



A Beautiful Mind: Addison's Religious Essays

John S. Uebersax, Editor

A BEAUTIFUL MIND: ADDISON'S RELIGIOUS ESSAYS

**A Collection of Joseph Addison's
Metaphysical Essays from *The Spectator***

Edited by John S. Uebersax

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"No whiter page than Addison remains,
Forms the soft bosom with the gentlest art,
And pours each human virtue thro' the heart."

POPE

"All the enchantment of fancy, and all the cogency of argument, are employed to recommend to the reader his real interest, the care of pleasing the Author of his being."

JOHNSON

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Introduction

JOSEPH ADDISON (1672–1719) deserves more attention than he receives today. In modern times he is considered — if considered at all — a writer of lesser importance than his contemporaries, Pope and Swift. He is credited chiefly as a literary stylist, especially in connection with his numerous essays in the *Tatler*, *Spectator*, and *Guardian*, and as author of the play *Cato*, which, among other things, helped spark revolutionary sentiment in Colonial America. As a moralist he is considered more quaint than relevant.

Readers of the 18th century evaluated Addison's stature more highly. It is not Addison's value, but public and intellectual tastes which have diminished. Disregard for Addison, a writer with sublime thoughts and lofty imagination, is symptomatic of the modern age of materialism. All the more reason, then, why those who recognize the current cultural problem of radical materialism, and who anticipate a new era of Idealism, should acquaint themselves with Addison.

Neither in the present age nor in his own times, however, has Addison been given due credit as an *original* thinker. The agreeable *tone* of his moralism is praised as innovative, but the general view is that its *content* adds nothing to the Greek and

Roman tradition. He is praised as a Virgil writing in English, but newness and creativity are insufficiently credited him.

This view the present small volume aims to correct. A common practice in art galleries is to collect many works of a painter on a particular theme, and to exhibit them together. This then reveals a new dimension to the artist's work, and causes him or her to be viewed afterwards in a new and different light. That is the purpose here: to present together twelve of Addison's best religious and metaphysical essays, in the hope that this will bring an important dimension of Addison's thought into clearer relief. This, it is further hoped, will promote a better understand the fundamental role which religion played in all his thought and writings, and better establish him as an original and relevant *religious* thinker.

These are judgments which it is left to the reader to make. It is certain, however, that reading the essays contained here and making any such evaluation, will be a pleasant and delightful task.

The twelve essays here all come from the *Spectator*. Other of Addison's essays might have been included from the *Spectator*, well as some earlier ones from the *Tatler*, and later ones from the *Guardian*. However these examples, all appearing within the span of two years, and all dealing with themes of immortality and metaphysics, arguably constitute the finest of his religious writings.

Lest the reader be needlessly detained further from the enjoyment of Addison's essays, let these few remarks suffice by way of introduction. Some insightful appraisal's of Addison by eminent writers are supplied below and these may be read with profit.

The editor will offer but one more remark. There is a distinctive joy in Addison's writings. One reason for this is that they exhibit an earnest search for Truth, Beauty, and Moral Excellence simultaneously. These, of course, are the famous Platonic Triad. As one attains high levels in the pursuit of any one, Plato tells us, we approach the highest principle of all, the Form of Goodness, which is virtually synonymous with God. And when one ascends on all three routes at once, so much more rapid the progress. Such is the magic of Addison's essays. Few if any literary works since Plato's dialogues convey the joy of this more amply or consistently.



Nought can the genius of his works transcend,
But their fair purpose and important end;
With Virtue's charms to kindle sacred love,
Or paint the' eternal bowers of bliss above.
Where hadst thou room, great author? where, to roll,
The mighty theme of an immortal soul?
Through paths unknown, unbeaten, whence were brought

Thy proofs so strong for immaterial thought?
 One let me join, all other may excel:
 "How could a mortal essence think so well?"

~ Young¹

He employed wit on the side of virtue and religion. He not only made the proper use of wit himself, but taught it to others; and from his time it has been generally subservient to the cause of reason and of truth. He has dissipated the prejudice that had long connected gaiety with vice, and easiness of manners with laxity of principles. He has restored virtue to its dignity, and taught innocence not to be ashamed. This is an elevation of literary character, *above all Greek, above all Roman fame*. No greater felicity can genius attain than that of having purified intellectual pleasure, separated mirth from indecency, and wit from licentiousness; of having taught a succession of writers to bring elegance and gaiety to the aid of goodness; and, if I may use expressions yet more awful, of having *turned many to righteousness*.²

~ Johnson ('Life of Addison')

Thy spotless thoughts unshock'd the priest may
 hear;
 And the pure vestal in her bosom wear.
 Nor harsh thy precepts, but infus'd by stealth,
 Pleas'd while they cure, and cheat us into health.

~ Tickell ('To the Author of the *Spectator*')³

¹ Edward Young (1683–1765), 'Letter to Mr. Tickell, Occasioned by the Death of Joseph Addison', *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 338.

² *they that turn many to righteousness [shall shine] as the stars for ever and ever*. [Dan 12:3b].

³ Thomas Tickell (1685–1740); poet and close friend of Addison.

That becoming air which Tully⁴ esteemed the criterion of fine composition; and which every reader, he says, imagines so easy to be imitated, yet will find so difficult to attain; is the prevailing characteristic of all that excellent author's most elegant performances. In a word, one may justly apply to him what Plato, in his allegorical language, says of Aristophanes, that the Graces, having searched all the world round for a temple wherein they might for ever dwell, settled at last in the breast of Mr. Addison.

~ William Melmoth⁵

The philosophy of [Addison's essays] ... has been pronounced to be slight and superficial, by a crowd of modern metaphysicians who were but ill entitled to erect themselves into judges on such a question. The singular simplicity and perspicuity of Addison's style have contributed much to the prevalence of this prejudice. Eager for the instruction, and unambitious of the admiration of the multitude, he everywhere studies to bring himself down to their level; and even when he thinks with the greatest originality, and writes with the most inimitable felicity, so easily do we enter into the train of his ideas, that we can hardly persuade ourselves that we could not have thought and written in the same manner. He has somewhere said of "fine writing," that it "consists of sentiments which are natural, without being obvious:" and his definition has been applauded by Hume, as at once concise and just. Of the thing defined, his own periodical essays exhibit the most perfect examples.

~ Dugald Stewart (*Progress*)⁶

⁴ Cicero (Marcus Tullius Cicero)

⁵ the younger; *Fitzosborne Letters*, Letter 29, p. 96.

⁶ Dissertation 1, Part 2, Section 4, pp. 156–157.

Those Sages of antiquity, who, from their improvements in knowledge and virtue, had the least dubious claim to the appellation of wise men, were yet too modest to assume a name which had the appearance of ostentation, and rather chose to be called Philosophers, or Lovers of Wisdom. From similar motives, many of the moderns, who have written with great skill on subjects of morality and science, have entitled their productions *essays*; a name which, though it may now convey the idea of regular treatises and dissertations, is synonymous with the word *attempts*, and means no more than humble endeavours to instruct or to amuse....

Many works ... distinguished by this unassuming title, have been well received, and have obtained a very exalted place in the scale of literary honours. None have become more popular in their own country than those periodical papers which were published by the *Tatler*, the *Guardian*, and the *Spectator*, and which have been successively imitated by later writers. The taste and morals of the nation have been more generally improved by these excellent, though short and detached, compositions, than by long, regular, elaborate systems. They were addressed to the heart and imagination, and fitted for the haunts of men engaged in the employments of common life; while scientific treatises of ethics were calculated only for the exercise of scholastic disputation ; and their influence on the conduct of life, if they ever possessed any, was circumscribed within narrow limits. Addison, like Socrates, to whom he has often been compared, brought down knowledge from those heights which were accessible only to professed scholars, and placed it within the reach of all who, to natural and common sense, added the advantage of a common education. He it was who stripped philosophy of that unbecoming garb in which she had been disguised by her mistaken followers, and represented her attired by the Graces, like the Goddess of Beauty.

Addison, who had appeared with peculiar lustre in the *Tatler*,

was to shine again in the *Spectator* with still brighter and more permanent glory. The great charm of his diction, which has delighted readers of every class, appears to me to be a certain natural sweetness, ease, and delicacy, which no affectation can attain. Truths of all kinds, the sublime and the familiar, the serious and the comic, are taught in that peculiar style, which raises in the mind a placid and equable flow of emotions; that placidness and equability, which are in a particular manner adapted to give permanency to all our pleasurable feelings. A work, which warms our passions, and hurries us on with the rapid vehemence of its style, may be read once or twice with pleasure; but it is the more tranquil style which is most frequently in unison with our minds, and which, therefore, on the tenth repetition, as Horace says, will afford fresh pleasure.

Let it be considered, as an instance of the advantage which mankind derives from singular genius, what a train of light has been diffused far and wide on thousands and tens of thousands, for the space of near twenty hundred years, from the illuminated understanding of the individual Cicero. Or, to take an example from our own polished age and country, let a conjecture be formed of the number of those who have been led to every thing good and great by an Addison.

Our Addison, like some of the most celebrated ancients, possesses that sweetness, that delicacy, and that grace, which is formed to please the human mind, under all the revolutions of time, of fashion,— and of capricious taste. It is not only the excellent matter which produces the effect of gently composing our passions while we are reading Addison; but it is also that sweet style which cannot be read and tasted without communicating to the mind something of its own equability.

~ Dr. Knox (*Essays* 1, 28, 84 & 106)

Addison's compositions are built with the finest materials, in the taste of the ancients, and (to speak his own language) on truly classic ground; and though they are the delight of the present age, yet am I persuaded that they will receive more justice from posterity.

~ Young⁷

It is, however, the appropriate, the transcendent praise of Addison, that he steadily and uniformly, and in a manner peculiarly his own, exerted these great qualities in teaching and disseminating a *love* for morality and religion.... He saw his countrymen become better as they became wiser; he saw them, through his instructions, feel and own the beauty of holiness and virtue; and for this we may affirm, posterity, however distant or refined, shall revere and bless his memory.

~ Nathan Drake

The piety of Addison was, in truth, of a singularly cheerful character. The feeling which predominates in all his devotional writings, is gratitude. God was to him the all-wise and all-powerful friend, who had watched over his cradle with more than maternal tenderness; who had listened to his cries before they could form themselves in prayer; who had preserved his youth from the snares of vice; who had made his cup run over with worldly blessings; who had doubled the value of those blessings, by bestowing a thankful heart to enjoy them, and dear friends to partake them.

~ Macaulay ('Addison').

⁷ *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759); *Works*, vol. 2, p. 579.

IN WHAT new region to the just assigned,
What new employments please th' unbodied mind?
A winged Virtue, through th' ethereal sky,
From world to world unwearied does he fly;
Or curious trace the long laborious maze
Of heaven's decrees, where wondering angels gaze?
Does he delight to hear bold seraphs tell,
How Michael battled, and the Dragon fell?
Or, mixt with milder cherubim, to glow
In hymns of love, not ill essay'd below?
Or dost thou warn poor mortals left behind,
A task well suited to thy gentle mind?
Oh, if sometimes thy spotless form descend,
To me thy aid, thou guardian Genius, lend!
When rage misguides me, or when fear alarms,
When pain distresses, or when pleasure charms,
In silent whisperings purer thoughts impart,
And turn from ill a frail and feeble heart.

~ Tickell ('Elegy for Addison')

~ * ~

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1. Immortality of the Soul

No. 111. Saturday, July 7, 1711.

————— *Inter silvas Academi quaerere verum.*
HORACE, 2 *Epistles* 2.45.

To search for truth in academic groves.

THE course of my last speculation led me insensibly into a subject upon which I always meditate with great delight; I mean the immortality of the soul. I was yesterday walking alone in one of my friend's woods, and lost myself in it very agreeably, as I was running over in my mind the several arguments that establish this great point, which is the basis of morality, and the source of all the pleasing hopes and secret joys that can arise in the heart of a reasonable creature. I consider those several proofs drawn :

First, From the nature of the soul itself, and particularly its immateriality; which though not absolutely necessary to the eternity of its duration, has, I think, been evinced to almost a demonstration.

Secondly, From its passions and sentiments, as particularly from

its love of existence, its horror of annihilation, and its hopes of immortality, with that secret satisfaction which it finds in the practice of virtue, and that uneasiness which follows in it upon the commission of vice.

Thirdly, From the nature of the Supreme Being, whose justice, goodness, wisdom, and veracity, are all concerned in this great point.

But among these and other excellent arguments for the immortality of the soul, there is one drawn from the perpetual progress of the soul to its perfection, without a possibility of ever arriving at it; which is a hint that I do not remember to have seen opened and improved by others who have written on this subject, though it seems to me to carry a great weight with it. How can it enter into the thoughts of man, that the soul, which is capable of such immense perfections, and of receiving new improvements to all eternity, shall fall away into nothing almost as soon as it is created? Are such abilities made for no purpose? A brute arrives at a point of perfection that he can never pass: in a few years he has all the endowments he is capable of; and were he to live ten thousand more, would be the same thing he is at present. Were a human soul thus at a stand in her accomplishments, were her faculties to be full blown, and incapable of further enlargements, I could imagine it might fall away insensibly, and drop at once into a state of annihilation. But can we believe a thinking being that is in

a perpetual progress of improvements, and travelling on from perfection to perfection, after having just looked abroad into the works of its Creator, and made a few discoveries of his infinite goodness, wisdom and power, must perish at her first setting out, and in the very beginning of her inquiries?

A man, considered in his present state, seems only sent into the world to propagate his kind. He provides himself with a successor, and immediately quits his post to make room for him.

————— *haeres*
Haeredem alterius, velut unda supervenit undam.
 HORACE, 2 *Epistles* 2.175.

Heir crowds heir, as in a rolling flood
 Wave urges wave.

CREECH.

He does not seem born to enjoy life, but to deliver it down to others. This is not surprising to consider in animals, which are formed for our use, and can finish their business in a short life. The silk-worm, after having spun her task, lays her eggs and dies. But a man can never have taken in his full measure of knowledge, has not time to subdue his passions, establish his soul in virtue, and come up to the perfection of his nature, before he is hurried off the stage. Would an infinitely wise Being make such glorious creatures for so mean a purpose? Can he delight in the production of such abortive intelligences, such short-lived reasonable beings? Would

he give us talents that are not to be exerted ? Capacities that are never to be gratified? How can we find that wisdom, which shines through all his works, in the formation of man, without looking on this world as only a nursery for the next, and believing that the several generations of rational creatures, which rise up and disappear in such quick succession, are only to receive their rudiments of existence here, and afterwards to be transplanted into a more friendly climate, where they may spread and flourish to all eternity?

There is not, in my opinion, a more pleasing and triumphant consideration in religion, than this of the perpetual progress which the soul makes towards the perfection of its nature, without ever arriving at a period in it. To look upon the soul as going on from strength to strength, to consider that she is to shine for ever with new accessions of glory, and brighten to all eternity; that she will be still adding virtue to virtue, and knowledge to knowledge; [cf. 2 Cor 3:18] carries in it something wonderfully agreeable to that ambition which is natural to the mind of man. Nay, it must be a prospect pleasing to God himself, to see his creation for ever beautifying in his eyes, and drawing nearer to him, by greater degrees of resemblance.

Methinks this single consideration, of the progress of a finite spirit to perfection, will be sufficient to extinguish all envy in inferior natures, and all contempt in superior. That Cherubim which now

appears as a God to a human soul, knows very well that the period will come about in eternity, when the human soul shall be as perfect as he himself now is: nay, when she shall look down upon that degree of perfection, as much as she now falls short of it. It is true, the higher nature still advances, and by that means preserves his distance and superiority in the scale of being; but he knows, how high soever the station is of which he stands possessed at present, the inferior nature will at length mount up to it, and shine forth in the same degree of glory.

With what astonishment and veneration may we look into our own souls, where there are such hidden stores of virtue and knowledge, such inexhausted sources of perfection? We know not yet what we shall be, nor will it ever enter into the heart of man to conceive the glory that will be always in reserve for him. [1 Cor 2:9] The soul considered with its Creator, is like one of those mathematical lines that may draw nearer to another to all eternity without a possibility of touching it: and can there be a thought so transporting, as to consider ourselves in these perpetual approaches to him, who is not only the standard of perfection but of happiness! L.

~ * ~

2. Knowledge and Immortality

No. 210. Wednesday, October 31, 1711.

*Nescio quomodo inhaeret in mentibus quasi saeculorum
quoddam augurium futurorum
idque in maximis ingeniis altissimisque animis et existit
maxime et apparet facillime.*

CICERO, *Tusculan Disputations*.

There is, I know not how, in minds a certain presage, as it were, of a future existence; and this has the deepest root, and is most discoverable in the greatest geniuses and most exalted souls.

TO the SPECTATOR.⁸
SIR,

I AM fully persuaded that one of the best springs of generous and worthy actions, is the having generous and worthy thoughts of ourselves. Whoever has a mean opinion of the dignity of his nature, will act in no higher a rank than he has allotted himself in his own estimation. If he considers his being as circumscribed by the uncertain term of a few years, his designs will be contracted into the same narrow span he imagines is to bound his existence.

⁸ This letter by John Hughes responding to *Spectator* No. 111 (Essay 1 here) has so much Addison's spirit and style we should include it here. .

How can he exalt his thoughts to any thing great and noble, who only believes that, after a short turn on the stage of this world, he is to sink into oblivion, and to lose his consciousness for ever?

For this reason I am of opinion, that so useful and elevated a contemplation as that of the soul's immortality, cannot be resumed too often. There is not a more improving exercise to the human mind than to be frequently reviewing its own great privileges and endowments; nor a more effectual means to awaken in us an ambition raised above low objects and little pursuits, than to value ourselves as heirs of eternity.

It is a very great satisfaction to consider the best and wisest of mankind in all nations and ages asserting, as with one voice, this their birthright, and to find it ratified by an express revelation. At the same time, if we turn our thoughts inward upon ourselves, we may meet with a kind of secret sense concurring with the proofs of our own immortality.

You have, in my opinion, raised a good presumptive argument from the increasing appetite the mind has to knowledge,⁹ and to the extending its own faculties, which cannot be accomplished, as the more restrained perfection of lower creatures may, in the limits of a short life. I think another probable conjecture may be raised from

⁹ *Spectator* No. 111, Essay 1 here.

our appetite to duration itself, and from a reflection on our progress through the several stages of it. "We are complaining," as you observe in a former speculation,¹⁰ "of the shortness of life, and yet are perpetually hurrying over the parts of it, to arrive at certain little settlements, or imaginary points of rest, which are dispersed up and down in it."

Now let us consider what happens to us when we arrive at these imaginary points of rest. Do we stop our motion, and sit down satisfied in the settlement we have gained? or are we not removing the boundary, and marking out new points of rest, to which we press forward with the like eagerness, and which cease to be such as fast as we attain them? Our case is like that of a traveller upon the Alps, who should fancy that the top of the next hill must end his journey because it terminates his prospect; but he no sooner arrives at it, than he sees new ground and other hills beyond it, and continues to travel on as before.

This is so plainly every man's condition in life, that there is no one who has observed any thing but may observe, that as fast as his time wears away, his appetite to something future remains. The use therefore I would make of it is this, that since Nature (as some love to express it) does nothing in vain, or to speak properly, since the Author of our being has planted no wandering passion in it, no desire which has not its object, futurity is the proper object of the

¹⁰ *Spectator* No. 93, 'Proper Methods of Employing Time.'

passion so constantly exercised about it; and this restlessness in the present, this assigning ourselves over to farther stages of duration, this successive grasping at somewhat still to come, appears to me (whatever it may to others) as a kind of instinct or natural symptom which the mind of man has of its own immortality.

I take it at the same time for granted, that the immortality of the soul is sufficiently established by other arguments: and if so, this appetite, which otherwise would be very unaccountable and absurd, seems very reasonable, and adds strength to the conclusion. But I am amazed when I consider there are creatures capable of thought, who, in spite of every argument, can form to themselves a sullen satisfaction in thinking otherwise. There is some thing so pitifully mean in the inverted ambition of that man who can hope for annihilation, and please himself to think that his whole fabric shall one day crumble into dust, and mix with the mass of inanimate beings, that it equally deserves our admiration and pity. The mystery of such men's unbelief is not hard to be penetrated; and indeed amounts to nothing more than a sordid hope that they shall not be immortal, because they dare not be so.

This brings me back to my first observation, and gives me occasion to say farther, that as worthy actions spring from worthy thoughts, so worthy thoughts are likewise the consequence of worthy actions. But the wretch who has degraded himself below the character of immortality, is very willing to resign his pretensions to

it, and to substitute in its room a dark negative happiness in the extinction of his being.

The admirable Shakespeare has given us a strong image of the unsupported condition of such a person in his last minutes in the second part of *King Henry the Sixth*, where Cardinal Beaufort, who had been concerned in the murder of the good Duke Humphry, is represented on his death-bed. After some short confused speeches, which show an imagination disturbed with guilt, just as he is expiring. King Henry standing by him, full of compassion, says,

"Lord Cardinal! if thou think'st on heaven's bliss,
Hold up thy hand, make signal of that hope!—
He dies, and makes no sign! ———"

The despair which is here shown, without a word or action on the part of the dying person, is beyond what could be painted by the most forcible expressions whatever.

I shall not pursue this thought farther, but only add, that as annihilation is not to be had with a wish, so it is the most abject thing in the world to wish it. What are honour, fame, wealth, or power, when compared with the generous expectation of a being without end, and a happiness adequate to that being?

I shall trouble you no farther; but with a certain gravity, which

these thoughts have given me, I reflect upon some things people say of you, (as they will of all men who distinguish themselves,) which I hope are not true; and wish you as good a man as you are an author.

I am, SIR, your most obedient humble servant, T.

~ * ~

3. Happiness of Dependence on the Supreme Being

No. 441. Saturday, July 26. 1712

*Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinae.*

HORACE, 8 *Odes* 3.7.

Should the whole frame of nature round him break,
In ruin and confusion hurl'd,
He, unconcern'd, would hear the mighty crack.
And stand secure amidst a fallen world.

ANON.

MAN, considered in himself, is a very helpless and a very wretched being. He is subject every moment to the greatest calamities and misfortunes. He is beset with dangers on all sides, and may become unhappy by numberless casualties, which he could not foresee, nor have prevented, had he foreseen them.

It is our comfort, while we are obnoxious to so many accidents, that we are under the care of one who directs contingencies, and has in his hands the management of every thing that is capable of annoying or offending us; who knows the assistance we stand in

need of, and is always ready to bestow it on those who ask it of him.

The natural homage, which such a creature bears to so infinitely wise and good a being, is a firm reliance on him for the blessings and conveniences of life, and an habitual trust in him for deliverance out of all such dangers and difficulties as may befall us.

The man, who always lives in this disposition of mind, has not the same dark and melancholy views of human nature, as he who considers himself abstractedly from this relation to the Supreme Being. At the same time that he reflects upon his own weakness and imperfection, he comforts himself with the contemplation of those divine attributes, which are employed for his safety and his welfare. He finds his want of foresight made up by the omniscience of Him who is his support. He is not sensible of his own want of strength, when he knows that his helper is almighty. In short, the person who has a firm trust on the Supreme Being, is powerful in His power, wise by His wisdom, happy by His happiness. He reaps the benefit of every divine attribute, and loses his own insufficiency in the fulness of infinite perfection.

To make our lives more easy to us, we are commanded to put our trust in him, who is thus able to relieve and succour us; the divine goodness having made such a reliance a duty, notwithstanding we should have been miserable, had it been forbidden us.

Among several motives, which might be made use of to recommend this duty to us, I shall only take notice of these that follow.

The first and strongest is, that we are promised, He will not fail those who put their trust in him.

But without considering the supernatural blessing which accompanies this duty, we may observe that it has a natural tendency to its own reward, or in other words, that this firm trust and confidence in the great disposer of all things, contributes very much to the getting clear of any affliction, or to the bearing it manfully. A person who believes he has his succour at hand, and that he acts in the sight of his friend, often exerts himself beyond his abilities, and does wonders that are not to be matched by one who is not animated with such a confidence of success. I could produce instances from history, of generals, who out of a belief that they were under the protection of some invisible assistant, did not only encourage their soldiers to do their utmost, but have acted themselves beyond what they would have done, had they not been inspired by such a belief. I might in the same manner shew how such a trust in the assistance of an Almighty Being, naturally produces patience, hope, cheerfulness, and all other dispositions of the mind that alleviate those calamities we are not able to remove.

The practice of this virtue administers great comfort to the mind of man in times of poverty and affliction, but most of all in the hour of death. When the soul is hovering in the last moments of its separation, when it is just entering on another state of existence, to converse with scenes, and objects, and companions that are altogether new, what can support her under such tremblings of thought, such fear, such anxiety, such apprehensions, but the casting of all her cares upon him who first gave her being, who has conducted her through one stage of it, and will be always with her to guide and comfort her in her progress through eternity?

David has very beautifully represented this steady reliance on God Almighty in his twenty-third psalm, which is a kind of Pastoral Hymn, and filled with those allusions which are usual in that kind of writing. As the poetry is very exquisite, I shall present my reader with the following translation of it.

I.

The LORD my pasture shall prepare,
And feed me with a shepherd's care:
His presence shall my wants supply,
And guard me with a watchful eye ;
My noon-day walks he shall attend,
And all my midnight hours defend.

II.

When in the sultry glebe I faint,
Or on the thirsty mountain pant;
To fertile vales and dewy meads,

My weary wand'ring steps he leads;
Where peaceful rivers soft and slow,
Amid the verdant landscape flow.

III.

Tho' in the paths of death I tread,
With gloomy horrors over-spread;
My steadfast heart shall fear no ill,
For thou, O LORD, art with me still;
Thy friendly crook shall give me aid,
And guide me through the dreadful shade.

IV.

Tho' in a bare and rugged way,
Through devious lonely wilds I stray,
Thy bounty shall my pains beguile:
The barren wilderness shall smile
With sudden greens and herbage crown'd,
And streams shall murmur all around.

~ * ~

4. Means of Strengthening Faith

No. 465. Saturday, August 23, 1712

*Qua ratione queas traducere leniter aevum;
Ne te semper inops agitet vexetque cupido;
Ne pavor et rerum mediocriter utilium spes.*

HORACE, 1 *Epistles* 18.97.

How thou may'st live, how spend thine age in peace;
Lest avarice, still poor, disturb thine ease;
Or fears should shake, or cares thy mind abuse,
Or ardent hope for things of little use.

CREECH.

HAVING endeavoured in my last Saturday's paper¹¹ to shew the great excellency of faith, I shall here consider what are the proper means of strengthening and confirming it in the mind of man. Those who delight in reading books of controversy, which are written on both sides of the question in points of faith, do very seldom arrive at a fixed and settled habit of it. They are one day entirely convinced of its important truths, and the next meet with something that shakes and disturbs them. The doubt which was laid revives again, and shews itself in new difficulties, and that generally for this reason, because

¹¹ *Spectator* No. 459, 'On Religious Faith and Practice.'

the mind which is perpetually tost in controversies and disputes, is apt to forget the reasons which had once set it at rest, and to be disquieted with any former perplexity, when it appears in a new shape, or is started by a different hand. As nothing is more laudable than an inquiry after truth, so nothing is more irrational than to pass away our whole lives, without determining ourselves one way or other in those points which are of the last importance to us. There are indeed many things from which we may withhold our assent; but in cases by which we are to regulate our lives, it is the greatest absurdity to be wavering and unsettled, without closing with that side which appears the most safe and the most probable. The first rule, therefore, which I shall lay down is this, that when by reading or discourse we find ourselves thoroughly convinced of the truth of any article, and of the reasonableness of our belief in it, we should never after suffer ourselves to call it into question. We may perhaps forget the arguments which occasioned our conviction, but we ought to remember the strength they had with us, and therefore still to retain the conviction which they once produced. This is no more than what we do in every common art or science, nor is it possible to act otherwise, considering the weakness and limitation of our intellectual faculties. It was thus that Latimer, one of the glorious army of martyrs who introduced the reformation in England, behaved himself in that great conference which was managed between the most learned among the Protestants and Papists in the reign of Queen Mary. This venerable old man knowing how his abilities were impaired by

age, and that it was impossible for him to recollect all those reasons which had directed him in the choice of his religion, left his companions who were in the full possession of their parts and learning, to baffle and confound their antagonists by the force of reason. As for himself, he only repeated to his adversaries the articles in which he firmly believed, and in the profession of which he was determined to die. It is in this manner that the mathematician proceeds upon propositions which he has once demonstrated; and though the demonstration may have slipt out of his memory, he builds upon the truth, because he knows it was demonstrated. This rule is absolutely necessary for weaker minds, and in some measure for men of the greatest abilities; but to these last I would propose in the second place, that they should lay up in their memories, and always keep by them in readiness, those arguments which appear to them of the greatest strength, and which cannot be got over by all the doubts and cavils of infidelity.

But, in the third place, there is nothing which strengthens faith more than morality. Faith and morality naturally produce each other. A man is quickly convinced of the truth of religion, who finds it is not against his interest that it should be true. The pleasure he receives at present, and the happiness which he promises himself from it hereafter, will both dispose him very powerfully to give credit to it, according to the ordinary observation, 'that we are easy to believe what we wish.' It is very certain, that a man of sound reason cannot forbear closing with

religion upon an impartial examination of it; but at the same time it is as certain, that faith is kept alive in us, and gathers strength from practice more than from speculation.

There is still another method which is more persuasive than any of the former, and that is an habitual adoration of the Supreme Being, as well in constant acts of mental worship, as in outward forms. The devout man does not only believe but feels there is a Deity. He has actual sensations of him; his experience concurs with his reason; he sees him more and more in all his intercourses with him, and even in this life almost loses his faith in conviction.

The last method which I shall mention for the giving life to man's faith, is frequent retirement from the world, accompanied with religious meditation. When a man thinks of anything in the darkness of the night, whatever deep impressions it may make in his mind, they are apt to vanish as soon as the day breaks about him. The light and noise of the day, which are perpetually soliciting his senses, and calling off his attention, wear out of his mind the thoughts that imprinted themselves in it, with so much strength, during the silence and darkness of the night. A man finds the same difference as to himself in a crowd and in a solitude: the mind is stunned and dazzled amidst that variety of objects which press upon her in a great city: she cannot apply herself to the consideration of those things which are of the utmost concern to her. The cares or pleasures of the world strike in with every

thought, and a multitude of vicious examples give a kind of justification to our folly. In our retirements every thing disposes us to be serious. In courts and cities we are entertained with the works of men; in the country with those of God. One is the province of art, the other of nature. Faith and devotion naturally grow in the mind of every reasonable man, who sees the impressions of divine power and wisdom in every object on which he casts his eye. The Supreme Being has made the best arguments for his own existence, in the formation of the heavens and the earth, and these are arguments which a man of sense cannot forbear attending to, who is out of the noise and hurry of human affairs. Aristotle says, 'that should a man live under ground, and there converse with the works of art and mechanism, and should afterwards be brought up into the open day, and see the several glories of the heaven and earth, he would immediately pronounce them the works of such a being as we define God to be.'¹² The psalmist has very beautiful strokes of poetry to this purpose, in that exalted strain, 'The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. One day telleth another: and one night certifieth another. There is neither speech nor language: but their voices are heard among them. Their sound is gone into all lands: and their words into the ends of the world.' As such a bold and sublime manner of thinking furnishes very noble matter for an ode, the reader may see it wrought into the following one.

¹² Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.37. 95.

I.

The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue etherial sky,
And spangled heav'ns, a shining frame
Their great Original proclaim:
Th' unwearied sun from day to day,
Does his Creator's power display,
And publishes to every land
The work of an Almighty hand.

II.

Soon as the evening shades prevail,
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the list'ning earth
Repeats the story of her birth:
Whilst all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets, in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole.

III.

What though, in solemn silence, all
Move round the dark terrestrial ball?
What tho' nor real voice nor sound
Amid their radiant orbs be found?
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice,
For ever singing, as they shine,
"The hand that made us is divine."

~ * ~

5. On the Nature of Man—of the Supreme Being

No. 565. Friday, July 9, 1712

———*Deum namque ire per omnes
Terrasque, tractusque maris, caelumque profundum.*
VIRGIL, *Georgics* 4.221.

For God the whole created mass inspires;
Thro' heaven, and earth, and ocean's depths, he throws
His influence round, and kindles as he goes.

DRYDEN.

I WAS yesterday about sun-set walking in the open fields, 'til the night insensibly fell upon me. I at first amused myself with all the richness and variety of colours, which appeared in the western parts of heaven: in proportion as they faded away and went out, several stars and planets appeared one after another 'till the whole firmament was in a glow. The blueness of the Æther was exceedingly heightened and enlivened by the season of the year, and by the rays of all those luminaries that passed through it. The galaxy appeared in its most beautiful white. To compleat the scene, the full moon rose at length in that clouded majesty, which

Milton¹³ takes notice of, and opened to the eye a new picture of nature, which was more finely shaded, and disposed among softer lights, than that which the sun had before discovered to us.

As I was surveying the moon walking in her brightness, and taking her progress among the constellations, a thought rose in me which I believe very often perplexes and disturbs men of serious and contemplative natures. David himself fell into it, in that reflection, ‘When I consider the heavens the works of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou regardest him ?’ In the same manner, when I considered that infinite host of stars, or, to speak more philosophically, of suns, which were then shining upon me, with those innumerable sets of planets or worlds, which were moving round their respective suns; when I still enlarged the idea, and supposed another heaven of suns and worlds rising still above this which we discovered, and these still enlightened by a superior firmament of luminaries, which are planted at so great a distance that they may appear to the inhabitants of the former, as the stars do to us; in short, whilst I pursued this thought, I could not but reflect on that little insignificant figure which I myself bore amidst the immensity of God's works.

Were the sun, which enlightens this part of the creation, with all the host of planetary worlds that move about him, utterly

¹³ *Paradise Lost* 4.9–10.

extinguished and annihilated, they would not be missed more than a grain of sand upon the sea-shore. The space they possess is so exceedingly little, in comparison of the whole, that it would scarce make a blank in the creation. The chasm would be imperceptible to an eye, that could take in the whole compass of nature, and pass from one end of the creation to the other, as it is possible there may be such a sense in ourselves hereafter, or in creatures which are at present more exalted than ourselves. We see many stars by the help of glasses, which we do not discover with our naked eyes; and the finer our telescopes are, the more still are our discoveries.

Huygenius¹⁴ carries this thought so far, that he does not think it impossible there may be stars whose light is not yet travelled down to us, since their first creation. There is no question but the universe has certain bounds set to it: but when we consider that it is the work of infinite power, prompted by infinite goodness, with an infinite space to exert itself in, how can our imagination set any bounds to it?

To return, therefore, to my first thought, I could not but look upon myself with secret horror, as a being that was not worth the smallest regard of one who had so great a work under his care and superintendency. I was afraid of being overlooked amidst the immensity of nature, and lost among that infinite variety of creatures, which in all probability swarm through all these

¹⁴ Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695), Dutch astronomer, mathematician, and telescopist.

immeasurable regions of matter.

In order to recover myself from this mortifying thought, I considered that it took its rise from those narrow conceptions, which we are apt to entertain of the Divine Nature. We ourselves cannot attend to many different objects at the same time. If we are careful to inspect some things, we must of course neglect others. This imperfection which we observe in ourselves, is an imperfection that cleaves in some degree to creatures of the highest capacities, as they are creatures, that is, Beings of finite and limited natures. The presence of every created being is confined to a certain measure of space, and consequently his observation is stinted to a certain number of objects. The sphere in which we move, and act, and understand, is of a wider circumference to one creature than another, according as we rise one above another in the scale of existence. But the widest of these our spheres has its circumference. When, therefore, we reflect on the Divine Nature, we are so used and accustomed to this imperfection in ourselves, that we cannot forbear, in some measure, ascribing it to him, in whom there is no shadow of imperfection. Our reason, indeed, assures us, that his attributes are infinite, but the poorness of our conceptions is such, that it cannot forbear setting bounds to every thing it contemplates, till our reason comes again to our succour, and throws down all those little prejudices which rise in us unawares, and are natural to the mind of man.

We shall, therefore, utterly extinguish this melancholy thought, of

our being overlooked by our Maker in the multiplicity of his works, and the infinity of those objects among which he seems to be incessantly employed, if we consider, in the first place, that he is Omnipresent; and, in the second, that he is Omniscient.

If we consider him in his Omnipresence: his Being passes through, actuates, and supports, the whole frame of nature. His creation, and every part of it, is full of him. There is nothing he has made that is either so distant, so little, or so inconsiderable, which he does not essentially inhabit. His substance is within the substance of every being, whether material or immaterial, and as intimately present to it, as that Being is to itself. It would be an imperfection in him, were he able to remove out of one place into another, or to withdraw himself from any thing he has created, or from any part of that space which is diffused and spread abroad to infinity. In short, to speak of him in the language of the old philosopher,¹⁵ he is a Being whose centre is every where, and his circumference no where.

In the second place, he is Omniscient as well as Omnipresent. His Omniscience indeed necessarily and naturally flows from his Omnipresence; he cannot but be conscious of every motion that arises in the whole material world, which he thus essentially pervades, and of every thought that is stirring in the intellectual world, to every part of which he is thus intimately united. Several

¹⁵ Alain of Lille.

moralists have considered the creation as the Temple of God, which he has built with his own hands, and which is filled with his presence. Others have considered infinite space as the receptacle, or rather the habitation of the Almighty: but the noblest and most exalted way of considering this infinite space, is that of Sir Isaac Newton, who calls it the sensorium of the Godhead. Brutes and men have their sensoriola, or little sensoriums, by which they apprehend the presence, and perceive the actions of a few objects that lie contiguous to them. Their knowledge and observation turns within a very narrow circle. But as God Almighty cannot but perceive and know every thing in which he resides, infinite space gives room to infinite knowledge and is, as it were, an organ to Omniscience.

Were the soul separate from the body, and with one glance of thought, should start beyond the bounds of the creation, should it for millions of years continue its progress through in finite space with the same activity, it would still find itself within the embrace of its creator, and encompassed round with the immensity of the Godhead. Whilst we are in the body he is not less present with us, because he is concealed from us. 'O that I knew where I might find him (says Job.) Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left-hand, where he does work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right-hand, that I cannot see him.' [Job 23: 3a, 8–9] In short, reason as well as revelation assures us, that he cannot be absent from us,

notwithstanding he is undiscovered by us.

In this consideration of God Almighty's Omnipresence and Omniscience, every uncomfortable thought vanishes. He cannot but regard every thing that has being, especially such of his creatures who fear they are not regarded by him. He is privy to all their thoughts, and to that anxiety of heart in particular, which is apt to trouble them on this occasion: for as it is impossible he should overlook any of his creatures, so we may be confident that he regards, with an eye of mercy, those who endeavour to recommend themselves to his notice, and in an unfeigned humility of heart, think themselves unworthy that he should be mindful of them.

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6. Advantages of Seeking the Protection of the Supreme Being

No. 571. Friday, July 23, 1712

Coelum quid quaerimus ultra?
LUCAN.

What seek ye beyond heaven?

AS the work I have engaged in, will not only consist of papers of humour and learning, but of several essays moral and divine, I shall publish the following one, which is founded on a former *Spectator*, and sent me by a particular friend, not questioning but it will please such of my readers as think it no disparagement to their understandings, to give way sometimes to a serious thought.

“SIR,

“IN your paper of Friday the 9th instant,¹⁶ you had occasion to consider the ubiquity of the Godhead, and, at the same time, to shew, that as he is present to every thing, he cannot but be attentive to every thing, and privy to all the modes and parts of its existence:

¹⁶ *Spectator* No. 565, Essay 5 here.

or in other words that his Omniscience and Omnipresence are co-existent, and run together, through the whole infinitude of space. This consideration might furnish us with many incentives to devotion, and motives to morality; but as this subject has been handled by several excellent writers, I shall consider it in a light, wherein I have not seen it placed by others.

“First, How disconsolate is the condition of an intellectual being, who is thus present with his Maker, but at the same time, receives no extraordinary benefit or advantage from this his presence!

“Secondly, How deplorable is the condition of an intellectual being, who feels no other effects from this his presence, but such as proceed from divine wrath and indignation!

“Thirdly, How happy is the condition of that intellectual being, who is sensible of his Maker's presence, from the secret effects of his mercy and loving-kindness.

“First, How disconsolate is the condition of an intellectual being, who is thus present with his Maker, but, at the same time, receives no extraordinary benefit or advantage from this his presence! Every particle of matter is actuated by this Almighty Being which passes through it. The heavens and the earth, the stars and planets, move and gravitate by virtue of this great principle within them. All the dead parts of nature are invigorated by the presence of their

Creator, and made capable of exerting their respective qualities. The several instincts, in the brute creation, do likewise operate and work towards the several ends which are agreeable to them, by this divine energy. Man only, who does not co-operate with this Holy Spirit, and is unattentive to His presence, receives none of those advantages from it, which are perfective of his nature, and necessary to his well-being. The Divinity is with him, and in him, and every where about him, but of no advantage to him. It is the same thing to a man without religion, as if there were no God in the world. It is, indeed, impossible for an infinite Being to remove himself from any of his creatures, but though he cannot withdraw his essence from us, which would argue an imperfection in him, he can withdraw from us all the joys and consolations of it. His presence, may, perhaps, be necessary to support us in our existence; but he may leave this our existence to itself, with regard to its happiness or misery. For, in this sense, he may cast us away from his presence, and take his Holy Spirit from us. This single consideration one would think sufficient to make us open our hearts to all those infusions of joy and gladness which are so near at hand, and ready to be poured in upon us; especially, when we consider, Secondly, the deplorable condition of an intellectual being, who feels no other effects from his Maker's presence, but such as proceed from divine wrath and indignation!

“We may assure ourselves, that the Great Author of Nature will not always be as one who is indifferent to any of his creatures. Those

who will not feel him in his love, will be sure, at length, to feel him in his displeasure. And how dreadful is the condition of that creature, who is only sensible of the Being of his Creator by what he suffers from him! He is as essentially present in hell as in heaven, but the inhabitants of those accursed places behold him only in his wrath, and shrink within their flames, to conceal themselves from him. It is not in the power of imagination to conceive the fearful effects of Omnipotence incensed.

“But I shall only consider the wretchedness of an intellectual being, who, in this life, lies under the displeasure of him that at all times, and in all places, is intimately united with him. He is able to disquiet the soul, and vex it in all its faculties. He can hinder any of the greatest comforts of life from refreshing us, and give an edge to every one of its slightest calamities. Who then can bear the thought of being an outcast from his presence, that is, from the comforts of it, or of feeling it only in its terrors? How pathetic is that expostulation of Job, when, for the trial of his patience, he was made to look upon himself in this deplorable condition! ‘Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am become a burden to myself?’ [Job 7: 20] But, Thirdly, how happy is the condition of that intellectual being, who is sensible of his Maker's presence, from the secret effects of his mercy and loving-kindness!

“The blessed in heaven behold him face to face, [1 Cor 13:12] that is, are as sensible of his presence, as we are of the presence of any

person whom we look upon with our eyes. There is, doubtless, a faculty in spirits, by which they apprehend one another, as our senses do material objects: and there is no question but our souls, when they are disembodied, or placed in glorified bodies, will, by this faculty, in whatever part of space they reside, be always sensible of the Divine Presence. We, who have this veil of flesh standing between us and the world of spirits, must be content to know that the Spirit of God is present with us, by the effects which he produceth in us. Our outward senses are too gross to apprehend him; we may, however, taste and see how gracious he is, [Ps 34:8] by his influence upon our minds, by those virtuous thoughts which he awakens in us, by those secret comforts and refreshments which he conveys into our souls, and by those ravishing joys and inward satisfactions, which are perpetually springing up, and diffusing themselves among all the thoughts of good men. He is lodged in our very essence, and is as a soul within the soul, to irradiate its understanding, rectify its will, purify its passions, and enliven all the powers of man. How happy, therefore, is an intellectual being, who, by prayer and meditation, by virtue and good works, opens this communication between God and his own soul! Though the whole creation frowns upon him, and all nature looks black about him, he has his light and support within him, that are able to cheer his mind, and bear him up in the midst of all those horrors which encompass him. He knows that his helper is at hand, and is always nearer to him than any thing else can be, which is capable of annoying or terrifying him. In the midst of calumny or contempt,

he attends to that Being who whispers better things within his soul, and whom he looks upon as his defender, his glory, and the lifter-up of his head. [Ps 3: 3] In his deepest solitude and retire, he knows that he is in company with the greatest of Beings; and perceives within himself such real sensations of his presence, as are more delightful than any thing that can be met with in the conversation of his creatures. Even in the hour of death, he considers the pains of his dissolution to be nothing else but the breaking down of that partition, which stands betwixt his soul, and the sight of that Being, who is always present with him, and is about to manifest itself to him in fullness of joy.

“If we would be thus happy, and thus sensible of our Maker's presence, from the secret effects of his mercy and goodness, we must keep such a watch over all our thoughts, that, in the language of the scripture, his soul may have pleasure in us. [Heb 10:38-39; cf. Ps 147:11, 149:4] We must take care not to grieve his Holy Spirit, [Eph 4:30] and endeavour to make the meditations of our hearts [Ps 19:14] always acceptable in his sight, that he may delight thus to reside and dwell in us. The light of nature could direct Seneca to this doctrine, in a very remarkable passage among his epistles; *Sacer inest nobis spiritus bonorum malorumque custos, et observator, et quemadmodum nos illum tractamus, ita et ille nos.* There is a holy spirit residing us, who watches and observes both good and evil men, and will treat us after the same manner that we treat him. But I shall conclude this discourse with those more emphatical words in Divine Revelation: ‘If a man love

me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” [Jn 14:23]

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7. Advantages of Content

No. 574. Friday, July 30, 1712

*Non possidentem multa vocaveris
Recte beatum: rectius occupat
Nomen beati, qui Deorum
Muneribus sapienter uti
Duramque callet pauperiem pati.*
HORACE, 4 *Odes* 9.45.

Believe not those that lands possess,
And shining heaps of useless ore,
The only lords of happiness;
But rather those that know,
For what kind fates bestow,
And have the art to use the store;
That have the generous skill to bear
The hated weight of poverty.
CREECH.

I WAS once engaged in discourse with a Rosicrucian about the Great Secret. As this kind of men, (I mean those of them we are not professed cheats) are overrun with enthusiasm and philosophy, it was very amusing to hear this religious adept descanting on his pretended discovery. He talked of the secret, as of a spirit which lived within an emerald, and converted every

thing that was near it to the highest perfection it was capable of. 'It gives a lustre, (says he) to the sun, and water to the diamond. It irradiates every metal, and enriches lead with all the properties of gold. It heightens smoke into flame, flame into light, and light into glory. He further added, that a single ray of it dissipates pain, and care, and melancholy, from the person on whom it falls. In short, (says he,) its presence naturally changes every place into a kind of heaven.' After he had gone on for some time in this unintelligible cant, I found that he jumbled natural and moral ideas together into the same discourse, and that his great secret was nothing else but Content.

This virtue does indeed produce, in some measure, all those effects which the alchymist usually ascribes to what he calls the Philosopher's Stone; and if it does not bring riches, it does the same thing, by banishing the desire of them. If it cannot remove the disquietudes arising out of a man's mind, body, or fortune, it makes him easy under them. It has, indeed, a kindly influence on the soul of man, in respect of every being to whom he stands related. It extinguishes all murmur, repining, and ingratitude towards that Being, who has allotted him his part to act in this world. It destroys all inordinate ambition, and every tendency to corruption, with regard to the community wherein he is placed. It gives sweetness to his conversation, and a perpetual serenity to all his thoughts.

Among the many methods which might be made use of, for the acquiring of this virtue, I shall only mention the two following. First of all, a man should always consider how much he has more than he wants¹⁷; and, secondly, how much more unhappy he might be, than he really is.

First of all, a man should always consider how much he has more than he wants. I am wonderfully pleased with the reply which Aristippus¹⁸ made to one who condoled¹⁹ him upon the loss of a farm; 'Why, (said he,) I have three farms still, and you have but one; so that I ought rather to be afflicted for you, than you for me.' On the contrary, foolish men are more apt to consider what they have lost, than what they possess: and to fix their eyes upon those who are richer than themselves, rather than those who are under greater difficulties. All the real pleasures and conveniencies of life lie in a narrow compass; but it is the humour of mankind to be always looking forward, and straining after one who has got the start of them in wealth and honour. For this reason, as there are none can be properly called rich, who have not more than they want; there are few rich men, in any of the politer nations, but among the middle sort of people, who keep their wishes within their fortunes, and have more wealth than they know how to enjoy. Persons of a higher rank live in a kind of splendid poverty, and are

¹⁷ lacks.

¹⁸ Pupil of Socrates; first of the Cyrenaic philosophers.

¹⁹ offered condolences to.

perpetually wanting, because, instead of acquiescing in the solid pleasures of life, they endeavour to outvie one another in shadows and appearances. Men of sense have, at all times, beheld, with a great deal of mirth, this silly game that is playing over their heads; and by contracting their desires, enjoy all that secret satisfaction which others are always in quest of. The truth is, this ridiculous chase after imaginary pleasures cannot be sufficiently exposed, as it is the great source of those evils which generally undo a nation. Let a man's estate be what it will, he is a poor man if he does not live within it, and naturally sets himself to sale to any one that can give him his price. When Pittacus,²⁰ after the death of his brother, who had left him a good estate, was offered a great sum of money by the King of Lydia, he thanked him for his kindness, but told him he had already more by half than he knew what to do with. In short, content is equivalent to wealth, and luxury to poverty; or to give the thought a more agreeable turn, 'Content is natural wealth,' says Socrates; to which I shall add, 'Luxury is artificial poverty.' I shall, therefore, recommend to the consideration of those who are always aiming after superfluous and imaginary enjoyments, and will not be at the trouble of contracting their desires, an excellent saying of Bion²¹ the philosopher: namely, 'That no man has so much care, as he who endeavours after the most happiness.'

²⁰ Pittacus of Mytilene (640–568 BC) in Asia Minor, one of the Seven Sages.

²¹ Bion of Borysthenes (c. 325–c. 250 BC), an eclectic Cynic see DL x.x

In the second place, every one ought to reflect how much more unhappy he might be, than he really is. The former consideration took in all those who are sufficiently provided with the means to make themselves easy; this regards such as actually lie under some pressure or misfortune. These may receive great alleviation from such a comparison as the unhappy person may make between himself and others, or between the misfortune which he suffers, and greater misfortunes which might have be fallen him.

I like the story of the honest Dutchman, who, upon breaking his leg by a fall from the mainmast, told the standers-by, 'It was a great mercy that it was not his neck.' To which, since I have got into quotations, give me leave to add the saying of an old philosopher,²² who, after having invited some of his friends to dine with him, was ruffled by his wife, that came into the room in a passion, and threw down the table that stood before them: 'Every one, (says he) has his calamity, and he is a happy man that has no greater than this.' We find an instance to the same purpose, in the life of Doctor Hammond, written by Bishop Fell. As this good man was troubled with a complication of distempers, when he had the gout upon him, he used to thank God that it was not the stone; and when he had the stone, that he had not both these distempers on him at the same time.

I cannot conclude this essay without observing, that there was

²² Socrates, whose wife was notoriously ill-tempered.

never any system, besides that of Christianity, which could effectually produce, in the mind of man, the virtue I have been hitherto speaking of. In order to make us content with our present condition, many of the ancient philosophers tell us, that our discontent only hurts ourselves, without being able to make any alteration in our circumstances; others, that whatever evil befalls us, is derived to us by a fatal necessity, to which the gods themselves are subject; whilst others very gravely tell the man who is miserable, that it is necessary he should be so, to keep up the harmony of the universe, and that the scheme of Providence would be troubled and perverted, were he otherwise. These, and the like considerations, rather silence than satisfy a man. They may show him that his discontent is unreasonable, but are by no means sufficient to relieve it. They rather give despair than consolation. In a word, a man might reply to one of these comforters, as Augustus did to his friend, who advised him not to grieve for the death of a person whom he loved, because his grief could not fetch him again. 'It is for that very reason, (said the emperor,) that I grieve.'

On the contrary, religion bears a more tender regard to human nature. It prescribes to every miserable man the means of bettering his condition; nay, it shews him, that the bearing of his afflictions as he ought to do, will naturally end in the removal of them: it makes him easy here, because it can make him happy hereafter.

Upon the whole, a contented mind is the greatest blessing a man

can enjoy in this world; and if, in the present life, his happiness arises from the subduing of his desires, it will arise in the next from the gratification of them.



8. The Present Life Preparatory to the Happiness of Eternity

No. 575. Monday, August 2, 1712

———— *Nec morti esse locum* ————

VIRGIL, *Georgics* 4.226.

No room is left for death.

DRYDEN.

A LEWD young fellow seeing an aged hermit go by him bare footed, “Father, (says he), you are in a very miserable condition, if there is not another world.”— “True, son, (said the hermit) but what is thy condition if there is?” Man is a creature designed for two different states of being, or rather, for two different lives. His first life is short and transient; his second, permanent and lasting. The question we are all concerned in is this, In which of these two lives it is our chief interest to make ourselves happy? or, in other words, Whether we should endeavour to secure to ourselves the pleasures and gratifications of a life which is uncertain and precarious, and, at its utmost length, of a very inconsiderable duration; or to secure to ourselves the pleasures of a life which is fixed and settled, and will

never end? Every man, upon the first hearing of this question, knows very well which side of it he ought to close with. But however right we are in theory, it is plain, that in practice, we adhere to the wrong side of the question. We make provisions for this life, as though it were never to have an end, and for the other life, as though it were never to have a beginning.

Should a spirit of superior rank, who is a stranger to human nature, accidentally alight upon the earth, and take a survey of its inhabitants; what would his notions of us be? Would not he think that we are a species of beings made for quite different ends and purposes than what we really are? Must not he imagine that we are placed in this world to get riches and honours? Would not he think that it was our duty to toil after wealth, and station, and title? Nay, would not he believe we were forbidden poverty, by threats of eternal punishment, and enjoined to pursue our pleasures under pain of damnation? He would certainly imagine, that we were influenced by a scheme of duties, quite opposite to those which are indeed prescribed to us. And truly, according to such an imagination, he must conclude that we are a species of the most obedient creatures in the universe; that we are constant to our duty; and that we keep a steady eye on the end for which we were sent hither.

But how great would be his astonishment, when he learned that we were beings not designed to exist in this world above threescore

and ten years? and that the greatest part of this busy species fall short even of that age? How would he be lost in horror and admiration, when he should know that this set of creatures, who lay out all their endeavours for this life, which scarce deserves the name of existence, when, I say, he should know that this set of creatures are to exist to all eternity in another life, for which they make no preparations? Nothing can be a greater disgrace to reason, than that men, who are persuaded of these two different states of being, should be perpetually employed in providing for a life of threescore and ten years, and neglecting to make provision for that, which, after many myriads of years, will be still new, and still beginning; especially when we consider, that our endeavours for making ourselves great, or rich, or honourable, or whatever else we place our happiness in, may after all prove unsuccessful; whereas, if we constantly and sincerely endeavour to make ourselves happy in the other life, we are sure that our endeavours will succeed, and that we shall not be disappointed of our hope.

The following question is started by one of the schoolmen.²³

Supposing the whole body of the earth were a great ball or mass of the finest sand, and that a single grain or particle of this sand should be annihilated every thousand years. Supposing then that you had it in your choice to be happy all the while this prodigious mass of sand was consuming by this slow method till there was not a grain of it left, on condition you were to be miserable for ever

²³ Medieval scholastic theologians.

after; or, supposing that you might be happy for ever after, on condition you were to be miserable till the whole mass of sand were thus annihilated, at the rate of one sand in a thousand years: which of these two cases would you make your choice?

It must be confessed in this case, so many thousands of years are, to the imagination, as a kind of eternity, though in reality they do not bear so great a proportion to that duration which is to follow them, as a unit does to the greatest number which you can put together in figures, or as one of those sands to the supposed heap. Reason, therefore, tells us, without any manner of hesitation, which would be the better part in this choice. However, as I have before intimated, our reason might in such a case be overset by the imagination, as to dispose some persons to sink under the consideration of the great length of the first part of this duration, and of the great distance of that second duration which is to succeed it. The mind, I say, might give itself up to that happiness which is at hand, considering that it is so very near, and that it would last so very long. But when the choice we actually have before us is this, Whether we will choose to be happy for the space of only threescore and ten, nay, perhaps, of only twenty or ten years, I might say of only a day or an hour, and miserable to all eternity; or, on the contrary, miserable for this short term of years, and happy for a whole eternity; what words are sufficient to express that folly and want of consideration which in such a case makes a wrong choice?

I here put the case even at the worst, by supposing (what seldom happens) that a course of virtue makes us miserable in this life; but if we suppose (as it generally happens) that virtue would make us more happy, even in this life, than a contrary course of vice; how can we sufficiently admire the stupidity or madness of those persons who are capable of making so absurd a choice?

Every wise man, therefore, will consider this life only as it may conduce to the happiness of the other, and cheerfully sacrifice the pleasures of a few years to those of an eternity.

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9. On the Glories of Heaven

No. 580. Friday, August 13, 1712

————— *Si verbo audacia detur,
Non metnam magni dixisse palatia coeli.*

OVID, *Metamorphoses* 1.175.

This place, the brightest mansion of the sky,
I'll call the palace of the Deity.

DRYDEN.

"SIR,

"I Considered in my two last letters²⁴ that awful and tremendous subject, the Ubiquity or Omnipresence of the Divine Being. I have shewn that he is equally present in all places throughout the whole extent of infinite space. This doctrine is so agreeable to reason, that we meet with it in the writings of the enlightened heathens, as I might show at large, were it not already done by other hands. But though the Deity be thus essentially

²⁴ *Spectator* Nos. 565 and 571; Essays 5 and 6 here.

present through all the immensity of space, there is one part of it in which he discovers himself in a most transcendant and visible glory. This is that place which is marked out in Scripture under the different appellations of 'Paradise,' 'The third Heaven,' 'The Throne of God,' and 'The Habitation of his Glory.' It is here where the glorified body of our Saviour resides, and where all the celestial hierarchies, and the innumerable hosts of angels, are represented as perpetually surrounding the seat of God, with Hallelujahs and hymns of praise. This is that Presence of God, which some of the divines call his glorious, and others his majestic²⁵ presence. He is, indeed, as essentially present in all other places as in this, but it is here where he resides in a sensible magnificence, and in the midst of all those splendors which can affect the imagination of created beings.

"It is very remarkable that this opinion of God Almighty's presence in heaven, whether discovered by the light of nature, or by a general tradition from our first parents, prevails among all the nations of the world, whatsoever different notions they entertain of the Godhead. If you look into Homer, that is, the most ancient of the Greek writers, you see the supreme powers seated in the heavens, and encompassed with inferior deities, among whom the Muses are represented as singing incessantly about his throne. Who does not here see the main strokes and outlines of this great truth we are speaking of? The same doctrine is shadowed out in

²⁵ A superlative form of 'majestic.'

many other heathen authors, though at the same time, like several other revealed truths, dashed and adulterated with a mixture of fables and human inventions. But to pass over the notions of the Greeks and Romans, those more enlightened parts of the pagan world, we find there is scarce a people among the late discovered nations who are not trained up in an opinion, that heaven is the habitation of the Divinity whom they worship.

"As in Solomon's Temple there was the *Sanctum Sanctorum*, in which a visible Glory appeared among the figures of the Cherubims, and into which none but the high-priest himself was permitted to enter, after having made an atonement for the sins of the people; so if we consider the whole creation as one great temple, there is in it this Holy of Holies, into which the High Priest of our salvation entered, and took his place among angels and archangels, after having made a propitiation for the sins of mankind.²⁶

"With how much skill must the Throne of God be erected? With what glorious designs is that habitation beautified, which is contrived and built by Him who inspired Hiram with wisdom? [1 Kgs 7:13– 45] How great must be the majesty of that place, where the whole art of creation has been employed, and where God has chosen to show himself in the most magnificent manner? What must be the architecture of infinite power under the direction of

²⁶ This is a principal theme of Hebrews.

infinite wisdom? A spirit cannot but be transported, after an ineffable manner, with the sight of those objects, which were made to affect him by that Being who knows the inward frame of a soul, and how to please and ravish it in all its most secret powers and faculties. It is to this majestic Presence of God we may apply those beautiful expressions in holy writ: 'Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight.' [Job 25:5] The light of the sun, and all the glories of the world in which we live, are but as weak and sickly glimmerings, or rather darkness itself, in comparison of those splendors which encompass the Throne of God.

"As the glory of this place is transcendant beyond imagination, so probably is the extent of it. There is light behind light, and glory within glory. How far that space may reach, in which God thus appears in perfect majesty, we cannot possibly conceive. Though it is not infinite, it may be indefinite; and though not immeasurable in itself, it may be so with regard to any created eye or imagination. If he has made these lower regions of matter so inconceivably wide and magnificent for the habitation of mortal and perishable beings, how great may we suppose the courts of his house to be, where he makes his residence in a more especial manner, and displays himself in the fullness of his glory, among an innumerable company of angels, and spirits of just men made perfect?

"This is certain, that our imaginations cannot be raised too high, when we think on a place where Omnipotence and Omniscience have so signally exerted themselves, because that they are able to produce a scene infinitely more great and glorious than what we are able to imagine. It is not impossible but at the consummation of all things, these outward apartments of nature, which are now suited to those beings who inhabit them, may be taken in and added to that glorious place of which I am here speaking; and by that means made a proper habitation for beings who are exempt from mortality, and cleared of their imperfections: for so the scripture seems to intimate, when it speaks of new heavens and of a new earth, [Isa 65:17-25; Rev 21:1] wherein dwelleth righteousness.

"I have only considered this glorious place with regard to the sight, and imagination, though it is highly probable that our other senses may here likewise enjoy their highest gratifications. There is nothing which more ravishes and transports the soul, than harmony; and we have great reason to believe, from the descriptions of this place in Holy Scripture, that this is one of the entertainments of it. And if the soul of man can be so wonderfully affected with those strains of music, which human art is capable of producing, how much more will it be raised and elevated by those, in which is exerted the whole power of harmony! the senses are faculties of the human soul, though they cannot be employed, during this our vital union, without proper instruments in the body.

Why, therefore, should we exclude the satisfaction of these faculties, which we find by experience, are inlets of great pleasure to the soul, from among those entertainments which are to make up our happiness hereafter? why should we suppose that our hearing and seeing will not be gratified with those objects which are most agreeable to them, and which they cannot meet with in these lower regions of nature; 'objects which neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart of man to conceive? I knew a man in Christ (says St. Paul, speaking of himself) above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell, or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) such a one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not possible for man to utter.' [2 Cor 12: 2-4] By this is meant, that what he heard was so infinitely different from any thing which he had heard in this world, that it was impossible to express it in such words as might convey a notion of it to his hearers.

"It is very natural for us to take delight in inquiries concerning any foreign country, where we are some time or other to make our abode; and as we all hope to be admitted into this glorious place, it is both a laudable and useful curiosity, to get what informations we can of it, whilst we make use of revelation for our guide. When these everlasting doors shall be opened to us, we may be sure that the pleasures and beauties of this place will infinitely transcend our

present hopes and expectations, and that the glorious appearance of the Throne of God, will rise infinitely beyond whatever we are able to conceive of it. We might here entertain ourselves with many other speculations on this subject, from those several hints which we find of it in the Holy Scriptures; as whether they may not be different mansions and apartments of glory, to beings of different natures; whether as they excel one another in perfection, they are not admitted nearer to the Throne of the Almighty, and enjoy greater manifestations of his presence; whether there are not solemn times and occasions, when all the multitude of heaven celebrate the presence of their Maker in more extraordinary forms of praise and adoration; as Adam, though he had continued in a state of innocence, would, in the opinion of our divines, have kept holy the Sabbath-day, in a more particular manner than any other of the seven. These, and the like speculations, we may very innocently indulge, so long as we make use of them to inspire us with a desire of becoming inhabitants of this delightful place.

"I have in this, and in two foregoing letters, treated on the most serious subject that can employ the mind of man, the Omnipresence of the Deity: a subject which, if possible, should never depart from our meditations. We have considered the Divine Being, as he inhabits infinitude, as he dwells among his works, as he is present to the mind of man, and as he discovers himself in a more glorious manner among the regions of the blest. Such a consideration should be kept awake in us at all times, and in all

places, and possess our minds with a perpetual awe and reverence. It should be interwoven with all our thoughts and perceptions, and become one with the consciousness of our own being. It is not to be reflected on in the coldness of philosophy,²⁷ but ought to sink us into the lowest prostration before Him, who is so astonishingly great, wonderful, and holy."

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²⁷ i.e., abstract, speculative philosophy, not *love of Wisdom*.

10. On Eternity

No. 590. Monday, September 6, 1712

—————*Assiduo labuntur tempora motu
Non secus ac flumen. Neque enim consistere flumen,
Nec levis hora potest: sed ut unda impellitur unda,
Urgeturque prior venienti, urgetque priorem,
Tempora sic fugiunt pariter, pariterque sequuntur;
Et nova sunt semper. Nam quod fuit ante, relictum est;
Fitque quod haud fuerat: momentaque cuncta novantur.*

OVID, *Metamorphoses* 15.179

E'en times are in perpetual flux, and run,
Like rivers from their fountains, rolling on.
For time, no more than streams, is at a stay;
The flying hour is ever on her way:
And as the fountain still supplies their store,
The wave behind impels the wave before;
Thus in successive course the minutes run,
And urge their predecessor minutes on.
Still moving, ever knew: for former things
Are laid aside, like abdicated kings;
And ev'ry moment alters what is done,
And innovates some act, till then unknown.

DRYDEN.

WE consider infinite space as an expansion without a circumference: we consider eternity, or infinite duration, as a line that has neither a beginning nor an end. In our speculations of infinite space, we consider that particular place in which we exist, as a kind of centre to the whole expansion. In our speculations of eternity, we consider the time which is present to us as the middle which divides the whole line into two equal parts. For this reason, many witty authors compare the present time to an isthmus or narrow neck of land, that rises in the midst of an ocean, immeasurably diffused on either side of it.

Philosophy, and indeed common sense, naturally throws eternity under two divisions; which we may call in English, that eternity which is past, and that eternity which is to come. The learned terms of *aeternitas a parte ante*, and *aeternitas a parte post*, may be more amusing to the reader, but can have no other idea affixed to them than what is conveyed to us by those words, an eternity that is past, and an eternity that is to come. Each of these eternities is bounded at the one extreme; or, in other words, the former has an end, and the latter a beginning.

Let us first of all consider that eternity which is past, reserving that which is to come for the subject of another paper. The nature of this eternity is utterly inconceivable by the mind of man: our reason demonstrates to us that it 'has been,' but at the same time

can frame no idea of it, but what is big with absurdity and contradiction. We can have no other conception of any duration which is past, than that all of it was once present, and whatever was once present, is at some certain distance from us; and whatever is at any certain distance from us, be the distance never so remote, cannot be eternity. The very notion of any duration's being past, implies that it was once present; for the idea of being once present, is actually included in the idea of its being past. This, therefore, is a depth not to be sounded by human understanding. We are sure that there has been an eternity, and yet contradict ourselves when we measure this eternity by any notion which we can frame of it.

If we go to the bottom of this matter, we shall find, that the difficulties we meet with in our conceptions of eternity, proceed from this single reason, that we can have no other idea of any kind of duration, than that by which we ourselves, and all other created beings, do exist; which is a successive duration, made up of past, present, and to come. There is nothing which exists after this manner, all the parts of whose existence were not once actually present, and consequently may be reached by a certain number of years applied to it. We may ascend as high as we please, and employ our Being to that eternity which is to come, in adding millions of years to millions of years, and we can never come up to any fountain-head of duration, to any beginning in eternity: but at the same time we are sure, that whatever was once present, does lie

within the reach of numbers, though perhaps we can never be able to put enough of them together for that purpose. We may as well say, that any thing may be actually present in any part of infinite space, which does not lie at a certain distance from us, as that any part of infinite duration was once actually present, and does not also lie at some determined distance from us. The distance in both cases may be immeasurable and indefinite as to our faculties, but our reason tells us that it cannot be so in itself. Here, therefore, is that difficulty which human understanding is not capable of surmounting. We are sure that something must have existed from eternity, and are at the same time unable to conceive, that any thing which exists, according to our notion of existence, can have existed from eternity.

It is hard for a reader, who has not rolled this thought in his own mind, to follow in such an abstracted speculation; but I have been the longer on it, because I think it is a demonstrative argument of the Being and Eternity of a God: and though there are many other demonstrations which lead us to this great truth, I do not think we ought to lay aside any proofs in this matter which the light of reason has suggested to us, especially when it is such a one as has been urged by men famous for their penetration and force of understanding, and which appears altogether conclusive to those who will be at the pains to examine it.

Having thus considered that eternity which is past, according to the

best idea we can frame of it, I shall now draw up those several articles on this subject which are dictated to us by the light of reason, and which may be looked upon as the creed of a philosopher in this great point.

First, It is certain that no being could have made itself; for if so, it must have acted before it was, which is a contradiction.

Secondly, That, therefore, some being must have existed from all Eternity.

Thirdly, That whatever exists after the manner of created beings, or, according to any notions which we have of existence, could not have existed from Eternity.

Fourthly, That this Eternal Being must therefore be the great Author of Nature, 'the Ancient of Days,' who, being at infinite distance in his perfections from all finite and created beings, exists in a quite different manner from them, and in a manner of which they can have no idea.

I know that several of the schoolmen, who would not be thought ignorant of anything, have pretended to explain the manner of God's existence, by telling us, 'That he comprehends infinite duration in every moment; that Eternity is with him a *punctum stans*, a fixed point; or, which is as good sense, an Infinite Instant:

that nothing with reference to his existence is either past or to come.' To which the ingenious Mr. Cowley alludes in his description of heaven,

Nothing is there to come, and nothing past,
But an eternal NOW does always last.

For my own part, I look upon these propositions as words that have no ideas annexed to them; and think men had better own their ignorance, than advance doctrines by which they mean nothing, and which indeed are self-contradictory. We cannot be too modest in our disquisitions, when we meditate on him who is environed with so much glory and perfection, who is the Source of Being, the fountain of all that existence which we and his whole creation derive from him. Let us, therefore, with the utmost humility, acknowledge, that as some being must necessarily have existed from eternity, so this Being does exist after an incomprehensible manner, since it is impossible for a being to have existed from eternity after our manner or notions of existence. Revelation confirms these natural dictates of reason in the accounts which it gives us of the Divine existence, where it tells us, that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; that he is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending; that a thousand years are with him as one day, and one day as a thousand years; by which, and the like expressions, we are taught that his existence, with relation to time or duration, is infinitely different from the existence of any of his creatures, and consequently that it is

impossible for us to frame any adequate conceptions of it.

In the first revelation that he makes of his own Being, he entitles himself, 'I am that I am;' and when Moses desires to know what name he shall give him in his embassy to Pharaoh, he bids him say that, 'I am hath sent you.' Our great Creator, by this revelation of himself, does in a manner exclude every thing else from a real existence, and distinguishes himself from his creatures, as the only Being which truly and really exists. The ancient Platonic notion, which was drawn from speculations of eternity, wonderfully agrees with this revelation which God has made of himself. There is nothing, say they, which in reality exists, whose existence, as we call it, is pieced up of past, present and to come. Such a flitting and successive existence is rather a shadow of existence, and something which is like it, than existence itself. He only properly exists whose existence is entirely present; that is, in other words, who exists in the most perfect manner, and in such a manner as we have no idea of.

I shall conclude this speculation with one useful inference. How can we sufficiently prostrate ourselves and fall down before our Maker, when we consider that ineffable Goodness and Wisdom which contrived this existence for finite natures? What must be the overflowings of that Good-Will, which prompted our Creator to adapt existence to beings, in whom it is not necessary? especially when we consider, that he himself was before in the complete

possession of existence and of happiness, and in the full enjoyment of Eternity. What man can think of himself as called out and separated from nothing, of his being made a conscious, a reasonable, and a happy creature, in short, of being taken in as a sharer of Existence, and a kind of partner in Eternity, without being swallowed up in wonder, in praise, in adoration! It is, indeed, a thought too big for the mind of man, and rather to be entertained in the secrecy of devotion and in the silence of the soul than to be expressed by words. The Supreme Being has not given us powers or faculties sufficient to extol and magnify such unutterable goodness.

It is, however, some comfort to us, that we shall be always doing what we shall never be able to do, and that a work which cannot be finished, will, however, be the work of an eternity.

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11. Various Opinions of Future Happiness

No. 600. Wednesday, September 29, 1712.

——— *Solemque suum, sua sidera norunt.*
VIRGIL, *Æneid* 6.641.

Stars of their own, and their own sun, they know.
DRYDEN.

IHAVE always taken a particular pleasure in examining the opinions which men of different religion, different ages, and different countries, have entertained concerning the immortality of the soul, and the state of happiness which they promise themselves in another world. For whatever prejudices and errors human nature lies under; we find that either reason, or tradition from our first parents, has discovered to all people something in these great points which bears analogy to truth, and to the doctrines opened to us by divine revelation. I was lately discoursing on this subject with a learned person who has been very much conversant among the inhabitants of the more western parts of Afric.²⁸ Upon his conversing with several in that country,

²⁸ Greene remarks: "Some suppose his father...; and if so, this paper was written long before it was published, for L. Addison died 1703."

he tells me that their notions of heaven, or of a future state of happiness, is this, 'That every thing we there wish for will immediately present itself to us. We find, (say they) our souls are of such a nature that they require variety, and are not capable of being always delighted with the same objects. The Supreme Being, therefore, in compliance with this taste of happiness which he has planted in the soul of man, will raise up from time to time, (say they) every gratification which it is in the humour to be pleased with. If we wish to be in groves or bowers, among running streams or falls of water, we shall immediately find ourselves in the midst of such a scene as we desire. If we would be entertained with music and the melody of sounds, the concert rises upon our wish, and the whole region about us is filled with harmony. In short, every desire will be followed by fruition, and whatever a man's inclination directs him to, will be present with him. Nor is it material whether the Supreme Power *creates* in conformity to our wishes, or whether he only produces such a change in our imagination, as makes us believe ourselves conversant among those scenes which delight us. Our happiness will be the same, whether it proceed from external objects, or from the impressions of the Deity upon our own private fancies.' This is the account which I have received from my learned friend. Notwithstanding this system of belief be in general very chimerical and visionary, there is something sublime in its manner of considering the influence of a Divine Being on a human soul. It has also, like most other opinions of the heathen world upon these

important points, it has, I say, its foundation in truth, as it supposes the souls of good men after this life to be in a state of perfect happiness, that in this state there will be no barren hopes, nor fruitless wishes, and that we shall enjoy every thing we can desire. But the particular circumstance which I am most pleased with in this scheme, and which arises from a just reflection upon human nature, is that variety of pleasures which it supposes the souls of good men will be possessed of in another world. This I think highly probable from the dictates both of reason and revelation. The soul consists of many faculties, as the understanding and the will, with all the senses, both outward and inward; or, to speak more philosophically, the soul can exert herself in many different ways of action. She can understand, will, imagine, see, and hear, love, and discourse, and apply herself to many other the like exercises of different kinds and natures; but what is more to be considered, the soul is capable of receiving a most exquisite pleasure and satisfaction from the exercise of any of these its powers, when they are gratified with their proper objects; she can be entirely happy by the satisfaction of the memory, the sight, the hearing, or any other mode of perception. Every faculty is a distinct taste in the mind, and hath objects accommodated to its proper relish. Doctor Tillotson somewhere says, that he will not presume to determine in what consists the happiness of the blessed, because God Almighty is capable of making the soul happy by ten thousand different ways. Besides those several avenues to pleasure which the soul is endowed with in this life; it is not impossible,

according to the opinions of many eminent divines, but there may be new faculties in the souls of good men made perfect, as well as new senses in their glorified bodies. This we are sure of that there will be new objects offered to all those faculties which are essential to us.

We are, likewise, to take notice, that every particular faculty is capable of being employed on a very great variety of objects. The understanding, for example, may be happy in the contemplation of moral, natural, mathematical, and other kinds of truth. The memory, likewise, may turn itself to an infinite multitude of objects, especially when the soul shall have passed through the space of many millions of years, and shall reflect with pleasure on the days of eternity. Every other faculty may be considered in the same extent.

We cannot question, but that the happiness of a soul will be adequate to its nature, and that it is not endowed with any faculties which are to lie useless and unemployed. The happiness is to be the happiness of the whole man, and we may easily conceive to ourselves the happiness of the soul, whilst any one of its faculties is in the fruition of its chief good. The happiness may be of a more exalted nature, in proportion as the faculty employed is so; but as the whole soul acts in the exertion of any of its particular powers, the whole soul is happy in the pleasure which arises from any of its particular acts. For notwithstanding, as has been before hinted, and

as it has been taken notice of by one of the greatest modern philosophers, we divide the soul into several powers and faculties, there is no such division in the soul itself, since it is the whole soul that remembers, understands, wills, or imagines. Our manner of considering the memory, understanding, will, imagination, and the like faculties, is for the better enabling us to express ourselves in such abstracted subjects of speculation, not that there is any such division in the soul itself.

Seeing then that the soul has many different faculties, or, in other words, many different ways of acting; that it can be intensely pleased, or made happy, by all these different faculties, or ways of acting; that it may be endowed with several latent faculties, which it is not at present in a condition to exert; that we cannot believe the soul is endowed with any faculty which is of no use to it; that whenever any one of these faculties is transcendently pleased, the soul is in a state of happiness; and in the last place, considering that the happiness of another world is to be the happiness of the whole man; who can question, but that there is an infinite variety in those pleasures we are speaking of; and that this fulness of joy will be made up of all those pleasures which the nature of the soul is capable of receiving.

We shall be the more confirmed in this doctrine, if we observe the nature of variety, with regard to the mind of man. The soul does not care to be always in the same bent. The faculties relieve one

another by turns, and receive an additional pleasure from the novelty of those objects, about which they are conversant.

Revelation, likewise, very much confirms this notion, under the different views which it gives us of our future happiness. In the description of the Throne of God, it represents to us all those objects which are able to gratify the senses and imagination. In very many places, it intimates to us all the happiness which the understanding can possibly receive in that state, where all things shall be revealed to us, and we shall know, even as we are known; [1 Cor 13:12] the raptures of devotion, of divine love, the pleasure of conversing with our Blessed Saviour, with an innumerable host of angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect²⁹, are likewise revealed to us in several parts of the holy writings. There are also mentioned those hierarchies, or governments, in which the blessed shall be ranged one above another, and in which we may be sure a great part of our happiness will likewise consist; for it will not be there as in this world, where every one is aiming at power and superiority; but on the contrary, every one will find that station the most proper for him in which he is placed, and will probably think that he could not have been so happy in any other station. These, and many other particulars, are marked in divine revelation, as the several ingredients of our happiness in heaven, which all imply such a variety of joys, and such a gratification of

²⁹ On conversing with the spirits of just men cf. Plato, *Apology*, 40e–41c.

the soul in all its different faculties, as I have been here mentioning.

Some of the rabbins tell us, that the cherubims are a set of angels who know most, and the seraphims a set of angels who love most. Whether this distinction be not altogether imaginary, I shall not here examine; but it is highly probable, that among the spirits of good men, there may be some one who will be more pleased with the employment of one faculty than of another, and this, perhaps, according to those innocent and virtuous habits or inclinations which have here taken the deepest root.

I might here apply this consideration to the spirits of wicked men, with relation to the pain which they shall suffer in every one of their faculties, and the respective miseries which shall be appropriated to each faculty in particular. But leaving this to the reflection of my readers, I shall conclude, with observing how we ought to be thankful to our great Creator, and rejoice in the being which he has bestowed upon us, for having made the soul susceptible of pleasure by so many different ways. We see by what a variety of passages, joy and gladness may enter into the thoughts of man. How wonderfully a human spirit is framed, to imbibe its proper satisfactions, and taste the goodness of its Creator. We may, therefore, look into ourselves with rapture and amazement, and cannot sufficiently express our gratitude to Him, who has encompassed us with such profusion of blessings and opened in us

so many capacities of enjoying them.

There cannot be a stronger argument that God has designed us for a state of future happiness, and for that heaven which he has revealed to us, than that he has thus naturally qualified the soul for it, and made it a being capable of receiving so much bliss. He would never have made such faculties in vain, and have endowed us with powers that were not to be exerted on such objects as are suited to them. It is very manifest, by the inward frame and constitution of our minds, that he has adapted them to an infinite variety of pleasures and gratifications, which are not to be met with in this life. We should, therefore, at all times, take care that we do not disappoint this his gracious purpose and intention towards us, and make those faculties which he formed as so many qualifications for happiness and rewards, to be the instruments of pain and punishment.

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12. The Tale of Maraton

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Felices errore suo —————
LUCAN, 1.459

Happy in their mistake.

THE Americans believe that all creatures have souls, not only men and women, but brutes, vegetables, nay even the most inanimate things, as stocks and stones. They believe the same of all the works of art, as of knives, boats, looking-glasses: and that as any of these things perish, their souls go into another world, which is inhabited by the ghosts of men and women. For this reason they always place by the corpse of their dead friend a bow and arrows, that he may make use of the souls of them in the other world, as he did of their wooden bodies in this. How absurd soever such an opinion as this may appear, our European philosophers have maintained several notions altogether as improbable. Some of Plato's followers in particular, when they talk of the world of ideas³⁰, entertain us with substances and beings no less extravagant and chimerical. Many Aristotelians have likewise spoken as unintelligibly of their substantial forms. I shall

³⁰ Platonic Forms or Ideals.

only instance Albertus Magnus, who in his dissertation upon the loadstone, observing that fire will destroy its magnetic virtues, tells us that he took particular notice of one as it lay glowing amidst an heap of burning coals, and that he perceived a certain blue vapour to arise from it, which he believed might be the substantial form, that is, in our West Indian³¹ phrase, the soul of the loadstone.

There is a tradition among the Americans, that one of their countrymen descended in a vision to the great repository of souls, or, as we call it here, to the other world; and that upon his return he gave his friends a distinct account of everything he saw among those regions of the dead. A friend of mine, whom I have formerly mentioned,³² prevailed upon one of the interpreters of the Indian kings to inquire of them, if possible, what tradition they have among them of this matter: which, as well as he could learn by those many questions which he asked them at several times, was in substance as follows.

The visionary, whose name was Maraton, after having travelled for a long space under an hollow mountain, arrived at length on the confines of this world of spirits; but could not enter it by reason of a thick forest made up of bushes, brambles, and pointed thorns, so perplexed and interwoven with one another that it was impossible to find a passage through it. Whilst he was looking about for some

³¹ i.e., Native American.

³² Spectator No. 50.

track or pathway that might be worn in any part of it, he saw an huge lion couched under the side of it, who kept his eye upon him in the same posture as when he watches for his prey. The Indian immediately started back, whilst the lion rose with a spring, and leaped towards him. Being wholly destitute of all other weapons, he stooped down to take up an huge stone in his hand; but to his infinite surprise grasped nothing, and found the supposed stone to be only the apparition of one. If he was disappointed on this side, he was as much pleased on the other, when he found the lion, which had seized on his left shoulder, had no power to hurt him, and was only the ghost of that ravenous creature which it appeared to be. He no sooner got rid of his impotent enemy, but he marched up to the wood, and after having surveyed it for some time, endeavoured to press into one part of it that was a little thinner than the rest; when again, to his great surprise, he found the bushes made no resistance, but that he walked through briars and brambles with the same ease as through the open air; and, in short, that the whole wood was nothing else but a wood of shades. He immediately concluded, that this huge thicket of thorns and brakes was designed as a kind of fence or quickset hedge to the ghosts it enclosed; and that probably their soft substances might be torn by these subtle points and prickles, which were too weak to make any impressions in flesh and blood. With this thought he resolved to travel through this intricate wood; when by degrees he felt a gale of perfumes breathing upon him, that grew stronger and sweeter in proportion as he advanced. He had not proceeded much farther

when he observed the thorns and briars to end, and give place to a thousand beautiful green trees covered with blossoms of the finest scents and colours, that formed a wilderness of sweets, and were a kind of lining to those ragged scenes which he had before passed through. As he was coming out of this delightful part of the wood, and entering upon the plains it enclosed, he saw several horsemen rushing by him, and a little while after heard the cry of a pack of dogs. He had not listened long before he saw the apparition of a milk-white steed, with a young man on the back of it, advancing upon full stretch after the souls of about an hundred beagles that were hunting down the ghost of an hare, which ran away before them with an unspeakable swiftness. As the man on the milk-white steed came by him, he looked upon him very attentively, and found him to be the young Prince Nicharagua, who died about half a year before, and by reason of his great virtues, was at that time lamented over all the western parts of America.

He had no sooner got out of the wood, but he was entertained with such a landscape of flowery plains, green meadows, running streams, sunny hills, and shady vales, as were not to be represented by his own expressions, nor, as he said, by the conceptions of others. This happy region was peopled with innumerable swarms of spirits, who applied themselves to exercises and diversions according as their fancies led them. Some of them were tossing the figure of a quoit; others were pitching the shadow of a bar; others were breaking the apparition of a horse; and multitudes employing

themselves upon ingenious handicrafts with the souls of departed utensils; for that is the name which in the Indian language they give their tools when they are burnt or broken. As he travelled through this delightful scene, he was very often tempted to pluck the flowers that rose everywhere about him in the greatest variety and profusion, having never seen several of them in his own country. But he quickly found that though they were objects of his sight, they were not liable to his touch. He at length came to the side of a great river, and being a good fisherman himself, stood upon the banks of it some time to look upon an angler that had taken a great many shapes of fishes, which lay flouncing up and down by him.

I should have told my reader that this Indian had been formerly married to one of the greatest beauties of his country, by whom he had several children. This couple were so famous for their love and constancy to one another, that the Indians to this day, when they give a married man joy of his wife, wish that they may live together like Maraton and Yaratilda. Maraton had not stood long by the fisherman when he saw the shadow of his beloved Yaratilda, who had for some time fixed her eye upon him before he discovered her. Her arms were stretched out towards him, floods of tears ran down her eyes; her looks, her hands, her voice called him over to her ; and at the same time seemed to tell him that the river was impassable. Who can describe the passion made up of joy, sorrow, love, desire, astonishment, that rose in the Indian upon the

sight of his dear Yaratilda? He could express it by nothing but his tears, which ran like a river down his cheeks as he looked upon her. He had not stood in this posture long before he plunged into the stream that lay before him, and finding it to be nothing but the phantom of a river, walked on the bottom of it till he arose on the other side. At his approach Yaratilda flew into his arms, whilst Maraton wished himself disencumbered of that body which kept her from his embraces. After many questions and endearments on both sides, she conducted him to a bower which she had dressed with her own hands, with all the ornaments that could be met with in those blooming regions. She had made it gay beyond imagination, and was every day adding something new to it. As Maraton stood astonished at the unspeakable beauty of her habitation, and ravished with the fragrancy that came from every part of it, Yaratilda told him that she was preparing this bower for his reception, as well knowing that his piety to his God, and his faithful dealing towards men, would certainly bring him to that happy place whenever his life should be at an end. She then brought two of her children to him, who died some years before, and resided with her in the same delightful bower; advising him to breed up those others which were still with him in such a manner that they might hereafter all of them meet together in this happy place.

The tradition tells us further that he had afterwards a sight of those dismal habitations which are the portion of ill men after death, and

mentions several molten seas of gold in which were plunged the souls of barbarous Europeans, who put to the sword so many thousands of poor Indians for the sake of that precious metal. But having already touched upon the chief points of this tradition, and exceeded the measure of my paper, I shall not give any further account of it.

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