



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

N° 451. Thursday, August 7.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53621](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53621)

root in them, they cannot be happy when divested of the body, unless we may suppose, that Providence will, in a manner, create them anew, and work a miracle in the rectification of their faculties. They may, indeed, taste a kind of malignant pleasure in those actions to which they are accustomed, whilst in this life, but when they are removed from all those objects which are here apt to gratify them, they will naturally become their own tormentors, and cherish in themselves those painful habits of mind which are called in Scripture phrase, the Worm which never dies. This notion of heaven and hell is so very conformable to the light of nature, that it was discovered by several of the most exalted heathens. It has been finely improved by many eminent Divines of the last Age, as in particular by Arch-bishop *Tillotson* and Dr. *Sherlock*, but there is none who has raised such noble speculations upon it, as Dr. *Scott*, in the first book of his *Christian Life*, which is one of the finest and most rational schemes of Divinity that is written in our tongue, or in any other. That excellent Author has shewn how every particular custom and habit of virtue will, in its own nature, produce the heaven, or a state of happiness, in him who shall hereafter practise it: as on the contrary, how every custom or habit of vice will be the natural hell of him in whom it subsists.

N^o 451. *Thursday, August 7.*

----- *Jam sœvus apertam*
In rabiem capit verti jocus, et per honestas
Ire minax impunè domos-----

THERE is nothing so scandalous to a government, and detestable in the eyes of all good men, as defamatory papers and pamphlets; but at the same time there is nothing so difficult to tame, as a satirical Author. An angry writer, who cannot appear in print, naturally vents his spleen in libels and lampoons. A gay old woman, says the Fable, seeing all her wrinkles represented in a large Looking-glass, threw it upon the ground in a passion, and broke it in a thousand pieces; but

as she was afterwards surveying the fragments with a spiteful kind of pleasure, she could not forbear uttering her self in the following soliloquy. What have I got by this revengeful blow of mine? I have only multiplied my deformity, and see an hundred ugly faces, where before I saw but one.

It has been propos'd, *to oblige every person that writes a book, or a paper, to swear himself the Author of it, and enter down in a publick register his name and place of abode.*

This, indeed, would have effectually suppress'd all printed scandal, which generally appears under borrowed names, or under none at all. But it is to be feared, that such an expedient would not only destroy scandal, but learning. It would operate promiscuously, and root up the corn and tares together. Not to mention some of the most celebrated works of piety, which have proceeded from anonymous Authors, who have made it their merit to convey to us so great a charity in secret: there are few works of genius that come out at first with the Author's name. The writer generally makes a tryal of them in the world before he owns them; and, I believe, very few, who are capable of writing, would set pen to paper, if they knew, before hand, that they must not publish their productions but on such conditions. For my own part, I must declare, the papers I present the publick are like fairy favours, which shall last no longer than while the Author is concealed.

That which makes it particularly difficult to restrain these sons of calumny and defamation is, that all sides are equally guilty of it, and that every dirty scribler is countenanced by great names, whose interests he propagates by such vile and infamous methods. I have never yet heard of a Ministry, who have inflicted an exemplary punishment on an Author that has supported their cause with falshood and scandal, and treated, in a most cruel manner, the names of those who have been looked upon as their rivals and antagonists. Would a Government set an everlasting mark of their displeasure upon one of those infamous writers, who makes his court to them by tearing to pieces the reputation of a competitor, we should quickly see an end put to this race of vermin, that are a scandal to Government, and a reproach to human nature. Such a proceeding would make a minister of State shine in history, and would fill all mankind with a just abhorrence of persons who should treat him unworthily, and employ against him those arms which he scorn'd to make use of against his enemies.

I cannot think that any one will be so unjust as to imagine what I have here said, is spoken with a respect to any party or faction. Every one who has in him the sentiments either of a Christian or a Gentleman, cannot but be highly offended at this wicked and ungenerous practice which is so much in use among us at present, that it is become a kind of national crime, and distinguishes us from all the Governments that lie about us. I cannot but look upon the finest strokes of satyr which are aimed at particular persons, and which are supported even with the appearances of truth, to be the marks of an evil mind, and highly criminal in themselves. Infamy, like other punishments, is under the direction and distribution of the Magistrate, and not of any private person. Accordingly we learn from a fragment of *Cicero*, that though there were very few capital punishments in the twelve tables, a libel or lampoon which took away the good name of another, was to be punished by death. But this is far from being our case. Our satyr is nothing but ribaldry and *Bilingsgate*. Scurrility passes for wit; and he who can call names in the greatest variety of phrases, is looked upon to have the shrewdest pen. By this means the honour of families is ruined, the highest posts and greatest titles are rendered cheap and vile in the sight of the people; the noblest virtues, and most exalted parts, exposed to the contempt of the vicious and the ignorant. Should a foreigner, who knows nothing of our private factions, or one who is to act his part in the world, when our present heats and animosities are forgot, should, I say, such an one form to himself a notion of the greatest men of all sides in the *British* nation, who are now living, from the characters which are given them in some or other of those abominable writings which are daily published among us, what a nation of monsters must we appear!

As this cruel practice tends to the utter subversion of all truth and humanity among us, it deserves the utmost detestation and discouragement of all who have either the love of their country, or the honour of their religion, at heart. I would therefore earnestly recommend it to the consideration of those who deal in these pernicious arts of writing; and of those who take pleasure in the reading of them. As for the first, I have spoken of them in former papers, and have not stuck to rank them with the murderer and assassin. Every honest man sets as high a value upon a good name, as upon life it self; and I cannot but think that those who privily assault the one, would destroy the other, might they do it with the same secrecy and impunity.

As

As for persons who take pleasure in the reading and dispersing of such detestable libels, I am afraid they fall very little short of the guilt of the first composers. By a law of the Emperors *Valentinian* and *Valens*, it was made death for any person not only to write a libel, but if he met with one by chance, not to tear or burn it. But because I would not be thought singular in my opinion of this matter, I shall conclude my paper with the words of Monsieur *Bayle*, who was a man of great freedom of thought, as well as of exquisite learning and judgment.

“ I cannot imagine, that a man who disperses a libel is less desirous of
 “ doing mischief than the Author himself. But what shall we say of
 “ the pleasure which a man takes in the reading of a defamatory libel?
 “ Is it not a heinous sin in the sight of God? We must distinguish in this
 “ point. This pleasure is either an agreeable sensation we are affected
 “ with, when we meet with a witty thought which is well expressed, or
 “ it is a joy which we conceive from the dishonour of the Person who is
 “ defamed. I will say nothing to the first of these cases; for perhaps
 “ some would think that my morality is not severe enough, if I should af-
 “ firm that a man is not master of those agreeable sensations, any more
 “ than of those occasioned by sugar or honey, when they touch his tongue;
 “ but as to the second, every one will own that pleasure to be a heinous
 “ sin. The pleasure in the first case is of no continuance; it prevents
 “ our reason and reflection, and may be immediately followed by a se-
 “ cret grief, to see our neighbour’s honour blasted. If it does not cease
 “ immediately, it is a sign that we are not displeas’d with the ill-nature
 “ of the Satyrist, but are glad to see him defame his enemy by all kinds
 “ of stories; and then we deserve the punishment to which the writer of
 “ the libel is subject. I shall here add the words of a modern Author,
 “ *St. Gregory upon excommunicating those writers who had dishonoured*
 “ *Castorius, does not except those who read their works; because, says*
 “ *he, if calumnies have always been the delight of the hearers, and a gra-*
 “ *tification of those persons who have no other advantage over honest*
 “ *men, is not he who takes pleasure in reading them as guilty as he who*
 “ *composed them?* It is an uncontested maxim, that they who approve an
 “ action would certainly do it if they could; that is, if some reason of
 “ self-love did not hinder them. There is no difference, says *Cicero*, be-
 “ tween advising a crime, and approving it when committed. The *Ro-*
 “ *man* law confirmed this maxim, having subjected the Approvers and
 “ Authors of this evil to the same penalty. We may therefore conclude,
 “ that those who are pleas’d with reading defamatory libels, so far as to
 “ ap-

“ approve the authors and dispersers of them, are as guilty as if they had
 “ composed them ; for if they do not write such libels themselves, it is
 “ because they have not the talent of writing, or because they will run
 “ no hazard.

The Author produces other authorities to confirm his judgment in this particular.

N^o 452.

Friday, August 8.

Est natura hominum novitatis avida.

Plin. apud Lillium.

THERE is no humour in my countrymen, which I am more inclined to wonder at, than their general thirst after news. There are about half a dozen ingenious men, who live very plentifully upon this curiosity of their fellow-subjects. They all of them receive the same advices from abroad, and very often in the same words ; but their way of cooking it is so different, that there is no citizen, who has an eye to the publick good, that can leave the Coffee-house with peace of mind, before he has given every one of them a reading. These several dishes of news are so very agreeable to the palate of my countrymen, that they are not only pleased with them when they are served up hot, but when they are again set cold before them, by those penetrating Politicians, who oblige the publick with their reflections and observations upon every piece of intelligence that is sent us from abroad. The text is given us by one sett of writers, and the comment by another.

But notwithstanding we have the same tale told us in so many different papers, and if occasion requires in so many articles of the same paper ; notwithstanding in a scarcity of foreign posts we hear the same story repeated, by different advices from *Paris*, *Brussels*, the *Hague*, and from every great town in *Europe* ; notwithstanding the multitude of annotations, explanations, reflections, and various readings which it passes through, our time lies heavy on our hands till the arrival of a fresh Mail: we long to receive further particulars, to hear what will be the next step, or what will be the consequence of that which has been already taken.

A