

way of dealing with them, is to retort their own Weapons upon them, which are those of Scorn and Mockery.

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N^o 390. *Wednesday, May 28.*

Non pudendo sed non faciendo id quod non decet impudentiæ nomen effugere debemus. Tull.

MANY are the Epistles I receive from Ladies extremely afflicted that they lie under the Observation of scandalous People, who love to defame their Neighbours, and make the unjustest Interpretation of innocent and indifferent Actions. They describe their own Behaviour so unhappily, that there indeed lies some Cause of Suspicion upon them. It is certain, that there is no Authority for Persons who have nothing else to do, to pass away Hours of Conversation upon the Miscarriages of other People; but since they will do so, they who value their Reputation should be cautious of Appearances to their disadvantage. But very often our young Women, as well as the middle-aged and the gay Part of those growing old, without entering into a formal League for that purpose, to a Woman agree upon a short Way to preserve their Characters, and go on in a Way that at best is only not vicious. The Method is, when an ill-natur'd or talkative Girl has said any thing that bears hard upon some part of another's Carriage, this Creature, if not in any of their little Cabals, is run down for the most censorious dangerous Body in the World. Thus they guard their Reputation rather than their Modesty; as if Guilt lay in being under the Imputation of a Fault, and not in a Commission of it. *Orbicilla* is the kindest poor Thing in the Town, but the most blushing Creature living: It is true, she has not lost the Sense of Shame, but she has lost the Sense of Innocence. If she had more Confidence, and never did any thing which ought to stain her Cheeks, would she not be much more modest without that ambiguous Suffusion,

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which

which is the Livery both of Guilt and Innocence? Modesty consists in being conscious of no Ill, and not in being ashamed of having done it. When People go upon any other Foundation than the Truth of their own Hearts for the Conduct of their Actions, it lies in the Power of scandalous Tongues to carry the World before them, and make the rest of Mankind fall in with the Ill, for fear of Reproach. On the other hand, to do what you ought, is the ready way to make Calumny either silent or ineffectually malicious. *Spencer*, in his *Fairy Queen*, says admirably to young Ladies under the Distress of being defamed;

*The best, said he, that I can you advise,
Is to avoid th' Occasion of the Ill;
For when the Cause, whence Evil doth arise,
Removed is, th' Effect surceaseth still.
Abstain from Pleasure, and restrain your Will,
Subdue Desire, and bridle loose Delight:
Use scantied Diet, and forbear your Fill;
Shun Secrecy, and talk in open sight:
So shall you soon repair your present evil Plight.*

Instead of this Care over their Words and Actions, recommended by a Poet in old *Queen Bess's* Days, the modern Way is to do and say what you please, and yet be the prettiest sort of Woman in the World. If Fathers and Brothers will defend a Lady's Honour, she is quite as safe as in her own Innocence. Many of the Distressed, who suffer under the Malice of evil Tongues, are so harmless that they are every Day they live asleep 'till twelve at Noon; concern themselves with nothing but their own Persons 'till Two; take their necessary Food between that time and Four; visit, go to the Play, and sit up at Cards 'till towards the ensuing Morn: and the malicious World shall draw Conclusions from innocent Glances, short Whispers, or pretty familiar Galleries with fashionable Men, that these Fair ones are not as rigid as Vestals. It is certain, say these goodest Creatures very well, that Virtue does not consist in constrain'd Behaviour and wry Faces, that must be allow'd; but there is a Decency in the Aspect and Manner of Ladies contracted from a Habit of Virtue,
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and from general Reflexions that regard a modest Conduct, all which may be understood, tho' they cannot be described. A young Woman of this sort claims an Esteem mixed with Affection and Honour, and meets with no Defamation; or if she does, the wild Malice is overcome with an undisturbed Perseverance in her Innocence. To speak freely, there are such Coveys of Coquettes about this Town, that if the Peace were not kept by some impertinent Tongues of their own Sex, which keep them under some Restraint, we should have no manner of Engagement upon them to keep them in any tolerable Order.

AS I am a SPECTATOR, and behold how plainly one Part of Womankind balance the Behaviour of the other, whatever I may think of Tale-bearers or Slanders, I cannot wholly suppress them, no more than a General would discourage Spies. The Enemy would easily surprise him whom they knew had no Intelligence of their Motions. It is so far otherwise with me, that I acknowledge I permit a She-Slanderer or two in every Quarter of the Town, to live in the Characters of Coquettes, and take all the innocent Freedoms of the rest, in order to send me Information of the Behaviour of their respective Sisterhoods.

BUT as the Matter of Respect to the World, which looks on, is carried on, methinks it is so very easy to be what is in the general called virtuous, that it need not cost one Hour's Reflexion in a Month to preserve that Appellation. It is pleasant to hear the pretty Rogues talk of Virtue and Vice among each other: She is the laziest Creature in the World, but I must confess strictly virtuous: The peevishest Husky breathing, but as to her Virtue she is without Blemish: She has not the least Charity for any of her Acquaintance, but I must allow rigidly Virtuous. As the unthinking Part of the Male World call every Man a Man of Honour who is not a Coward; so the Crowd of the other Sex terms every Woman who will not be a Wench Virtuous. T



Thursday.