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

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

**London, 1721**

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N<sup>o</sup> 40. Monday, May 7.

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*Urit enim fulgore suo qui pręgravat artes  
Infra se positas: extinctus amabitur idem.*

Hor.

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**I**T requires no small degree of resolution, to be an Author in a country so facetious and satyrical as this of *Great Britain*. Such a one raises a kind of alarm among his fellow-subjects, and by pretending to distinguish himself from the herd, becomes a mark of publick censure, and sometimes a standing object of Raillery and Ridicule. Writing is indeed a provocation to the envious, and an affront to the ignorant. How often do we see a person, whose intentions are visibly to do good by the works which he publishes, treated in as scurrilous a manner, as if he were an enemy to mankind? All the little scramblers after fame fall upon him, publish every blot in his life, depend upon hear-say to defame him, and have recourse to their own invention, rather than suffer him to erect himself into an Author with impunity. Even those who write on the most indifferent subjects, and are conversant only in works of taste, are looked upon as men that make a kind of insult upon society, and ought to be humbled as disturbers of the publick tranquillity. Not only the dull and the malicious, which make a formidable party in our Island, but the whole fraternity of writers rise up in arms against every new intruder into the world of fame; and a thousand to one, before they have done, prove him not only to be a fool, but a knave. Successful Authors do what they can to exclude a competitor, while the unsuccessful with as much eagerness lay in their claim to him as a brother. This natural antipathy to a man who breaks his ranks, and endeavours to signalize his parts in the world, has very probably hindered many persons from making their appearance in print, who might have enriched our country with better productions in all kinds than any that are now extant. The truth of it is, the active part of mankind, as they do most for the good of their contemporaries, very deservedly gain the greatest share in their applauses; whilst men of specu-

speculative endowments, who employ their talents in writing, as they may equally benefit or amuse succeeding ages, have generally the greatest share in the admiration of posterity. Both good and bad writers may receive great satisfaction from the prospects of futurity; as in after-ages the former will be remembered and the latter forgotten.

Among all sets of Authors, there are none who draw upon themselves more displeasure, than those who deal in political matters, which indeed is very often too justly incurred; considering that spirit of rancour and virulence, with which works of this nature generally abound. These are not only regarded as Authors, but as partizans, and are sure to exasperate at least one half of their readers. Other writers offend only the stupid or jealous among their countrymen; but these, let their cause be never so just, must expect to irritate a supernumerary party of the self-interested, prejudiced, and ambitious. They may however comfort themselves with considering, that if they gain any unjust reproach from one side, they generally acquire more praise than they deserve from the other; and that writings of this kind, if conducted with candour and impartiality, have a more particular tendency to the good of their country, and of the present age, than any other compositions whatsoever.

To consider an Author farther, as the subject of obloquy and detraction. We may observe with what pleasure a work is received by the invidious part of mankind, in which a writer falls short of himself, and does not answer the character which he has acquired by his former productions. It is a fine simile in one of Mr. *Congreve's* prologues, which compares a writer to a buttering gamester, that stakes all his winnings upon every cast: so that if he loses the last throw, he is sure to be undone. It would be well for all Authors, if, like that Gentleman, they knew when to give over, and to desist from any farther pursuits after fame, whilst they are in the full possession of it. On the other hand, there is not a more melancholy object in the learned world, than a man who has written himself down. As the publick is more disposed to censure than to praise, his readers will ridicule him for his last works, when they have forgot to applaud those which preceded them. In this case, where a man has lost his spirit by old age and infirmity, one could wish that his friends and relations would keep him from the use of pen, ink and paper, if he is not to be reclaimed by any other methods.

The Author indeed often grows old before the man, especially if he treats on subjects of invention, or such as arise from reflections upon human nature: for in this case, neither his own strength of mind, nor those

parts of life which are commonly unobserved, will furnish him with sufficient materials to be at the same time both pleasing and voluminous. We find even in the outward dress of poetry, that men, who write much without taking breath, very often return to the same phrases and forms of expression, as well as to the same manner of thinking. Authors, who have thus drawn off the spirit of their thoughts, should lie still for some time, till their minds have gathered fresh strength, and by reading, reflection and conversation, laid in a new stock of elegancies, sentiments, and images of Nature. The soil, that is worn with too frequent culture, must lie fallow for a while, till it has recruited its exhausted salts, and again enriched it self by the ventilations of the air, the dews of Heaven, and the kindly influences of the sun.

For my own part, notwithstanding this general malevolence towards those who communicate their thoughts in print, I cannot but look with a friendly regard on such as do it, provided there is no tendency in their writings to vice and prophaneness. If the thoughts of such Authors have nothing in them, they at least do no harm, and shew an honest industry and a good intention in the composer. If they teach me any thing I did not know before, I cannot but look upon my self as obliged to the writer, and consider him as my particular benefactor, if he conveys to me one of the greatest gifts that is in the power of man to bestow, an improvement of my understanding, an innocent amusement, or an incentive to some moral virtue. Were not men of abilities thus communicative, their wisdom would be in a great measure useless, and their experience uninstrucive. There would be no business in solitude, nor proper relaxations in business. By these assistances, the retired man lives in the world, if not above it; passion is composed; thought hindered from being barren; and the mind from preying upon it self. That esteem, indeed, which is paid to good writers by their posterity, sufficiently shews the merit of persons who are thus employed. Who does not now more admire *Cicero* as an Author, than as a Consul of *Rome*! and does not oftner talk of the celebrated writers of our own country, who lived in former ages, than of any other particular persons among their contemporaries and fellow-subjects.

When I consider my self as a *British* Free-holder, I am in a particular manner pleased with the labours of those who have improved our language with the translation of old *Latin* and *Greek* Authors; and by that means let us into the knowledge of what passed in the famous governments of *Greece* and *Rome*. We have already most of their historians

ans in our own tongue: and what is still more for the honour of our language, it has been taught to express with elegance the greatest of their Poets in each nation. The illiterate among our countrymen, may learn to judge from *Dryden's Virgil* of the most perfect epic performance: and those parts of *Homer*, which have already been published by Mr. *Pope*, give us reason to think that the *Iliad* will appear in *English* with as little disadvantage to that immortal Poem.

There is another Author, whom I have long wished to see well translated into *English*, as his work is filled with a spirit of liberty, and more directly tends to raise sentiments of honour and virtue in his Reader, than any of the poetical writings of antiquity. I mean the *Pharsalia* of *Lucan*. This is the only Author of consideration among the *Latin* Poets, who was not explained for the use of the *Dauphin*, for a very obvious reason; because the whole *Pharsalia* would have been no less than a satire upon the *French* form of government. The translation of this Author is now in the hands of Mr. *Rowe*, who has already given the world some admirable specimens of it; and not only kept up the fire of the original, but delivered the sentiments with greater perspicuity, and in a finer turn of phrase and verse.

As undertakings of so difficult a nature require the greatest encouragements, one cannot but rejoice to see those general Subscriptions which have been made to them; especially since if the two works last mentioned are not finished by those masterly hands, which are now employed in them, we may despair of seeing them attempted by others.

