

Chapter XLII: The Opinion of the Astronomer is Explained and Justified

" Hear therefore, what I shall impart, with attention, such as the welfare of a world requires. If the task of a king be considered as difficult, who has the care only of a few millions, to whom he cannot do much good or harm, what must be the anxiety of him, on whom depends the action of the elements, and the great gifts of light and heat!--Hear me therefore with attention.

" I have diligently considered the position of the earth and fun, and formed [120] innumerable schemes in which I changed their situation. I have sometimes turned aside the axis of the earth, and sometimes varied the ecliptick of the fun : but I have found it impossible to make a disposition by which the world may be advantaged ; what one region gains, another loses by any imaginable alteration, even without considering the distant parts of the solar system with which we are unacquainted. Do not, therefore, in thy administration of the year, indulge thy pride by innovation ; do not please thyself with thinking that thou canst make thyself renowned to all future ages, by disordering the seasons. The memory of mischief is no desirable fame. Much less will it become thee to let kindness. or interest prevail. Never rob other [121] countries of rain to pour it on thine own. For us the Nile is sufficient."

" I promised that when I possessed the power, I would use it with inflexible integrity, and he dismissed me, pressing my hand."

" My heart, said he, will be now at rest, and my benevolence will no more destroy my quiet : I have found a man of wisdom and virtue, to whom I can chearfully bequeath the inheritance of the sun." The prince heard this narration with very serious regard, but the princess smiled, and Pekuah convulsed herself with laughter.

" Ladies, said Imlac, to mock the heaviest of human afflictions is neither charitable nor wise. Few can attain this man's knowledge, and [122] few practise his virtues ; but all may suffer his calamity. Of the uncertainties of our present state, the most dreadful and alarming is the uncertain continuance of reason." The princess was recollected, and the favourite was abashed. Rasselas, more deeply affected, enquired of Imlac, whether he thought such maladies of the mind frequent, and how they were contracted. [123]