

NUMB. 59. TUESDAY, OCT. 9, 1750.

*Est aliquid fatale malum per verba levare,
 Hoc querulam Halcyonenque Progenem facit:
 Hoc erat in solo quare Pæantias antro
 Vox fatigaret Lemnia saxa sua.
 Strangulat inclusus dolor atque exæstuat intus,
 Cogitur et vires multiplicare suas.* OVID.

IT is common to distinguish men by the names of animals which they are supposed to resemble. Thus a hero is frequently termed a lion, and a statesman a fox, an extortioner gains the appellation of vultur, and a fop the title of monkey. There is also among the various anomalies of character, which a survey of the world exhibits, a species of beings in human form, which may be properly marked out as the screech-owls of mankind.

THESE screech-owls seem to be settled in an opinion that the great business of life is to complain, and that they were born for no other purpose than to disturb the happiness of others, to lessen the little comforts, and shorten

ten the short pleasures of our condition, by painful remembrances of the past, or melancholy prognosticks of the future; their only care is to crush the rising hope, to damp the kindling transport, and allay the golden hours of gayety with the hateful dross of grief and suspicion.

To those, whose weakness of spirits, or timidity of temper, subjects them to impressions from others, and who are apt to suffer by fascination, and catch the contagion of misery, it is extremely unhappy to live within the compass of a screech-owl's voice; for it will often fill their ears in the hour of dejection, terrify them with apprehensions, which their own thoughts would never have produced, and sadden, by intruded sorrows, the day which might have been passed in amusements, or in business; it will fill the heart with unnecessary discontents, and weaken for a time that love of life which is necessary to the vigorous prosecution of any undertaking.

THOUGH I have, like the rest of mankind, many failings and weaknesses, I have never yet, by either friends or enemies, been charged with superstition; I never count the com-

pany which I enter, and I look at the new moon indifferently over either shoulder. I have, like most other philosophers, often heard the cuckoo without money in my pocket, and have been sometimes reproached as fool-hardy, for not turning down my eyes when a raven flew over my head. I never go home abruptly because a snake crosses my way, nor have any particular dread of a climacterical year; yet I confess that, with all my scorn of old women, and their tales, I consider it as an unhappy day when I happen to be greeted, in the morning, by Suspirius the screech-owl.

I HAVE now known Suspirius fifty eight years and four months, and have never yet passed an hour with him in which he has not made some attack upon my quiet. When we were first acquainted, his great topick was the misery of youth without riches, and whenever we walked out together he solaced me with a long enumeration of pleasures, which, as they were beyond the reach of my fortune, were without the verge of my desires, and which I should never have considered as the objects of a wish, had not his unseasonable representations placed them in my sight.

ANOTHER of his topicks is the neglect of merit, with which he never fails to amuse every man whom he sees not eminently fortunate. If he meets with a young officer, he always informs him of gentlemen whose personal courage is unquestioned, and whose military skill qualifies them to command armies, that have, notwithstanding all their merit, grown old with subaltern commissions. For a genius in the church, he is always provided with a curacy for life. The lawyer he informs of many men of great parts and deep study, who have never had an opportunity to speak in the courts: And meeting Serenus the physician, “ Ah doctor, says he, what
 “ a-foot still, when so many blockheads are
 “ rattling their chariots? I told you seven
 “ years ago that you would never meet with
 “ encouragement, and I hope you will now
 “ take more notice, when I tell you, that
 “ your *Greek*, and your diligence, and your
 “ honesty, will never enable you to live like
 “ yonder apothecary, who prescribes to his
 “ own shop, and laughs at the physician.”

SUSPIRIUS has, in his time, intercepted fifteen authors in their way to the stage; per-

suaded nine and thirty merchants to retire from a prosperous trade for fear of bankruptcy, broke off an hundred and thirteen matches by prognostications of unhappiness, and enabled the small-pox to kill nineteen ladies, by perpetual alarms of the loss of beauty.

WHENEVER my evil stars bring us together, he never fails to represent to me the folly of my pursuits, and informs me that we are much older than when we began our acquaintance, that the infirmities of decrepitude are coming fast upon me, that whatever I now get I shall enjoy but a little time, that fame is to a man tottering on the edge of the grave of very little importance, and that the time is now at hand when I ought to look for no other pleasures than a good dinner and an easy chair.

THUS he goes on in his unharmonious strain, displaying present miseries, and foreboding more, *νυκτικορὰξ αἰεὶ θανατήφορος*, every syllable is loaded with misfortune, and death is always brought nearer to the view. Yet, what always raises my resentment and indignation, I do not perceive that his mournful meditations have much effect upon himself.

He

He talks, and has long talked of calamities, ~~without~~ discovering, otherwise than by the tone of his voice, that he feels any of the evils which he bewails or threatens, but has the same habit of uttering lamentations, as others of telling stories, and falls into expressions of condolence for past, or apprehension of future mischiefs, as all men studious of their ease have recourse to those subjects upon which they can most fluently or copiously discourse.

It is reported of the Sybarites, that they destroyed all their cocks, that they might dream out their morning dreams without disturbance. Though I would not so far promote effeminacy as to propose the Sybarites for an example, yet since there is no man so corrupt or foolish, but something useful may be learned from him, I could wish that, in imitation of a people not often to be copied, some regulations might be made to exclude screech-owls from all company as the enemies of mankind, and confine them to some proper receptacle, where they may mingle sighs at leisure, and thicken the gloom of one another.

*Thou prophet of evil, says Homer's Agamem-
non*

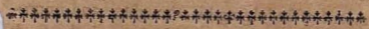
non, thou never foretellest me good, but the joy of thy heart is to predict misfortunes. Vvnoever is of the same temper might there find the means of indulging his thoughts, and improving his vein of denunciation, and the flock of screech-owls might hoot together without injury to the rest of the world.

YET, though I have so little kindness for this dark generation, I am very far from intending to debar the soft and tender mind from the privilege of complaining, when the sigh rises from the desire not of giving pain, but of gaining ease. To hear complaints with patience, even when complaints are vain, is one of the duties of friendship; and though it must be allowed that he suffers most like a hero that hides his grief in silence,

Spem vultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem,

yet, it cannot be denied that he who complains acts like a man, like a social being who looks for help from his fellow-creatures. Pity is to many of the unhappy a source of comfort in hopeless distresses, as it contributes to recommend them to themselves, by proving that they have not lost the regard of others; and heaven seems to indicate the duty even of
bar-

barren compassion, by inclining us to weep for evils which we cannot remedy.



NUMB. 60. SATURDAY, Oct. 13, 1750.

— *Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile,
quid non,*

Plenius et melius Chryssippo et Grantore dicit.

HOR.

ALL joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the imagination, that realises the event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves.

OUR passions are therefore more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the pains or pleasure proposed to our minds, by recognising them as once our own, or considering them as naturally incident to our state of life. It is not easy for the most