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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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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^o 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

what would his notions of us be? Would not he think that we are a species of Beings made for quite different ends and purposes than what we really are? Must not he imagine that we were placed in this world to get riches and honours? Would not he think that it was our duty to toil after wealth, and station, and title? Nay, would not he believe we were forbidden poverty by threats of eternal punishment, and enjoined to pursue our pleasures under pain of damnation? He would certainly imagine that we were influenced by a scheme of duties quite opposite to those which are indeed prescribed to us. And truly, according to such an imagination, he must conclude that we are a species of the most obedient creatures in the universe; that we are constant to our duty; and that we keep a steady eye on the end for which we were sent hither.

But how great would be his astonishment, when he learnt that we were Beings not designed to exist in this world above threescore and ten years? and that the greatest part of this busy species fall short even of that age? How would he be lost in horror and admiration, when he should know that this set of creatures, who lay out all their endeavours for this life, which scarce deserves the name of existence, when, I say, he should know that this set of creatures are to exist to all eternity in another life, for which they make no preparations? Nothing can be a greater disgrace to reason, than that men, who are persuaded of these two different states of Being, should be perpetually employed in providing for a life of threescore and ten years, and neglecting to make provision for that, which after many myriads of years will be still new, and still beginning; especially when we consider that our endeavours for making our selves great, or rich, or honourable, or whatever else we place our happiness in, may after all prove unsuccessful; whereas if we constantly and sincerely endeavour to make our selves happy in the other life, we are sure that our endeavours will succeed, and that we shall not be disappointed of our hope.

The following question is started by one of the schoolmen. Supposing the whole body of the earth were a great ball or mass of the finest sand, and that a single grain or particle of this sand should be annihilated every thousand years. Supposing then that you had it in your choice to be happy all the while this prodigious mass of sand was consuming by this slow method till there was not a grain of it left, on condition you were to be miserable for-ever after; or, supposing that you might be happy for ever after, on condition you would be miserable till the whole mass of sand were thus annihilated at the rate of one sand in a thousand years: which of these two cases would you make your choice?

It

It must be confessed in this case, so many thousands of years are to the imagination as a kind of eternity, though in reality they do not bear so great a proportion to that duration which is to follow them, as a Unite does to the greatest number which you can put together in figures, or as one of those sands to the supposed heap. Reason therefore tells us, without any manner of hesitation, which would be the better part in this choice. However, as I have before intimated, our reason might in such a case be so over-set by the imagination, as to dispose some persons to sink under the consideration of the great length of the first part of this duration, and of the great distance of that second duration which is to succeed it. The mind, I say, might give itself up to that happiness which is at hand, considering that it is so very near, and that it would last so very long. But when the choice we actually have before us is this, Whether we will chuse to be happy for the space of only threescore and ten, nay perhaps of only twenty or ten years, I might say of only a day or an hour, and miserable to all eternity; or, on the contrary, miserable for this short term of years, and happy for a whole eternity: what words are sufficient to express that folly and want of consideration which in such a case makes a wrong choice?

I here put the case even at the worst, by supposing (what seldom happens) that a course of virtue makes us miserable in this life: but if we suppose (as it generally happens) that virtue would make us more happy even in this life than a contrary course of vice; how can we sufficiently admire the stupidity or madness of those persons who are capable of making so absurd a choice?

Every wise man therefore will consider this life only as it may conduce to the happiness of the other, and cheerfully sacrifice the pleasures of a few years to those of an eternity.



Wednesday,