



N<sup>o</sup> 451. Thursday, August 7.

— *Jam scævus apertam  
In rabiem cœpit verti jocus, & per honestas  
Ire minax impunè domos* —

Hor.

THERE is nothing so scandalous to a Government, and detestable in the Eyes of all good Men, as defamatory Papers and Pamphlets; but at the same time there is nothing so difficult to tame, as a Satyrical Author. An angry Writer, who cannot appear in Print, naturally vents his Spleen in Libels and Lampoons. A gay old Woman, says the Fable, seeing all her Wrinkles represented in a large Looking-glass, threw it upon the Ground in a Passion, and broke it into a thousand Pieces, but as she was afterwards surveying the Fragments with a spiteful kind of Pleasure, she could not forbear uttering her self in the following Soliloquy. What have I got by this revengeful Blow of mine, I have only multiplied my Deformity, and see an hundred ugly Faces, where before I saw but one.

IT has been proposed, to oblige every Person that writes a Book, or a Paper, to swear himself the Author of it, and enter down in a publick Register his Name and Place of Abode.

THIS, indeed, would have effectually suppressed all printed Scandal, which generally appears under borrowed Names, or under none at all. But it is to be feared, that such an Expedient would not only destroy Scandal, but Learning. It would operate promiscuously, and root up the Corn and Tares together. Not to mention some of the most celebrated Works of Piety, which have proceeded from anonymous Authors, who have made it their Merit to convey to us so great a Charity in secret: There are few Works of Genius that come out at first with the Author's Name. The Writer generally makes a Trial of them in the World before he owns them; and, I believe, very

very few, who are capable of Writing, would set Pen to Paper, if they knew, before-hand, that they must not publish their Productions but on such Occasions. For my own part, I must declare, the Papers I present the Publick are like Fairy Favours, which shall last no longer than while the Author is concealed.

THAT which makes it particularly difficult to restrain these Sons of Calumny and Defamation is, that all Sides are equally guilty of it, and that every dirty Scribbler is countenanced by great Names, whose Interests he propagates by such vile and infamous Methods. I have never yet heard of a Ministry, who have inflicted an exemplary Punishment on an Author that has supported their Cause with Falshood and Scandal, and treated, in a most cruel manner, the Names of those who have been looked upon as their Rivals and Antagonists. Would a Government set an everlasting Mark of their Displeasure upon one of those infamous Writers, who makes his Court to them by tearing to pieces the Reputation of a Competitor, we should quickly see an End put to this Race of Vermin, that are a Scandal to Government, and a Reproach to Human Nature. Such a Proceeding would make a Minister of State shine in History, and would fill all Mankind with a just Abhorrence of Persons who should treat him unworthily, and employ against him those Arms which he scorned to make use of against his Enemies.

I cannot think that any one will be so unjust as to imagine, what I have here said is spoken with respect to any Party or Faction. Every one who has in him the Sentiments either of a Christian or Gentleman, cannot but be highly offended at this wicked and ungenerous Practice which is so much in use among us at present, that it is become a kind of National Crime, and distinguishes us from all the Governments that lie about us. I cannot but look upon the finest Strokes of Satire which are aimed at particular Persons, and which are supported even with the appearances of Truth, to be the Marks of an evil Mind, and highly Criminal in themselves. Infamy, like other Punishments, is under the Direction and Distribution of the Magistrate, and not of any private Person. Accordingly we learn from a Fragment of *Cicero*,  
that



that tho' there were very few Capital Punishments in the twelve Tables, a Libel or Lampoon which took away the good Name of another, was to be punished by Death. But this is far from being our Case. Our Satire is nothing but Ribaldry, and *Billinggate*. Scurrility passes for Wit; and he who can call Names in the greatest Variety of Phrases, is looked upon to have the shrewdest Pen. By this Means the Honour of Families is ruined, the highest Posts and greatest Titles are render'd cheap and vile in the Sight of the People; the noblest Virtues, and most exalted Parts exposed to the Contempt of the Vicious and the Ignorant. Should a Foreigner, who knows nothing of our private Factions, or one who is to act his Part in the World when our present Heats and Animosities are forgot, should, I say, such an one form to himself a Notion of the greatest Men of all Sides in the *British* Nation, who are now living, from the Characters which are given them in some or other of those abominable Writings which are daily published among us, what a Nation of Monsters must we appear!

AS this cruel Practice tends to the utter Subversion of all Truth and Humanity among us, it deserves the utmost Detestation and Discouragement of all who have either the Love of their Country, or the Honour of their Religion at Heart. I would therefore earnestly recommend it to the Consideration of those who deal in these pernicious Arts of Writing; and of those who take Pleasure in the Reading of them. As for the first, I have spoken of them in former Papers, and have not stuck to rank them with the Murderer and Assassin. Every honest Man sets as high a Value upon a good Name, as upon Life it self; and I cannot but think that those who privily assault the one, would destroy the other, might they do it with the same Security and Impunity.

AS for Persons who take Pleasure in the reading and dispersing of such detestable Libels, I am afraid they fall very little short of the Guilt of the first Composers. By a Law of the Emperors *Valentinian* and *Valens*, it was made Death for any Person not only to write a Libel, but if he met with one by chance, not to tear or burn it. But because I would not be thought singular in my Opinion of this Matter, I shall conclude my Paper with the

Words

Words of Monsieur *Bayle*, who was a Man of great Freedom of Thought, as well as of exquisite Learning and Judgment.

I cannot imagine, that a Man who disperses a Libel, is less desirous of doing Mischief than the Author himself. But what shall we say of the Pleasure which a man takes in the Reading of a defamatory Libel? Is it not an heinous Sin in the Sight of God? We must distinguish in this Point. This Pleasure is either an agreeable Sensation we are affected with, when we meet with a witty Thought which is well expressed, or it is a Joy which we conceive from the Dishonour of the Person who is defamed. I will say nothing to the first of these Cases; for perhaps some would think that my Morality is not severe enough, if I should affirm that a Man is not Master of those agreeable Sensations, any more than of those occasioned by Sugar or Honey, when they touch his Tongue; but as to the second, every one will own that Pleasure to be a heinous Sin. The Pleasure in the first Case is of no Continuance; it prevents our Reason and Reflexion, and may be immediately followed by a secret Grief, to see our Neighbour's Honour blasted. If it does not cease immediately, it is a Sign that we are not displeased with the Ill-nature of the Satyrists, but are glad to see him defame his Enemy by all kinds of Stories; and then we deserve the Punishment to which the Writer of the Libel is subject. I shall here add the Words of a Modern Author. *St. Gregory upon excommunicating those Writers who had dishonoured Castorius, does not except those who read their Works; because, says he, if Calumnies have always been the delight of their Hearers, and a gratification of those Persons who have no other Advantage over honest Men, is not he who takes Pleasure in reading them as guilty as he who composed them?* It is an uncontested Maxim, that they who approve an Action would certainly do it if they could; that is, if some Reason of Self love did not hinder them. There is no difference, says *Cicero*, between advising a Crime, and approving it when committed. The Roman Law confirmed this Maxim, having subjected the Approvers and Authors of this Evil to the same Penalty. We may therefore conclude, that those who are pleased with