The Vanity of Human Wishes

by Samuel Johnson

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The Augustan Reprint Society

SAMUEL JOHNSON

The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749)

and

Two Rambler papers (1750)

With an Introduction by Bertrand H. Bronson

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INTRODUCTION

The pieces reproduced in this little volume are now beginning to bid for notice from their third century of readers. At the time they were written, although Johnson had already done enough miscellaneous literary work to fill several substantial volumes, his name, far from identifying an "Age", was virtually unknown to the general public. The Vanity of Human Wishes was the first of his writings to bear his name on its face. There were some who knew him to be the author of the vigorous satire, London, and of the still more remarkable biographical study, An Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage; and a few interested persons were aware that he was engaged in compiling an English Dictionary, and intended to edit Shakespeare. He was also, at the moment, attracting brief but not over-favorable attention as the author of one of the season's new crop of tragedies at Drury Lane. But The Vanity of Human Wishes and The Rambler were a potent force in establishing Johnson's claim to a permanent place in English letters. The Vanity appeared early in January, 1749; The Rambler ran from March 20, 1749/50 to March 14, 1752. With the exception of five numbers and two quoted letters, the periodical was written entirely by Johnson.

As moral essays, the Ramblers deeply stirred some readers and bored others. Young Boswell, not unduly saturnine in temperament, was profoundly impressed by them and determined on their account to seek out the author. Taine, a century later, discovered that he already knew by heart all they had to teach and warned his readers away from them. Generally speaking, they were valued as they deserved by the eighteenth century and undervalued by the nineteenth. The first half of the twentieth has shown a marked impulse to restore them, as a series, to a place of honor second only to the work of Addison and Steele in the same form. Raleigh, in 1907, paid discriminating tribute to their humanity. If read, he observed, against a knowledge of their author's life, "the pages of The Rambler are aglow with the earnestness of dear-bought conviction, and rich in conclusions gathered not from books but from life and suffering." And later: "We come to closer quarters with Johnson in the best pages of The Rambler than in the most brilliant of the

conversations recalled by Boswell. The hero of a hundred fights puts off his armour, and becomes a wise and tender confessor." Latterly, the style of Johnson's essays has been subjected to a closer scrutiny than ever before. What Taine found as inflexible and inert as a pudding-mold is now seen to be charged with life and movement, vibrant with light and shadow and color. More particularly, Wimsatt has shown how intimately connected is the vocabulary of The Rambler with Johnson's reading for the Dictionary, and how, having mastered the words of the experimental scientists of the previous century, Johnson proceeded to put them to original uses, generating with them new stylistic overtones in contexts now humorously precise, now philosophically metaphorical, employing them now for purposes of irony and satire, and again for striking directly home to the roots of morality and religion. In a playful mood, he is never more characteristic than when he is his own mimic, propounding with mock seriousness some preposterous theory like that of the intellectual advantages of living in a garret:

I have discovered … that the tenuity of a defecated air at a proper distance from the surface of the earth accelerates the fancy, and sets at liberty those intellectual powers which were before shackled by too strong attraction, and unable to expand themselves under the pressure of a gross atmosphere. I have found dullness to quicken into sentiment in a thin ether, as water, though not very hot, boils in a receiver partly exhausted; and heads, in appearance empty, have teemed with notions upon rising ground, as the flaccid sides of a football would have swelled out into stiffness and extension.

This is one side of his genius; but another, and profounder, appears in the eloquent simplicity of such a passage as the following, against our fears of lessening ourselves in the eyes of others:

The most useful medicines are often unpleasing to the taste. Those who are oppressed by their own reputation will, perhaps, not be comforted by hearing that

their cares are unnecessary. But the truth is that no man is much regarded by the rest of the world. He that considers how little he dwells upon the condition of others, will learn how little the attention of others is attracted to himself. While we see multitudes passing before us, of whom, perhaps, not one appears to deserve our notice, or excite our sympathy, we should remember that we likewise are lost in the same throng; that the eye which happens to glance upon us is turned in a moment on him that follows us, and that the utmost which we can reasonably hope or fear is, to fill a vacant hour with prattle, and be forgotten.

When we approach Johnson's poetry, the revolution of taste becomes a more acute consideration. It seems very nearly impossible to compare or contrast eighteenth-century poetry and that of the twentieth without wilfully tipping the scales in one direction or the other, judgment in this area being so much influenced by preference. But let us begin with titles. For a start, let us take, from a recent Pulitzer Prize-winner: "The Day's No Rounder Than Its Angles Are", and "Don't Look Now But Mary Is Everybody"; from another distinguished current volume, these: "The Trance", "Lost", "Meeting"; from another, "After This, Sea", "Lineman Calling", "Meaning Motion"; and from a fourth, "Terror", "Picnic Remembered", "Eidolon", and "Monologue at Midnight". Here are individual assertions, suggestive of individual ways of looking at things; here are headings that signalize particular events in the authors' experience,—moments' monuments. Beside them, Johnson's title, "The Vanity of Human Wishes", looks very dogged and downright.

Titles are not poems but they have a barometric function. The modern titles cited above are evocative of a world with which, for the past century and a half, we have been growing increasingly familiar. This air we are accustomed to breathe: it requires no unusual effort of adjustment from us. We readily understand that we are being invited to participate in a private experience and, by sharing it, to help in giving it as much universality as may be. It is by no means easy for readers of to-day to reverse the process, to start with the general and find in it their personal account.

We are more likely to feel a resentment, or at least a prejudice, against the writer who solicits our attention to a topic without even the pretense of novelty.

Johnson's generation would have found it equally hard to see the matter from our point of view, or to allow that the authors of the poems named above were being less than impudent or at best flippant in thus brazenly obtruding their private experience, undisguised, before the reader. We ought, moreover, to realize that in this judgment they would have the suffrages of all previous generations, including the greatest writers, from classical times down to their own. It is we who are singular, not they. Quite apart from considerations of moral right or wrong, of artistic good or bad, it obviously, therefore, behooves us to try to cultivate a habit of mind free from initial bias against so large a proportion of recorded testimony.

Very early in The Rambler Johnson remarks characteristically that "men more frequently require to be reminded than informed." He believed this, and his generation believed it, because they thought that human nature changed little from age to age. The problems of conduct that confront the living individual have been faced countless times by his predecessors, and the accumulated experience of mankind has arrived at conclusions which in the main are just and therefore helpful to-day. The most important truths are those which have been known for a very long time. For that very reason they tend to be ignored or slighted unless they are restated in such a way as to arrest attention while they compel assent. Hence the best writing is that which most successfully resolves the paradox of combining the sharpest surprise with the widest recognition. Such an ideal is so difficult of attainment that, inevitably, many who subscribed to it succeeded only in unleavened platitude and others rejected it for the easier goal of novelty.

In this most difficult class The Vanity of Human Wishes has won a respectable place. It is freighted with a double cargo, the wisdom of two great civilizations, pagan and Christian. Although based upon Juvenal's tenth Satire, it is so free a

paraphrase as to be an original poem. The English reader who sets it against Dryden's closer version will sense immediately its greater weight. It is informed with Johnson's own sombre and most deeply rooted emotional responses to the meaning of experience. These, although emanating from a devout practising Christian and certainly not inconsistent with Christianity, neither reflect the specific articles of Christian doctrine nor are lightened by the happiness of Christian faith: they are strongly infused with classical resignation.

The poem is difficult as well as weighty. At times its expression is so condensed that the meaning must be wrestled for. Statements so packed as, for example,

Fate wings with ev'ry wish th' afflictive dart, Each gift of nature, and each grace of art,

do not yield their full intention to the running reader. One line, indeed,—the eighth from the end (361)—has perhaps never been satisfactorily explained by any commentator. (The eighteenth paragraph of Johnson's first sermon might go far to clarify it.) But such difficulties are worth the effort they demand, because there is always a rational and unesoteric solution to be gained.

The work as a whole has form, is shapely, even dramatic; but it is discontinuous and episodic in its conduct, and is most memorable in its separate parts. No one can forget the magnificent "set pieces" of Wolsey and Charles XII; but hardly less noteworthy are the two parallel invocations interspersed, the one addressed to the young scholar, the other to young beauties "of rosy lips and radiant eyes",—superb admonitions both, each containing such felicities of grave, compacted statement as will hardly be surpassed. The assuaging, marmoreal majesty of the concluding lines of the poem are a final demonstration of the virtue of this formal dignity in poetry. If it did not appear invidious, one would like to quote by way of contrast some lines oddly parallel, but on a pitch deliberately subdued to a less rhetorical level, from what is indubitably one of the very greatest poems written in our own century, Mr.

Eliot's Four Quartets:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting. Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought: So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

From The Vanity of Human Wishes:

Still raise for good the supplicating voice, But leave to heav'n the measure and the choice, Safe in his pow'r, whose eyes discern afar The secret ambush of a specious pray'r. Implore his aid, in his decisions rest, Secure whate'er he gives, he gives the best…. Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind, Obedient passions, and a will resign'd; For love, which scarce collective man can fill; For patience sov'reign o'er transmuted ill; For faith, that panting for a happier seat, Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat: These goods for man the laws of heav'n ordain, These goods he grants, who grants the pow'r to gain; With these celestial wisdom calms the mind, And makes the happiness she does not find.

The Vanity of Human Wishes is reproduced from a copy in the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library; the Rambler papers from copies in possession of Professor E.N. Hooker. The lines from T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets are quoted with the permission of Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Bertrand H. Bronson University of California Berkeley

THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES.

THE Tenth Satire of Juvenal, IMITATED By SAMUEL JOHNSON.

LONDON:

Printed for R. DODSLEY at Tully's Head in Pall-Mall, and Sold by M. COOPER in

Pater-noster Row.

M.DCC.XLIX.

THE TENTH SATIRE OF JUVENAL.

Let[a] Observation with extensive View, Survey Mankind, from China to Peru; Remark each anxious Toil, each eager Strife, And watch the busy Scenes of crouded Life; Then say how Hope and Fear, Desire and Hate, O'erspread with Snares the clouded Maze of Fate, Where wav'ring Man, betray'd by venturous Pride, To tread the dreary Paths without a Guide; As treach'rous Phantoms in the Mist delude, Shuns fancied Ills, or chases airy Good. How rarely Reason guides the stubborn Choice, Rules the bold Hand, or prompts the suppliant Voice, How Nations sink, by darling Schemes oppress'd, When Vengeance listens to the Fool's Request. Fate wings with ev'ry Wish th' afflictive Dart, Each Gift of Nature, and each Grace of Art, With fatal Heat impetuous Courage glows, With fatal Sweetness Elocution flows, Impeachment stops the Speaker's pow'rful Breath, And restless Fire precipitates on Death. [Footnote a: Ver. 1-11.]

[b]But scarce observ'd the Knowing and the Bold, Fall in the general Massacre of Gold; Wide-wasting Pest! that rages unconfin'd, And crouds with Crimes the Records of Mankind, For Gold his Sword the Hireling Ruffian draws, For Gold the hireling Judge distorts the Laws; Wealth heap'd on Wealth, nor Truth nor Safety buys, The Dangers gather as the Treasures rise. [Footnote b: Ver. 12-22.]

Let Hist'ry tell where rival Kings command, And dubious Title shakes the madded Land, When Statutes glean the Refuse of the Sword, How much more safe the Vassal than the Lord, Low sculks the Hind beneath the Rage of Pow'r, And leaves the bonny Traytor in the Tow'r, Untouch'd his Cottage, and his Slumbers found, Tho' Confiscation's Vulturs clang around.

The needy Traveller, serene and gay, Walks the wild Heath, and sings his Toil away.

Does Envy seize thee? crush th' upbraiding Joy, Encrease his Riches and his Peace destroy, New Fears in dire Vicissitude invade, The rustling Brake alarms, and quiv'ring Shade, Nor Light nor Darkness bring his Pain Relief, One shews the Plunder, and one hides the Thief.

Yet[c] still the gen'ral Cry the Skies assails And Gain and Grandeur load the tainted Gales; Few know the toiling States man's Fear or Care, Th' insidious Rival and the gaping Heir. [Footnote c: Ver. 23-27.]

Once[d] more, Democritus, arise on Earth, With chearful Wisdom and instructive Mirth, See motley Life in modern Trappings dress'd, And feed with varied Fools th' eternal Jest: Thou who couldst laugh where Want enchain'd Caprice, Toil crush'd Conceit, and Man was of a Piece; Where Wealth unlov'd without a Mourner dy'd; And scarce a Sycophant was fed by Pride; Where ne'er was known the Form of mock Debate, Or seen a new-made Mayor's unwieldy State; Where change of Fav'rites made no Change of Laws, And Senates heard before they judg'd a Cause; How wouldst thou shake at Britain's modish Tribe, Dart the quick Taunt, and edge the piercing Gibe? Attentive Truth and Nature to descry, And pierce each Scene with Philosophic Eye. To thee were solemn Toys or empty Shew, The Robes of Pleasure and the Veils of Woe: All aid the Farce, and all thy Mirth maintain, Whose Joys are causeless, or whose Griefs are vain. [Footnote d: Ver. 28-55.]

Such was the Scorn that fill'd the Sage's Mind, Renew'd at ev'ry Glance on Humankind; How just that Scorn ere yet thy Voice declare, Search every State, and canvass ev'ry Pray'r.

[e]Unnumber'd Suppliants croud Preferment's Gate, Athirst for Wealth, and burning to be great; Delusive Fortune hears th' incessant Call, They mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall. On ev'ry Stage the Foes of Peace attend, Hate dogs their Flight, and Insult mocks their End. Love ends with Hope, the sinking Statesman's Door Pours in the Morning Worshiper no more; For growing Names the weekly Scribbler

lies, To growing Wealth the Dedicator flies, From every Room descends the painted Face, That hung the bright Palladium of the Place, And smoak'd in Kitchens, or in Auctions sold, To better Features yields the Frame of Gold; For now no more we trace in ev'ry Line Heroic Worth, Benevolence Divine: The Form distorted justifies the Fall, And Detestation rids th' indignant Wall. [Footnote e: Ver. 56-107.]

But will not Britain hear the last Appeal, Sign her Foes Doom, or guard her Fav'rites Zeal; Through Freedom's Sons no more Remonstrance rings; Degrading Nobles and controuling Kings; Our supple Tribes repress their Patriot Throats, And ask no Questions but the Price of Votes; With Weekly Libels and Septennial Ale, Their Wish is full to riot and to rail.

In full-blown Dignity, see Wolsey stand, Law in his Voice, and Fortune in his Hand: To him the Church, the Realm, their Pow'rs consign, Thro' him the Rays of regal Bounty shine, Turned by his Nod the Stream of Honour flows, His Smile alone Security bestows: Still to new Heights his restless Wishes tow'r, Claim leads to Claim, and Pow'r advances Pow'r; Till Conquest unresisted ceas'd to please, And Rights submitted, left him none to seize. At length his Sov'reign frowns—the Train of State Mark the keen Glance, and watch the Sign to hate. Where-e'er he turns he meets a Stranger's Eye, His Suppliants scorn him, and his Followers fly; Now drops at once the Pride of aweful State, The golden Canopy, the glitt'ring Plate, The regal Palace, the luxurious Board, The liv'ried Army and the menial Lord. With Age, with Cares, with Maladies oppress'd, He seeks the Refuge of Monastic Rest. Grief aids Disease, remember'd Folly stings, And his last Sighs reproach the Faith of Kings.

Speak thou, whose Thoughts at humble Peace repine, Shall Wolsey's Wealth, with Wolsey's End be thine? Or liv'st thou now, with safer Pride content, The richest Landlord on the Banks of Trent? For why did Wolsey by the Steps of Fate, On weak Foundations raise th' enormous Weight? Why but to sink beneath Misfortune's Blow, With louder Ruin to the Gulphs below?

What[f] gave great Villiers to th' Assassin's Knife, And fix'd Disease on Harley's closing Life? What murder'd Wentworth, and what exil'd Hyde, By Kings protected and to Kings ally'd? What but their Wish indulg' in Courts to shine, And Pow'r too great to keep or to resign? [Footnote f: Ver. 108-113.]

When[g] first the College Rolls receive his Name, The young Enthusiast quits his Ease for Fame; Resistless burns the Fever of Renown, Caught from the strong Contagion of the Gown; O'er Bodley's Dome his future Labours spread, And Bacon's Mansion trembles o'er his Head; Are these thy Views? proceed, illustrious Youth, And Virtue guard thee to the Throne of Truth, Yet should thy Soul indulge the gen'rous Heat, Till captive Science yields her last Retreat; Should Reason guide thee with her brightest Ray, And pour on misty Doubt resistless Day; Should no false Kindness lure to loose Delight, Nor Praise relax, nor Difficulty fright; Should tempting Novelty thy Cell refrain, And Sloth's bland Opiates shed their Fumes in vain; Should Beauty blunt on Fops her fatal Dart, Nor claim the Triumph of a letter'd Heart; Should no Disease thy torpid Veins invade, Nor Melancholy's Phantoms haunt thy Shade; Yet hope not Life from Grief or Danger free, Nor think the Doom of Man revers'd for thee: Deign on the passing World to turn thine Eyes, And pause awhile from Learning to be wise; There mark what Ills the Scholar's Life assail; Toil, Envy, Want, the Garret, and the Jail. See Nations slowly wise, and meanly just; To buried Merit raise the tardy Bust. If Dreams yet flatter, once again attend, Hear Lydiat's Life, and Galileo's End. [Footnote g: Ver. 114-132.]

Nor deem, when Learning her lost Prize bestows The glitt'ring Eminence exempt from Foes; See when the Vulgar 'scap'd, despis'd or aw'd, Rebellion's vengeful Talons seize on Laud. From meaner Minds, tho' smaller Fines content The plunder'd Palace or sequester'd Rent; Mark'd out by dangerous Parts he meets the Shock, And fatal Learning leads him to the Block: Around his Tomb let Art and Genius weep, But hear his Death, ye Blockheads, hear and sleep.

The[h] festal Blazes, the triumphal Show, The ravish'd Standard, and the captive Foe, The Senate's Thanks, the Gazette's pompous Tale, With Force resistless o'er the Brave prevail. Such Bribes the rapid Greek o'er Asia whirl'd, For such the steady Romans shook the World; For such in distant Lands the Britons shine, And stain with Blood the Danube or the Rhine; This Pow'r has Praise, that Virtue scarce can warm, Till Fame supplies the universal Charm. Yet Reason frowns on War's unequal Game, Where wasted Nations raise a single Name, And mortgag'd States their Grandsires Wreaths regret From Age to Age in everlasting Debt; Wreaths which at last the dear-bought Right convey To rust on Medals, or on Stones decay. [Footnote h: Ver. 133-146.]

On[i] what Foundation stands the Warrior's Pride? How just his Hopes let Swedish Charles decide; A Frame of Adamant, a Soul of Fire, No Dangers fright him, and no Labours tire; O'er Love, o'er Force, extends his wide Domain, Unconquer'd Lord of Pleasure and of Pain; No Joys to him pacific Scepters yield, War sounds the Trump, he rushes to the Field; Behold surrounding Kings their Pow'r combine, And One capitulate, and One resign; Peace courts his Hand, but spread her Charms in vain; "Think Nothing gain'd, he cries, till nought remain, On Moscow's Walls till Gothic Standards fly, And all is Mine beneath the Polar Sky." The March begins in Military State, And Nations on his Eye suspended wait; Stern Famine guards the solitary Coast, And Winter barricades the Realms of Frost; He comes, nor Want nor Cold his Course delay;— Hide, blushing Glory, hide Pultowa's Day: The vanquish'd Hero leaves his broken Bands, And shews his Miseries in distant Lands; Condemn'd a needy Supplicant to wait, While Ladies interpose, and Slaves debate. But did not Chance at length her Error mend? Did no subverted Empire mark his End? Did rival Monarchs give the fatal Wound? Or hostile Millions press him to the Ground? His Fall was destin'd to a barren Strand, A petty Fortress, and a dubious Hand; He left the Name, at which the World grew pale, To point a Moral, or adorn a Tale. [Footnote i: Ver. 147-167.]

All[k] Times their Scenes of pompous Woes afford, From Persia's Tyrant to Bavaria's Lord. In gay Hostility, and barb'rous Pride, With half Mankind embattled at his Side, Great Xerxes comes to seize the certain Prey, And starves exhausted Regions in his Way; Attendant Flatt'ry counts his Myriads o'er, Till counted Myriads sooth his Pride no more; Fresh Praise is try'd till Madness fires his Mind, The Waves he lashes, and enchains the Wind; New Pow'rs are claim'd, new Pow'rs are still bestow'd, Till rude Resistance lops the spreading God; The daring Greeks deride the Martial Shew, And heap their Vallies with the gaudy Foe; Th' insulted Sea with humbler Thoughts he gains, A single Skiff to speed his Flight remains; Th' incumber'd Oar scarce leaves the dreaded Coast Through purple Billows and a floating Host. [Footnote k: Ver. 168-187.]

The bold Bavarian, in a luckless Hour, Tries the dread Summits of Cesarean Pow'r, With unexpected Legions bursts away, And sees defenceless Realms receive his Sway; Short Sway! fair Austria spreads her mournful Charms, The Queen, the Beauty, sets the World in Arms; From Hill to Hill the Beacons rousing Blaze Spreads wide the Hope of Plunder and of Praise; The fierce Croatian, and the wild Hussar, And all the Sons of Ravage croud the War; The baffled Prince in Honour's flatt'ring Bloom Of hasty Greatness finds the fatal Doom, His Foes Derision, and his Subjects Blame, And steals to Death from Anguish and from Shame.

Enlarge[l] my Life with Multitude of Days, In Health, in Sickness, thus the Suppliant prays; Hides from himself his State, and shuns to know, That Life protracted is protracted Woe. Time hovers o'er, impatient to destroy, And shuts up all the Passages of Joy: In vain their Gifts the bounteous Seasons pour, The Fruit Autumnal, and the Vernal Flow'r, With listless Eyes the Dotard views the Store, He views, and wonders that they please no more; Now pall the tastless Meats, and joyless Wines, And Luxury with Sighs her Slave resigns. Approach, ye Minstrels, try the soothing Strain, And yield the tuneful Lenitives of Pain: No Sounds alas would touch th' impervious Ear, Though dancing Mountains witness'd Orpheus near;

Nor Lute nor Lyre his feeble Pow'rs attend, Nor sweeter Musick of a virtuous Friend, But everlasting Dictates croud his Tongue, Perversely grave, or positively wrong. The still returning Tale, and ling'ring Jest, Perplex the fawning Niece and pamper'd Guest, While growing Hopes scarce awe the gath'ring Sneer, And scarce a Legacy can bribe to hear; The watchful Guests still hint the last Offence, The Daughter's Petulance, the Son's Expence, Improve his heady Rage with treach'rous Skill, And mould his Passions till they make his Will. [Footnote l: Ver. 188.-288.]

Unnumber'd Maladies each Joint invade, Lay Siege to Life and press the dire Blockade; But unextinguish'd Av'rice still remains, And dreaded Losses aggravate his Pains; He turns, with anxious Heart and cripled Hands, His Bonds of Debt, and Mortgages of Lands; Or views his Coffers with suspicious Eyes, Unlocks his Gold, and counts it till he dies.

But grant, the Virtues of a temp'rate Prime Bless with an Age exempt from Scorn or Crime; An Age that melts in unperceiv'd Decay, And glides in modest Innocence away; Whose peaceful Day Benevolence endears, Whose Night congratulating Conscience cheers; The gen'ral Fav'rite as the gen'ral Friend: Such Age there is, and who could wish its End?

Yet ev'n on this her Load Misfortune flings, To press the weary Minutes flagging Wings: New Sorrow rises as the Day returns, A Sister sickens, or a Daughter mourns. Now Kindred Merit fills the fable Bier, Now lacerated Friendship claims a Tear. Year chases Year, Decay pursues Decay, Still drops some Joy from with'ring Life away; New Forms arise, and diff'rent Views engage, Superfluous lags the Vet'ran on the Stage, Till pitying Nature signs the last Release, And bids afflicted Worth retire to Peace.

But few there are whom Hours like these await, Who set unclouded in the Gulphs of Fate. From Lydia's Monarch should the Search descend, By Solon caution'd to regard his End, In Life's last Scene what Prodigies surprise, Fears of the Brave, and

Follies of the Wise? From Marlb'rough's Eyes the Streams of Dotage flow, And Swift expires a Driv'ler and a Show.

The[m] teeming Mother, anxious for her Race, Begs for each Birth the Fortune of a Face: Yet Vane could tell what Ills from Beauty spring; And Sedley curs'd the Form that pleas'd a King. Ye Nymphs of rosy Lips and radiant Eyes, Whom Pleasure keeps too busy to be wise, Whom Joys with soft Varieties invite By Day the Frolick, and the Dance by Night, Who frown with Vanity, who smile with Art, And ask the latest Fashion of the Heart, What Care, what Rules your heedless Charms shall save, Each Nymph your Rival, and each Youth your Slave? An envious Breast with certain Mischief glows, And Slaves, the Maxim tells, are always Foes, Against your Fame with Fondness Hate combines, The Rival batters, and the Lover mines. With distant Voice neglected Virtue calls, Less heard, and less the faint Remonstrance falls; Tir'd with Contempt, she quits the slipp'ry Reign, And Pride and Prudence take her Seat in vain. In croud at once, where none the Pass defend, The harmless Freedom, and the private Friend. The Guardians yield, by Force superior ply'd; By Int'rest, Prudence; and by Flatt'ry, Pride. Here Beauty falls betray'd, despis'd, distress'd, And hissing Infamy proclaims the rest. [Footnote m: Ver. 289-345.]

Where[n] then shall Hope and Fear their Objects find? Must dull Suspence corrupt the stagnant Mind? Must helpless Man, in Ignorance sedate, Swim darkling down the Current of his Fate? Must no Dislike alarm, no Wishes rise, No Cries attempt the Mercies of the Skies? Enquirer, cease, Petitions yet remain, Which Heav'n may hear, nor deem Religion vain. Still raise for Good the supplicating Voice, But leave to Heav'n the Measure and the Choice. Safe in his Pow'r, whose Eyes discern afar The secret Ambush of a specious Pray'r. Implore his Aid, in his Decisions rest, Secure whate'er he gives, he gives the best. Yet with the Sense of sacred Presence prest, When strong Devotion fills thy glowing Breast, Pour forth thy Fervours for a healthful Mind, Obedient Passions, and a Will resign'd; For Love, which scarce collective Man can fill; For Patience sov'reign o'er transmuted Ill; For Faith, that

panting for a happier Seat, Thinks Death kind Nature's Signal of Retreat: These Goods for Man the Laws of Heav'n ordain, These Goods he grants, who grants the Pow'r to gain; With these celestial Wisdom calms the Mind, And makes the Happiness she does not find. [Footnote n: Ver. 346-366.]

FINIS.

THE RAMBLER.

NUMB. 5. Price 2 d.

TUESDAY, April 3, 1750.

To be continued on TUESDAYS and SATURDAYS.

Et nunc omnis Ager, nunc omnis parturit Arbos, Nunc frondent Silvae, nunc formosissimus Annus. VIRG.

Every Man is sufficiently discontented with some Circumstances of his present State, to suffer his Imagination to range more or less in quest of future Happiness, and to fix upon some Point of Time, in which he shall, by the Removal of the Inconvenience which now perplexes him, or the Acquisition of Advantage which he at present wants, find his Condition of Life very much improved.

When this Time, which is too often expected with great Impatience, at last arrives, it generally comes without the Blessing for which it was desired; but we solace ourselves with some new Prospect, and press forward again with equal Eagerness.

It is some Advantage to a Man, in whom this Temper prevails in any great Degree, when he turns his Hopes upon Things wholly out of his own Power, since he forbears then to precipitate his Affairs, for the Sake of the great Event that is to complete his Felicity, and waits for the blissful Hour, without neglecting such Measures as are necessary to be taken in the mean Time.

I have long known a Person of this Temper, who indulged his Dream of Happiness

with less Hurt to himself than such chimerical Wishes commonly produce, and adjusted his Scheme with such Address, that his Hopes were in full bloom three parts of the Year, and in the other part never wholly blasted. Many, perhaps, would be desirous of learning by what Means he procured to himself such a cheap and lasting Satisfaction. It was gained only by a constant Practice of referring the Removal of all his Uneasiness to the Coming of the next Spring. If his Affairs were disordered, he could regulate them in the Spring; if a Regimen was prescribed him, the Spring was the proper Time of pursuing it; if what he wanted was at a high Price, it would fall its Value in the Spring.

The Spring, indeed, did often come without any of these Effects; but he was always certain that the next would be more propitious; and was never convinced that the present Spring would fail him until the Middle of Summer; for he always talked of the Spring as coming 'till it was past, and when it was once past, every one agreed with him that it was coming.

By long Converse with this Man, I am, perhaps, in some Degree brought to feel the same immoderate Pleasure in the Contemplation of this delightful Season; but I have the Satisfaction of finding many, whom it can be no Shame to resemble, infected with the same Enthusiasm; for there is, I believe, scarce any Poet of Eminence, who has not left some Testimony of his Fondness for the Flowers, the Zephyrs, and the Warblers of the Spring. Nor has the most luxuriant Imagination been able to describe the Serenity and Happiness of the golden Age otherwise than by giving a perpetual Spring, as the highest Reward of uncorrupted Innocence.

There is, indeed, something inexpressibly pleasing in the annual Renovation of the World, and the new Display of the Treasures of Nature. The Cold and Darkness of Winter, with the naked Deformity of every Object on which we turn our Eyes, makes us necessarily rejoice at the succeeding Season, as well for what we have escaped, as for what we may enjoy; and every budding Flower, which a warm

Situation brings early to our View, is considered by us as a Messenger, to inform us of the Approach of more joyous Days.

The Spring affords to a Mind, so free from the Disturbance of Cares or Passions as to be vacant to calm Amusements, almost every Thing that our present State makes us capable of enjoying. The variegated Verdure of the Fields and Woods, the Succession of grateful Odours, the Voice of Pleasure pouring out its Notes on every Side, with the Observation of the Gladness apparently conceived by every Animal, from the Growth of his Food, and the Clemency of the Weather, throw over the whole Earth an Air of Gayety, which is very significantly expressed by the Smile of Nature.

There are Men to whom these Scenes are able to give no Delight, and who hurry away from all the Varieties of rural Beauty, to lose their Hours, and divert their Thoughts by Cards, or publick Assemblies, a Tavern Dinner, or the Prattle of the Day.

It may be laid down as a Position which will seldom deceive, that when a Man cannot bear his own Company there is something wrong. He must fly from himself, either because he feels a Tediousness in Life from the Equipoise of an empty Mind, which, having no Tendency to one Motion more than another but as it is impelled by some external Power, must always have recourse to foreign Objects; or he must be afraid of the Intrusion of some unpleasing Ideas, and, perhaps, is always struggling to escape from the Remembrance of a Loss, the Fear of a Calamity, or some other Thought of greater Horror.

Those, who are incapacitated to enjoy the Pleasures of Contemplation, by their Griefs, may, very properly, apply to such Diversions, provided they are innocent, as lay strong hold on the Attention; and those, whom Fear of any future Calamity chains down to Misery, must endeavour to obviate the Danger.

My Considerations shall, on this Occasion, be turned on such as are burthensome to

themselves merely because they want Subjects for Reflection, and to whom the Volume of Nature is thrown open without affording them Pleasure or Instruction, because they never learned to read the Characters.

A French Author has advanced this seeming Paradox, that very few Men know how to take a Walk; and, indeed, it is very true, that few Men know how to take a Walk with a Prospect of any other Pleasure, than the same Company would have afforded them in any other Circumstances.

There are Animals that borrow their Colour from the neighbouring Body, and, consequently, vary their Hue as they happen to change their Place. In like manner it ought to be the Endeavour of every Man to derive his Reflexions from the Objects about him; for it is to no purpose that he alters his Position, if his Attention continues fixt to the same Point. The Mind should be kept open to the Access of every new Idea, and so far disengaged from the Predominance of particular Thoughts, as to be able to accommodate itself to emergent Occasions, and remark every Thing that offers itself to present Examination.

A Man that has formed this Habit of turning every new Object to his Entertainment, finds in the Productions of Nature an inexhaustible Stock of Materials, upon which he can employ himself, without any Temptations to Envy or Malevolence; Faults, perhaps, seldom totally avoided by those, whose Judgment is much exercised upon the Works of Art. He has always a certain Prospect of discovering new Reasons for adoring the Sovereign Author of the Universe, and probable Hopes of making some Discovery of Benefit to others, or of Profit to himself. There is no doubt but many Vegetables and Animals have Qualities that might be of great Use; to the Knowledge of which there is required no great Sagacity of Penetration, or Fatigue of Study, but only frequent Experiments, and close Attention. What is said by the Chymists of their darling Mercury, is, perhaps, true of every Body through the whole Creation, that, if a thousand Lives should be spent upon it, all its Properties

would not be found out.

Mankind must necessarily be diversified by various Tastes, since Life affords and requires such multiplicity of Employments; and a Nation of Naturalists is neither to be hoped, or desired, but it is surely not improper to point out a fresh Amusement to those who langush in Health, and repine in Plenty, for want of some Source of Diversion that may be less easily exhausted, and to inform the Multitudes of both Sexes, who are burthened with every new Day, that there are many Shews which they have not seen.

He that enlarges his Curiosity after the Works of Nature, demonstrably multiplies the Inlets to Happiness, and, therefore, the younger Part of my Readers, to whom I dedicate this vernal Speculation, must excuse me for calling upon them to make use at once of the Spring of the Year, and the Spring of Life; to acquire, while their Minds may be yet impressed with new Images, a Love of innocent Pleasures, and an ardour for useful Knowledge; and to remember, that a blighted Spring makes a barren Year, and that the vernal Flowers, however beautiful and gay, are only intended by Nature as Preparatives to Autumnal Fruits.

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To be continued on TUESDAYS and SATURDAYS.

SATURDAY, October 13, 1750.

—Quid fit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non, Plenius et melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit. HOR.

All Joy or Sorrow for the Happiness or Calamities of others is produced by an Act of

the Imagination, that realises the Event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a Time, in the Condition of him whose Fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the Deception lasts, whatever Motions would be excited by the same Good or Evil happening to ourselves.

Our Passions are therefore more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the Pains or Pleasures proposed to our Minds, by recognising them as once our own, or considering them as naturally incident to our State of Life. It is not easy for the most artful Writer to give us an Interest in Happiness or Misery, which we think ourselves never likely to feel, and with which we have never yet been made acquainted. Histories of the Downfall of Kingdoms, and Revolutions of Empires are read with great Tranquillity; the imperial Tragedy pleases common Auditors only by its Pomp of Ornament, and Grandeur of Ideas; and the Man whose Faculties have been engrossed by Business, and whose Heart never fluttered but at the Rise or Fall of Stocks, wonders how the Attention can be seized, or the Affections agitated by a Tale of Love.

Those parallel Circumstances, and kindred Images to which we readily conform our Minds, are, above all other Writings, to be found in Narratives of the Lives of particular Persons; and there seems therefore no Species of Writing more worthy of Cultivation than Biography, since none can be more delightful, or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the Heart by irresistible Interest, or more widely diffuse Instruction to every Diversity of Condition.

The general and rapid Narratives of History, which involve a thousand Fortunes in the Business of a Day, and complicate innumerable Incidents in one great Transaction, afford few Lessons applicable to private Life, which derives its Comforts and its Wretchedness from the right or wrong Management of Things that nothing but their Frequency makes considerable, Parva si non fiunt quotidie, says Pliny, and which can have no Place in those Relations which never descend below

the Consultation of Senates, the Motions of Armies, and the Schemes of Conspirators.

I have often thought that there has rarely passed a Life of which a judicious and faithful Narrative would not be useful. For, not only every Man has in the mighty Mass of the World great Numbers in the same Condition with himself, to whom his Mistakes and Miscarriages, Escapes and Expedients would be of immediate and apparent Use; but there is such an Uniformity in the Life of Man, if it be considered apart from adventitious and separable Decorations and Disguises, that there is scarce any Possibility of Good or Ill, but is common to Humankind. A great Part of the Time of those who are placed at the greatest Distance by Fortune, or by Temper, must unavoidably pass in the same Manner; and though, when the Claims of Nature are satisfied, Caprice, and Vanity, and Accident, begin to produce Discriminations, and Peculiarities, yet the Eye is not very heedful, or quick, which cannot discover the same Causes still terminating their Influence in the same Effects, though sometimes accelerated, sometimes retarded, or perplexed by multiplied Combinations. We are all prompted by the same Motives, all deceived by the same Fallacies, all animated by Hope, obstructed by Danger, entangled by Desire, and seduced by Pleasure.

It is frequently objected to Relations of particular Lives, that they are not distinguished by any striking or wonderful Vicissitude. The Scholar who passes his Life among his Books, the Merchant who conducted only his own Affairs, the Priest whose Sphere of Action was not extended beyond that of his Duty, are considered as no proper Objects of publick Regard, however they might have excelled in their several Stations, whatever might have been their Learning, Integrity, and Piety. But this Notion arises from false Measures of Excellence and Dignity, and must be eradicated by considering, that, in the Eye of uncorrupted Reason, what is of most Use is of most Value.

It is, indeed, not improper to take honest Advantages of Prejudice, and to gain Attention by a great Name; but the Business of the Biographer is often to pass slightly over those Performances and Incidents, which produce vulgar Greatness, to lead the Thoughts into domestick Privacies, and display the minute Details of daily Life, where exterior Appendages are cast aside, and Men excel each other only by Prudence, and by Virtue. The Life of Thuanus is, with great Propriety, said by its Author to have been written, that it might lay open to Posterity the private and familiar Character of that Man, cujus Ingenium et Candorem ex ipsius Scriptis sunt olim simper miraturi, whose Candour and Genius his Writings will to the End of Time preserve in Admiration.

There are many invisible Circumstances, which whether we read as Enquirers after natural or moral Knowledge, whether we intend to enlarge our Science, or encrease our Virtue, are more important than publick Occurrences. Thus Salust, the great Master, has not forgot, in his Account of Catiline, to remark that his Walk was now quick, and again slow, as an Indication of a Mind revolving something with violent Commotion. Thus the Story of Melancthon affords a striking Lecture on the Value of Time, by informing us that when he made an Appointment, he expected not only the Hour, but the Minute to be fixed, that Life might not run out in the Idleness of Suspense; and all the Plans and Enterprizes of De Wit are now of less Importance to the World, than that Part of his personal Character which represents him as careful of his Health, and negligent of his Life.

But Biography has often been allotted to Writers who seem very little acquainted with the Nature of their Task, or very negligent about the Performance. They rarely afford any other Account than might be collected from publick Papers, and imagine themselves writing a Life when they exhibit a chronological Series of Actions or Preferments; and so little regard the Manners or Behaviour of their Heroes, that more Knowledge may be gained of a Man's real Character, by a short Conversation with one of his Servants, than from a formal and studied Narrative, begun with his

Pedigree, and ended with his Funeral.

If now and then they condescend to inform the World of particular Facts, they are not always so happy as to select those which are of most Importance. I know not well what Advantage Posterity can receive from the only Circumstance by which Tickell has distinguished Addison from the Rest of Mankind, the Irregularity of his Pulse: nor can I think myself overpaid for the Time spent in reading the Life of Malherb, by being enabled to relate, after the learned Biographer, that Malherb had two predominant Opinions; one, that the Looseness of a single Woman might destroy all the Boast of ancient Descent; the other, that the French Beggers made use very improperly and barbarously of the Phrase noble Gentleman, because either Word included the Sense of both.

There are, indeed, some natural Reasons why these Narratives are often written by such as were not likely to give much Instruction or Delight, and why most Accounts of particular Persons are barren and useless. If a Life be delayed till all Interest and Envy are at an End, and all Motives to Calumny or Flattery are suppressed, we may hope for Impartiality, but must expect little Intelligence; for the Incidents which give Excellence to Biography are of a volatile and evanescent Kind, such as soon escape the Memory, and are rarely transmitted by Tradition. We know how few can portray a living Acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable Particularities, and the grosser Features of his Mind; and it may be easily imagined how much of this little Knowledge may be lost in imparting it, and how soon a Succession of Copies will lose all Resemblance of the Original.

If the Biographer writes from personal Knowledge, and makes haste to gratify the publick Curiosity, there is Danger left his Interest, his Fear, his Gratitude, or his Tenderness, overpower his Fidelity, and tempt him to conceal, if not to invent. There are many who think it an Act of Piety to hide the Faults or Failings of their Friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their Detection; we therefore see whole

Ranks of Characters adorned with uniform Panegyrick, and not to be known from one another, but by extrinsick and casual Circumstances. "Let me remember, says Hale, when I find myself inclined to pity a Criminal, that there is likewise a Pity due to the Country." If there is a Regard due to the Memory of the Dead, there is yet more Respect to be paid to Knowledge, to Virtue, and to Truth.

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