

# Chapter XVIII: The Prince Finds a Wise and Happy Man

As he was one day walking in the street, he saw a spacious building which all were, by the open doors, invited to enter: he followed the stream of people, and found it a hall or school of [\[infopopup:johnson\\_rasselas\\_xviii\\_declamati\]](#) , in which professors read lectures to their auditory. He fixed his eye upon a sage raised above the rest, who discoursed with great energy on the government of the passions. His look was venerable, his action graceful, his pronunciation clear, and his diction elegant. He [\[infopopup:johnson\\_rasselas\\_xviii\\_shewed\]](#) , with great strength of sentiment, [127] and variety of illustration, that human nature is degraded and debased, when the lower faculties predominate over the higher; that when fancy, the parent of passion, usurps the dominion of the mind, nothing ensues but the natural effect of unlawful government, perturbation and confusion; that she betrays the fortresses of the intellect to rebels, and excites her children to sedition against reason their lawful sovereign. He compared reason to the sun, of which the light is constant, uniform, and lasting; and fancy to a meteor, of bright but transitory lustre, irregular in its motion, and [\[infopopup:johnson\\_rasselas\\_xviii\\_delusive\]](#) .

He then communicated the various precepts given from time to time for the conquest of passion, and displayed the [128] happiness of those who had obtained the important victory, after which man is no longer the slave of fear, nor the fool of hope; is no more emaciated by envy, inflamed by anger, emasculated by tenderness, or depressed by grief; but walks on calmly through the tumults or the privacies of life, as the sun pursues alike his course through the calm or the stormy sky.

He enumerated many examples of heroes immovable by pain or pleasure, who looked with indifference on those modes or accidents to which the vulgar give the names of good and evil. He exhorted his hearers to lay aside their prejudices, and arm themselves against the shafts of malice or misfortune, by invulnerable patience; concluding, that [129] this state only was happiness, and that this happiness was in every one's power.

Rasselas listened to him with the veneration due to the instructions of a superiour being, and, waiting for him at the door, humbly implored the liberty of visiting so great a master of true wisdom. The lecturer hesitated a moment, when Rasselas put a purse of gold into his hand, which he received with a mixture of joy and wonder.

"I have found, said the prince, at his return to [\[infopopup:johnson\\_rasselas\\_xviii\\_imalac\]](#) , a man who can teach all that is necessary to be known, who, from the unshaken throne of rational fortitude, looks down on the scenes of life changing beneath him. He speaks, and attention watches his lips. He reasons, and conviction closes his periods. This man shall be my future guide: I will learn his doctrines, and imitate his life."

"Be not too hasty, said Imlac, to trust, or to admire, the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels, but [\[infopopup:johnson\\_rasselas\\_xviii\\_they\]](#) ."

Rasselas, who could not conceive how any man could reason so forcibly without feeling the cogency of his own arguments, paid his visit in a few days, and was denied admission. He had now learned the power of money, and made his way by a piece of gold to the inner apartment, where he found the philosopher in a room half darkened, with his eyes misty, and his face pale. "Sir, said he, you are come at a time when all human friendship [131] is useless; what I suffer cannot be remedied, what I have lost cannot be supplied. My daughter,

my only daughter, from whose tenderness I expected all the comforts of my age, died last night of a fever. My views, my purposes, my hopes are at an end: I am now a lonely being disunited from society.”

“Sir, said the prince, mortality is an event by which a wife man can never be surprised: we know that death is always near, and it should therefore always be expected.” “Young man, answered the philosopher, you speak like one that has never felt the pangs of separation.” “Have you the forgot the precepts, said Raffelas, which you so powerfully enforced? Has wisdom no strength to arm the heart against calamity? Consider, that [132] external things are naturally variable, but truth and reason are always the fame.” “What comfort, said the mourner, can truth and reason afford me? of what effect are they now, but to tell me, that my daughter will not be restored?”

The prince, whose humanity would not suffer him to insult misery with reproof, went away convinced of the emptiness of rhetorical found, and the inefficacy of polished periods and studied sentences.

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