

Chapter XXV. The Princess Pursues Her Inquiry with More Diligence than Success

THE princess, in the mean time, insinuated herself into many families; for there are few doors, through which liberality, joined with good humour, cannot find its way. The daughters of many houses were airy and chearful, but Nekayah had been too long accustomed to the conversation of Imlac and her brother to be much pleased with childish levity and prattle which had no meaning. She found their thoughts narrow, their wishes low, and their merriment [162] often artificial. Their pleasures, poor as they were, could not be preserved pure, but were embittered by petty competitions and worthless emulation. They were always jealous of the beauty of each other; of a quality to which solicitude can add nothing, and from which detraction can take nothing away. Many were in love with triflers like themselves, and many fancied that they were in love when in truth they were only idle. Their affection was seldom fixed on sense or virtue, and therefore seldom ended but in vexation. Their grief, however, like their joy, was transient; every thing floated in their mind unconnected with the past or future, so that one desire easily gave way to another, as a second stone cast into the water effaces and confounds the circles of the first. [163]

With these girls she played as with inoffensive animals, and found them proud of her [infopopup:Countenance] ;, and weary of her company.

But her purpose was to examine more deeply, and her affability easily persuaded the hearts that were swelling with sorrow to discharge their secrets in her ear: and those whom hope flattered, or prosperity delighted, often courted her to partake their pleasures.

The princess and her brother commonly met in the evening in a private summer-house on the bank of the Nile, and related to each other the occurrences of the day. As they were fitting together, the princess cast her eyes upon the river that flowed before her. “Answer, said she, great [164] [\[infopopup:Nile\]](#) of waters, thou that rollest thy floods through eighty nations, to the invocations of the daughter of thy native king, Tell me if thou waterest, through all thy course, a single habitation from which thou dost not hear the murmurs of complaint?”

“You are then, said Rasselas, not more successful in private houses than I have been in courts.” “I have, since the last partition of our provinces, said the princess, enabled myself to enter familiarly into many families, where there was the fairest show of prosperity and peace, and know not one house that is not haunted by some fury that destroys its quiet.

“I [165] did not seek ease among the poor, because I concluded that there it could not be found. But I saw many poor whom I had supposed to live in affluence. Poverty has, in large cities, very different appearances: it is often concealed in splendour, and often in extravagance. It is the care of a very great part of mankind to conceal their indigence from the rest: they support themselves by temporary expedients, and every day is lost in contriving for the morrow.

“This, however, was an evil, which, though frequent, I saw with less pain, because I could relieve it. Yet some have refused my bounties; more offended with my quickness to detect their wants, than pleased with my readiness to [\[infopopup:assistance\]](#) them: and others, whose [\[infopopup:urgent\]](#) compelled [166] them to admit my kindness, have never been able to forgive their benefactress. Many however, have been sincerely grateful without the ostentation of gratitude, or the hope of other favours.”

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME