

NUMB. 66. SATURDAY, November 3, 1750.

*Pauci dignoscere possunt**Vera bona, atque illis multum diversa, remotâ  
Erroris nebulâ.*

JUV.

THE folly of human wishes and pursuits has always been a standing subject of mirth and declamation, and has been ridiculed and lamented from age to age ; till perhaps the fruitless repetition of complaints and censures may be justly numbered among the subjects of censure and complaint.

SOME of these instructors of mankind have not contented themselves with checking the overflows of passion, and lopping the exuberance of desire, but have attempted to destroy the root as well as the branches ; and not only to confine the mind within bounds, but to smoothen it forever by a dead calm. They have employed their reason and their eloquence to persuade us, that nothing is worth the wish of a wise man, have represented all earthly good and evil as indifferent, and counted among vulgar errors the dread of pain, and the love of life.

IT

IT is almost always the unhappiness of a victorious disputant, to destroy his own authority by claiming too many consequences, or diffusing his proposition to an indefensible extent. When we have heated our zeal in a cause, and elated our confidence with success, we are naturally inclined to pursue the same train of reasoning, to establish some collateral truth, to remove some adjacent difficulty, and to take in the whole comprehension of our system. As a prince in the ardour of acquisition, is willing to secure his first conquest by the addition of another, add fortress to fortress, and city to city, till despair and opportunity turn his enemies upon him, and he loses in a moment the glory of a reign.

THE philosophers having found an easy victory over those desires which we produce in ourselves, and which terminate in some imaginary state of happiness unknown and unattainable, proceeded to make further inroads upon the heart, and attacked at last our senses and our instincts. They continued to war upon nature with arms, by which only folly could be conquered; they therefore lost the trophies of their former combats, and were  
 confi-

considered no longer with reverence or regard.

YET it cannot be with justice denied, that these men have been very useful monitors, and have left many proofs of strong reason, deep penetration, and accurate attention to the affairs of life, which it is now our business to separate from the foam of a boiling imagination, and to apply judiciously to our own use. They have shewn that most of the conditions of life, which raise the envy of the timorous, and rouse the ambition of the daring, are empty shows of felicity, which, when they become familiar, lose their power of delighting; and that the most prosperous and exalted have very few advantages over a meaner and more obscure fortune, when their dangers and solitudes are balanced against their equipage, their banquets, and their palaces.

It is natural for every man, uninstructed and unenlightened, to murmur at his condition, because, in the general infelicity of life, he feels his own miseries, without knowing that they are common to all the rest of the species; and therefore though he will not be less sensible of pain by being told that others are equal-  
ly

ly tormented, he will at least be freed from the temptation of seeking by perpetual changes that ease which is no where to be found, and though his disease still continues, he escapes the hazard of exasperating it by remedies.

THE gratifications which affluence of wealth, extent of power, and eminence of reputation confer, must be always, by their own nature, confined to a very small number; and the life of the greater part of mankind must be lost in empty wishes and painful comparisons, were not the balm of philosophy shed upon us, and our discontent at the appearances of unequal distribution soothed and appeased.

It seemed, perhaps, below the dignity of the great masters of moral learning, to descend to familiar life, and caution mankind against that petty ambition, which is known among us by the name of vanity; which yet had been an undertaking not unworthy of the longest beard, and most solemn austerities. For though the passions of little minds, acting in low stations, do not fill the world with bloodshed and devastations, or mark, by great events, the periods of time, yet they torture the

the breast which they happen to seize, infest those that are placed within the reach of their influence, destroy private quiet and private virtue, and undermine, insensibly, the happiness of the world.

THE desire of excellence is laudable, but is very frequently ill directed. We, fall, by chance, into some class of mankind, and, without consulting nature or wisdom, resolve to gain their regard by those qualities which they happen to esteem. I once knew a man remarkably dimighted, who, by conversing much with country gentlemen, found himself irresistibly determined to sylvan honours, and was very desirous to be thought a skilful sportsman. His great ambition was to shoot flying, and he therefore spent whole days in the woods pursuing game; which, before he was near enough to see them, his approach always frightened away.

WHEN it happens that the desire tends to objects which produce no competition, it may be overlooked with some indulgence, because, however fruitless or absurd, it cannot have ill effects upon the morals. But most of our enjoyments owe their value to the peculiarity of pos-

possession, and when they are rated at too high a value, give occasion to stratagems of malignity, and incite opposition, hatred, and defamation. The contest of two rural beauties for preference and distinction, is often sufficiently keen and rancorous to fill their breasts with all those passions, which are generally thought the curse only of senates, of armies, and of courts; and the rival dancers of an obscure assembly have their partisans and abettors, often not less exasperated against each other, than those who are promoting the interests of rival monarchs.

It is common to consider those whom we find infected with an unreasonable regard for trifling accomplishments, as justly chargeable with all the consequences of their folly, and as the authors of their own unhappiness: but, perhaps, those whom we thus scorn or detest, have more claim to tenderness than has been yet allowed them. Before we permit our severity to break loose upon any fault or error, we ought surely to consider how much we have countenanced or promoted it. We see multitudes busy in the pursuit of riches, at the expence of wisdom and of virtue; but we see the rest of mankind approving their conduct,  
and

and inciting their eagerness, by paying that regard and deference to wealth, which wisdom and virtue only can deserve. We see women universally jealous of the reputation of their beauty, and frequently look with contempt on the care with which they study their complexions, endeavour to preserve or to supply the bloom of youth, regulate every ornament, twist their hair into curls, and shade their faces from the weather. We often recommend to them the care of their nobler part, and tell them how little addition is made by all their arts to the graces of the mind. But when was it known that female virtue or knowledge was able to attract that officiousness, or inspire that ardour which beauty produces whenever it appears? And with what hope can we endeavour to persuade the ladies, that the time spent at the toilet is lost in vanity, when they have every moment some new conviction, that their interest is more effectually promoted by a ribband well disposed, than by the brightest act of heroick virtue?

In every instance of vanity it will be found, that the blame ought to be shared among more than it generally reaches; all who exalt trifles by immoderate praise, or instigate needless emula-

emulation by invidious incitements, are to be considered as perverters of reason, and corrupters of the world: and since every man is obliged to promote happiness and virtue, he should be careful not to mislead unwary minds, by appearing to set too high a value upon things by which no real excellence is conferred.

NUMB. 67. TUESDAY, *November 6, 1750.*

Αἱ δ' ἐλπίδες βόσκουσιν φυγὰδας, ὡς λόγος,  
Καλῶς βλέπουσιν ὄμμασι, μέλλουσιν δέ.

*Eurip.*

**T**HERE is no temper so universally indulged as hope: other passions operate by starts on particular occasions, or in certain parts of life; but hope begins with the first power of comparing our actual with our possible state, and attends us through every stage and period of our lives, always urging us forward to new acquisitions, and holding out some distant blessing to our view, promising us either relief from pain, or increase of happiness.

HOPE is necessary in every condition. The miseries of poverty, of sickness, of captivity