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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N^o 163. *Thursday, September 6.*

*Si quid ego adjuero, curamve levaffo,
 Quæ nunc te coquit, et versat sub pectore fixa,
 Ecquid erit pretii?* Enn. ap. Tullium.

ENquiries after happiness, and rules for attaining it, are not so necessary and useful to mankind as the arts of consolation, and supporting oneself under affliction. The utmost we can hope for in this world is contentment; if we aim at any thing higher, we shall meet with nothing but grief and disappointments. A man should direct all his studies and endeavours at making himself easie now, and happy hereafter.

The truth of it is, if all the happiness that is dispersed through the whole race of mankind in this world were drawn together, and put into the possession of any single man, it would not make a very happy Being. Though on the contrary, if the miseries of the whole species were fixed in a single person they would make a very miserable one.

I am engaged in this subject by the following letter, which, though subscribed by a fictitious name, I have reason to believe is not imaginary.

Mr. SPECTATOR,

“ I Am one of your disciples, and endeavour to live up to your rules
 “ which I hope will encline you to pity my condition: I shall open
 “ it to you in a very few words. About three years since a Gentleman,
 “ whom, I am sure, you your self would have approved, made his ad-
 “ dresses to me. He had every thing to recommend him but an estate,
 “ so that my friends, who all of them applauded his person, would not
 “ for the sake of both of us favour his passion. For my own part I re-
 “ signed my self up entirely to the direction of those who knew the
 “ world much better than my self, but still lived in hopes that some jun-
 “ cture or other would make me happy in the man whom, in my heart,
 “ I preferred to all the world; being determind if I could not have
 “ him, to have no body else. About three months ago I received a let-
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“ ter from him, acquainting me, that by the death of an uncle he had a
 “ considerable estate left him, which he said was welcome to him upon
 “ no other account, but as he hoped it would remove all difficulties that
 “ lay in the way to our mutual happiness. You may well suppose, Sir,
 “ with how much joy I received this letter, which was followed by several
 “ others filled with those expressions of love and joy, which I verily
 “ believe no body felt more sincerely, nor knew better how to describe,
 “ than the Gentleman I am speaking of. But, Sir, how shall I be able to
 “ tell it you! by the last week’s post I received a letter from an intimate
 “ friend of this unhappy Gentleman, acquainting me, that as he had just
 “ settled his affairs, and was preparing for his journey, he fell sick of a
 “ fever and died. It is impossible to express to you the distress I am in
 “ upon this occasion, I can only have recourse to my devotions, and to
 “ the reading of good books for my consolation; and as I always take a
 “ particular delight in those frequent advices and admonitions which you
 “ give the publick, it would be a very great piece of charity in you to
 “ lend me your assistance in this conjuncture. If after the reading of this
 “ letter you find your self in a humour rather to rally and ridicule, than
 “ to comfort me, I desire you would throw it into the fire, and think no
 “ more of it; but if you are touched with my misfortune, which is greater
 “ than I know how to bear, your counsels may very much support,
 “ and will infinitely oblige the afflicted.

LEONORA.

A disappointment in love is more hard to get over than any other; the
 passion it self so softens and subdues the heart, that it disables it from
 struggling or bearing up against the woes and distresses which befall it.
 The mind meets with other misfortunes in her whole strength; she stands
 collected within her self, and sustains the shock with all the force which
 is natural to her; but a heart in love has its foundations sapped, and immediately
 sinks under the weight of accidents that are disagreeable to its
 favourite passion.

In afflictions men generally draw their consolations out of books of
 morality, which indeed are of great use to fortifie and strengthen the
 mind against the impressions of sorrow. Monsieur *St. Evremont*, who
 does not approve of this method, recommends Authors who are apt to
 stir up mirth in the mind of the readers, and fancies *Don Quixote* can
 give more relief to an heavy heart than *Plutarch* or *Seneca*, as it is
 much easier to divert grief than to conquer it. This doubtless may have

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its effects on some tempers. I should rather have recourse to Authors of a quite contrary kind, that give us instances of calamities and misfortunes, and shew human nature in its greatest distresses.

If the affliction we groan under be very heavy, we shall find some consolation in the society of as great sufferers as our selves, especially when we find our companions men of virtue and merit. If our afflictions are light, we shall be comforted by the comparisons we make between our selves and our fellow-sufferers. A loss at sea, a fit of sickness, or the death of a friend, are such trifles when we consider whole Kingdoms laid in ashes, families put to the sword, wretches shut up in dungeons, and the like calamities of mankind, that we are out of countenance for our own weakness, if we sink under such little strokes of fortune.

Let the disconsolate *Leonora* consider, that at the very time in which she languishes for the loss of her deceased lover, there are persons in several parts of the world just perishing in a Shipwreck; others crying out for mercy in the terrors of a death-bed repentance; others lying under the tortures of an infamous execution, or the like dreadful calamities; and she will find her sorrows vanish at the appearance of those which are so much greater and more astonishing.

I would further propose to the consideration of my afflicted disciple, that possibly what she now looks upon as the greatest misfortune, is not really such in it self. For my own part, I question not but our souls in a separate state will look back on their lives in quite another view, than what they had of them in the body; and that what they now consider as misfortunes and disappointments, will very often appear to have been escapes and blessings.

The mind that hath any cast towards devotion, naturally flies to it in its afflictions.

When I was in *France*, I heard a very remarkable story of two lovers, which I shall relate at length in my to-morrow's paper, not only because the circumstances of it are extraordinary, but because it may serve as an illustration to all that can be said on this last head, and shew the power of religion in abating that particular anguish which seems to lye so heavy on *Leonora*. The story was told me by a Priest, as I travelled with him in a stage-coach. I shall give it my Reader, as well as I can remember, in his own words, after having premised, that if consolations may be drawn from a wrong religion and a misguided devotion, they cannot but flow much more naturally from those which are founded upon reason, and established in good sense.