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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Quâ rationequeas traducere leniter ævum:

Ne te semper inops agitet vexetque cupido;

Ne pavor et rerum mediocriter utilium spes.

Hor.

HAVING endeavoured in my last *Saturday's* paper to shew the great excellency of Faith, I shall here consider what are the proper means of strengthning and confirming it in the mind of man. Those who delight in reading books of controverſie, which are written on both ſides of the question in points of Faith, do very ſeldom arrive at a fixed and ſettled habit of it. They are one day entirely convinced of its important truths, and the next meet with ſomething that ſhakes and diſturbs them. The doubt which was laid revives again, and ſhews it ſelf in new difficulties, and that generally for this reaſon, becauſe the mind which is perpetually toſt in controverſies and diſputes, is apt to forget the reaſons which had once ſet it at reſt, and to be diſquieted with any former perplexity, when it appears in a new ſhape, or is ſtarted by a different hand. As nothing is more laudable than an enquiry after Truth, ſo nothing is more irrational than to paſs away our whole lives, without determining our ſelves one way or other in thoſe points which are of the laſt importance to us. There are indeed many things from which we may withhold our aſſent; but in caſes by which we are to regulate our lives, it is the greateſt abſurdity to be wavering and unſettled, without cloſing with that ſide which appears the moſt ſafe and the moſt probable. The firſt rule therefore which I ſhall lay down is this, that when by reading or diſcourſe we find our ſelves thoroughly convinced of the truth of any article, and of the reaſonableneſs of our belief in it, we ſhould never after ſuffer our ſelves to call it into queſtion. We may perhaps forget the arguments which occaſioned our conviction, but we ought to remember the ſtrength they had with us, and therefore ſtill to retain the conviction which they once produced. This is no more than what

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we do in every common art or science, nor is it possible to act otherwise, considering the weakness and limitation of our intellectual faculties. It was thus that *Latimer*, one of the glorious army of Martyrs who introduced the reformation in *England*, behaved himself in that great conference which was managed between the most learned among the Protestants and Papists in the reign of *Queen Mary*. This venerable old man knowing how his abilities were impaired by age, and that it was impossible for him to recollect all those reasons which had directed him in the choice of his religion, left his companions who were in the full possession of their parts and learning, to baffle and confound their antagonists by the force of reason. As for himself he only repeated to his adversaries the articles in which he firmly believed, and in the profession of which he was determined to die. It is in this manner that the mathematician proceeds upon propositions which he has once demonstrated; and though the demonstration may have slipped out of his memory, he builds upon the truth, because he knows it was demonstrated. This rule is absolutely necessary for weaker minds, and in some measure for men of the greatest abilities; but to these last I would propose, in the second place, that they should lay up in their memories, and always keep by them in a readiness, those arguments which appear to them of the greatest strength, and which cannot be got over by all the doubts and cavils of infidelity.

But, in the third place, there is nothing which strengthens faith more than morality. Faith and morality naturally produce each other. A man is quickly convinced of the truth of religion, who finds it is not against his interest that it should be true. The pleasure he receives at present, and the happiness which he promises himself from it hereafter, will both dispose him very powerfully to give credit to it, according to the ordinary observation that *we are easie to believe what we wish*. It is very certain, that a man of sound reason cannot forbear closing with religion upon an impartial examination of it; but at the same time it is as certain, that faith is kept alive in us, and gathers strength from practice more than from speculation.

There is still another method which is more persuasive than any of the former, and that is an habitual adoration of the Supreme Being, as well in constant acts of mental worship, as in outward forms. The devout man does not only believe but feels there is a Deity. He has actual sensations of him; his experience concurs with his reason; he sees him more and more in all his intercourses with him, and even in this life almost loses his faith in conviction.

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The last method which I shall mention for the giving life to man's faith, is frequent retirement from the world, accompanied with religious meditation. When a man thinks of any thing in the darkness of the night, whatever deep impressions it may make in his mind, they are apt to vanish as soon as the day breaks about him. The light and noise of the day, which are perpetually solliciting his senses, and calling off his attention, wear out of his mind the thoughts that imprinted themselves in it, with so much strength, during the silence and darkness of the night. A man finds the same difference as to himself in a crowd and in a solitude: the mind is stunned and dazzled amidst that variety of objects which press upon her in a great city: she cannot apply her self to the consideration of those things which are of the utmost concern to her. The cares or pleasures of the world strike in with every thought, and a multitude of vicious examples give a kind of justification to our folly. In our retirements every thing disposes us to be serious. In courts and cities we are entertained with the works of men; in the country with those of God. One is the province of art, the other of nature. Faith and devotion naturally grow in the mind of every reasonable man, who sees the impressions of divine power and wisdom in every object, on which he casts his eye. The Supreme Being has made the best arguments for his own existence, in the formation of the heavens and the earth, and these are arguments which a man of sense cannot forbear attending to, who is out of the noise and hurry of human affairs. *Aristotle* says, that should a man live underground, and there converse with the works of art and mechanism, and should afterwards be brought up into the open day, and see the several glories of the heaven and earth, he would immediately pronounce them the works of such a Being as we define God to be. The Psalmist has very beautiful strokes of poetry to this purpose, in that exalted strain, *The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. One day telleth another: and one night certifieth another. There is neither speech nor language: but their voices are heard among them. Their sound is gone into all lands: and their words into the ends of the world.* As such a bold and sublime manner of thinking furnishes very noble matter for an Ode, the Reader may see it wrought into the following one.

I.

*The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue etherial sky,*

And

*And spangled heav'ns, a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim:
Th' unwearied Sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's power display,
And publishes to every land
The work of an Almighty hand.*

II.

*Soon as the evening shades prevail,
The Moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the listning earth
Repeats the story of her birth:
Whilst all the Stars that round her burn,
And all the Planets, in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they rowl,
And spread the truth from pole to pole.*

III.

*What though, in solemn silence, all
Move round the dark terrestrial ball?
What tho' nor real voice nor sound
Amid their radiant orbs be found?
In Reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice,
For ever singing, as they shine,
"The hand that made us is divine."*



Thursday,