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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Nimium risus pretium est si probitatis impendio constat. Quintil.

I Have lately read, with much pleasure, the Essays upon several subjects published by Sir *Richard Blackmore*; and though I agree with him in many of his excellent observations, I cannot but take that reasonable freedom, which he himself makes use of with regard to other writers, to dissent from him in some few particulars. In his reflections upon works of wit and humour, he observes how unequal they are to combat vice and folly; and seems to think, that the finest rallery and satyr, though directed by these generous views, never reclaimed one vicious man, or made one fool depart from his folly.

This is a position very hard to be contradicted, because no Author knows the number or names of his converts. As for the *Tatlers* and *Spectators* in particular, which are obliged to this ingenious and useful Author for the character he has given of them, they were so generally dispersed in single sheets, and have since been printed in so great numbers, that it is to be hoped they have made some profelytes to the interests, if not to the practice of wisdom and virtue, among such a multitude of Readers.

I need not remind this learned Gentleman, that *Socrates*, who was the greatest propagator of morality in the heathen world, and a martyr for the unity of the Godhead, was so famous for the exercise of this talent among the politest people of antiquity, that he gained the name of (*δ'Εργων*) *the Droll*.

There are very good effects which visibly arose from the above-mentioned performances, and others of the like nature; as, in the first place, they diverted rallery from improper objects, and gave a new turn to ridicule, which for many years had been exerted on persons and things of a sacred and serious nature. They endeavoured to make mirth instructive, and if they failed in this great end, they must be allowed at least to have made it innocent. If wit and humour begin again to relapse in-

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to their former licentiousness, they can never hope for approbation from those who know that rallery is useles when it has no moral under it, and pernicious when it attacks any thing that is either unblameable or praise-worthy. To this we may add, what has been commonly observed, that it is not difficult to be merry on the side of vice, as serious objects are the most capable of ridicule; as the party, which naturally favours such a mirth, is the most numerous; and as there are the most standing jests and patterns for imitation in this kind of writing.

In the next place: such productions of wit and humour, as have a tendency to expose vice and folly, furnish useful diversions to all kinds of Readers. The good, or prudent man may, by these means, be diverted, without prejudice to his discretion, or morality. Rallery, under such regulations, unbends the mind from serious studies and severer contemplations, without throwing it off from its proper byass. It carries on the same design that is promoted by Authors of a graver turn, and only does it in another manner. It also awakens reflection in those who are the most indifferent in the cause of virtue or knowledge, by setting before them the absurdity of such practices as are generally unobserved, by reason of their being common or fashionable: nay, it sometimes catches the dissolute and abandoned before they are aware of it; who are often betrayed to laugh at themselves, and upon reflection find, that they are merry at their own expence. I might farther take notice, that by entertainments of this kind, a man may be chearful in solitude, and not be forced to seek for company every time he has a mind to be merry.

The last advantage I shall mention from compositions of this nature, when thus restrained, is, that they shew wisdom and virtue are far from being inconsistent with politeness and good humour. They make morality appear amiable to people of gay dispositions, and refute the common objection against religion, which represents it as only fit for gloomy and melancholy tempers. It was the motto of a Bishop very eminent for his piety and good works in King *Charles* the Second's reign, *Inserui Deo et latere, Serve God and be cheerful.* Those therefore who supply the world with such entertainments of mirth as are instructive, or at least harmless, may be thought to deserve well of mankind; to which I shall only add, that they retrieve the honour of polite learning, and answer those sower enthusiasts who affect to stigmatize the finest and most elegant Authors, both ancient and modern, (which they have never read) as dangerous to religion, and destructive of all sound and saving knowledge.

Our nation are such lovers of mirth and humour, that it is impossible for detached papers, which come out on stated days, either to have a general run, or long continuance, if they are not diversified, and enlivened from time to time, with subjects and thoughts, accommodated to this taste, which so prevails among our countrymen. No periodical Author, who always maintains his gravity, and does not sometimes sacrifice to the Graces, must expect to keep in vogue for any considerable time. Political Speculations in particular, however just and important, are of so dry and austere a nature, that they will not go down with the publick without frequent seasonings of this kind. The work may be well performed, but will never take, if it is not set off with proper scenes and decorations. A mere politician is but a dull companion, and, if he is always wise, is in great danger of being tiresome or ridiculous.

Besides, papers of entertainment are necessary to increase the number of Readers, especially among those of different notions and principles; who by this means may be betrayed to give you a fair hearing, and to know what you have to say for your self. I might likewise observe, that in all political writings there is something that grates upon the mind of the most candid Reader, in opinions which are not conformable to his own way of thinking; and that the harshness of reasoning is not a little softened and smoothed by the infusions of mirth and pleasantry.

Political Speculations do likewise furnish us with several objects that may very innocently be ridiculed, and which are regarded as such by men of sense in all parties; of this kind are the passions of our Statewomen, and the reasonings of our Fox-hunters.

A writer who makes Fame the chief end of his endeavours, and would be more desirous of pleasing than of improving his Readers, might find an inexhaustible fund of mirth in politicks. Scandal and satyr are never-failing gratifications to the publick. Detraction and obloquy are received with as much eagerness as wit and humour. Should a writer single out particular persons, or point his rallery at any order of men, who by their profession ought to be exempt from it; should he slander the innocent, or satyrize the miserable; or should he, even on the proper subjects of derision, give the full play to his mirth, without regard to decency and good manners; he might be sure of pleasing a great part of his Readers, but must be a very ill man, if by such a proceeding he could please himself.

Monday,