

knows there is in such a Place an uninterrupted Walk ; he can meet in such a Company an agreeable Conversation. He has no Emulation, he is no Man's Rival, but every Man's Well-Wisher ; can look at a prosperous Man, with a Pleasure in reflecting that he hopes he is as happy as himself ; and has his Mind and his Fortune (as far as Prudence will allow) open to the Unhappy and to the Stranger.

LUCCEIUS has Learning, Wit, Humour, Eloquence, but no ambitious Prospects to pursue with these Advantages ; therefore to the ordinary World he is perhaps thought to want Spirit, but known among his Friends to have a Mind of the most consummate Greatness. He wants no Man's Admiration, is in no Need of Pomp. His Clothes please him if they are fashionable and warm ; his Companions are agreeable if they are civil and well-natured. There is with him no Occasion for Superfluity at Meals, for Jollity in Company, in a word, for any thing extraordinary to administer Delight to him. Want of Prejudice and Command of Appetite are the Companions which make his Journey of Life so easy, that he in all Places meets with more Wit, more good Cheer and more Good-humour than is necessary to make him enjoy himself with Pleasure and Satisfaction. T



N^o 207. Saturday, October 27.

*Omnibus in terris, quæ sunt à Gadibus usque
Auroram & Gangem, pauci dignoscere possunt
Vera bona, atque illis multùm diversa, remota
Erroris nebula* ——— Juv.

IN my last Saturday's Paper I laid down some Thoughts upon Devotion in general, and shall here shew what were the Notions of the most refined Heathens on this Subject, as they are represented in *Plato's* Dialogue upon Prayer, entituled, *Alcibiades the Second*, which doubtless gave Occasion to *Juvenal's* tenth Satyr, and to the second Satyr of *Persius* ; as the last of these Authors has almost tran-

transcribed the preceding Dialogue, entituled, *Alcibiades the First*, in his Fourth Satire.

THE Speakers in this Dialogue upon Prayer, are *Socrates* and *Alcibiades*; and the Substance of it (when drawn together out of the Intricacies and Digressions) as follows.

SOCRATES meeting his Pupil *Alcibiades*, as he was going to his Devotions, and observing his Eyes to be fixed upon the Earth with great Seriousness and Attention, tells him, that he had reason to be thoughtful on that Occasion, since it was possible for a Man to bring down Evils upon himself by his own Prayers, and that those things, which the Gods send him in Answer to his Petitions, might turn to his Destruction: This, says he, may not only happen when a Man prays for what he knows is mischievous in its own Nature, as *Oedipus* implored the Gods to sow Diffension between his Sons; but when he prays for what he believes would be for his Good, and against what he believes would be to his Detriment. This the Philosopher shews must necessarily happen among us, since most Men are blinded with Ignorance, Prejudice, or Passion, which hinder them from seeing such Things as are really beneficial to them. For an Instance, he asks *Alcibiades*, Whether he would not be thoroughly pleased and satisfied if that God, to whom he was going to address himself, should promise to make him the Sovereign of the whole Earth? *Alcibiades* answers, That he should doubtless look upon such a Promise as the greatest Favour that could be bestowed upon him. *Socrates* then asks him, If after receiving this great Favour he would be contented to lose his Life? or if he would receive it though he was sure he should make an ill Use of it? To both which Questions *Alcibiades* answers in the Negative. *Socrates* then shews him, from the Examples of others, how these might very probably be the Effects of such a Blessing. He then adds, That other reputed Pieces of Good-fortune, as that of having a Son, or procuring the highest Post in a Government, are subject to the like fatal Consequences; which nevertheless, says he, Men ardently desire, and would not fail to pray for, if they thought their Prayers might be effectual for the obtaining of them.

HAVING established this great Point, That all the most apparent Blessings in this Life are obnoxious to such dreadful Consequences, and that no Man knows what in its Events would prove to him a Blessing or a Curse, he teaches *Alcibiades* after what manner he ought to pray.

IN the first Place, he recommends to him, as the Model of his Devotions, a short Prayer, which a *Greek Poet* composed for the Use of his Friends, in the following Words; O Jupiter, give us those Things which are good for us, whether they are such Things as we pray for, or such Things as we do not pray for; and remove from us those Things which are hurtful, though they are such Things as we pray for.

IN the second Place, that his Disciple may ask such Things as are expedient for him, he shews him, that it is absolutely necessary to apply himself to the Study of true Wisdom, and to the Knowledge of that which is his chief Good, and the most suitable to the Excellency of his Nature.

IN the third and last Place he informs him, that the best Methods he could make use of to draw down Blessings upon himself, and to render his Prayers acceptable, would be to live in a constant Practice of his Duty towards the Gods, and towards Men. Under this Head he very much recommends a Form of Prayer the *Lacedemonians* make use of, in which they petition the Gods, to give them all good Things so long as they were virtuous. Under this Head likewise he gives a very remarkable Account of an Oracle to the following Purpose.

WHEN the *Athenians* in the War with the *Lacedemonians* received many Defeats both by Sea and Land, they sent a Message to the Oracle of *Jupiter Ammon*, to ask the Reason why they who erected so many Temples to the Gods, and adorned them with such costly Offerings; why they who had instituted so many Festivals, and accompanied them with such Poms and Ceremonies; in short, why they who had slain so many Hecatombs at their Altars, should be less successful than the *Lacedemonians*, who fell so short of them in all these Particulars. To this, says he, the Oracle made the following Reply; *I am better pleased with the Prayers of*
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the Lacedemonians, than with all the Oblations of the Greeks. As this Prayer implied and encouraged Virtue in those who made it; the Philosopher proceeds to shew how the most vicious Man might be devout, so far as Victims could make him, but that his Offerings were regarded by the Gods as Bribes, and his Petitions as Blasphemies. He likewise quotes on this Occasion two Verses out of *Homer*, in which the Poet says, That the Scent of the *Trojan* Sacrifices was carried up to Heaven by the Winds; but that it was not acceptable to the Gods, who were displeased with *Priam* and all his People.

THE Conclusion of this Dialogue is very remarkable. *Socrates* having deterred *Alcibiades* from the Prayers and Sacrifice which he was going to offer, by setting forth the above-mentioned Difficulties of performing that Duty as he ought, adds these Words, *We must therefore wait till such Time as we may learn how we ought to behave our selves towards the Gods, and towards Men.* But when will that Time come, says *Alcibiades*, and who is it that will instruct us? For I would fain see this Man, whoever he is. It is one, says *Socrates*, who takes care of you; but as *Homer* tells us, that *Minerva* removed the Mist from *Diomedes* his Eyes, that he might plainly discover both Gods and Men; so the Darkness that hangs upon your Mind must be removed before you are able to discern what is Good and what is Evil. Let him remove from my Mind, says *Alcibiades*, the Darkness, and what else he pleases, I am determined to refuse nothing he shall order me, whoever he is, so that I may become the better Man by it. The remaining Part of this Dialogue is very obscure: There is something in it that would make us think *Socrates* hinted at himself, when he spoke of this Divine Teacher who was to come into the World, did not he own that he himself was in this respect as much at a Loss, and in as great Distress as the rest of Mankind.

SOME learned Men look upon this Conclusion as a Prediction of our Saviour, or at least that *Socrates*, like the High-Priest, prophesied unknowingly, and pointed at that Divine Teacher who was to come into the World some Ages after him. However that may be, we find

that this great Philosopher saw, by the Light of Reason, that it was suitable to the Goodness of the Divine Nature, to send a Person into the World who should instruct Mankind in the Duties of Religion, and in particular, teach them how to Pray.

WHOEVER reads this Abstract of *Plato's* Discourse on Prayer, will, I believe, naturally make this Reflexion, That the great Founder of our Religion, as well by his own Example as in the Form of Prayer which he taught his Disciples, did not only keep up to those Rules which the Light of Nature had suggested to this great Philosopher, but instructed his Disciples in the whole Extent of this Duty, as well as of all others. He directed them to the proper Object of Adoration, and taught them, according to the third Rule above-mentioned, to apply themselves to him in their Closets, without Show or Ostentation, and to worship him in Spirit and in Truth. As the *Lacedemonians* in their Form of Prayer implored the Gods in general to give them all good things so long as they were virtuous, we ask in particular *that our Offences may be forgiven, as we forgive those of others*. If we look into the second Rule which *Socrates* has prescribed, namely, That we should apply our selves to the Knowledge of such Things as are best for us, this too is explain'd at large in the Doctrines of the Gospel, where we are taught in several Instances to regard those things as Curses, which appear as Blessings in the Eye of the World; and on the contrary, to esteem those things as Blessings, which to the Generality of Mankind appear as Curses. Thus in the Form which is prescribed to us we only pray for that Happiness which is our chief Good, and the great End of our Existence, when we petition the Supreme Being for *the coming of his Kingdom*, being solicitous for no other temporal Blessings but our *daily Sustenance*. On the other side, We pray against nothing but Sin, and against *Evil* in general, leaving it with Omniscience to determine what is really such. If we look into the first of *Socrates* his Rules of Prayer, in which he recommends the above-mentioned Form of the ancient Poet, we find that Form not only comprehended, but very much improved in the Petition, wherein we pray to the Supreme Being that *his Will may be*