

# ENGLISH LITERATURE (HONS)

## SEM 3. CC : 6

### TEXT

#### Recollections of Childhood

Till ate those among mankind. can enjoy no relish of their being. except the world I have acquainted all that relates to them. and think thing lost that passes unobserved; but others find a solid delight stealing by the crowd, and modelling their life after such a . ; IS as much above the approbation as the practice of the vulgar. Life being too short to give instances great enough of true friendship or good will. some sages I have thought it proper to preserve a certain reverence for the names of their deceased friends. and have withdrawn themselves from the rest of the world at certain seasons. to commemorate in their own thoughts such of their acquaintances who have gone before them out of this life. And indeed. when we are advanced in years. there is not a more pleasant entertainment, than to recollect in a gloomy moment the many we have parted with. that have been dear and agreeable to us. and to cast a melancholy thought or two after those. In short, perhaps, we have indulged ourselves in whole nights of mirth and jollity. With such inclinations in my heart. I went to my closet yesterday in the evening, and resolved to be sorrowful: upon which occasion I could not but look with disdain upon myself. that though all the reasons which I had to lament the loss of many of my friends are now as forcible as at the moment of their departure, yet did not my heart swell with the same sorrow which I felt at the time; but I could, without tears, reflect upon many pleasing adventures I have had with some, who have long been blended with common earth. Though it is by the benefit of nature. that length of time thus blots out the violence of afflictions; yet, with tempers too much given to pleasure, it is almost necessary to revive the old places of grief in our memory; and ponder step by step on past life. to lead the mind into that sobriety of

thought which poises the heart. and makes it beat with due time, without being quickened desire, or retarded with despair,



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from Its proper and equal motion. When we up a clock that is out of order. to make it go well for the future, we do not immediately set the hand to the present instant, but we make it strike the round of all its hours. before it can recover the regularity of its time. such. thought I, shall be my method this evening; and since it is that day of the year I dedicate to the memory of such in another life as I much delighted in when living, an hour or two shall be sacred to sorrow and their memory, while I run over all the melancholy circumstances of this kind which have occurred to me in my whole life.

The first sense of sorrow I ever knew was upon the death of my father. at time I was not quite five years of age; but was rather attracted at that all the house meant, than possessed with a real understanding nobody was willing to play with me. I remember I went into the room where his body lay, and my mother sat weeping alone by it. I had my battledore in my hand, and fell a-beating the coffin, and calling Papa; for, I know not how, I had some slight idea that he was locked up there. My mother caught me in her arms, and, transported beyond all patience of the silent grief she as before in, she almost smothered me in her embraces; and told me in a flood of tears, Papa could not hear me, and would play with me no more, for they were going to put him under ground. whence he could never come to us again. She was a very beautiful woman, of a noble spirit, and there was a dignity in her grief amidst all the wildness of her transport, which, methought, struck me with an instinct of sorrow, that, before I was sensible of what it was to grieve, seized my very soul, and has made pity the weakness of my heart ever since. The mind in infancy is, methinks, like the body in embryo; and receives impressions so forcible, that they are as hard to be removed by reason, as any mark with which a child is born is to be taken away by any future application. Hence it is. that good nature in me is no merit; but having been so frequently overwhelmed with her tears before I knew the cause of any affliction, or could draw defences from my own judgment, I imbibed commiseration, remorse, and an unmanly gentleness of mind. which has since ensnared me into ten thousand calamities; and from whence I can reap no advantage, except it be, that in such a hour as I am now in. I can the better indulge myself in the softnesses of humanity, and enjoy that secret anxiety which arises from the memory of past afflictions.

We, that are very old, are better able to remember things which befell us in our distant youth. than the passages of later days. For this reason it is, that the companions of my strong and vigorous years present themselves more immediately to me in this office of sorrow. Untimely and unhappy deaths are what we are most apt to lament; so little are we able to make it indifferent when a thing happens, though we know it must happen. Thus we groan under life, and bewail those who are relieved from it. Every object that returns to our imagination raises different passions, according to the circumstance of their departure) Who can have lived in an army, and in a serious hour reflect upon the many gay and agreeable men that might long have flourished in the arts of peace, and not join with the imprecations of the fatherless and widows on the tyrant to whose ambition they fell sacrifices? But gallant men, who are cut off by the sword, move rather our veneration than our pity; and we gather relief enough from their own contempt of death. to make that no evil, which was approached with so much cheerfulness, and attended with so much honour. But when we turn our thoughts from the great parts of life on such occasions, and instead of lamenting those who stood ready to give death to those from whom they had the fortune to receive it; I say, when we Jet our thoughts wander from such noble objects, and consider the havoc which is made among the tender and the innocent, pity enters with an unmixed softness, and possesses all our souls at once.

Here (were there words to express such sentiments with proper tenderness) I should record the beauty, innocence, and untimely death, of the first object my eyes ever beheld with love. Thebeauteous virgin! how ignorantly did she charm, how carelessly excel? Oh death! thou hast right to the bold, to the ambitious, to the high, and to the haughty; but why this cruelty to the humble, to the meek, to the undiscerning, to the thoughtless? Nor age, nor business, nor distress, can erase the dear image from my imagination. In the same week I saw her dressed for a ball, and in a shroud. How ill did the habit of death become the pretty trifler? I still behold the smiling earth—A large train of disasters were coming on to my memory, when my servant knock'ed at my c10Ketdoor, and interrupted me with a letter, attended with a harnper ot wine, of the same with that which is to be put to sale on Thursday next, at Garraway'h coffee-house. Upon the receipt ot it. I-sent for three of my friends. We are so intitnates that we can be

company in whateser state of mind meet, and can entertain each other without expecting to rejoice. The wine we found to be generous and



urming. but mth such a heat as moved us rather to be cheerful than frolicsome. It ived the spirits, withe out firing the blood. We commended it until two of the clock this njorning; and having to-day met a little before dinner, we found, that though sse drank two bottles a nvan, we had much more reason to) recollect than forget what had passed the night before.

RICHARD STEELE (1672-1729)

Richard Steele was born in Dublin, Ireland, and educated at the Charterhouse and Oxford. He left before taking his degree and joined the army in 1694. In 1713 as a staunch Whig he became a member of Parliament. He was knighted by George I. Steele owes his chief reputation to his effort as an essayist. The Tatler, which he started in 1709, was the beginning of a new era in periodical writing. The Tatler was followed in 1711 by The Spectator, by The Guardian in 1713 and thereafter by a succession of other journals of similar nature. In both The Taller and The Spectator Steele and Addison ran in harness together—one of the most brilliant collaborative efforts in English literature. The style of Steele is easy and familiar; antithesis and climax are seldom used. Steele is sentimental and warm-hearted, but always urbane. He has also a delicate sense of humour. Comparison between Steele and Addison has a strong critical relevance. We may find Steele to be greater funded with knowledge of life. He has also a more sympathetic heart. Addison on his part has much greater refinement and delicacy of wit. Addison's prose is also more balanced and lively. The common feature in both these essayists is their involvement in the social scene of the time and their desire for the reformation of morals and manners.

#### Recollections of Childhood

as much above. . .vulgar: distinctly above the praise or criticism of the common and unlettered people.

resolved to be sorrowful: decided to recall the past sorrows.

tempers too much given to pleasure: minds which always hunger for joyful thoughts. in such a humour. . .in: i.e. in a mood to recollect my past life.

the first object. . . love: the woman with whom Steele fell in love for the first time in his life.

dear image: the memory of the woman he loved. habit

of death: shroud.

without firing the blood: instead of making us besides ourselves with passions,

RICHARD STEELE

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