

NUMB. 39. TUESDAY, July 31, 1750.

Infelix—nulli bene nupta marito.

AUSONIUS.

THE condition of the female sex has been frequently the subject of compassion to medical writers, because their constitution of body is such, that every state of life brings its peculiar diseases: they are placed, according to the proverb, between Scylla and Charybdis, with no other choice than of dangers equally formidable; and whether they embrace marriage, or determine upon a single life, are exposed, in consequence of their choice, to sickness, misery, and death.

It were to be wished that so great a degree of natural infelicity might not be increased by adventitious and artificial miseries; and that beings whose beauty we cannot behold without admiration, and whose delicacy we cannot contemplate without tenderness, might be suffered to enjoy every alleviation of their sorrows. But, however it has happened, the custom of the world seems to have been formed in a kind of a conspiracy against them, tho'

it does not appear but they had themselves an equal share in its establishment; and prescriptions which, by whomsoever they were begun, are now of very long continuance, and by consequence of great authority, seem to have almost excluded them from content, in whatsoever condition they shall pass their lives.

IF they refuse the society of men, and continue in that state which is reasonably supposed to place happiness most in their own power, they seldom give those that observe their conduct, or frequent their conversation, any exalted notions of the blessing of liberty; for, whether it be that they are angry to see with what inconsiderate eagerness the rest of their sex rushes into slavery, or with what absurd vanity the married ladies boast the change of their condition, and condemn the heroines who endeavour by their example to assert the natural dignity of their sex; whether they are conscious that like barren countries they are free, only because they were never thought to deserve the trouble of a conquest; or imagine that their sincerity is not always unsuspected, when they declare their contempt for men; it is certain that they generally appear to have
some

some great and incessant cause of uneasiness, and that many of them have at last been persuaded, by powerful rhetoricians, to try the life which they had so long contemned, and put on the bridal ornaments at a time when they least became them.

WHAT are the real causes of the discontent and impatience which the ladies always discover in a virgin state, I shall perhaps take some other occasion to examine. That it is by no means to be envied for its happiness, appears from the solicitude with which it is generally avoided ; from the opinion universally prevalent among the sex, that no woman continues long in it but because she is not invited to forsake it, and the disposition which they always shew to treat old maids as the refuse of the world ; and from the willingness with which it is often quitted at last, by those whose experience has enabled them to judge at leisure, and decide with authority.

YET such is the condition of life, that whatever is proposed, it is much easier to find reasons for avoiding than embracing. Marriage, though a certain security from the reproach and solitude of antiquated virginity,
has

has yet, as it is usually conducted, many disadvantages, which take away much from the pleasure which society promises, and which it might afford, if pleasures and pains were honestly shared, and mutual confidence inviolably preserved.

THE miseries, indeed, which many ladies suffer under conjugal vexations, are to be considered with great pity, because their husbands are often not taken by them as objects of affection, but forced upon them by authority and violence, or by persuasion and importunity, equally resistless when urged by those whom they have been always accustomed to reverence and obey; and it very seldom appears, that those who are thus despotick in the disposal of their children, pay any regard to their domestick and personal felicity, or think it so much to be enquired whether they will be happy, as whether they will be rich.

It may be urged, however, in extenuation of this crime, which parents, not in any other respect to be numbered with robbers and assassins, frequently commit, that, in their estimation, riches and happiness are equivalent terms, and that having passed their lives with

no other wish than that of adding acre to acre, and filling one bag after another, they imagine themselves to have sufficiently considered the advantage of a daughter, when they have secured her a large jointure, and given her reasonable expectations of living in the midst of those satisfactions, with which she had seen her father and mother solacing their age.

THERE is an œconomical oracle received among the prudential and grave part of the world, which advises fathers *to marry their daughters lest they should marry themselves*; by which I suppose it is implied, that women left to their own conduct, generally unite themselves with such partners as can contribute very little to their felicity. Who was the author of this maxim, or with what intention it was originally uttered, I have not yet discovered; but imagine that however solemnly it may be transmitted, or however implicitly received, it can confer no authority which nature has denied; it cannot license Titius to be unjust, lest Caia should be imprudent; nor give right to imprison for life, lest liberty should be ill employed.

THAT the ladies have sometimes incurred imputations which might naturally produce edicts not much in their favour, must be confessed by their warmest advocates ; and I have indeed seldom observed, that when the tenderness or virtue of their parents has preserved them from forced marriage, and left them at large to chuse their own path in the labyrinth of life, they have made any great advantage of their liberty ; for they have generally taken the opportunity of an independent fortune to trifle away their youth in the amusements of the town, and lose their bloom in a hurry of diversions, recurring in a succession too quick to leave room for any settled reflection ; they have grown old without growing wise, have seen the world without gaining experience, and at last have regulated their choice by motives trivial as those of a girl, or mercenary as those of a miser.

MELANTHIA came to town upon the death of her father, with a very large fortune, and with the reputation of a much larger : she was therefore followed and caressed by many men of rank, and by some of understanding ; but having an insatiable desire of pleasure, she

was not at leisure, from the park, the gardens, the theatres, visits, assemblies, and masquerades, to attend seriously to any proposal, but was still impatient for a new flatterer, and neglected marriage as always in her power; till in time her admirers fell away, some wearied with treating, others disgusted with her folly, and others offended by her inconstancy; she heard of concerts to which she was not invited, and was more than once forced to sit still at an assembly, for want of a partner. In this distress, chance threw in her way Philotryphus, a man vain, glittering, and thoughtless as herself, who had spent a small fortune in equipage and dress, and was shining in the last suit for which his taylor would give him credit. He had been long endeavouring to retrieve his extravagance by marriage, and therefore soon paid his court to Melanthia, who after some weeks of insensibility at last saw him at a ball, and was wholly overcome by his performance in a minuet. They married; but a man cannot always dance, and Philotryphus had no other method of pleasing: however, as neither was in any great degree vicious, they live together with no greater unhappiness, than vacuity of mind, and that tastelessness of life, which proceeds from a satiety

tiety of juvenile pleasures, and an utter inability to fill their place by nobler and more suitable employments. As they have known the fashionable world at the same time, they agree in their notions of all those subjects on which they ever speak, and being able to add nothing to the ideas of each other, they are much inclined to conversation, but very often join in one wish, "That they could dream more, and think less."

Argyris, after having refused a thousand offers from men equal in rank and fortune, at last consented to marry Cotylus, the younger brother of a duke, a man without elegance of mien, beauty of person, or force of understanding; who, while he courted her, could not always forbear allusions to her birth, and hints how cheaply she would purchase an alliance to so illustrious a family. His conduct from the hour of his marriage has been insufferably tyrannical, nor has he any other regard to her than what arises from his desire that her appearance may not disgrace him. Upon this principle, however, he always orders that she should be gaily dressed, and splendidly attended; and she has, among all her mortifications, the happiness, which she always desired, of taking place of her elder sister.