



N^o 249. Saturday, December 15.

Τέλος ἀκαρῶ ἐν βροτοῖς δεινὸν κακόν. Frag. Vet. Po.

WHEN I make choice of a Subject that has not been treated on by others, I throw together my Reflexions on it without any Order or Method, so that they may appear rather in the Looseness and Freedom of an Essay, than in the Regularity of a set Discourse. It is after this manner that I shall consider Laughter and Ridicule in my present Paper.

MAN is the merriest Species of the Creation, all above and below him are serious. He sees things in a different Light from other Beings, and finds his Mirth arising from Objects that perhaps cause something like Pity or Displeasure in higher Natures. Laughter is indeed a very good Counterpoise to the Spleen; and it seems but reasonable that we should be capable of receiving Joy from what is no real Good to us, since we can receive Grief from what is no real Evil.

I have in my forty seventh Paper raised a Speculation on the Notion of a modern Philosopher, who describes the first Motive of Laughter to be a secret Comparifon which we make between our selves, and the Persons we laugh at; or, in other Words, that Satisfaction which we receive from the Opinion of some Preeminence in our selves, when we see the Absurdities of another, or when we reflect on any past Absurdities of our own. This seems to hold in most Cases, and we may observe that the vainest Part of Mankind are the most addicted to this Passion.

I have read a Sermon of a Conventual in the Church of Rome, on those Words of the Wise Man, *I said of Laughter, it is mad; and of Mirth, what does it?* Upon which he laid it down as a Point of Doctrine, that Laughter was the Effect of Original Sin, and that Adam could not laugh before the Fall.

LAUGHTER, while it lasts, slackens and unbraces the Mind, weakens the Faculties, and causes a kind of Remissness and Dissolution in all the Powers of the Soul: And thus far it may be looked upon as a Weakness in the Composition of human Nature. But if we consider the frequent

frequent Reliefs we receive from it, and how often it breaks the Gloom which is apt to depress the Mind and damp our Spirits with transient unexpected Gleams of Joy, one would take care not to grow too wise for so great a Pleasure of Life.

THE Talent of turning Men into Ridicule, and exposing to Laughter those one converses with, is the Qualification of little ungenerous Tempers. A young Man with this Cast of Mind cuts himself off from all manner of Improvement. Every one has his Flaws and Weaknesses; nay, the greatest Blemishes are often found in the most shining Characters; but what an absurd Thing is it to pass over all the valuable Parts of a Man, and fix our Attention on his Infirmities? To observe his Imperfections more than his Virtues? and to make use of him for the Sport of others, rather than for our own Improvement?

WE therefore very often find, that Persons the most accomplished in Ridicule are those who are very shrewd at hitting a Blot, without exerting any thing masterly in themselves. As there are many eminent Criticks who never writ a good Line, there are many admirable Buffoons that animadvert upon every single Defect in another, without ever discovering the least Beauty of their own. By this Means, these unlucky little Wits often gain Reputation in the Esteem of vulgar Minds, and raise themselves above Persons of much more laudable Characters.

IF the Talent of Ridicule were employed to laugh Men out of Vice and Folly, it might be of some Use to the World; but instead of this, we find that it is generally made use of to laugh Men out of Virtue and good Sense, by attacking every thing that is solemn and serious, decent and praise-worthy in human Life.

WE may observe, that in the first Ages of the World, when the great Souls and Master-pieces of human Nature were produced, Men shined by a noble Simplicity of Behaviour, and were Strangers to those little Embellishments which are so fashionable in our present Conversation. And it is very remarkable, that notwithstanding we fall short at present of the Ancients in Poetry, Painting, Oratory, History, Architecture, and all the noble Arts and Sciences which depend more upon Genius than Experience, we exceed them as much in
Doggerel,

Doggerel, Humour, Burlesque, and all the trivial Arts of Ridicule. We meet with more Rallery among the Moderns, but more good Sense among the Ancients.

THE two great Branches of Ridicule in Writing are Comedy and Burlesque. The first ridicules Persons by drawing them in their proper Characters, the other by drawing them quite unlike themselves. Burlesque is therefore of two Kinds; the first represents mean Persons in the Accoutrements of Heroes, the other describes great Persons acting and speaking like the basest among the People. *Don Quixote* is an Instance of the first, and *Lucian's* Gods of the second. It is a Dispute among the Criticks, whether Burlesque Poetry runs best in Heroick Verse, like that of the *Dispensary*; or in Doggerel, like that of *Hudibras*. I think where the low Character is to be raised, the Heroick is the proper Measure; but when an Hero is to be pulled down and degraded, it is done best in Doggerel.

IF *Hudibras* had been set out with as much Wit and Humour in Heroick Verse as he is in Doggerel, he would have made a much more agreeable Figure than he does; though the generality of his Readers are so wonderfully pleased with the double Rhimes, that I do not expect many will be of my Opinion in this Particular.

I shall conclude this Essay upon Laughter with observing, that the Metaphor of Laughing, applied to Fields and Meadows when they are in Flower, or to Trees when they are in Blossom runs, through all Languages; which I have not observed of any other Metaphor, excepting that of Fire and Burning when they are applied to Love. This shews that we naturally regard Laughter, as what is in it self both amiable and beautiful. For this Reason likewise *Venus* has gained the Title of *Φιλομένης*, the Laughter-loving Dame, as *Waller* has translated it, and is represented by *Horace* as the Goddess of delights in Laughter. *Milton*, in a joyous Assembly of imaginary Persons, has given us a very Poetical Figure of Laughter. His whole Band of Mirth is so finely described, that I shall set down the Passage at length.

*But come thou Goddess fair and free,
In Heaven ycleap'd Euphrosyne.
And by Men, heart-easing Mirth,
Whom lovely Venus at a Birth
With two Sister Graces more
To Ivy-crowned Bacchus bore:*

Haſte