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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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ists whose existence is intirely present ; that is, in other words, who exists in the most perfect manner, and in such a manner as we have no idea of.

I shall conclude this Speculation with one useful inference. How can we sufficiently prostrate our selves and fall down before our Maker, when we consider that ineffable Goodness and Wisdom which contrived this existence for finite natures ? What must be the overflowings of that good-will, which prompted our Creator to adapt existence to Beings, in whom it is not necessary ? especially when we consider, that he himself was before in the compleat possession of existence and of happiness, and in the full enjoyment of eternity. What man can think of himself as called out and separated from nothing, of his being made a conscious, a reasonable and a happy creature, in short, of being taken in as a sharer of existence and a kind of partner in eternity, without being swallowed up in Wonder, in Praise, in Adoration ! It is indeed a thought too big for the mind of man, and rather to be entertained in the secrecy of devotion and in the silence of the soul, than to be expressed by words. The Supreme Being has not given us powers or faculties sufficient to extol and magnifie such unutterable goodness.

It is however some comfort to us, that we shall be always doing what we shall be never able to do, and that a work which cannot be finished, will however be the work of an eternity.

N^o 592. *Friday, September 10.*

-----*Studium sine divite vena.*

Hor.

I Look upon the Play-house as a world within it self. They have lately furnished the middle region of it with a new sett of meteors, in order to give the Sublime to many modern Tragedies. I was there last winter at the first rehearsal of the new thunder, which is much more deep and sonorous than any hitherto made use of. They have a *Salmons* behind the scenes, who plays it off with great success. Their lightnings are made to flash more briskly than heretofore ; their clouds are

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also better furbelowed, and more voluminous; not to mention a violent storm locked up in a great chest that is designed for the *Tempest*. They are also provided with above a dozen showers of snow, which, as I am informed, are the Plays of many unsuccessful Poets artificially cut and threaded for that use. Mr. *Rimer's* *Edgar* is to fall in snow at the next acting of King *Lear*, in order to heighten, or rather to alleviate, the distress of that unfortunate Prince; and to serve by way of decoration to a piece which that great Critic has written against.

I do not indeed wonder that the actors should be such professed enemies to those among our nation who are commonly known by the name of Critics, since it is a rule among these Gentlemen to fall upon a Play, not because it is ill written, but because it takes. Several of them lay it down as a maxim, that whatever dramatic performance has a long run, must of necessity be good for nothing; as though the first precept in poetry were *not to please*. Whether this rule holds good or not, I shall leave to the determination of those who are better judges than my self: if it does, I am sure it tends very much to the honour of those Gentlemen who have established it; few of their pieces having been disgraced by a run of three days, and most of them being so exquisitely written, that the town would never give them more than one night's hearing.

I have a great esteem for a true Critic, such as *Aristotle* and *Longinus* among the *Greeks*, *Horace* and *Quintilian* among the *Romans*, *Boileau* and *Dacier* among the *French*. But it is our misfortune, that some who set up for professed Critics among us are so stupid, that they do not know how to put ten words together with elegance or common propriety, and withal so illiterate, that they have no taste of the learned languages, and therefore criticise upon old Authors only at second hand. They judge of them by what others have written, and not by any notions they have of the Authors themselves. The words Unity, Action, Sentiment, and Diction, pronounced with an air of Authority, give them a figure among unlearned Readers, who are apt to believe they are very deep, because they are unintelligible. The ancient Critics are full of the praises of their contemporaries; they discover beauties which escaped the observation of the vulgar, and very often find out reasons for palliating and excusing such little slips and oversights as were committed in the writings of eminent Authors. On the contrary, most of the smatterers in criticism who appear among us, make it their business to vilify and depreciate every new production that gains applause, to descry imaginary blemishes, and to prove by far-fetched arguments, that what pass for beauties

beauties in any celebrated piece are faults and errors. In short, the writings of these Critics compared with those of the Ancients, are like the works of the Sophists compared with those of the old Philosophers.

Envy and Cavil are the natural fruits of laziness and ignorance; which was probably the reason, that in the heathen mythology *Momus* is said to be the son of *Nox* and *Somnus*, of Darkness and Sleep. Idle men, who have not been at the pains to accomplish or distinguish themselves, are very apt to detract from others; as ignorant men are very subject to decry those beauties in a celebrated work which they have not eyes to discover. Many of our sons of *Momus*, who dignify themselves by the name of Critics, are the genuine descendants of those two illustrious Ancestors. They are often led into those numerous absurdities, in which they daily instruct the people, by not considering that, *First*, There is sometimes a greater judgment shewn in deviating from the rules of art, than in adhering to them; and, *Secondly*, That there is more beauty in the works of a great Genius who is ignorant of all the rules of art, than in the works of a little Genius, who not only knows, but scrupulously observes them.

First, We may often take notice of men who are perfectly acquainted with all the rules of good writing, and notwithstanding chuse to depart from them on extraordinary occasions. I could give instances out of all the Tragic writers of antiquity who have shewn their judgment in this particular, and purposely receded from an established rule of the drama, when it has made way for a much higher beauty than the observation of such a rule would have been. Those who have surveyed the noblest pieces of architecture and statuary both ancient and modern, know very well that there are frequent deviations from art in the works of the greatest masters, which have produced a much nobler effect than a more accurate and exact way of proceeding could have done. This often arises from what the *Italians* call the *Gusto Grande* in these arts, which is what we call the Sublime in writing.

In the next place, our Critics do not seem sensible that there is more beauty in the works of a great Genius who is ignorant of the rules of art, than in those of a little Genius who knows and observes them. It is of these men of genius that *Terence* speaks, in opposition to the little artificial cavillers of his time;

*Quorum emulari exoptat negligentiam
Potius, quàm istorum obscuram diligentiam.*

A Critic may have the same consolation in the ill success of his Play, as Dr. South tells us a Physician has at the death of a patient, That he was killed *secundum artem*. Our inimitable *Shakespear* is a stumbling-block to the whole tribe of these rigid Critics. Who would not rather read one of his Plays, where there is not a single rule of the Stage observed, than any production of a modern Critic, where there is not one of them violated? *Shakespear* was indeed born with all the seeds of poetry, and may be compared to the stone in *Pyrrhus's* ring, which, as *Pliny* tells us, had the figure of *Apollo* and the nine Muses in the veins of it, produced by the spontaneous hand of nature, without any help from art.

N^o 598. Friday, September 24.

*Jamne igitur laudas, quod de sapientibus alter
Ridebat, quoties a limine moverat unum
Protuleratque pedem: flebat contrarius alter?*

Juv.

MANKIND may be divided into the merry and the serious, who, both of them, make a very good figure in the species, so long as they keep their respective humours from degenerating into the neighbouring extreme; there being a natural tendency in the one to a melancholy moroseness, and in the other to a fantastic levity.

The merry part of the world are very amiable, whilst they diffuse a cheerfulness through conversation at proper seasons and on proper occasions; but, on the contrary, a great grievance to society, when they infect every discourse with insipid mirth, and turn into ridicule such subjects as are not suited to it. For though laughter is looked upon by the Philosophers as the property of Reason, the excess of it has been always considered as the mark of folly.

On the other side, seriousness has its beauty whilst it is attended with cheerfulness and humanity, and does not come in unseasonably to pall the good humour of those with whom we converse.

These two sets of men, notwithstanding they each of them shine in their respective characters, are apt to bear a natural aversion and antipathy to one another.

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