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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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This year containing farther the battels which he fought in *Scotland*, and the towns which he took, is so fresh in every one's memory, that we shall say no more of it.

N^o 37. Friday, April 27.

quod si

*Frigida curarum fomenta relinquere posses;
 Quo te coelestis sapientia duceret, ires.
 Hoc opus, hoc studium parvi properemus et ampli,
 Si patriæ volumus, si nobis vivere cari.* Hor.

IT is a melancholy reflection, that our country, which in times of Popery was called the nation of Saints, should now have less appearance of religion in it, than any other neighbouring State or Kingdom; whether they be such as continue still immerfed in the errors of the Church of *Rome*, or such as are recovered out of them. This is a truth that is obvious to every one, who has been conversant in foreign parts. It was formerly thought dangerous for a young man to travel, lest he should return an *Atheist* to his native country: but at present it is certain, that an *Englishman*, who has any tolerable degree of reflection, cannot be better awakened to a sense of religion in general, than by observing how the minds of all mankind are set upon this important point; how every nation is serious and attentive to the great business of their Being; and that in other countries a man is not out of the fashion, who is bold and open in the profession and practice of all christian duties.

This decay of piety is by no means to be imputed to the *Reformation*, which in its first establishment produced its proper fruits, and distinguished the whole age with shining instances of virtue and morality. If we would trace out the original of that flagrant and avowed impiety, which has prevailed among us for some years, we should find that it owes its rise to that opposite extrem of *Cant* and *Hypocrisie*, which had taken possession of the people's minds in the times of the great rebellion, and
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of the usurpation that succeeded it. The practices of these men, under the covert of a feigned zeal, made even the appearances of sincere devotion ridiculous and unpopular. The raillery of the wits and courtiers, in King *Charles* the Second's reign, upon every thing which they then called precise, was carried to so great an extravagance, that it almost put christianity out of countenance. The ridicule grew so strong and licentious, that from this time we may date that remarkable turn in the behaviour of our fashionable *Englishmen*, that makes them shame-faced in the exercise of those duties which they were sent into the world to perform.

The late cry of the *Church* has been an artifice of the same kind with that made use of by the hypocrites of the last age, and has had as fatal an influence upon religion. If a man would but seriously consider how much greater comfort he would receive in the last moments of his life from a reflection that he has made one virtuous man, than that he has made a thousand *Tories*, we should not see the zeal of so many good men turned off from its proper end, and employed in making such a kind of converts. What satisfaction will it be to an immoral man, at such a time, to think he is a good *Whig*! or to one that is conscious of sedition, perjury, or rebellion, that he dies with the reputation of a *High-Churchman*!

But to consider how this cry of the *Church* has corrupted the morals of both parties. Those, who are the loudest in it, regard themselves rather as a political, than a religious communion; and are held together rather by state-notions, than by articles of faith. This fills the minds of weak men, who fall into the snare, with groundless fears and apprehensions, unspeakable rage towards their fellow-subjects, wrong ideas of persons whom they are not acquainted with, and uncharitable interpretations of those actions of which they are not competent judges. It instills into their minds the utmost virulence and bitterness, instead of that charity, which is the perfection and ornament of religion, and the most indispensable and necessary means for attaining the end of it. In a word, among these mistaken zealots, it sanctifies cruelty and injustice, riots and treason.

The effects which this cry of the *Church* has had on the other party, are no less manifest and deplorable. They see themselves unjustly aspersed by it, and vindicate themselves in terms no less opprobrious, than those by which they are attacked. Their indignation and resentment rises in proportion to the malice of their adversaries. The unthinking
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part of them are apt to contract an unreasonable aversion even to that ecclesiastical constitution to which they are represented as enemies; and not only to particular persons, but to that order of men in general, which will be always held sacred and honourable, so long as there is reason and religion in the world.

I might mention many other corruptions common to both parties, which naturally flow from this source; and might easily shew, upon a full display of them, that this clamour, which pretends to be raised for the safety of religion, has almost worn out the very appearance of it; and rendered us not only the most divided, but the most immoral people upon the face of the earth.

When our nation is overflowed with such a deluge of impiety, it must be a great pleasure to find any expedient take place, that has a tendency to recover it out of so dismal a condition. This is one great reason why an honest man may rejoice to see an Act so near taking effect, for making elections of members to serve in Parliament less frequent. I find myself prevented by other writings (which have considered the Act now depending, in this particular light) from expatiating upon this subject. I shall only mention two short pieces which I have been just now reading, under the following titles, *Arguments about the alteration of the triennial elections of Parliament*: And, *The alteration in the triennial Act considered*.

The reasons for this Law, as it is necessary for settling his Majesty in his throne; for extinguishing the spirit of rebellion; for procuring foreign alliances; and other advantages of the like nature; carry a great weight with them. But I am particularly pleased with it, as it may compose our unnatural feuds and animosities, revive an honest spirit of industry in the nation, and cut off frequent occasions of brutal rage and intemperance. In short, as it will make us not only a more safe, a more flourishing, and a more happy, but also a more virtuous people.



Monday,