

NUMB. 52. SATURDAY, September 15, 1750.

——*Quoties flenti Theseius heros**Siste modum, dixit, neque enim fortuna querenda**Sola tua est, similes aliorum respice casus,**Mitius ista feres.*

OVID.

AMONG the various methods of consolation, to which the miseries inseparable from our present state have given occasion, it has been, as I have already remarked, recommended by some writers to put the sufferer in mind of heavier pressures, and more excruciating calamities, than those of which he has himself reason to complain.

THIS has, in all ages, been directed and practised; and, in conformity to this custom, Lipsius, the great modern master of the Stoic philosophy, has, in his celebrated treatise on *steadiness of mind*, endeavoured to fortify the breast against too much sensibility of misfortune, by enumerating the great evils which have in former ages fallen upon the world, the devastation of wide-extended regions, the sack of cities, and the massacre of nations.

And

And the common voice of the multitude uninstructed by precept, and unprejudiced by authority, which, in questions that relate to the heart of man, is, in my opinion, more decisive than the learning of Lipsius, seems to justify the efficacy of this procedure; for one of the first comforts which one neighbour administers to another, is a relation of the like infelicity, combined with circumstances of greater bitterness.

BUT this medicine of the mind is like many remedies applied to the body, of which, though we see the effects, most are unacquainted with the manner of operation, and of which, therefore, some, who are unwilling to suppose any thing out of the reach of their own sagacity, have been inclined to doubt whether they have really those virtues for which they are celebrated, and whether their reputation is not the mere gift of fancy, prejudice and credulity.

CONSOLATION, or comfort, are words which, in their proper acceptation, signify some alleviation of that pain to which it is not in our power to afford the proper and adequate remedy; they imply rather an augmentation

mentation of the power of bearing, than a diminution of the burthen. A prisoner is relieved by him that sets him at liberty, but receives comfort from such as suggests considerations by which he is enabled to be more patient under the inconvenience of confinement. To that grief which arises from a great loss he only brings the true remedy, who makes his friend's condition the same as before; but he may be properly termed a comforter, who by his counsel and persuasions extenuates the pain of poverty, and shews, in the style of *Hesiod*, that *half is more than the whole*.

It is, perhaps, not immediately obvious, how it can lull the memory of misfortune, or appease the throbbings of anguish, to hear that others are more miserable; others, perhaps, unknown or wholly indifferent, whose prosperity raises no envy, and whose fall can gratify no resentment. Some topics of comfort arising, like that which gave hope and spirit to the captive of Sesostris, from the perpetual vicissitudes of life, and mutability of human affairs, may as properly raise the dejected as depress the proud, and have an immediate and necessary tendency to exhilarate and revive. But how can it avail the man

who languishes in the gloom of sorrow, without prospect of emerging into the sunshine of cheerfulness, to hear that others are sunk yet deeper in the dungeon of misery, shackled with heavier chains, and surrounded with darker desperation?

THE solace arising from this consideration seems, indeed, the weakest of all others, and is, perhaps, never properly applied, but in cases where there is no place for reflexions of more speedy and pleasing efficacy. But even from such calamities life is by no means free; a thousand ills incurable, a thousand losses irreparable, a thousand difficulties insurmountable, are known, or will be known, by all the sons of men. Native deformity cannot be rectified, a dead friend cannot return, and the hours of youth trifled away in folly, or lost in sickness, cannot be restored.

UNDER the oppression of such melancholy it has been found useful to take a survey of the world, to contemplate the various scenes of distress in which mankind are struggling round us, and acquaint ourselves with the *terribiles visu formæ*, the various shapes of misery, which make havock of terrestrial happiness,

range

range all corners almost without restraint, trample down our hopes at the hour of harvest, and when we have built our schemes to the top, ruin their foundations.

THE first effect of this meditation is, that it furnishes a new employment for the mind, and engages the passions to remoter objects; as kings have sometimes freed themselves from the turbulence of a subject too haughty to be governed, and too powerful to be crushed, by posting him in a distant province, till his popularity has subsided, or his pride been repressed. The attention is dissipated by variety, and acts more weakly upon any single part, as that torrent may be drawn off to different channels, which, pouring down in one collected body, cannot be resisted. This species of comfort is, therefore, useless in severe paroxysms of corporal pain, when the mind is every instant called back to misery, and in the first shock of any sudden evil; but will certainly be of use against encroaching melancholy, and a settled habit of gloomy thoughts.

It is further advantageous as it supplies us with opportunities of making comparisons in our own favour. We know that very little

of the pain, or pleasure, which does not begin and end in our senses, is otherwise than relative; we are rich or poor, great or little, in proportion to the number that excel us, or fall beneath us, in any of these respects; and therefore, a man, whose uneasiness arises from reflection on any misfortune that throws him below those with whom he was once equal, is comforted by finding that he is not yet lowest.

BUT there is another kind of comparison, less tending towards the vice of envy, very well illustrated by an old poet, whose system will not afford many reasonable motives to content. ‘It is’, says he, ‘pleasing to look
 ‘from shore upon the tumults of a storm,
 ‘and to see a ship struggling with the billows;
 ‘it is pleasing, not because the pain of another can give us delight, but because we
 ‘have a stronger impression of the happiness
 ‘of safety.’ Thus when we look abroad, and behold the multitudes that are groaning under evils heavier than those which we have experienced, we shrink back to our own state, and instead of repining that so much must be felt, learn to rejoice that we have not more to feel.

By this observation of the miseries of others, fortitude is strengthened, and the mind brought to a more extensive knowledge of her own powers. As the heroes of action catch the flame from one another, so they to whom providence has allotted the harder task of suffering with calmness and dignity, may animate themselves by the remembrance of those evils which have been laid on others, perhaps naturally as weak as themselves, and bear up with vigour and resolution against their own oppressions, when they see it yet possible that more severe afflictions may be born.

THERE is still another reason why, to many minds, the relation of other mens' infelicity may give a lasting and continual relief. Some, not well instructed in the measures by which providence distributes happiness, are perhaps misled by divines, who, as Bellarmine makes temporal prosperity one of the characters of the true church, have represented wealth and ease as the certain concomitants of virtue, and the unfailing result of the divine approbation. Such sufferers are dejected in their misfortunes, not so much for what they feel, as for what they dread; not because

they cannot support the sorrows, or endure the wants, of their present condition, but because they consider them as only the beginnings of more sharp and more lasting pains. To these mourners it is an act of the highest charity to represent the calamities which not only virtue has suffered, but virtue has incurred; to inform them that one evidence of a future state is the uncertainty of any present reward for goodness; and to remind them, from the highest authority, of the distresses and penury of men *of whom the world was not worthy.*

NUMB. 53. TUESDAY, Sept. 18, 1750.

Φείδιο τῶν κτεάνων.

Epigram. Vet.

THERE is scarcely, among those evils to which human life is exposed, any so generally dreaded as poverty. Every other species of misery, those, who are not much accustomed to disturb the present moment with reflexion, can easily forget, because it is not always forced upon their regard: but it is impossible to pass a day or an hour in the confluxes