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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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Section IX.

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oeconomy for so many ages, whilst it had the same truth and vital principle in it, notwithstanding it was so frequently in danger of being utterly abolished and destroyed. *Origen*, in his fourth book against *Celsus*, mentioning their being cast out of *Jerusalem*, the place to which their worship was annexed, deprived of their temple and sacrifice, their religious rites and solemnities, and scattered over the face of the earth, ventures to assure them with a face of confidence, that they would never be re-established, since they had committed that horrid crime against the Saviour of the world. This was a bold assertion in the good man, who knew how this people had been so wonderfully re-established in former times, when they were almost swallowed up, and in the most desperate state of desolation, as in their deliverance out of the *Babylonish* captivity, and the oppressions of *Antiochus Epiphanes*. Nay, he knew that within less than a hundred years before his own time, the *Jews* had made such a powerful effort for their re-establishment under *Barchocab*, in the reign of *Adrian*, as shook the whole *Roman* empire. But he founded his opinion on a sure word of prophecy, and on the punishment they had so justly incurred; and we find, by a long experience of 1500 years, that he was not mistaken, nay that his opinion gathers strength daily, since the *Jews* are now at a greater distance from any probability of such a re-establishment, than they were when *Origen* wrote.

SECTION IX.

- I. *The lives of primitive Christians, another means of bringing learned Pagans into their religion.*
- II. *The change and reformation of their manners.*
- III. *This looked upon as supernatural by the learned Pagans,*
- IV. *And strengthened the accounts given of our Saviour's life and history.*
- V. *The Jewish prophecies of our Saviour, an argument for the heathens belief.*
- VI. *Pursued :*
- VII. *Pursued.*

I. **T**HERE was one other means enjoyed by the learned *Pagans* of the three first centuries, for satisfying them in the truth of our Saviour's history, which I might have flung under one of the foregoing heads; but as it is so shining a particular, and does

so

so much honour to our religion, I shall make a distinct article of it, and only consider it with regard to the subject I am upon: I mean the lives and manners of those holy men, who believed in *Christ* during the first ages of Christianity. I should be thought to advance a paradox, should I affirm that there were More Christians in the world during those times of persecution, than there are at present in these which we call the flourishing times of Christianity. But this will be found an indisputable truth, if we form our calculation upon the opinions which prevailed in those days, that every one who lives in the habitual practice of any voluntary sin, actually cuts himself off from the benefits and profession of Christianity, and whatever he may call himself, is in reality no Christian, nor ought to be esteemed as such.

II. In the times we are now surveying, the Christian religion showed its full force and efficacy on the minds of men, and by many examples demonstrated what great and generous souls it was capable of producing. It exalted and refined its profelytes to a very high degree of perfection, and set them far above the pleasures, and even the pains, of this life. It strengthened the infirmity, and broke the fierceness of human nature. It lifted up the minds of the ignorant to the knowledge and worship of him that made them, and inspired the vicious with a rational devotion, a strict purity of heart, and an unbounded love to their fellow-creatures. In proportion as it spread through the world, it seemed to change mankind into another species of Beings. No sooner was a convert initiated into it, but by an easy figure he became a New Man, and both acted and looked upon himself as one regenerated and born a second time into another state of existence.

III. It is not my business to be more particular in the accounts of primitive Christianity, which have been exhibited so well by others, but rather to observe, that the *Pagan* converts, of whom I am now speaking, mention this great reformation of those who had been the greatest sinners, with that sudden and surprising change which it made in the lives of the most profligate, as having something in it supernatural, miraculous, and more than human. *Origen* represents this power in the Christian religion, as no less wonderful than that of curing the lame and blind, or cleansing the leper. Many others represent it in the same light, and looked upon it as an argument that there was a certain divinity in that religion, which showed it self in such strange and glorious effects.

IV. This therefore was a great means not only of recommending Christianity to honest and learned heathens, but of confirming them in the belief

belief of our Saviour's history, when they saw multitudes of virtuous men daily forming themselves upon his example, animated by his precepts, and actuated by that Spirit which he had promised to send among his Disciples.

V. But I find no argument made a stronger impresson on the minds of these eminent *Pagan* converts, for strengthening their faith in the history of our Saviour, than the predictions relating to him in those old prophetick writings, which were deposited among the hands of the greatest enemies to Christianity, and owned by them to have been extant many ages before his appearance. The learned heathen converts were astonished to see the whole history of their Saviour's life published before he was born, and to find that the Evangelists and Prophets, in their accounts of the *Messiah*, differed only in point of time, the one foretelling what should happen to him, and the other describing those very particulars as what had actually happened. This our Saviour himself was pleased to make use of as the strongest argument of his being the promised *Messiah*, and without it would hardly have reconciled his Disciples to the ignominy of his death, as in that remarkable passage which mentions his conversation with the two Disciples, on the day of his resurrection. St. *Luke*, chap. 24. verse 13 to the end.

VI. The heathen converts, after having travelled through all human learning, and fortified their minds with the knowledge of arts and sciences, were particularly qualified to examine these prophecies with great care and impartiality, and without prejudice or prepossession. If the *Jews* on the one side put an unnatural interpretation on these prophecies, to evade the force of them in their controversies with the Christians; or if the Christians on the other side over-strained several passages in their applications of them, as it often happens among men of the best understanding, when their minds are heated with any consideration that bears a more than an ordinary weight with it: the learned Heathens may be looked upon as neuters in the matter, when all these prophecies were new to them, and their education had left the interpretation of them free and indifferent. Besides, these learned men among the primitive Christians, knew how the *Jews*, who had preceded our Saviour, interpreted these predictions, and the several marks by which they acknowledged the *Messiah* would be discovered, and how those of the *Jewish* Doctors who succeeded him, had deviated from the interpretations and doctrines of their forefathers, on purpose to stifle their own conviction.

VII. This set of arguments had therefore an invincible force with those *Pagan* Philosophers who became Christians, as we find in most of their writings. They could not disbelieve our Saviour's history, which so exactly agreed with every thing that had been written of him many ages before his birth, nor doubt of those circumstances being fulfilled in him, which could not be true of any person that lived in the world besides himself. This wrought the greatest confusion in the unbelieving *Jews*, and the greatest conviction in the *Gentiles*, who every where speak with astonishment of these truths they met with in this new magazine of learning which was opened to them, and carry the point so far as to think whatever excellent doctrine they had met with among *Pagan* writers, had been stole from their conversation with the *Jews*, or from the perusal of these writings which they had in their custody.

F I N I S.



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