

JOSEPH ADDISON, INCHBALD

**CATO: A
TRAGEDY, IN
FIVE ACTS**

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Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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Joseph Addison

Cato: A Tragedy, in Five Acts

REMARKS

The author of this tragedy, to whose vigorous mind the English are indebted for their choicest moral works, came into the world with a frame so weak, that he was christened immediately on his birth, in consequence of the symptoms he gave of a speedy dissolution. The hand which reared him did a more than ordinary service to the age in which he lived, and to succeeding generations. Addison's pious writings, untainted by the rigour of superstition, have softened the harsh spirit of ancient religion, whilst they have confirmed all its principles.

He was the son of the Reverend Launcelot Addison, Rector of Milston, in the county of Wilts, at which place he was born, on the 6th of May, 1672.

After passing through some inferior schools, he was placed at the Charter-House; where he contracted that intimacy with Steele, which grew to a friendship honourable to them both, from its duration, and the instructions which their joint labour bestowed on mankind.

At the age of fifteen, young Addison was entered at Queen's College, Oxford, where he applied himself so closely to study,

that, in a few years, his Latin poetry gained him high reputation in both universities, and, at the age of twenty-two, he became known to the nation at large by his English compositions.

He was now pressed by his father to take holy orders; which, notwithstanding his sedate turn of mind, and his habits of piety, he positively refused. Mr. Tickell has alleged, that it was Addison's extreme modesty, a constitutional timidity, which made him resolve against being in the church – but he became a statesman; and, surely, that is a character which requires as much courage as a clergyman's, when the church is not under persecution.

The first dramatic work from the pen of Addison, was an opera called "Rosamond," which having but indifferent success, he next assisted Steele in his play of "The Tender Husband;" for which the author surprised him by a dedication, openly to avow the obligation.

These two friends now united their efforts in that well-known periodical work, "The Spectator;" by which they reformed the manners, as well as the morals, of their readers, and established their own literary fame. But, as the talents of Addison were superior to those of Steele, so are the papers in this work which were written by him esteemed above the rest; – and, as a mark of distinction, he had the laudable, or his friend Steele the honest pride, to affix a letter at the end of every such paper, by which it should be known for his. The Muse Clio furnished the four letters which have been thus used in "The Spectator," as Addison's

honourable stamp of authorship.

In the periodical work of "The Guardian" he had likewise some share; and, in 1713, he produced, what Dr. Johnson has called "the noblest work of Addison's genius" – "Cato."

Notwithstanding the merit of this play, it is certain that it was indebted to the political circumstances of the times, for that enthusiastic applause with which it was received by the town.

The joy or sorrow which an author is certain to experience upon every new production, is far more powerful in the heart of a dramatist than in that of any other writer. The sound of clamorous plaudits raises his spirits to a kind of ecstasy; whilst hisses and groans, from a dissatisfied audience, strike on the ear like a personal insult, avowing loud and public contempt for that in which he has been labouring to show his skill.

Addison, with his timid nature, felt all the excruciating tortures of an ambitious, yet a fearful dramatist. He could not stay at home on the first night of "Cato;" for to be told, at once, that his tragedy was driven from the stage with derision, had been to his tremulous nerves like the dart of death. Not less peril might have befallen him as an auditor – he therefore was neither present on the first performance, nor absent from the theatre; – but, placing himself on a bench in the green-room, his body motionless, his soul in tumult, he kept by his side a friend, whom he dispatched every minute towards the stage, to bring him news of what was passing there. He thus secured, he conceived, progressive information of his fate, without the risk of hearing

it from an enraged multitude. But such was the vehemence of applause, that shouts of admiration forced their way through the walls of the green-room, before his messenger could return with the gladsome tidings. Yet, not till the last sentence was spoken, and the curtain fairly dropped upon Cato and his weeping friends, did the author venture to move from the inanimate position in which he was fixed. This acute dread of failure now heightened the joy of success, and never was success more complete.

"Cato," says Pope, in a letter to one of his friends, written at the time, "was not so much the wonder of Rome in his days, as he is of Britain in ours."

The most fortunate of all occurrences took place, from the skill with which Addison drew this illustrious Roman – he gave him so much virtue, that both Whigs and Tories declared him of their party; and instead of any one, on either side, opposing his sentences in the cause of freedom, all strove which should the most honour him.

Both auditors and readers, since that noted period, much as they may praise this tragedy, complain that it wants the very first requisite of a dramatic work – power to affect the passions. This criticism shows, to the full extent, how men were impassioned, at that time, by their political sentiments. They brought their passions with them to the playhouse, fired on the subject of the play; and all the poet had to do was to extend the flame.

It is a charge against this drama, that the love scenes are all insipid; but it should be considered, that neither Cato nor

his family, with strict propriety, could love any thing but their country. – As this is a love which women feel in a much less degree than men, and as bondage, not liberty, is woman's wish, "Cato," with all his patriotism, must ever be a dull entertainment to the female sex; and men of course receive but little pleasure from elegant amusements, of which women do not partake.

The language and sentiments contained here are worthy of the great Addison and the great Cato; and if, as it is objected, the characters are too elevated to be natural, yet they accord with that idea of nature which imagination conceives of such remarkable personages.

The author of "Cato" had planned other tragedies and celebrated works, which the subsequent part of his days did not give him leisure to execute; for, on the death of Queen Anne, the Lords Justices made him their Secretary: he was soon after appointed principal Secretary of State. These, and other public employments, prevented his completing farther literary designs. Or, it may be thought, that the loss of his domestic tranquillity, at this time, by his marriage with the Countess Dowager of Warwick, might possibly impede every future attempt for the favour of the Muses, to whom this, his wife, had not the slightest affinity. It is supposed she embittered, by arrogance and discontent, the remainder of this good man's life, which terminated on the 17th of June, 1719, in the 47th year of his age. He died at Holland House, near Kensington, and left an only child, a daughter, by the Countess.

Lady Warwick had also a son by her former husband, a very fine, spirited, and accomplished youth, for whose welfare the dying Addison showed peculiar concern; for, in the extremity of his disorder, having dismissed his physicians, and with them all hopes of recovery, he desired that the young Lord Warwick might be called to his bedside. He came – but life was now fast departing from his revered father-in-law, and he uttered not a word. After an afflicting pause, the young man said, "Dear sir, you sent for me; I believe, and I hope, that you have some commands; I shall hold them most sacred." Grasping his hand, Addison softly replied, "I sent for you, that you might see in what peace a Christian can die." He spoke with difficulty, and instantly expired.

It is to this circumstance Mr. Tickell refers in his lines on Addison's death, where he has this passage:

"He taught us how to live; and, oh! too high
A price for knowledge, taught us how to die."

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Cato, Mr. Cooke

Portius, Mr. Siddons

Marcus, Mr. H. Johnston

Sempronius, Mr. Cory

Juba, Mr. Brunton

Syphax, Mr. Murray

Lucius, Mr. Claremont

ACT THE FIRST

SCENE I

A Hall

Enter Portius and Marcus

Por. The dawn is overcast, the morning low'rs,
And heavily in clouds brings on the day,
The great, the important day, big with the fate
Of Cato and of Rome – Our father's death
Would fill up all the guilt of civil war,
And close the scene of blood. Already Cæsar
Has ravaged more than half the globe, and sees
Mankind grown thin by his destructive sword:
Should he go farther, numbers would be wanting
To form new battles, and support his crimes.
Ye gods, what havoc does ambition make
Among your works!

Marc. Thy steady temper, Portius,
Can look on guilt, rebellion, fraud, and Cæsar,
In the calm lights of mild philosophy;
I'm tortured e'en to madness, when I think
On the proud victor – ev'ry time he's named,
Pharsalia rises to my view! – I see
Th' insulting tyrant, prancing o'er the field,
Strew'd with Rome's citizens, and drench'd in slaughter;
His horse's hoofs wet with patrician blood!
Oh, Portius! is there not some chosen curse,
Some hidden thunder in the stores of Heav'n,
Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the man
Who owes his greatness to his country's ruin?

Por. Believe me, Marcus, 'tis an impious greatness,
And mix'd with too much horror to be envied:
How does the lustre of our father's actions,
Through the dark cloud of ills that cover him,
Break out, and burn with more triumphant brightness!
His sufferings shine, and spread a glory round him;
Greatly unfortunate, he fights the cause
Of honour, virtue, liberty, and Rome.
His sword ne'er fell, but on the guilty head;
Oppression, tyranny, and pow'r usurp'd,
Draw all the vengeance of his arm upon them.

Marc. Who knows not this? but what can Cato do
Against a world, a base, degenerate world,
That courts the yoke, and bows the neck to Cæsar?

Pent up in Utica, he vainly forms
A poor epitome of Roman greatness,
And, cover'd with Numidian guards, directs
A feeble army, and an empty senate,
Remnants of mighty battles fought in vain.
By Heav'n, such virtue, join'd with such success,
Distracts my very soul! Our father's fortune
Would almost tempt us to renounce his precepts.

Por. Remember what our father oft has told us:
The ways of Heav'n are dark and intricate,
Puzzled in mazes, and perplex'd with errors;
Our understanding traces them in vain,
Lost and bewilder'd in the fruitless search;
Nor sees with how much art the windings run,
Nor where the regular confusion ends.

Marc. These are suggestions of a mind at ease: —
Oh, Portius! didst thou taste but half the griefs
That wring my soul, thou couldst not talk thus coldly.
Passion unpitied, and successful love,
Plant daggers in my heart, and aggravate
My other griefs. — Were but my Lucia kind —

Por. Thou see'st not that thy brother is thy rival;
But I must hide it, for I know thy temper. [*Aside.*
Behold young Juba, the Numidian prince,
With how much care he forms himself to glory,
And breaks the fierceness of his native temper,

To copy out our father's bright example.
He loves our sister Marcia, greatly loves her;
His eyes, his looks, his actions, all betray it;
But still the smother'd fondness burns within him;
When most it swells, and labours for a vent,
The sense of honour, and desire of fame,
Drive the big passion back into his heart.
What! shall an African, shall Juba's heir,
Reproach great Cato's son, and show the world
A virtue wanting in a Roman soul?

Marc. Portius, no more! your words leave stings behind them.
Whene'er did Juba, or did Portius, show
A virtue that has cast me at a distance,
And thrown me out in the pursuits of honour?

Por. Marcus, I know thy gen'rous temper well;
Fling but the appearance of dishonour on it,
It straight takes fire, and mounts into a blaze.

Marc. A brother's suff'rings claim a brother's pity.

Por. Heav'n knows, I pity thee – Behold my eyes,
Ev'n whilst I speak – Do they not swim in tears?
Were but my heart as naked to thy view,
Marcus would see it bleed in his behalf.

Marc. Why then dost treat me with rebukes, instead
Of kind condoling cares, and friendly sorrow?

Por. Oh, Marcus! did I know the way to ease
Thy troubled heart, and mitigate thy pains,
Marcus, believe me, I could die to do it.

Marc. Thou best of brothers, and thou best of friends!
Pardon a weak distemper'd soul, that swells
With sudden gusts, and sinks as soon in calms,
The sport of passions. But Sempronius comes:
He must not find this softness hanging on me.

[Exit Marcus.]

Enter Sempronius

Sem. Conspiracies no sooner should be form'd
Than executed. What means Portius here?
I like not that cold youth. I must dissemble,
And speak a language foreign to my heart.*[Aside.*
Good-morrow, Portius; let us once embrace,
Once more embrace, while yet we both are free.
To-morrow, should we thus express our friendship,
Each might receive a slave into his arms;
This sun, perhaps, this morning sun's the last
That e'er shall rise on Roman liberty.

Por. My father has this morning call'd together

To this poor hall, his little Roman senate,
(The leavings of Pharsalia) to consult
If he can yet oppose the mighty torrent
That bears down Rome and all her gods before it,
Or must at length give up the world to Cæsar.

Sem. Not all the pomp and majesty of Rome
Can raise her senate more than Cato's presence.
His virtues render our assembly awful,
They strike with something like religious fear,
And make even Cæsar tremble at the head
Of armies flush'd with conquest. Oh, my Portius!
Could I but call that wond'rous man my father,
Would but thy sister Marcia be propitious
To thy friend's vows, I might be blest indeed!

Por. Alas, Sempronius! wouldst thou talk of love
To Marcia, whilst her father's life's in danger?
Thou might'st as well court the pale, trembling vestal,
When she beholds the holy flame expiring.

Sem. The more I see the wonders of thy race,
The more I'm charm'd. Thou must take heed, my Portius;
The world has all its eyes on Cato's son;
Thy father's merit sets thee up to view,
And shows thee in the fairest point of light,
To make thy virtues or thy faults conspicuous.

Por. Well dost thou seem to check my ling'ring here

In this important hour – I'll straight away,
And while the fathers of the senate meet
In close debate, to weigh th' events of war,
I'll animate the soldiers' drooping courage
With love of freedom and contempt of life;
I'll thunder in their ears their country's cause,
And try to rouse up all that's Roman in them.
'Tis not in mortals to command success,
But we'll do more, Sempronius – we'll deserve it. [*Exit.*

Sem. Curse on the stripling! how he apes his sire!
Ambitiously sententious – But I wonder
Old Syphax comes not; his Numidian genius
Is well disposed to mischief, were he prompt
And eager on it; but he must be spurr'd,
And every moment quicken'd to the course.
Cato has used me ill; he has refused
His daughter Marcia to my ardent vows.
Besides, his baffled arms, and ruin'd cause,
Are bars to my ambition. Cæsar's favour,
That show'rs down greatness on his friends, will raise me
To Rome's first honours. If I give up Cato,
I claim, in my reward, his captive daughter.
But Syphax comes —

Enter Syphax

Syph. Sempronius, all is ready;
I've sounded my Numidians, man by man,
And find them ripe for a revolt: they all
Complain aloud of Cato's discipline,
And wait but the command to change their master.

Sem. Believe me, Syphax, there's no time to waste;
Ev'n while we speak, our conqueror comes on,
And gathers ground upon us every moment.
Alas! thou know'st not Cæsar's active soul,
With what a dreadful course he rushes on
From war to war. In vain has nature form'd
Mountains and oceans t'oppose his passage;
He bounds o'er all.
One day more
Will set the victor thund'ring at our gates.
But, tell me, hast thou yet drawn o'er young Juba?
That still would recommend thee more to Cæsar,
And challenge better terms.

Syph. Alas! he's lost!
He's lost, Sempronius; all his thoughts are full
Of Cato's virtues – But I'll try once more
(For every instant I expect him here)

If yet I can subdue those stubborn principles
Of faith and honour, and I know not what,
That have corrupted his Numidian temper,
And struck th' infection into all his soul.

Sem. Be sure to press upon him every motive.
Juba's surrender, since his father's death,
Would give up Afric into Cæsar's hands,
And make him lord of half the burning zone.

Syph. But is it true, Sempronius, that your senate
Is call'd together? Gods! thou must be cautious;
Cato has piercing eyes, and will discern
Our frauds, unless they're cover'd thick with art.

Sem. Let me alone, good Syphax, I'll conceal
My thoughts in passion ('tis the surest way);
I'll bellow out for Rome, and for my country,
And mouth at Cæsar, till I shake the senate.
Your cold hypocrisy's a stale device,
A worn-out trick: wouldst thou be thought in earnest,
Clothe thy feign'd zeal in rage, in fire, in fury!

Syph. In troth, thou'rt able to instruct grey hairs,
And teach the wily African deceit.

Sem. Once more be sure to try thy skill on Juba.
Remember, Syphax, we must work in haste;
Oh, think what anxious moments pass between

The birth of plots, and their last fatal periods!
Oh, 'tis a dreadful interval of time,
Fill'd up with horror all, and big with death!
Destruction hangs on every word we speak,
On every thought, till the concluding stroke
Determines all, and closes our design.[*Exit.*

Syph. I'll try if yet I can reduce to reason
This headstrong youth, and make him spurn at Cato.
The time is short; Cæsar comes rushing on us —
But hold! young Juba sees me, and approaches!

Enter Juba

Jub. Syphax, I joy to meet thee thus alone.
I have observed of late thy looks are fall'n,
O'ercast with gloomy cares and discontent;
Then tell me, Syphax, I conjure thee, tell me,
What are the thoughts that knit thy brow in frowns,
And turn thine eye thus coldly on thy prince?

Syph. 'Tis not my talent to conceal my thoughts,
Or carry smiles and sunshine in my face,
When discontent sits heavy at my heart;
I have not yet so much the Roman in me.

Jub. Why dost thou cast out such ungenerous terms
Against the lords and sov'reigns of the world?
Dost thou not see mankind fall down before them,
And own the force of their superior virtue?
Is there a nation in the wilds of Afric,
Amidst our barren rocks and burning sands,
That does not tremble at the Roman name?

Syph. Gods! where's the worth that sets these people up
Above your own Numidia's tawny sons?
Do they with tougher sinews bend the bow?
Or flies the javelin swifter to its mark,
Launch'd from the vigour of a Roman arm?
Who like our active African instructs
The fiery steed, and trains him to his hand?
Or guides in troops th' embattled elephant
Laden with war? These, these are arts, my prince,
In which your Zama does not stoop to Rome.

Jub. These all are virtues of a meaner rank:
Perfections that are placed in bones and nerves.
A Roman soul is bent on higher views;
Turn up thy eyes to Cato;
There may'st thou see to what a godlike height
The Roman virtues lift up mortal man.
While good, and just, and anxious for his friends,
He's still severely bent against himself;
And when his fortune sets before him all
The poms and pleasures that his soul can wish,

His rigid virtue will accept of none.

Syph. Believe me, prince, there's not an African
That traverses our vast Numidian deserts
In quest of prey, and lives upon his bow,
But better practises those boasted virtues.
Coarse are his meals, the fortune of the chase;
Amidst the running stream he slakes his thirst;
Toils all the day, and, at the approach of night,
On the first friendly bank he throws him down,
Or rests his head upon a rock till morn;
Then rises fresh, pursues his wonted game,
And if the following day he chance to find
A new repast, or an untasted spring,
Blesses his stars, and thinks it luxury.

Jub. Thy prejudices, Syphax, won't discern
What virtues grow from ignorance and choice,
Nor how the hero differs from the brute.
Where shall we find the man that bears affliction,
Great and majestic in his griefs, like Cato?
How does he rise against a load of woes,
And thank the gods that threw the weight upon him!

Syph. 'Tis pride, rank pride, and haughtiness of soul;
I think the Romans call it stoicism.
Had not your royal father thought so highly
Of Roman virtue, and of Cato's cause,
He had not fall'n by a slave's hand inglorious.

Jub. Why dost thou call my sorrows up afresh?
My father's name brings tears into my eyes.

Syph. Oh, that you'd profit by your father's ills!

Jub. What wouldst thou have me do?

Syph. Abandon Cato.

Jub. Syphax, I should be more than twice an orphan
By such a loss.

Syph. Ay, there's the tie that binds you!
You long to call him father. Marcia's charms
Work in your heart unseen, and plead for Cato.
No wonder you are deaf to all I say.

Jub. Syphax, your zeal becomes importunate;
I've hitherto permitted it to rave,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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