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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N^o 565. Friday, July 9.

----- *Deum namque ire per omnes
Terrasque, tractusque maris, coelumque profundum.* Virg.

I Was yesterday about sun-set walking in the open fields, 'till the night insensibly fell upon me. I at first amused my self with all the richness and variety of colours, which appeared in the western parts of Heaven: in proportion as they faded away and went out, several stars and planets appeared one after another, 'till the whole firmament was in a glow. The blueness of the *Æther* was exceedingly heightened and enlivened by the season of the year, and by the rays of all those luminaries that passed through it. The *Galaxy* appeared in its most beautiful white. To compleat the scene, the full Moon rose at length in that clouded Majesty, which *Milton* takes notice of, and opened to the eye a new picture of nature, which was more finely shaded, and disposed among softer lights, than that which the Sun had before discovered to us.

As I was surveying the Moon walking in her brightness, and taking her progress among the constellations, a thought rose in me which I believe very often perplexes and disturbs men of serious and contemplative natures. *David* himself fell into it, in that reflection, *When I consider the Heavens the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou regardest him!* In the same manner, when I considered that infinite host of Stars, or, to speak more philosophically, of Suns, which were then shining upon me, with those innumerable sets of planets or worlds, which were moving round their respective suns; when I still enlarged the idea, and supposed another heaven of suns and worlds rising still above this which we discovered, and these still enlightened by a superior firmament of Luminaries, which are planted at so great a distance that they may appear to the inhabitants of the former as the stars do to us; in short, whilst I pursued this thought, I could not but reflect on that

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little

little insignificant figure which I my self bore amidst the immensity of God's works.

Were the Sun, which enlightens this part of the creation, with all the host of planetary worlds that move about him, utterly extinguished and annihilated, they would not be missed more than a grain of sand upon the sea-shore. The space they possess is so exceedingly little, in comparison of the whole, that it would scarce make a *Blank* in the creation. The Chasm would be imperceptible to an eye, that could take in the whole compass of nature, and pass from one end of the creation to the other, as it is possible there may be such a sense in our selves hereafter, or in creatures which are at present more exalted than our selves. We see many stars by the help of glasses, which we do not discover with our naked eyes; and the finer our Telescopes are, the more still are our discoveries. *Huygenius* carries this thought so far, that he does not think it impossible there may be stars whose light is not yet travelled down to us, since their first creation. There is no question but the Universe has certain bounds set to it; but when we consider that is the work of infinite power, prompted by infinite goodness, with an infinite space to exert itself in, how can our imagination set any bounds to it?

To return therefore to my first thought, I could not but look upon my self with secret horror, as a Being that was not worth the smallest regard of one who had so great a work under his care and superintendency. I was afraid of being overlooked amidst the immensity of nature, and lost among that infinite variety of creatures, which in all probability swarm through all these immeasurable regions of matter.

In order to recover my self from this mortifying thought, I considered that it took its rise from those narrow conceptions, which we are apt to entertain of the Divine Nature. We our selves cannot attend to many different objects at the same time. If we are careful to inspect some things, we must of course neglect others. This imperfection which we observe in our selves, is an imperfection that cleaves in some degree to creatures of the highest capacities, as they are creatures, that is, Beings of finite and limited natures. The presence of every created Being is confined to a certain measure of space, and consequently his observation is stinted to a certain number of objects. The Sphere in which we move, and act, and understand, is of a wider circumference to one creature than another, according as we rise one above another in the scale of existence. But the widest of these our spheres has its circumference. When therefore we reflect on the Divine Nature, we are so used and accustomed to this imperfection

imperfection in our selves, that we cannot forbear in some measure ascribing it to him, in whom there is no shadow of imperfection. Our reason indeed assures us, that his attributes are infinite, but the poorness of our conceptions is such, that it cannot forbear setting bounds to every thing it contemplates, 'till our reason comes again to our succour, and throws down all those little prejudices which rise in us unawares, and are natural to the mind of man.

We shall therefore utterly extinguish this melancholy thought, of our being overlooked by our Maker in the multiplicity of his works, and the infinity of those objects among which he seems to be incessantly employed, if we consider, in the first place, that he is Omnipresent; and, in the second, that he is Omniscient.

If we consider him in his Omnipresence: his Being passes through, actuates and supports the whole frame of Nature. His Creation, and every part of it, is full of him. There is nothing he has made that is either so distant, so little, or so inconsiderable, which he does not essentially inhabit. His substance is within the substance of every Being, whether material, or immaterial, and as intimately present to it, as that Being is to it self. It would be an imperfection in him, were he able to remove out of one place into another, or to withdraw himself from any thing he has created, or from any part of that space which is diffused and spread abroad to infinity. In short, to speak of him in the language of the old Philosopher, he is a Being whose centre is every where, and his circumference no where.

In the second place, he is Omniscient as well as Omnipresent. His Omniscience indeed necessarily and naturally flows from his Omnipresence; he cannot but be conscious of every motion that arises in the whole material world, which he thus essentially pervades, and of every thought that is stirring in the intellectual world, to every part of which he is thus intimately united. Several Moralists have considered the creation as the Temple of God; which he has built with his own hands, and which is filled with his presence. Others have considered infinite space as the receptacle, or rather the habitation of the Almighty: but the noblest and most exalted way of considering this infinite space is that of Sir *Isaac Newton*, who calls it the *Sensorium* of the Godhead. Brutes and men have their *Sensoriola*, or little *Sensoriums*, by which they apprehend the presence, and perceive the actions of a few objects that lie contiguous to them. Their knowledge and observation turns within a very narrow circle. But as God Almighty cannot but perceive and know every

every thing in which he resides, infinite space gives room to infinite knowledge, and is, as it were, an organ to Omniscience.

Were the Soul separate from the body, and with one glance of thought should start beyond the bounds of the Creation, should it for millions of years continue its progress through infinite space with the same activity, it would still find it self within the embrace of its Creator, and encompassed round with the immensity of the Godhead. Whilst we are in the body he is not less present with us, because he is concealed from us. *O that I knew where I might find him!* says Job. *Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left hand, where he does work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.* In short, reason as well as revelation assures us, that he cannot be absent from us, notwithstanding he is undiscovered by us.

In this consideration of God Almighty's Omnipresence and Omniscience, every uncomfortable thought vanishes. He cannot but regard every thing that has Being, especially such of his creatures who fear they are not regarded by him. He is privy to all their thoughts, and to that anxiety of heart in particular, which is apt to trouble them on this occasion: for as it is impossible he should overlook any of his creatures, so we may be confident that he regards, with an eye of mercy, those who endeavour to recommend themselves to his notice, and in an unfeigned humility of heart think themselves unworthy that he should be mindful of them.

N^o 567. *Wednesday, July 14.*

----- *Inceptus clamor frustratur hiantes.*

Virg.

I Have received private advice from some of my correspondents, that if I would give my paper a general run, I should take care to season it with scandal. I have indeed observed of late, that few writings sell which are not filled with great names and illustrious titles. The Reader generally casts his eye upon a new book, and if he finds several letters separated from one another by a dash, he buys it up, and peruses it with