

NUMB. 58. SATURDAY, October 6, 1750.

—————*Improbæ**Crescunt divitiæ, tamen**Curtæ nescio quid semper abest rei.* HOR.

AS the love of money has been, in all ages, one of the passions that have given great disturbance to the tranquillity of the world, there is no topick more copiously treated by the antient moralists than the folly of devoting the heart to the accumulation of riches; they who are acquainted with these authors need not be told how riches incite pity, contempt, or reproach, whenever they are mentioned; with what numbers of examples the danger of large possessions is illustrated; and how all the powers of reason and eloquence have been exhausted in a fruitless endeavour to eradicate a desire, which seems to have intrenched itself too strongly in the mind to be driven out by argument or ridicule, and which, perhaps, had not lost its power, even over those who declaimed most vehemently against it, but would have broken out in the poet or the sage, if it had been excited by opportunity

portunity, and invigorated by the approximation of its proper object.

THEIR arguments have been, indeed, so unsuccessful, that I know not whether it can be shown, that by all the wit and reason which this favourite cause has called forth, a single convert was ever made; that even one man has refused to be rich, when to be rich was in his power, from the conviction of the greater happiness of a narrow fortune; or disburthened himself of wealth, when he had tried its inquietudes, merely to enjoy the peace, and leisure, and security, of a mean and unenvied state.

It is true, indeed, that many have neglected opportunities of raising themselves to honours and to wealth, and rejected the kindest offers of fortune: but, however their moderation may be boasted by themselves, or admired by such as only view them at a distance, it will be, perhaps, seldom found that they value riches less, but that they dread labour, or danger, more than others; they are unable to rouse themselves to action, to strain in the race of competition, or to stand the shock of contest; but though they, therefore, decline

the toil of climbing, they, nevertheless, with themselves aloft, and would willingly enjoy what they dare not seize.

OTHERS have retired from high stations, and voluntarily condemned themselves to privacy and obscurity; but, even these will not afford many occasions of triumph to the philosopher; for they have commonly either quitted that only which they thought themselves unable to hold, and prevented disgrace by resignation; or they have been induced to try new measures by general inconstancy, which always dreams of happiness in novelty, or by a gloomy disposition, which is disgusted in the same degree with every state, and wishes every scene of life to change as soon as it is beheld; such men found high and low stations equally unable to satisfy the wishes of a distempered mind, and were unable to shelter themselves in the closest retreat from disappointment, solicitude, and misery.

Yet though these admonitions have been thus neglected by those, who either enjoyed riches, or were able to procure them, it is not rashly to be determined that they are altogether without use; for since far the greatest
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part of mankind must be confined to conditions comparatively mean, and placed in situations, from which they naturally look up with envy to the eminences before them, those writers cannot be thought ill employed that have administered remedies to discontent almost universal, by showing, that what we cannot reach may very well be forborn, that the inequality of distribution, at which we murmur, is for the most part less than it seems, and that the greatness, which we admire at a distance, has much fewer advantages, and much less splendor, when we are suffered to approach it.

IT is the business of moralists to detect the frauds of fortune, and to show that she imposes upon the careless eye, by a quick succession of shadows, which will shrink to nothing in the gripe; that she disguises life in extrinsick ornaments, which can be of use only for show, and are laid aside in the hours of solitude, and of pleasure; and that when greatness aspires either to felicity or to wisdom, it shakes off, as vain or cumbrous, the chief part of those distinctions which are of use to dazzle the gazer, and to awe the suppliant.

It may be remarked, that they whose condition has not afforded them the light of moral or religious instruction, and who collect all their ideas by their own eyes, and digest them by their own understandings, seem to consider those who are placed in ranks of remote superiority, as almost another and higher species of beings; and as themselves have known little other misery than the consequences of want, they are with difficulty persuaded that where there is wealth there can be sorrow, or that those who glitter in dignity, and glide along in affluence, can be acquainted with pains and cares like those which lie heavy upon the rest of mankind.

THIS prejudice is, indeed, confined to the lowest meanness, and the darkest ignorance; but it is so confined only because others have been shown its folly, and its falsehood, because it has been opposed in its progress by history and philosophy, and hindered from spreading its infection by powerful preservatives.

THE doctrine of the contempt of wealth though it has not been wholly able to extinguish

guish avarice or ambition, has certainly made them less importunate and over-bearing; and though it has not wholly suppressed that reluctance with which a man passes his days in a state of inferiority, it must, at least, have made the lower conditions less grating and wearisome, and has consequently contributed to the general security of life, by hindering a great part of that fraud and violence, rapine and circumvention, which must have been produced by an unbounded eagerness of wealth, arising from an unshaken conviction that to be rich is to be happy.

WHOEVER finds himself incited, by some violent impulse of passion, to pursue riches as the chief end of being, must, surely, be so much alarmed by the successive admonitions of those, whose experience and sagacity have recommended them as the guides of mankind, as to stop and consider whether he is about to engage in an undertaking that will reward his toil, and to examine before he rushes to wealth, through right and wrong, what it will confer when he has acquired it; and this examination will seldom fail to repress his ardor, and retard his violence.

WEALTH is nothing in itself, it is not useful but when it departs from us, its value is found only in that which it can purchase, which, if we suppose it put to its best use by those that possess it, seems not much to deserve the desire or envy of a wise man. It is certain that, with regard to corporal enjoyment, money can neither open new avenues to pleasure, nor block up the passages of anguish. Disease and infirmity still continue to torture and enfeeble, perhaps exasperated by luxury, or promoted by softness. With respect to the mind, it has rarely been observed, that wealth contributes much to quicken the discernment, enlarge the capacity, or elevate the imagination; but may, by hiring flattery, or laying diligence asleep, confirm error, and harden stupidity.

WEALTH cannot confer greatness, for nothing can make that great, which the decree of nature has ordained to be little. The bramble may be placed in a hot-bed, but can never become an oak. Even royalty itself is not able to give that dignity which it happens not to find, but oppresses feeble minds, though it may elevate the strong. The world has
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been governed in the name of kings, whose existence has scarcely been perceived by any real effects beyond their own palaces.

WHEN therefore the desire of wealth takes hold of the mind, let us look round and see how it operates upon those whose industry, or fortune, has obtained it. When we find them oppressed with their own abundance, luxurious without pleasure, idle without ease, impatient and querulous in themselves, and despised, or hated, by the rest of mankind, we shall soon be convinced that if the real wants of our condition are satisfied, there remains little to be sought with solicitude, or desired with eagerness.