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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Having given you a sketch of this project, I shall, in the next place, suggest to you another for a monthly pamphlet, which I shall likewise submit to your spectatorial wisdom. I need not tell you, Sir, that there are several Authors in *France, Germany and Holland*, as well as in our own country, who publish every month, what they call *An Account of the Works of the Learned*, in which they give us an abstract of all such books as are printed in any part of *Europe*. Now, Sir, it is my design to publish every month, *An Account of the Works of the Unlearned*. Several late productions of my own country-men, who many of them make a very eminent figure in the illiterate world, encourage me in this undertaking. I may, in this work, possibly make a review of several pieces which have appeared in the foreign *Accounts* above-mentioned, though they ought not to have been taken notice of in works which bear such a title. I may, likewise, take into consideration such pieces as appear from time to time, under the names of those Gentlemen who compliment one another, in publick Assemblies, by the title of the *Learned Gentlemen*. Our Party-authors will also afford me a great variety of subjects, not to mention Editors, Commentators, and others, who are often men of no learning, or what is as bad, of no knowledge. I shall not enlarge upon this hint; but if you think any thing can be made of it, I shall set about it with all the pains and application that so useful a work deserves.

I am ever, most worthy Sir, &c.

N^o 458. Friday, August 15.

*Αιδως εν αγαθη

—Pudor malus—

Hes.

Hor.

I Could not but smile at the account that was yesterday given me of a modest young Gentleman, who being invited to an entertainment, though he was not used to drink, had not the confidence to refuse his glass in his turn, when on a sudden he grew so flustered that he took all the talk of the table into his own hands, abused every one of the company,

pany, and flung a bottle at the Gentleman's head who treated him. This has given me occasion to reflect upon the ill effects of a vicious modesty, and to remember the saying of *Brutus*, as it is quoted by *Plutarch*, that *the person has had but an ill education, who has not been taught to deny any thing*. This false kind of modesty has, perhaps, betrayed both sexes into as many vices as the most abandoned impudence, and is the more inexcusable to Reason, because it acts to gratify others rather than it self, and is punished with a kind of remorse, not only like other vicious habits when the crime is over, but even at the very time that it is committed.

Nothing is more amiable than true modesty, and nothing is more contemptible than the false. The one guards virtue, the other betrays it. True modesty is ashamed to do any thing that is repugnant to the rules of right reason: false modesty is ashamed to do any thing that is opposite to the humour of the company. True modesty avoids every thing that is criminal, false modesty every thing that is unfashionable. The latter is only a general undetermined instinct; the former is that instinct, limited and circumscribed by the rules of prudence and religion.

We may conclude that modesty to be false and vicious, which engages a man to do any thing that is ill or indiscreet, or which restrains him from doing any that is of a contrary nature. How many men, in the common concerns of life, lend sums of money which they are not able to spare, are bound for persons whom they have but little friendship for, give recommendatory characters of men whom they are not acquainted with, bestow places on those whom they do not esteem, live in such a manner as they themselves do not approve, and all this meerly because they have not the confidence to resist sollicitation, importunity, or example?

Nor does this false modesty expose us only to such actions as are indiscreet, but very often to such as are highly criminal. When *Xenophanes* was called timorous, because he would not venture his money in a game at dice: *I confess*, said he, *that I am exceeding timorous, for I dare not do an ill thing*. On the contrary, a man of vicious modesty complies with every thing, and is only fearful of doing what may look singular in the company where he is engaged. He falls in with the torrent, and lets himself go to every action or discourse, however unjustifiable in it self, so it be in vogue among the present party. This, though one of the most common, is one of the most ridiculous dispositions in human nature, that men should not be ashamed of speaking or acting in a dissolute or irrational manner, but that one who is in their company should be ashamed of governing himself by the principles of reason and virtue.

In

In the second place we are to consider false modesty, as it restrains a man from doing what is good and laudable. My Reader's own thoughts will suggest to him many instances and examples under this head. I shall only dwell upon one reflection, which I cannot make without a secret concern. We have in *England* a particular bashfulness in every thing that regards religion. A well-bred man is obliged to conceal any serious sentiment of this nature, and very often to appear a greater libertine than he is, that he may keep himself in countenance among the men of mode. Our excess of modesty makes us shame-faced in all the exercises of piety and devotion. This humour prevails upon us daily; infomuch, that at many well-bred tables, the master of the house is so very modest a man, that he has not the confidence to say grace at his own table: a custom which is not only practised by all the nations about us, but was never omitted by the heathens themselves. *English* Gentlemen who travel into Roman Catholick countries, are not a little surprized to meet with people of the best quality kneeling in their Churches, and engaged in their private devotions, though it be not at the hours of public worship. An Officer of the army, or a man of wit and pleasure in those countries, should he be seen to go to bed, or sit down at table, without offering up his devotions on such occasions. The same show of religion appears in all the foreign reformed Churches, and enters so much into their ordinary conversation, that an *Englishman* is apt to term them hypocritical and precise.

This little appearance of a religious deportment in our nation, may proceed in some measure from that modesty which is natural to us; but the great occasion of it is certainly this. Those swarms of sectaries that over-ran the nation in the time of the great rebellion, carried their hypocrisy so high, that they had converted our whole language into a jargon of enthusiasm; infomuch that upon the Restoration men thought they could not recede too far from the behaviour and practice of those persons, who had made religion a cloak to so many villanies. This led them into the other extreme, every appearance of devotion was looked upon as puritanical; and falling into the hands of the ridiculers who flourished in that reign, and attacked every thing that was serious, it has ever since been out of countenance among us. By this means we are gradually fallen into that vicious modesty which has in some measure worn out from among us the appearance of christianity in ordinary life and conversation, and which distinguishes us from all our neighbours.

Hypocrisie cannot indeed be too much detested, but at the same time is to be preferred to open impiety. They are both equally destructive to the person who is possessed with them; but in regard to others, hypocrisie is not so pernicious as bare-faced irreligion. The due mean to be observed is to be sincerely virtuous, and at the same time to let the world see we are so. I do not know a more dreadful menace in the holy writings, than that which is pronounced against those who have this perverted modesty, to be ashamed before men in a particular of such unspeakable importance.

N^o 459. Saturday, August 16.

----- *quicquid dignum sapiente bonoque est.* Hor.

RELIGION may be considered under two general heads. The first comprehends what we are to believe, the other what we are to practise. By those things which we are to believe, I mean whatever is revealed to us in the holy writings, and which we could not have obtained the knowledge of by the light of nature; by the things which we are to practise, I mean all those duties to which we are directed by reason or natural religion. The first of these I shall distinguish by the name of Faith, the second by that of Morality.

If we look into the more serious part of mankind, we find many who lay so great a stress upon Faith, that they neglect Morality; and many who build so much upon Morality, that they do not pay a due regard to Faith. The perfect man should be defective in neither of these particulars, as will be very evident to those who consider the benefits which arise from each of them, and which I shall make the subject of this day's paper.

Norwithstanding this general division of christian duty into Morality and Faith, and that they have both their peculiar excellencies, the first has the pre-eminence in several respects.

First, Because the greatest part of morality (as I have stated the notion of it,) is of a fixt eternal nature, and will endure when faith shall fail, and be lost in conviction.

Secondly,