



N^o 161. Tuesday, September 4.

*Ipse dies agitat festos: Fususque per herbam,
Ignis ubi in medio & Socii cratera coronant,
Te libans, Lenæe, vocat: pecorisque magistris
Velocis Jaculi certamina ponit in ulmo,
Corporaque agresti nudat prædura Palæstra.
Hanc olim veteres vitam coluere Sabini,
Hanc Remus & Frater: Sic fortis Etruria crevit,
Scilicet & rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma. Virg. G. 2.*

I am glad that my late going into the Country has increas'd the Number of my Correspondents, one of whom sends me the following Letter.

S I R,

THOUGH you are pleased to retire from us so soon into the City, I hope you will not think the Affairs of the Country altogether unworthy of your Inspection for the future. I had the Honour of seeing your short Face at Sir ROGER DE COVERLY's, and have ever since thought your Person and Writings both extraordinary. Had you staid there a few Days longer you would have seen a Country Wake, which you know in most Parts of England is the Eve-Feast of the Dedication of our Churches. I was last Week at one of these Assemblies, which was held in a neighbouring Parish; where I found their Green covered with a promiscuous Multitude of all Ages and both Sexes, who esteem one another more or less the following Part of the Year according as they distinguish themselves at this Time. The whole Company were in their Holiday Clothes, and divided into several Parties, all of them endeavouring to shew themselves in those Exercises wherein they excelled, and to gain the Approbation of the Lookers-on.

I found a ring of Cudgel Players, who were breaking one another's Heads in order to make some Impression on their Mistresses Hearts. I observed a lusty young Fellow,

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low,

low, who had the Misfortune of a broken Pate ; but what considerably added to the Anguish of the Wound, was his over-hearing an old Man, who shook his Head and said, *That he questioned now if black Kate would marry him these three Years.* I was diverted from a farther Observation of these Combatans, by a Foot-ball Match, which was on the other Side of the Green ; where Tom Short behaved himself so well, that most People seemed to agree it was impossible that he should remain a Bachelor till the next Wake. Having played many a Match myself, I could have looked longer on this Sport, had I not observed a Country Girl, who was posted on an Eminence at some Distance from me, and was making so many odd Grimaces, and writhing and distorting her whole Body in so strange a manner, as made me very desirous to know the Meaning of it. Upon my coming up to her, I found that she was overlooking a Ring of Wrestlers, and that her Sweet-heart, a Person of small Stature, was contending with an huge brawny Fellow, who twirled him about, and shook the little Man so violently, that by a secret Sympathy of Hearts it produced all those Agitations in the Person of his Mistress, who I dare say, like *Cælia* in *Shakespear* on the same Occasion, could have wished herself invisible to catch the strong Fellow by the Leg. The Squire of the Parish treats the whole Company every Year with a Hoghead of Ale ; and proposes a *Beaver Hat* as a Recompence to him who gives most *Falls.* This has raised such a Spirit of Emulation in the Youth of the Place, that some of them have rendered themselves very expert at this Exercise ; and I was often surpris'd to see a Fellow's Heels fly up, by a Trip which was given him so smartly that I could scarce discern it. I found that the old Wrestlers seldom entered the Ring, till some one was grown formidable by having thrown two or three of his Opponents ; but kept themselves as it were in a reserved Body to defend the *Hat*, which is always hung up by the Person who gets it in one of the most conspicuous Parts of the House, and looked upon by the whole Family as something redounding much more to their Honour than a Coat of Arms. There was a Fellow who was so busy in regulating all the Ceremonies, and seemed to carry such an Air of Importance in

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his Looks, that I could not help inquiring who he was, and was immediately answered, *That he did not value himself upon nothing, for that he and his Ancestors had won so many Hats, that his Parlour looked like a Haberdasher's Shop*: However this Thirst of Glory in them all, was the Reason that no one Man stood Lord of the Ring for above three Falls while I was among them.

THE young Maids, who were not Lookers-on at these Exercises, were themselves engaged in some Diversion; and upon my asking a Farmer's Son of my own Parish what he was gazing at with so much Attention, he told me, *That he was seeing Betty Welch, whom I knew to be his Sweet-heart, pitch a Bar.*

IN short, I found the Men endeavoured to shew the Women they were no Cowards, and that the whole Company strived to recommend themselves to each other, by making it appear that they were all in a perfect State of Health, and fit to undergo any Fatigues of bodily Labour.

YOUR Judgment upon this Method of Love and Gallantry, as it is at present practised amongst us in the Country, will very much oblige,

S I R, Yours, &c.

IF I would here put on the Scholar and Politician, I might inform my Readers how these bodily Exercises or Games were formerly encouraged in all the Commonwealths of Greece; from whence the Romans afterwards borrowed their *Pentathlum*, which was composed of *Running, Wrestling, Leaping, Throwing, and Boxing*, tho' the Prizes were generally nothing but a Crown of Cypress or Parsley, Hats not being in fashion in those Days: That there is an old Statute, which obliges every Man in England, having such an Estate, to keep and exercise the long Bow; by which means our Ancestors excelled all other Nations in the Use of that Weapon, and we had all the real Advantages, without the Inconvenience of a standing Army: And that I once met with a Book of Projects, in which the Author considering to what noble Ends that Spirit of Emulation which so remarkably shews it self among our common People in these Wakes, might be directed, proposes that for the Improvement of all our handicraft

Trades there should be annual Prizes set up for such Persons as were most excellent in their several Arts. But laying aside all these political Considerations, which might tempt me to pass the Limits of my Paper, I confess the greatest Benefit and Convenience that I can observe in these Country Festivals, is the bringing young People together, and giving them an Opportunity of shewing themselves in the most advantageous Light. A Country Fellow that throws his Rival upon his Back, has generally as good Success with their common Mistress; as nothing is more usual than for a nimble-footed Wench to get a Husband at the same time she wins a Smock. Love and Marriages are the natural Effects of these anniversary Assemblies. I must therefore very much approve the Method by which my Correspondent tells me each Sex endeavours to recommend it self to the other, since nothing seems more likely to promise a healthy Offspring or a happy Cohabitation. And I believe I may assure my Country Friend, that there has been many a Court Lady who would be contented to exchange her crazy young Husband for *Tom Short*, and several Men of Quality who would have parted with a tender Yoke-fellow for *Black Kate*.

I am the more pleased with having *Love* made the principal End and Design of these Meetings, as it seems to be most agreeable to the Intent for which they were at first instituted, as we are informed by the learned Dr. Kennet, with whose Words I shall conclude my present Paper.

THESE Wakes, says he, *were in Imitation of the ancient ἀγάπαι, or Love-Feasts; and were first established in England by Pope Gregory the Great, who in an Epistle to Melitus the Abbot gave Order that they should be kept in Sheds or Arbories made up with Branches and Boughs of Trees round the Church.*

HE adds, *That this laudable Custom of Wakes prevailed for many Ages, till the nice Puritans began to exclaim against it as a Remnant of Popery; and by Degrees the precise Humour grew so popular, that at an Exeter Assizes the Lord Chief Baron Walter made an Order for the Suppression of all Wakes; but on Bishop Laud's complaining of this innovating Humour, the King commanded the Order to be reversed.* X

Wednesday,