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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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-----*Solemque suum, sua sidera norunt.*

Virg.

I Have always taken a particular pleasure in examining the opinions which men of different religion, different ages, and different countries, have entertained concerning the immortality of the Soul, and the state of happiness which they promise themselves in another world. For whatever prejudices and errors human nature lies under; we find that either reason, or tradition from our first parents, has discovered to all people something in these great points which bears analogy to truth, and to the doctrines opened to us by divine revelation. I was lately discoursing on this subject with a learned person who has been very much conversant among the inhabitants of the more western parts of *Africk*. Upon his conversing with several in that country, he tells me that their notion of Heaven or of a future state of happiness is this, That every thing we there wish for will immediately present it self to us. We find, say they, our Souls are of such a nature that they require variety, and are not capable of being always delighted with the same objects. The supreme Being therefore, in compliance with this taste of happiness which he has planted in the Soul of man, will raise up from time to time, say they, every gratification which it is in the humour to be pleased with. If we wish to be in groves or bowers, among running streams or falls of water, we shall immediately find our selves in the midst of such a scene as we desire. If we would be entertained with musick and the melody of sounds, the consort rises upon our wish, and the whole region about us is filled with harmony. In short, every desire will be followed by fruition, and whatever a man's inclination directs him to, will be present with him. Nor is it material whether the Supreme power creates in conformity to our wishes, or whether he only produces such a change in our imagination, as makes us believe our selves conversant among those scenes which delight us. Our happiness will be the same, whether it proceed

ceed from external objects, or from the impressions of the Deity upon our own private fancies. This is the account which I have received from my learned friend. Notwithstanding this system of belief be in general very chimerical and visionary, there is something sublime in its manner of considering the influence of a Divine Being on a human Soul. It has also, like most other opinions of the heathen world upon these important points, it has, I say, its foundation in truth, as it supposes the Souls of good men after this life to be in a state of perfect happiness, that in this state there will be no barren hopes, nor fruitless wishes, and that we shall enjoy every thing we can desire. But the particular circumstance which I am most pleased with in this scheme, and which arises from a just reflexion upon human nature, is that variety of pleasures which it supposes the Souls of good men will be possessed of in another world. This I think highly probable from the dictates both of reason and revelation. The Soul consists of many faculties, as the understanding, and the will, with all the senses both outward and inward; or to speak more philosophically, the Soul can exert her self in many different ways of action. She can understand, will, imagine, see, and hear, love, and discourse, and apply her self to many other the like exercises of different kinds and natures; but what is more to be considered, the Soul is capable of receiving a most exquisite pleasure and satisfaction from the exercise of any of these its powers, when they are gratified with their proper objects; she can be entirely happy by the satisfaction of the memory, the sight, the hearing, or any other mode of perception. Every faculty is as a distinct taste in the mind, and hath objects accommodated to its proper relish. Doctor *Tillotson* somewhere says, that he will not presume to determine in what consists the happiness of the Blessed, because God Almighty is capable of making the Soul happy by ten thousand different ways. Besides those several avenues to pleasure which the Soul is endowed with in this life; it is not impossible, according to the opinions of many eminent Divines, but there may be new faculties in the Souls of good men made perfect, as well as new senses in their glorified bodies. This we are sure of, that there will be new objects offered to all those faculties which are essential to us.

We are likewise to take notice that every particular faculty is capable of being employed on a very great variety of objects. The understanding, for example, may be happy in the contemplation of moral, natural, mathematical, and other kinds of truth. The memory likewise may turn it self to an infinite multitude of objects, especially when the Soul shall

have passed through the space of many millions of years, and shall reflect with pleasure on the days of eternity. Every other faculty may be considered in the same extent.

We cannot question but that the happiness of a Soul will be adequate to its nature, and that it is not endowed with any faculties which are to be useles and unemployed. The happiness is to be the happiness of the whole man, and we may easily conceive to our selves the happiness of the Soul, whilst any one of its faculties is in the fruition of its chief good. The happiness may be of a more exalted nature in proportion as the faculty employed is so; but as the whole Soul acts in the exertion of any of its particular powers, the whole Soul is happy in the pleasure which arises from any of its particular acts. For notwithstanding, as has been before hinted, and as it has been taken notice of by one of the greatest modern Philosophers, we divide the Soul into several powers and faculties, there is no such division in the Soul it self, since it is the whole Soul that remembers, understands, wills, or imagines. Our manner of considering the memory, understanding, will, imagination, and the like faculties, is for the better enabling us to express our selves in such abstracted subjects of speculation, not that there is any such division in the Soul it self.

Seeing then that the Soul has many different faculties, or in other words, many different ways of acting; that it can be intensely pleased, or made happy by all these different faculties, or ways of acting; that it may be endowed with several latent faculties, which it is not at present in a condition to exert; that we cannot believe the Soul is endowed with any faculty which is of no use to it; that whenever any one of these faculties is transcendently pleased, the Soul is in a state of happiness; and in the last place, considering that the happiness of another world is to be the happiness of the whole man; who can question but that there is an infinite variety in those pleasures we are speaking of; and that this fulness of joy will be made up of all those pleasures which the nature of the Soul is capable of receiving.

We shall be the more confirmed in this doctrine, if we observe the nature of variety, with regard to the mind of man. The Soul does not care to be always in the same bent. The faculties relieve one another by turns, and receive an additional pleasure from the novelty of those objects, about which they are conversant.

Revelation likewise very much confirms this notion, under the different views which it gives us of our future happiness. In the description of the throne of God, it represents to us all those objects which are able

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to gratifie the senses and imagination. In very many places it intimates to us all the happiness which the understanding can possibly receive in that state, where all things shall be revealed to us, and we shall know, even as we are known; the raptures of devotion, of divine love, the pleasure of conversing with our blessed Saviour, with an innumerable host of Angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect, are likewise revealed to us in several parts of the holy writings. There are also mentioned those Hierarchies, or governments, in which the Blessed shall be ranged one above another, and in which we may be sure a great part of our happiness will likewise consist; for it will not be there as in this world, where every one is aiming at power and superiority; but on the contrary, every one will find that station the most proper for him in which he is placed, and will probably think that he could not have been so happy in any other station. These and many other particulars, are marked in divine revelation, as the several ingredients of our happiness in Heaven, which all imply such a variety of joys, and such a gratification of the Soul in all its different faculties, as I have been here mentioning.

Some of the Rabbins tell us, that the Cherubims are a set of Angels who know most, and the Seraphims a set of Angels who love most. Whether this distinction be not altogether imaginary, I shall not here examine; but it is highly probable that among the spirits of good men, there may be some who will be more pleased with the employment of one faculty than of another, and this perhaps according to those innocent and virtuous habits or inclinations which have here taken the deepest root.

I might here apply this consideration to the spirits of wicked men, with relation to the pain which they shall suffer in every one of their faculties, and the respective miseries which shall be appropriated to each faculty in particular. But leaving this to the reflection of my Readers, I shall conclude, with observing how we ought to be thankful to our great Creator, and rejoice in the Being which he has bestowed upon us, for having made the Soul susceptible of pleasure by so many different ways. We see by what a variety of passages, joy and gladness may enter into the thoughts of man. How wonderfully a human spirit is framed, to imbibe its proper satisfactions, and taste the goodness of its Creator. We may therefore look into our selves with rapture and amazement, and cannot sufficiently express our gratitude to him, who has encompassed us with such profusion of blessings, and opened in us so many capacities of enjoying them.

There cannot be a stronger argument that God has designed us for a state of future happiness, and for that Heaven which he has revealed to

us, than that he has thus naturally qualified the Soul for it, and made it a Being capable of receiving so much bliss. He would never have made such faculties in vain, and have endowed us with powers that were not to be exerted on such objects as are suited to them. It is very manifest by the inward frame and constitution of our minds, that he has adapted them to an infinite variety of pleasures and gratifications, which are not to be met with in this life. We should therefore at all times take care that we do not disappoint this his gracious purpose and intention towards us, and make those faculties which he formed as so many qualifications for happiness and rewards, to be the instruments of pain and punishment.



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