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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

N° 476. Friday, September 5.

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“ modest, civil, tall, well-bred, handsome man, and I am obliged to him
 “ for his civilities ever since I saw him. I forgot to tell you that he has
 “ black eyes, and looks upon me now and then as if he had tears in
 “ them. And yet my friends are so unreasonable, that they would have
 “ me be uncivil to him. I have a good portion which they cannot hin-
 “ der me of, and I shall be fourteen on the 29th day of *August* next, and
 “ am therefore willing to settle in the world as soon as I can, and so is
 “ Mr. *Shapely*. But every body I advise with here is poor Mr. *Shapely*'s
 “ enemy. I desire therefore you will give me your advice, for I know
 “ you are a wise man; and if you advise me well, I am resolved to fol-
 “ low it. I heartily wish you could see him dance, and am,

SIR, Your most humble Servant, B. D.

“ He loves your *Spectators* mightily.

N^o 476. *Friday, September 5.*

———— *Lucidus ordo.*

Hor.

AMONG my daily papers which I bestow on the publick, there
 are some which are written with regularity and method, and
 others that run out into the wildness of those compositions which
 go by the name of *Essays*. As for the first, I have the whole scheme of
 the discourse in my mind before I set pen to paper. In the other kind
 of writing, it is sufficient that I have several thoughts on a subject, with-
 out troubling my self to range them in such order, that they may seem to
 grow out of one another, and be disposed under the proper heads. *Se-
 neca* and *Montaigne* are patterns for writing in this last kind, as *Tully*
 and *Aristotle* excel in the other. When I read an Author of Genius who
 writes without method, I fancy my self in a wood that abounds with a great
 many noble objects, rising among one another in the greatest confusion
 and disorder. When I read a methodical discourse, I am in a regular
 plantation, and can place my self in its several centers, so as to take a
 view of all the lines and walks that are struck from them. You may
 ramble

ramble in the one a whole day together, and every moment discover something or other that is new to you; but when you have done, you will find but a confused imperfect notion of the place: in the other, your eye commands the whole prospect, and gives you such an idea of it, as is not easily worn out of the memory.

Irregularity and want of method are only supportable in men of great learning or genius, who are often too full to be exact, and therefore chuse to throw down their pearls in heaps before the Reader, rather than be at the pains of fringing them.

Method is of advantage to a work, both in respect to the writer and the reader. In regard to the first, it is a great help to his invention. When a man has planned his discourse, he finds a great many thoughts rising out of every head, that do not offer themselves upon the general survey of a subject. His thoughts are at the same time more intelligible, and better discover their drift and meaning, when they are placed in their proper lights, and follow one another in a regular series, than when they are thrown together without order and connexion. There is always an obscurity in confusion, and the same sentence that would have enlightened the Reader in one part of a discourse, perplexes him in another. For the same reason likewise every thought in a methodical discourse shews it self in its greatest beauty, as the several figures in a piece of painting receive new grace from their disposition in the picture. The advantages of a Reader from a methodical discourse, are correspondent with those of the writer. He comprehends every thing easily, takes it in with pleasure, and retains it long.

Method is not less requisite in ordinary conversation than in writing, provided a man would talk to make himself understood. I, who hear a thousand Coffee-house debates every day, am very sensible of this want of method in the thoughts of my honest countrymen. There is not one dispute in ten which is managed in those schools of politics, where, after the three first sentences, the question is not entirely lost. Our disputants put me in mind of the skuttle-fish, that when he is unable to extricate himself, blackens all the water about him till he becomes invisible. The man who does not know how to methodize his thoughts, has always, to borrow a phrase from the Dispensary, a *barren superfluity of words*; the fruit is lost amidst the exuberance of leaves.

Tom Puzzle is one of the most eminent immethodical disputants of any that has fallen under my observation. *Tom* has read enough to make him very impertinent; his knowledge is sufficient to raise doubts, but

not to clear them. It is pity that he has so much learning, or that he has not a great deal more. With these qualifications *Tom* sets up for a Free-thinker, finds a great many things to blame in the constitution of his country, and gives shrewd intimations that he does not believe another world. In short, *Puzzle* is an atheist as much as his parts will give him leave. He has got about half a dozen common-place topics, into which he never fails to turn the conversation, whatever was the occasion of it: though the matter in debate be about *Doway* or *Denain*, it is ten to one but half his discourse runs upon the unreasonableness of bigotry and priest-craft. This makes Mr. *Puzzle* the admiration of all those who have less sense than himself, and the contempt of all those who have more. There is none in town whom *Tom* dreads so much as my friend *Will Dry*. *Will*, who is acquainted with *Tom's* Logic, when he finds him running off the question, cuts him short with a *What then? we allow all this to be true, but what is it to our present purpose?* I have known *Tom* eloquent half an hour together, and triumphing, as he thought, in the superiority of argument, when he has been non-plused on a sudden by Mr. *Dry's* desiring him to tell the company what it was that he endeavoured to prove. In short, *Dry* is a man of a clear methodical head, but few words, and gains the same advantages over *Puzzle*, that a small body of regular troops would gain over a numberless undisciplined Militia.

N^o 477. Saturday, September 6.

----- *An me ludit amabilis*

Infania? audire et videor pius

Errare per lucos, amœne

Quos et aque subeunt et aure.

Hor.

S I R,

HAVING lately read your Essay on the pleasures of the imagination, I was so taken with your thoughts upon some of our *English* gardens, that I cannot forbear troubling you with a Letter upon that