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

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

**London, 1721**

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 N<sup>o</sup> 135. Saturday, August 15.
 

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-----meâ  
 Virtute me involvo-----

Hor.

**A** Good conscience is to the Soul what health is to the body: it preserves a constant ease and serenity within us, and more than countervails all the calamities and afflictions which can possibly befall us. I know nothing so hard for a generous mind to get over as calumny and reproach, and cannot find any method of quieting the Soul under them, besides this single one, of our being conscious to our selves that we do not deserve them.

I have been always mightily pleased with that passage in *Don Quixote*, where the fantastical Knight is represented as loading a Gentleman of good sense with praises and elogiums. Upon which the Gentleman makes this reflection to himself: How grateful is praise to human nature! I cannot forbear being secretly pleased with the commendations I receive, though I am sensible it is a madman bestows them on me. In the same manner, though we are often sure that the censures which are passed upon us are uttered by those who know nothing of us, and have neither means nor abilities to form a right judgment of us, we cannot forbear being grieved at what they say.

In order to heal this infirmity, which is so natural to the best and wisest of men, I have taken a particular pleasure in observing the conduct of the old Philosophers, how they bore themselves up against the malice and detraction of their enemies.

The way to silence calumny, says *Bias*, is to be always exercised in such things as are praise-worthy. *Socrates*, after having received sentence, told his friends, that he had always accustomed himself to regard truth and not censure, and he was not troubled at his condemnation because he knew himself free from guilt. It was in the same spirit that he heard the accusations of his two great adversaries, who had uttered against him the most virulent reproaches. *Anytus* and *Melitus*, says he, may procure sentence

sentence against me, but they cannot hurt me. This divine Philosopher was so well fortified in his own innocence, that he neglected all the impotence of evil tongues which were engaged in his destruction. This was properly the support of a good conscience, that contradicted the reports which had been raised against him, and cleared him to himself.

Others of the Philosophers rather chose to retort the injury, by a smart reply, than thus to disarm it with respect to themselves. They shew that it stung them, though, at the same time, they had the address to make their aggressors suffer with them. Of this kind was *Aristotle's* reply to one who pursued him with long and bitter invectives. You, says he, who are used to suffer reproaches, utter them with delight; I, who have not been used to utter them, take no pleasure in hearing them. *Diogenes* was still more severe on one who spoke ill of him: No body will believe you when you speak ill of me, any more than they would believe me should I speak well of you.

In these, and many other instances I could produce, the bitterness of the answer sufficiently testifies the uneasiness of the mind the person was under who made it. I would rather advise my Reader, if he has not in this case the secret consolation that he deserves no such reproaches as are cast upon him, to follow the advice of *Epietetus*. If any one speaks ill of thee, consider whether he has truth on his side; and if so, reform thy self, that his censures may not affect thee. When *Anaximander* was told, that the very boys laught at his singing; Ay, says he? then I must learn to sing better. But of all the sayings of Philosophers which I have gathered together for my own use on this occasion, there are none which carry in them more candour and good sense than the two following ones of *Plato*. Being told that he had many enemies who spoke ill of him, It is no matter, said he, I will live so that none shall believe them. Hearing at another time, that an intimate friend of his had spoken detractingly of him; I am sure he would not do it, says he, if he had not some reason for it. This is the surest, as well as the noblest way, of drawing the sting out of a reproach, and the true method of preparing a man for that great and only relief against the pains of calumny, a good conscience.

I designed in this Essay, to show, that there is no happiness wanting to him who is possesst of this excellent frame of mind, and that no person can be miserable who is in the enjoyment of it; but I find this subject so well treated in one of *Dr. South's* Sermons, that I shall fill this *Saturday's* paper with a passage of it, which cannot but make the man's heart burn within him, who reads it with due attention. That

That admirable Author, having shown the virtue of a good conscience in supporting a man under the greatest tryals and difficulties of life, concludes with representing its force and efficacy in the hour of death.

*The third and last instance, in which above all others this confidence towards God does most eminently shew and exert it self, is at the time of death. Which surely gives the grand opportunity of trying both the strength and worth of every principle. When a man shall be just about to quit the stage of this world, to put off his mortality, and to deliver up his last accounts to God; at which sad time his memory shall serve him for little else, but to terrifie him with a frightful review of his past life, and his former extravagancies stripped of all their pleasure, but retaining their guilt. What is it then that can promise him a fair passage into the other world, or a comfortable appearance before his dreadful Judge when he is there? not all the friends and interests, all the riches and honours under heaven, can speak so much as a word for him, or one word of comfort to him in that condition; they may possibly reproach, but they cannot relieve him.*

*No; at this disconsolate time, when the busie tempter shall be more than usually apt to vex and trouble him, and the pains of a dying body to hinder and discompose him, and the settlement of worldly affairs to disturb and confound him; and in a word, all things conspire to make his sick bed grievous and uneasy: nothing can then stand up against all these ruins, and speak life in the midst of death, but a clear conscience.*

*And the testimony of that shall make the comforts of heaven descend upon his weary head, like a refreshing dew, or shower upon a parched ground. It shall give him some lively earnest, and secret anticipations of his approaching Joy. It shall bid his soul go out of the body undauntedly, and lift up its head with confidence before Saints and Angels. Surely the comfort, which it conveys at this season, is something bigger than the capacities of mortality, mighty and unspeakable, and not to be understood till it comes to be felt.*

*And now, who would not quit all the pleasures, and trash and trifles, which are apt to captivate the heart of man, and pursue the greatest rigors of piety, and austerities of a good life, to purchase to himself such a conscience, as at the hour of death, when all the friendship in the world shall bid him adieu, and the whole creation turn its back upon him, shall dismiss the soul, and close his eyes with that blessed sentence, Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?*

*Monday,*