both these instances in the following manner.

The set of ideas, which we received from such a prospect or garden, having entered the mind at the same time, have a set of traces belonging to them in the brain, bordering very near upon one another; when therefore any one of these ideas arises in the Imagination, and consequently dispatches a flow of animal spirits to its proper trace, these spirits, in the violence of their motion, run not only into the trace, to which they were more particularly directed, but into several of those that lye about it: by this means they awaken other ideas of the same set, which immediately

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