

Employment of our dead unactive Hours, and which I shall only mention in general to be the Pursuit of Knowledge. L



N<sup>o</sup> 94. Monday, June 18.

————— *Hoc est*  
*Vivere bis, vitâ posse priore frui.*

Mart.

THE last Method which I propos'd in my *Saturday's* Paper, for filling up those empty Spaces of Life which are so tedious and burdensome to idle People, is the employing our selves in the Pursuit of Knowledge. I remember Mr. *Boyle*, speaking of a certain Mineral, tells us, That a Man may consume his whole Life in the Study of it, without arriving at the Knowledge of all its Qualities. The Truth of it is, there is not a single Science, or any Branch of it, that might not furnish a Man with Business for Life, though it were much longer than it is.

I shall not here engage on those beaten Subjects of the Usefulness of Knowledge, nor of the Pleasure and Perfection it gives the Mind, nor on the Methods of attaining it, nor recommend any particular Branch of it, all which have been the Topicks of many other Writers; but shall indulge my self in a Speculation that is more uncommon, and may therefore perhaps be more entertaining.

I have before shewn how the unemployed Parts of Life appear long and tedious, and shall here endeavour to shew how those Parts of Life which are exercis'd in Study, Reading, and the Pursuits of Knowledge, are long but not tedious, and by that Means discover a Method of lengthening our Lives, and at the same time of turning all the Parts of them to our Advantage.

Mr. *Locke* observes " That we get the Idea of Time, " or Duration, by reflecting on that Train of Ideas which " succeed one another in our Minds: That for this Reason, when we sleep soundly without dreaming, we " have

“ have no Perception of Time, or the Length of it,  
 “ whilst we sleep; and that the Moment wherein we leave  
 “ off to think, till the Moment we begin to think again,  
 “ seem to have no Distance.” To which the Author adds,  
 “ And so I doubt not but it would be to a waking Man,  
 “ if it were possible for him to keep only one *Idea* in his  
 “ Mind, without Variation, and the Succession of others;  
 “ and we see, that one who fixes his Thoughts very in-  
 “ tently on one thing, so as to take but little Notice of the  
 “ Succession of *Ideas* that pass in his Mind whilst he is  
 “ taken up with that earnest Contemplation, lets slip  
 “ out of his Account a good Part of that Duration, and  
 “ thinks that Time shorter than it is.

WE might carry this Thought further, and consider a Man as, on one Side, shortening his Time by thinking on nothing, or but a few things; so, on the other, as lengthening it, by employing his Thoughts on many Subjects, or by entertaining a quick and constant Succession of Ideas. Accordingly Monsieur *Mallebranche*, in his *Inquiry after Truth*, (which was published several Years before Mr. *Locke's Essay on Human Understanding*) tells us, That it is possible some Creatures may think Half an Hour as long as we do a thousand Years; or look upon that Space of Duration which we call a Minute, as an Hour, a Week, a Month, or a whole Age.

THIS Notion of Monsieur *Mallebranche* is capable of some little Explanation from what I have quoted out of Mr. *Locke*; for if our Notion of Time is produced by our reflecting on the Succession of Ideas in our Mind, and this Succession may be infinitely accelerated or retarded, it will follow, that different Beings may have different Notions of the same Parts of Duration, according as their Ideas, which we suppose are equally distinct in each of them, follow one another in a greater or less Degree of Rapidity.

THERE is a famous Passage in the *Alcoran*, which looks as if *Mahomet* had been possessed of the Notion we are now speaking of. It is there said, That the Angel *Gabriel* took *Mahomet* out of his Bed one Morning to give him a Sight of all Things in the Seven Heavens, in Paradise, and in Hell, which the Prophet took a distinct View of; and after having held Ninety thou-



and Conferences with God, was brought back again to his Bed. All this, says the *Alcoran*, was transacted in so small a Space of Time, that *Mahomet* at his Return found his Bed still warm, and took up an Earthen Pitcher, (which was thrown down at the very Instant that the Angel *Gabriel* carried him away) before the Water was all spilt.

THERE is a very pretty Story in the *Turkish* Tales which relates to this Passage of that famous Impostor, and bears some Affinity to the Subject we are now upon. A Sultan of *Egypt*, who was an Infidel, used to laugh at this Circumstance in *Mahomet's* Life, as what was altogether impossible and absurd: But conversing one Day with a great Doctor in the Law, who had the Gift of working Miracles, the Doctor told him he would quickly convince him of the Truth of this Passage in the History of *Mahomet*, if he would consent to do what he should desire of him. Upon this the Sultan was directed to place himself by an huge Tub of Water, which he did accordingly; and as he stood by the Tub amidst a Circle of his great Men, the holy Man bid him plunge his Head into the Water, and draw it up again: The King accordingly thrust his Head into the Water, and at the same time found himself at the Foot of a Mountain on a Sea-Shore. The King immediately began to rage against his Doctor for this Piece of Treachery and Witchcraft; but at length, knowing it was in vain to be angry, he set himself to think on proper Methods for getting a Livelihood in this strange Country: Accordingly he applied himself to some People whom he saw at Work in a Neighbouring Wood; these People conducted him to a Town that stood at a little Distance from the Wood, where, after some Adventures, he married a Woman of great Beauty and Fortune. He lived with this Woman so long till he had by her seven Sons and seven Daughters: He was afterwards reduced to great Want, and forced to think of plying in the Streets as a Porter for his Livelihood. One Day as he was walking alone by the Sea-side, being seized with many melancholy Reflexions upon his former and his present State of Life, which had raised a Fit of Devotion in him, he threw off his Clothes with a Design to wash himself, according to the Custom of the *Mahometans*, before he said his Prayers.

AFTER



AFTER his first Plunge into the Sea, he no sooner raised his Head above the Water but he found himself standing by the Side of the Tub, with the great Men of his Court about him, and the holy Man at his Side. He immediately upbraided his Teacher for having sent him on such a Course of Adventures, and betrayed him into so long a State of Misery and Servitude; but was wonderfully surprized when he heard that the State he talked of was only a Dream and Delusion; that he had not stirred from the Place where he then stood; and that he had only dipped his Head into the Water, and immediately taken it out again.

THE *Mahometan* Doctor took this Occasion of instructing the Sultan, that nothing was impossible with God; and that *He*, with whom a Thousand Years are but as one Day, can, if he pleases, make a single Day, nay a single Moment, appear to any of his Creatures as a Thousand Years.

I shall leave my Reader to compare these Eastern Fables with the Notions of those two great Philosophers whom I have quoted in this Paper; and shall only, by way of Application, desire him to consider how we may extend Life beyond its natural Dimensions, by applying our selves diligently to the Pursuits of Knowledge.

THE Hours of a wise Man are lengthened by his Ideas, as those of a Fool are by his Passions: The Time of the one is long, because he does not know what to do with it; so is that of the other, because he distinguishes every Moment of it with useful or amusing Thoughts; or in other Words, because the one is always wishing it away, and the other always enjoying it.

HOW different is the View of past Life, in the Man who is grown old in Knowledge and Wisdom, from that of him who is grown old in Ignorance and Folly? The latter is like the Owner of a barren Country that fills his Eye with the Prospect of naked Hills and Plains, which produce nothing either profitable or ornamental; the other beholds a beautiful and spacious Landskip, divided into delightful Gardens, green Meadows, fruitful Fields, and can scarce cast his Eye on a single Spot of his Possessions, that is not covered with some beautiful Plant or Flower.