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

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

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N<sup>o</sup> 574.

Friday, July 30.

*Non possidentem multa vocaveris**Rectè beatum : rectiùs occupat**Nomen beati, qui deorum**Muneribus sapienter uti**Duramque callet pauperiem pati.*

Hor.

I Was once engaged in discourse with a *Rosicrucian* about *the great secret*. As this kind of men (I mean those of them who are not professed cheats) are over-run with Enthusiasm and Philosophy, it was very amusing to hear this religious Adept descanting on his pretended discovery. He talked of the secret as of a spirit which lived within an emerald, and converted every thing that was near it to the highest perfection it was capable of. It gives a lustre, says he, to the sun, and water to the diamond. It irradiates every metal, and enriches lead with all the properties of gold. It heightens smoke into flame, flame into light, and light into glory. He further added, that a single ray of it dissipates pain, and care, and melancholy from the person on whom it falls. In short, says he, its presence naturally changes every place into a kind of heaven. After he had gone on for some time in this unintelligible cant, I found that he jumbled natural and moral ideas together into the same discourse, and that his great secret was nothing else but *Content*.

This virtue does indeed produce, in some measure, all those effects which the Alchymist usually ascribes to what he calls the Philosopher's stone; and if it does not bring riches, it does the same thing, by banishing the desire of them. If it cannot remove the disquietudes arising out of a man's mind, body, or fortune, it makes him easie under them. It has indeed a kindly influence on the soul of man, in respect of every Being to whom he stands related. It extinguishes all murmur, repining, and ingratitude towards that Being who has allotted him his part to act in this world. It destroys all inordinate ambition, and every tendency to corruption,

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ruption,



ruption, with regard to the community wherein he is placed. It gives sweetness to his conversation, and a perpetual serenity to all his thoughts.

Among the many methods which might be made use of for the acquiring of this virtue, I shall only mention the two following. First of all, a man should always consider how much he has more than he wants; and, secondly, how much more unhappy he might be than he really is.

First of all, a man should always consider how much he has more than he wants. I am wonderfully pleased with the reply which *Aristippus* made to one who condoled him upon the loss of a farm, *Why*, said he, *I have three farms still, and you have but one; so that I ought rather to be afflicted for you, than you for me.* On the contrary, foolish men are more apt to consider what they have lost than what they possess; and to fix their eyes upon those who are richer than themselves, rather than on those who are under greater difficulties. All the real pleasures and conveniences of life lie in a narrow compass; but it is the humour of mankind to be always looking forward, and straining after one who has got the start of them in wealth and honour. For this reason, as there are none can be properly called rich, who have not more than they want; there are few rich men in any of the politer nations but among the middle sort of people, who keep their wishes within their fortunes, and have more wealth than they know how to enjoy. Persons of a higher rank live in a kind of splendid poverty, and are perpetually wanting, because instead of acquiescing in the solid pleasures of life, they endeavour to outvy one another in shadows and appearances. Men of sense have at all times beheld with a great deal of mirth this silly game that is playing over their heads, and by contracting their desires, enjoy all that secret satisfaction which others are always in quest of. The truth is, this ridiculous chace after imaginary pleasures cannot be sufficiently exposed, as it is the great source of those evils which generally undo a nation. Let a man's estate be what it will, he is a poor man if he does not live within it, and naturally sets himself to sale to any one that can give him his price. When *Pittacus*, after the death of his brother, who had left him a good estate, was offered a great sum of money by the King of *Lydia*, he thanked him for his kindness, but told him he had already more by half than he knew what to do with. In short, content is equivalent to wealth, and luxury to poverty; or, to give the thought a more agreeable turn, *content is natural wealth*, says *Socrates*; to which I shall add, *luxury is artificial poverty*. I shall therefore recommend to the consideration of those who are always aiming after superfluous and imaginary enjoyments, and  
will



will not be at the trouble of contracting their desires, an excellent saying of *Bion* the Philosopher; namely, *That no man has so much care, as he who endeavours after the most happiness.*

In the second place, every one ought to reflect how much more unhappy he might be than he really is. The former consideration took in all those who are sufficiently provided with the means to make themselves easie; this regards such as actually lie under some pressure or misfortune. These may receive great alleviation from such a comparison as the unhappy person may make between himself and others, or between the misfortune which he suffers, and greater misfortunes which might have befallen him.

I like the story of the honest *Dutchman*, who, upon breaking his leg by a fall from the mainmast, told the standers-by, It was a great mercy that it was not his neck. To which, since I am got into quotations, give me leave to add the saying of an old Philosopher, who, after having invited some of his friends to dine with him, was ruffled by his wife that came into the room in a passion, and threw down the table that stood before them; *Every one*, says he, *has his calamity, and he is a happy man that has no greater than this.* We find an instance to the same purpose in the life of Doctor *Hammond*, written by Bishop *Fell*. As this good man was troubled with a complication of distempers, when he had the Gout upon him, he used to thank God that it was not the Stone; and when he had the Stone, that he had not both these distempers on him at the same time.

I cannot conclude this Essay without observing, that there was never any system besides that of Christianity, which could effectually produce in the mind of man the virtue I have been hitherto speaking of. In order to make us content with our present condition, many of the ancient Philosophers tell us that our discontent only hurts our selves, without being able to make any alteration in our circumstances; others, that whatever evil befalls us is derived to us by a fatal necessity, to which the Gods themselves are subject; whilst others very gravely tell the man who is miserable, that it is necessary he should be so to keep up the harmony of the universe, and that the *scheme* of providence would be troubled and perverted, were he otherwise. These, and the like considerations, rather silence than satisfy a man. They may show him that his discontent is unreasonable, but are by no means sufficient to relieve it. They rather give despair than consolation. In a word, a man might reply to one of these comforters, as *Augustus* did to his friend who advised him not to grieve

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for



for the death of a person whom he loved, because his grief could not fetch him again. *It is for that very reason, said the Emperor, that I grieve.*

On the contrary, religion bears a more tender regard to human nature. It prescribes to every miserable man the means of bettering his condition; nay, it shews him, that the bearing of his afflictions as he ought to do, will naturally end in the removal of them: it makes him easie here, because it can make him happy hereafter.

Upon the whole, a contented mind is the greatest blessing a man can enjoy in this world; and if in the present life his happiness arises from the subduing of his desires, it will arise in the next from the gratification of them.

N<sup>o</sup> 575. Monday, August 2.

-----*Nec morti esse locum*-----

Virg.

**A** Lewd young fellow seeing an aged Hermit go by him barefoot, *Father, says he, you are in a very miserable condition if there is not another world. True son, said the Hermit; but what is thy condition if there is?* Man is a creature designed for two different states of being, or rather, for two different lives. His first life is short and transient; his second permanent and lasting. The question we are all concerned in is this, In which of these two lives it is our chief interest to make our selves happy? or, in other words, Whether we should endeavour to secure to our selves the pleasures and gratifications of a life which is uncertain and precarious, and at its utmost length of a very inconsiderable duration; or to secure to our selves the pleasures of a life which is fixed and settled, and will never end? Every man, upon the first hearing of this question, knows very well which side of it he ought to close with. But however right we are in theory, it is plain that in practice we adhere to the wrong side of the question. We make provisions for this life as though it were never to have an end, and for the other life as though it were never to have a beginning.

Should a spirit of superior rank, who is a stranger to human nature, accidentally alight upon the earth, and take a survey of its inhabitants; what