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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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If I were to name a Poet that is a perfect Master in all these arts of working on the Imagination, I think *Milton* may pass for one: and if his *Paradise Lost* falls short of the *Aeneid* or *Iliad* in this respect, it proceeds rather from the fault of the language in which it is written, than from any defect of genius in the Author. So divine a Poem in *English*, is like a stately Palace built of brick, where one may see Architecture in as great a perfection as in one of marble, though the materials are of a coarser nature. But to consider it only as it regards our present subject: what can be conceived greater than the battel of Angels, the Majesty of Messiah, the stature and behaviour of Satan and his peers? What more beautiful than *Pandemonium*, Paradise, Heaven, Angels, *Adam* and *Eve*? What more strange, than the Creation of the world, the several Metamorphoses of the fallen Angels, and the surprising adventures their leader meets with in his search after Paradise? No other subject could have furnished a Poet with scenes so proper to strike the Imagination, as no other Poet could have painted those scenes in more strong and lively colours.

N^o 418. Monday, June 30.

-----ferat et rubus asper amomum.

Virg.

THE pleasures of these secondary views of the Imagination, are of a wider and more universal nature than those it has when joined with sight; for not only what is great, strange or beautiful, but any thing that is disagreeable when looked upon, pleases us, in an apt description. Here, therefore, we must enquire after a new principle of pleasure, which is nothing else but the action of the mind, which compares the Ideas that arise from words, with the Ideas that arise from the objects themselves; and why this operation of the mind is attended with so much pleasure, we have before considered. For this reason therefore, the description of a dunghill is pleasing to the Imagination, if the image be presented to our minds by suitable expressions; though perhaps, this may be more properly called the pleasure of the understanding than of the fancy, because we are not so much delighted with the image that is contained in the description, as with the aptness of the description to excite the image. But

But if the description of what is little, common or deformed, be acceptable to the imagination, the description of what is great, surprizing or beautiful, is much more so; because here we are not only delighted with *comparing* the representation with the original, but are highly pleased with the original it self. Most Readers, I believe, are more charmed with *Milton's* description of Paradise, than of Hell; they are both, perhaps, equally perfect in their kind, but in the one the brimstone and sulphur are not so refreshing to the imagination, as the beds of flowers and the wilderness of sweets in the other.

There is yet another circumstance which recommends a description more than all the rest, and that is if it represents to us such objects as are apt to raise a secret ferment in the mind of the Reader, and to work, with violence, upon his passions. For, in this case, we are at once warmed and enlightned, so that the Pleasure becomes more universal, and is several ways qualified to entertain us. Thus, in Painting, it is pleasant to look on the picture of any face, where the resemblance is hit, but the pleasure encreases, if it be the picture of a face that is beautiful, and is still greater, if the beauty be softned with an air of melancholy or sorrow. The two leading passions which the more serious parts of Poetry endeavour to stir up in us, are Terror and Pity. And here, by the way, one would wonder how it comes to pass, that such passions as are very unpleasent at all other times, are very agreeable when excited by proper descriptions. It is not strange, that we should take delight in such passages as are apt to produce Hope, Joy, Admiration, Love, or the like emotions in us, because they never rise in the mind without an inward pleasure which attends them. But how comes it to pass, that we should take delight in being terrified or dejected by a description, when we find so much uneasiness in the fear or grief which we receive from any other occasion?

If we consider, therefore, the nature of this pleasure, we shall find that it does not arise so properly from the description of what is terrible, as from the reflection we make on our selves at the time of reading it. When we look on such hideous objects, we are not a little pleased to think we are in no danger of them. We consider them at the same time, as dreadful and harmless; so that the more frightful appearance they make, the greater is the pleasure we receive from the sense of our own safety. In short, we look upon the terrors of a description, with the same curiosity and satisfaction that we survey a dead monster.

— *Informe*

— *Informe cadaver*

Protrahitur, nequeunt expleri corda tuendo

Terribiles oculos, vultum, villosaque setis

Pectora semiferi, atque extinctos faucibus ignes.

Virg.

It is for the same reason that we are delighted with the reflecting upon dangers that are past, or in looking on a precipice at a distance, which would fill us with a different kind of horror, if we saw it hanging over our heads.

In the like manner, when we read of torments, wounds, deaths, and like dismal accidents, our pleasure does not flow so properly from the grief which such melancholy descriptions give us, as from the secret comparison which we make between our selves and the person who suffers. Such representations teach us to set a just value upon our own condition, and make us prize our good fortune which exempts us from the like calamities. This is, however, such a kind of pleasure as we are not capable of receiving, when we see a person actually lying under the tortures that we meet with in a description; because, in this case, the object presses too close upon our senses, and bears so hard upon us, that it does not give us time or leisure to reflect on our selves. Our thoughts are so intent upon the miseries of the sufferer, that we cannot turn them upon our own happiness. Whereas, on the contrary, we consider the misfortunes we read in history or poetry, either as past, or as fictitious, so that the reflection upon our selves rises in us insensibly, and over-bears the sorrow we conceive for the sufferings of the afflicted.

But because the mind of man requires something more perfect in matter, than what it finds there, and can never meet with any sight in nature which sufficiently answers its highest ideas of pleasantness; or, in other words, because the imagination can fancy to it self things more great, strange, or beautiful, than the eye ever saw, and is still sensible of some defect in what it has seen; on this account it is the part of a Poet to humour the imagination in its own notions, by mending and perfecting nature where he describes a reality, and by adding greater beauties than are put together in nature, where he describes a fiction.

He is not obliged to attend her in the slow advances which she makes from one season to another, or to observe her conduct, in the successive production of plants and flowers. He may draw into his description all the beauties of the spring and autumn, and make the whole year contribute something to render it the more agreeable. His rose-trees, wood-

bines,

binés, and jessamines, may flower together, and his beds be covered at the same time with lilies, violets, and amaranths. His soil is not restrained to any particular sett of plants, but is proper either for oaks or myrtles, and adapts it self to the products of every climate. Oranges may grow wild in it; myrrh may be met with in every hedge, and if he thinks it proper to have a grove of spices, he can quickly command Sun enough to raise it. If all this will not furnish out an agreeable scene, he can make several new species of flowers, with richer scents and higher colours, than any that grow in the gardens of nature. His comforts of birds may be as full and harmonious, and his woods as thick and gloomy as he pleases. He is at no more expence in a long vista, than a short one, and can as easily throw his cascades from a precipice of half a mile high, as from one of twenty yards. He has his choice of the winds, and can turn the course of his rivers in all the variety of *Meanders*, that are most delightful to the Reader's imagination. In a word, he has the modelling of nature in his own hands, and may give her what charms he pleases, provided he does not reform her too much, and run into absurdities, by endeavouring to excel.

N^o 419. *Tuesday, July 1.*

----- *mentis gratissimus Error.* Hor.

THERE is a kind of writing, wherein the Poet quite loses sight of nature, and entertains his Reader's imagination with the characters and actions of such persons as have many of them no existence, but what he bestows on them. Such are fairies, witches, magicians, demons, and departed spirits. This Mr. *Dryden* calls *the Fairy way of writing*, which is, indeed, more difficult than any other that depends on the Poet's fancy, because he has no pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own invention.

There is a very odd turn of thought required for this sort of writing, and it is impossible for a Poet to succeed in it, who has not a particular cast of fancy, an imagination naturally fruitful and superstitious. Besides this,