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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N^o 53. Friday, June 22.----- *Bellua Centiceps.* Hor.

THERE is scarce any man in *England*, of what denomination soever, that is not a Free-thinker in politicks, and hath not some particular notions of his own, by which he distinguishes himself from the rest of the community. Our Island, which was formerly called a nation of Saints, may now be called a nation of Statesmen. Almost every age, profession, and sex among us, has its favourite set of Ministers, and scheme of government.

Our children are initiated into factions before they know their right hand from their left. They no sooner begin to speak, but Whig and Tory are the first words they learn. They are taught in their infancy to hate one half of the nation; and contract all the virulence and passion of a party, before they come to the use of their reason.

As for our Nobility, they are politicians by birth; and though the Commons of the nation delegate their power in the community to certain Representatives, every one reserves to himself a private jurisdiction, or privilege, of censuring their conduct, and rectifying the Legislature. There is scarce a fresh-man in either University, who is not able to mend the constitution in several particulars. We see 'Squires and Yeomen coming up to town every day, so full of politicks, that, to use the thought of an ingenious Gentleman, we are frequently put in mind of *Roman Dictators*, who were called from the plough. I have often heard of a senior Alderman in *Buckinghamshire*, who, at all publick meetings, grows drunk in praise of Aristocracy, and is as often encountered by an old Justice of the Peace who lives in the neighbourhood, and will talk you from morning till night on the *Gothic* balance. Who hath not observed several parish Clerks, that have ransacked *Hopkins* and *Sternbold* for staves in favour of the race of *Jacob*; after the example of their politick predecessors in *Oliver's* days, who on every Sabbath were for binding Kings in chains, and

and Nobles in links of iron! You can scarce see a bench of porters without two or three casuists in it, that will fettle you the right of Princes, and state the bounds of the Civil and Ecclesiastical power, in the drinking of a pot of ale. What is more usual than on a rejoicing night to meet with a drunken cobbler bawling out for the church, and perhaps knocked down a little after, by an enemy in his own profession, who is a lover of moderation!

We have taken notice in former papers of this political ferment being got into the female sex, and of the wild work it makes among them. We have had a late most remarkable instance of it in a contest between a sister of the *White Rose*, and a beautiful and loyal young Lady, who to shew her zeal for Revolution-principles, had adorned her pretty bosom with a *Sweet William*. The rabble of the sex have not been ashamed very lately to gather about bonfires, and scream out their principles in the publick streets. In short, there is hardly a female in this our metropolis, who is not a competent judge of our highest controversies in church and state. We have several Oyster-women that hold the unlawfulness of Episcopacy; and cinder wenches that are great sticklers for indefeasible right.

Of all the ways and means by which this political humour hath been propagated among the people of *Great Britain*, I cannot single out any so prevalent and universal, as the late constant application of the press to the publishing of State-matters. We hear of several that are newly erected in the country, and set apart for this particular use. For, it seems, the people of *Exeter*, *Salisbury*, and other large towns, are resolved to be as great politicians as the inhabitants of *London* and *Westminster*; and deal out such news of their own printing, as is best suited to the genius of the market-people, and the taste of the county.

One cannot but be sorry, for the sake of these places, that such a pernicious machine is erected among them; for it is very well known here, that the making of the politician is the breaking of the tradesman. When a citizen turns a *Machiavel*, he grows too cunning to mind his own business; and I have heard a curious observation, that the woollen manufacture has of late years decayed in proportion as the paper manufacture has encreased. Whether the one may not properly be looked upon as the occasion of the other, I shall leave to the judgment of persons more profound in political enquiries.

As our news-writers record many facts which, to use their own phrase, afford great matter of Speculation, their Readers speculate accordingly, and

and by their variety of conjectures, in a few years become consummate Statesmen; besides, as their papers are filled with a different party-spirit, they naturally divide the people into different sentiments, who generally consider rather the principles, than the truth of the news-writer. This humour prevails to such a degree, that there are several well-meaning persons in the nation, who have been so mis-led by their favourite Authors of this kind, that in the present contention between the *Turk* and the Emperor, they are gone over insensibly from the interests of Christianity, and become well-wishers to the *Mahometan* cause. In a word, almost every news-writer has his sect, which (considering the natural genius of our countrymen to mix, vary, or refine in notions of state) furnishes every man, by degrees, with a particular system of policy. For, however any one may concur in the general scheme of his party, it is still with certain reserves and deviations, and with a salvo to his own private judgment.

Among this innumerable herd of politicians, I cannot but take notice of one sect, who do not seem to play fair with the rest of the fraternity, and make a very considerable class of men. These are such as we may call the *Afterwise*, who, when any project fails, or hath not had its desired effect, foresaw all the inconveniencies that would arise from it, though they kept their thoughts to themselves till they discovered the issue. Nay, there is nothing more usual than for some of these wise men, who applauded publick measures, before they were put in execution, to condemn them upon their proving unsuccessful. The dictators in Coffee-houses are generally of this rank, who often give shrewd intimations that things would have taken another turn, had they been members of the cabinet.

How difficult must it be for any form of government to continue undisturbed, or any ruler to live uncensured, where every one of the community is thus qualified for modelling the constitution, and is so good a judge in matters of state! A famous *French* wit, to shew how the Monarch of that nation, who has no partners in his Sovereignty, is better able to make his way through all the difficulties of government, than an Emperor of *Germany*, who acts in concert with many inferior Fellow-soveraigns; compares the first to a serpent with many tails to one head; and the other to a serpent with one tail to many heads; and puts the question, which of them is like to glide with most ease and activity through a thicket? The same comparison will hold in the business of a nation conducted by a Ministry, or a whole kingdom of politicians.

Monday,