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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N^o 576. *Wednesday, August 4.*

*Nitor in adversum; nec me, qui cætera, vincit
Impetus; et rapido contrarius evehor orbi.*

Ovid.

I Remember a young man of very lively parts, and of a sprightly turn in conversation, who had only one fault, which was an inordinate desire of appearing fashionable. This ran him into many amours, and consequently into many distempers. He never went to bed till two a'clock in the morning, because he would not be a queer fellow; and was every now and then knocked down by a Constable, to signalize his vivacity. He was initiated into half a dozen clubs before he was one and twenty, and so improved in them his natural gayety of temper, that you might frequently trace him to his lodgings by a range of broken windows, and other the like monuments of wit and gallantry. To be short, after having fully established his reputation of being a very agreeable rake, he died of old age at five and twenty.

There is indeed nothing which betrays a man into so many errors and inconveniencies, as the desire of not appearing singular; for which reason it is very necessary to form a right idea of singularity, that we may know when it is laudable and when it is vicious. In the first place, every man of sense will agree with me, that singularity is laudable, when, in contradiction to a multitude, it adheres to the dictates of conscience, morality, and honour. In these cases we ought to consider, that it is not custom, but duty, which is the rule of action; and that we should be only so far *sociable*, as we are reasonable creatures. Truth is never the less so, for not being attended to; and it is the nature of actions, not the number of actors, by which we ought to regulate our behaviour. Singularity in concerns of this kind is to be looked upon as heroic bravery, in which a man leaves the species only as he soars above it. What greater instance can there be of a weak and pusillanimous temper, than for a man to pass his whole life in opposition to his own sentiments? or not to dare to be what he thinks he ought to be? Sin-

Singularity therefore is only vicious when it makes men act contrary to reason, or when it puts them upon distinguishing themselves by trifles. As for the first of these, who are singular in any thing that is irreligious, immoral, or dishonourable, I believe every one will easily give them up. I shall therefore speak of those only who are remarkable for their singularity in things of no importance, as in dress, behaviour, conversation, and all the little intercourses of life. In these cases there is a certain deference due to custom; and notwithstanding there may be a colour of reason to deviate from the multitude in some particulars, a man ought to sacrifice his private inclinations and opinions to the practice of the publick. It must be confessed that good sense often makes a humourist; but then it unqualifies him for being of any moment in the world, and renders him ridiculous to persons of a much inferior understanding.

I have heard of a Gentleman in the north of *England*, who was a remarkable instance of this foolish singularity. He had laid it down as a rule within himself, to act in the most indifferent parts of life according to the most abstracted notions of reason and good sense, without any regard to fashion or example. This humour broke out at first in many little oddnesses: he had never any stated hours for his dinner, supper, or sleep; because, said he, we ought to attend the calls of nature, and not set our appetites to our meals, but bring our meals to our appetites. In his conversation with Country-gentlemen, he would not make use of a phrase that was not strictly true: he never told any of them, that he was his humble servant, but that he was his well-wisher; and would rather be thought a malecontent, than drink the King's health when he was not a-dry. He would thrust his head out of his chamber-window every morning, and after having gaped for fresh air about half an hour, repeat fifty verses as loud as he could bawl them for the benefit of his lungs; to which end he generally took them out of *Homer*; the *Greek* tongue, especially in that Author, being more deep and sonorous, and more conducive to expectoration, than any other. He had many other particularities, for which he gave sound and philosophical reasons. As this humour still grew upon him, he chose to wear a turban instead of a perriwig; concluding very justly, that a bandage of clean linnen about his head was much more wholesome, as well as cleanly, than the caul of a wig, which is soiled with frequent perspirations. He afterwards judiciously observed, that the many ligatures in our *English* dress must naturally check the circulation of the blood; for which reason, he made his breeches and his doublet of one continued piece of cloth, after the manner of the *Hussars*.

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In short, by following the pure dictates of reason, he at length departed so much from the rest of his countrymen, and indeed from his whole species, that his friends would have clapped him into *Bedlam*, and have begged his estate; but the Judge being informed that he did no harm, contented himself with issuing out a commission of lunacy against him, and putting his estate into the hands of proper guardians.

The fate of this Philosopher puts me in mind of a remark in Monsieur *Fontenelle's* dialogue of the dead. *The ambitious and the covetous* (says he) *are madmen to all intents and purposes, as much as those who are shut up in dark rooms; but they have the good luck to have numbers on their side; whereas the frenzy of one who is given up for a lunatick, is a frenzy hors d'oeuvre; that is, in other words, something which is singular in its kind, and does not fall in with the madness of a multitude.*

N^o 579. *Wednesday, August II.*

----- *Odora canum vis.*

Virg.

IN the reign of King *Charles I*, the company of Stationers, into whose hands the printing of the Bible is committed by Patent, made a very remarkable *Erratum* or blunder in one of their editions: for instead of *Thou shalt not commit Adultery*, they printed off several thousands of copies with *Thou shalt commit Adultery*. Archbishop *Laud*, to punish this their negligence, laid a considerable fine upon that company in the *Star-chamber*.

By the practice of the world, which prevails in this degenerate age, I am afraid that very many young profligates, of both sexes, are possessed of this spurious edition of the Bible, and observe the Commandment according to that faulty reading.

Adulterers, in the first ages of the church, were excommunicated for ever, and unqualified all their lives for bearing a part in christian assemblies, notwithstanding they might seek it with tears, and all the appearances of the most unfeigned repentance.