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**The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.**

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

**London, 1721**

No 39. Friday, May 4.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53597](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53597)

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N<sup>o</sup> 39. Friday, May 4.

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*Prodesse quam conspici.*

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**I**T often happens, that extirpating the love of glory, which is observed to take the deepest root in noble minds, tears up several virtues with it; and that suppressing the desire of fame, is apt to reduce men to a state of indolence and supineness. But when, without any incentive of vanity, a person of great abilities is zealous for the good of mankind; and as solicitous for the concealment, as the performance of illustrious actions; we may be sure that he has something more than ordinary in his composition, and has a heart filled with goodness and magnanimity.

There is not perhaps, in all history, a greater instance of this temper of mind, than what appeared in that excellent person, whose motto I have placed at the head of this paper. He had worn himself out in his application to such studies as made him useful or ornamental to the world, in concerting schemes for the welfare of his country, and in prosecuting such measures as were necessary for making those schemes effectual: but all this was done with a view to the publick good that should rise out of these generous endeavours, and not to the fame which should accrue to himself. Let the reputation of the action fall where it would; so his country reaped the benefit of it, he was satisfied. As this turn of mind threw off in a great measure the oppositions of envy and competition, it enabled him to gain the most vain and impracticable into his designs, and to bring about several great events for the safety and advantage of the publick, which must have died in their birth, had he been as desirous of appearing beneficial to mankind, as of being so.

As he was admitted into the secret and most retired thoughts and counsels of his Royal master King *William*, a great share in the plan of the Protestant Succession is universally ascribed to him. And if he did not entirely project the Union of the two kingdoms, and the Bill of Regency, which seem to have been the only methods in human policy, for  
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securing to us so inestimable a blessing; there is none who will deny him to have been the chief conductor in both these glorious works. For posterity are obliged to allow him that praise after his death, which he industriously declined while he was living. His life indeed seems to have been prolonged beyond its natural term, under those indispositions which hung upon the latter part of it, that he might have the satisfaction of seeing the happy settlement take place, which he had proposed to himself as the principal end of all his publick labours. Nor was it a small addition to his happiness, that by this means he saw those who had been always his most intimate friends, and who had concerted with him such measures for the guaranty of the Protestant succession, as drew upon them the displeasure of men who were averse to it, advanced to the highest posts of trust and honour under his present Majesty. I believe there are none of these Patriots, who will think it a derogation from their merit to have it said, that they received many lights and advantages from their intimacy with my Lord *Somers*: who had such a general knowledge of affairs, and so tender a concern for his friends, that whatever station they were in, they usually applied to him for his advice in every perplexity of business, and in affairs of the greatest difficulty.

His life was, in every part of it, set off with that graceful modesty and reserve, which made his virtues more beautiful, the more they were cast in such agreeable shades.

His religion was sincere, not ostentatious; and such as inspired him with an universal benevolence towards all his fellow-subjects, not with bitterness against any part of them. He shewed his firm adherence to it as modelled by our national constitution, and was constant to its offices of devotion, both in publick and in his family. He appeared a champion for it with great reputation in the cause of the seven Bishops, at a time when the Church was really in danger. To which we may add, that he held a strict friendship and correspondence with the great Archbishop *Tillotson*, being acted by the same spirit of candor and moderation; and moved rather with pity than indignation towards the persons of those who differed from him in the unessential parts of christianity.

His great humanity appeared in the minutest circumstances of his conversation. You found it in the benevolence of his aspect, the complacency of his behaviour, and the tone of his voice. His great application to the severer studies of the law, had not infected his temper with any thing positive or litigious. He did not know what it was to wrangle on indifferent points, to triumph in the superiority of his understanding, or to be



be supercilious on the side of truth. He joined the greatest delicacy of good-breeding to the greatest strength of reason. By approving the sentiments of a person, with whom he conversed, in such particulars as were just, he won him over from those points in which he was mistaken; and had so agreeable a way of conveying knowledge, that whoever conferred with him grew the wiser, without perceiving that he had been instructed. We may probably ascribe to this masterly and engaging manner of conversation, the great esteem which he had gained with the late Queen, while she pursued those measures which had carried the *British* nation to the highest pitch of glory; notwithstanding she had entertained many unreasonable prejudices against him, before she was acquainted with his personal worth and behaviour.

As in his political capacity we have before seen how much he contributed to the establishment of the Protestant interest, and the good of his native country, he was always true to these great ends. His character was uniform and consistent with itself, and his whole conduct of a piece. His principles were founded in reason, and supported by virtue; and therefore did not lie at the mercy of Ambition, Avarice, or Resentment. His notions were no less steady and unshaken, than just and upright. In a word, he concluded his course among the same well-chosen friendships and alliances, with which he began it.

This great man was not more conspicuous as a Patriot and a Statesman, than as a person of universal knowledge and learning. As by dividing his time between the publick scenes of business, and the private retirements of life, he took care to keep up both the great and good man; so by the same means he accomplished himself not only in the knowledge of men and things, but in the skill of the most refined arts and sciences. That unwearied diligence, which followed him through all the stages of his life, gave him such a thorough insight into the laws of the land, that he passed for one of the greatest masters of his profession, at his first appearance in it. Though he made a regular progress through the several honours of the long robe, he was always looked upon as one who deserved a superior station to that he was possessed of; till he arrived at the highest dignity to which those studies could advance him.

He enjoyed in the highest perfection two talents, which do not often meet in the same person, the greatest strength of good sense, and the most exquisite taste of politeness. Without the first, learning is but an incumbrance; and without the last, is ungraceful. My Lord *Somers* was Master of these two qualifications in so eminent a degree, that all the parts  
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of knowledge appeared in him with such an additional strength and beauty, as they want in the possession of others. If he delivered his opinion of a piece of Poetry, a Statue, or a Picture, there was something so just and delicate in his observations, as naturally produced pleasure and assent in those who heard him.

His solidity and elegance, improved by the reading of the finest Authors both of the learned and modern languages, discovered itself in all his productions. His Oratory was masculine and persuasive, free from every thing trivial and affected. His style in writing was chaste and pure, but at the same time full of spirit and politeness; and fit to convey the most intricate business to the understanding of the reader, with the utmost clearness and perspicuity. And here it is to be lamented, that this extraordinary person, out of his natural aversion to vain-glory, wrote several pieces as well as performed several actions, which he did not assume the honour of: though at the same time so many works of this nature have appeared, which every one has ascribed to him, that I believe no Author of the greatest eminence would deny my Lord *Somers* to have been the best writer of the age in which he lived.

This noble Lord, for the great extent of his knowledge and capacity, has been often compared with the Lord *Verulam*, who had also been Chancellor of *England*. But the conduct of these extraordinary persons, under the same circumstances, was vastly different. They were both impeached by a House of Commons. One of them, as he had given just occasion for it, sunk under it; and was reduced to such an abject submission, as very much diminished the lustre of so exalted a character: but my Lord *Somers* was too well fortified in his integrity to fear the impotence of an attempt upon his reputation; and though his accusers would gladly have dropped their impeachment, he was instant with them for the prosecution of it, and would not let that matter rest till it was brought to an issue. For the same virtue and greatness of mind which gave him a disregard of fame, made him impatient of an undeserved reproach.

There is no question but this wonderful man will make one of the most distinguished figures in the history of the present age; but we cannot expect that his merit will shine out in its proper light, since he wrote many things which are not published in his name; was at the bottom of many excellent Counsels, in which he did not appear; did offices of friendship to many persons, who knew not from whom they were derived; and performed great services to his country, the glory of which was transferred to others: In short, since he made it his endeavour rather to do worthy actions, than to gain an illustrious character.