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MISERY IN LIFE
NOT MORE PREVALENT THAN
HAPPINESS.

THE various complaints of mankind would seem at first sight to confirm an opinion, which has often prevailed, 'that in the course of human life, there is more misery than happiness.' But having never subscribed to this opinion myself, so I shall endeavour to convince my readers, that it is erroneous, and that if happiness does not absolutely exceed misery in the world, yet at least the portion is nearly equal. Let us first consider by whom this doctrine is chiefly advanced; and we shall find it by those, who have communicated their discontented thoughts in writing to the public; for in conversation, few men wish to represent themselves less happy than they are. It is therefore, to the class of authors, that we must trace this melancholly observation: and I will allow, that if any profession be more miserable than another, it is that of authorship, from the poor drudge who writes a paragraph in a garter, to that great, and rich, and royal author, who declared that 'increase of wisdom was increase of sorrow.' For the man who has time and abilities to write, has also time and abilities to think.

The idle speculatist, whether groaning under the pressure of poverty, or gasping on the pinnacle of affluence, will occasionally be led to feel the emptiness of all human enjoyments. and

complain with Solomon, that 'all is vanity.' He will look back on attempts, in which he has failed; with vexation, and on those, in which he has succeeded, with contempt, at their little worth: he will look forward with chilling fear at future hopes, and shrink from undertakings accompanied with hazard. Yet, amidst the disgust of retrospection, and the gloom of hopeless prospects, there will be always something to solicit his present attention, some trifling engagement, or some frivolous avocation, that may enable him at least to enjoy the present moment; and if he seriously reflect upon his feelings, he will perceive, that he is very seldom, indeed, unhappy at what has happened to him, but rather at the dread of what may happen. The Spectator has observed, that were a man's sorrows and disquietudes to be summed up at the end of his life, it would be generally found, that he had suffered more from the apprehensions of such evils as had never happened, than from the evils that had really befallen him; and he adds, that 'of those evils which had really befallen him, many have been more painful in the prospect, than by their actual pressure.' This observation holds good through all the stages and conditions of life, whether the evils be real or imaginary, whether they proceed from mental or corporeal affections. I do not pretend to assert, that there is no evil in bodily pain; but whoever

has experienced much of it, must confess, that it is never continued or unabating. The great dispenser both of good and evil, has so formed our bodies, that the most excruciating agonies have moments of remission: and the pains, of the gout, the stone, or of child-birth, are frequently relieved by natural intervals of mitigation, without the assistance of laudanum, which never fails to give temporary ease from pain: and when the body is again restored to health, and freed from torture, to look back on past sufferings is one of the greatest sources of human enjoyment. I am acquainted with a gentleman, who, amidst ample possessions, having little to excite his hopes or fears, is occasionally apt to become listless and dissatisfied with life, till a severe fit of the gout reminds him of his happiness, an ardent sense of which he most gratefully expresses at the termination of every paroxysm. Thus it is with the mind also. From whatever source our misery proceeds, it is never without alleviation, if we will admit it.

'Tis not the actual existence of present calamity, but the anticipation of its consequences, that afflicts and tortures us.— The loss of a friend presents us with a view of solitude and privation of his future conversation, in which we might never again be delighted. The loss of a child puts a period to hopes, which might never be realized, had the child survived. The