



The CRAFTSMAN, No. II.

*Rara temporum felicitas, ubi sentire, quae velis
et quae sentias dicere licet.* Tacit.

FRIDAY, December 9.



THE *liberty of speaking, or publishing our thoughts* (which, since the invention of Printing, has been usually call'd the *Liberty of the PRESS*) is a thing very little understood, and but rarely enjoy'd; for tho' it is undeniably one of the greatest blessings of a free people, and justly valued as such, by all men of sense, whose practices have not made them afraid of it, or when it does not interfere with some particular views; yet this is so frequently the case, especially amongst *Great Men*; that, in most arbitrary Governments, it lies under such restraints and discouragements, as amount almost to a prohibition; and, in too many free countries, we meet only with the shadow of this privilege instead of the substance.

By the *Liberty of the Press*, we are not to understand any licentious freedom to re-

vile our lawful Governors and Magistrates; to traduce the establish'd Laws and Religion of our Country; or any attempts to weaken and subvert, by opprobrious writings, that sacred Respect and Veneration, which ought always to be maintain'd for authority, and persons in authority. Neither ought the *Press* to be made an engine to destroy the reputation of our neighbours, or to prejudice any private subject; by insulting his personal frailties, misfortunes, or defects, or by exposing the secrets of his family to publick laughter and ridicule; for as these are things only of a private nature, which do not affect the publick, so the publick has no right to the knowledge of them; and indeed the *Law* has provided such wholesome remedies against all these enormities, both of *publick* and *private Scandal*, that I should have had no occasion to make this distinction between *Freedom* and *Licentiousness* if some persons had not confounded them together, in their arguments against the *Liberty of the Press*.

I shall therefore proceed, in a very concise manner, to define what I mean by this *Liberty* and wherein it truly consists; as well as to shew what are its proper objects, and when any nation may be said to possess this blessing in its just and proper extent.

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By the *Liberty of the Press*. I mean (as I suppose every body else does) an unreserved; discretionary power for every man to publish his thoughts on any subject, and in any manner, *which is not expressly forbidden by the Laws of the Land*, without being obliged to apply for a *licence* or *privilege* for so doing. In short, where this *Liberty* prevails, every author has a right to print what he pleases, without asking any body leave, and without fearing any molestation from authority, so long as he keeps within his proper bounds, which it is his business to take care not to transgress; he knows the *Laws* of his country, and, if he rashly offends against them, he must submit to the *penalty*.

For this reason, in *England*, the *Press* is now said to be *free*; which cannot be affirmed of it in *France* and other arbitrary Governments, where no man can publish his opinions on any subject, without first submitting them to the examination of a certain officer, who is authorized by the Government for that purpose, under the title of *Licencer of the Press*; a power which still prevails in our *English* Universities, and was but lately abolished in the other parts of the kingdom.

Where such a power is exercised, the *Press* cannot be said to be *free* or open; because this *officer* being appointed by the chief Magistrate,

Magistrate, or his Ministers, and continued only *during pleasure*, it cannot be supposed that he will grant his *imprimatur* to any Book, Pamphlet, or Paper, which is written with a view to discredit their proceedings, however unjust, or tends in any manner to give them offence.

We ought therefore to esteem the abolition of this *Office* as one of our greatest acquisitions in the cause of *Liberty*, and use our utmost endeavours to prevent its being ever revived among us. For which purpose, we should keep a constant eye upon those Men, who are suspected to be no good wishers to it, and look upon it as a certain sign of a bad Government, when any Minister attempts to destroy the *Liberty of the Press*.

The next point to be consider'd, is, the object of this *Liberty*, or on what subjects it is supposed to allow us to debate *freely*; and those can be only GOVERNMENT and RELIGION; for, as the publick welfare of every nation depends entirely on these two great articles, so they are the only points, on which any Tyrant or arbitrary Prince would desire to restrain our thoughts. We meet with no instance, in history, of any nation where the subjects are prohibited from writing on matters of indifference and speculation, or from venting the productions of their idle hours. The most slavish

vish nations, where any degree of learning prevails, abound, as much as ours, with books of mere entertainment and diversion; as we may observe in *France, Italy, and Spain*, where there is no prohibition of Plays, Novels, Love-letters, Travels and Romances: but this is no proof of the *Liberty of the Press* in those countries; nor would it be worth contending for here on such accounts. What renders it so valuable and desirable amongst us, is, that we have hereby an opportunity of writing upon subjects of the utmost importance, such as nearly affect our consciences, our liberties, and estates.

I do not mean by this, (as I have already observed, and would always be understood) a *Liberty* to undermine the fundamentals of *Government and Religion*, or to calumniate persons in high power; neither of which ought to be tolerated in any Society; but a *Liberty of examining* the principles of our *faith* by the test of Scripture and Reason; of declaring our judgment in all disputable matters, and of exposing the corruptions, impositions, and ridiculous claims of some Clergymen; a *Liberty* of giving our opinion, in the same manner, of all *political* transactions; of debating the great affairs of peace and war; of freely delivering our sentiments concerning any Laws which are in agitation, and of modestly offering;

fering our reasons, for the repeal of those, which are found to be oppressive; a *Liberty* of setting forth male-administration, and pleading for the redress of grievances; of exposing mismanagement and corruption in high places, and discovering the secret designs of wicked and ambitious Men:

Herein consists that valuable *Liberty* before described, which is the strongest Barrier of all our other liberties, both in *church* and *state*; a *Liberty*, which has contributed to so many noble transactions and extraordinary events, in all ages; and will, I hope, still contribute to a great many more, whenever there is a real occasion; a *Liberty*, which all wise and disinterested men have contended for, in every nation, and particularly in our own: but I shall treat of this in another paper, and content myself, at present, with shewing when any people may be said to possess this glorious privilege in its just latitude.

I have already taken notice, that this *Liberty* is absolutely inconsistent with the office of a *publick Licenser* established by authority, and under the direction of men in power. But neither is it always to be found even in those countries, where there is no such *officer*; mischievous Politicians are never at a loss to preserve the appearance, when they have a mind to abolish the thing; a lesson, that was first taught
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them by their great Master *Machiavel*, and which has been much practised, and wonderfully improved, since his time.

Thus, in some countries, where the greatest *Liberty* of the Press is supposed to be allowed, very little in reality will be found; for the case, in effect, is just the same, whether their Superiors will not suffer them to publish any thing, without their *Licence*, or whether they pretend to leave them at their full *Liberty*, and yet have always some artifice in reserve to punish them, for using this *Liberty*; or whether they lay such heavy *duties* on the *Press*, as manifestly tend to prejudice and discourage the freedom of writing.

A young unexperienced author, indeed, thinks it a great happiness that he lives in a country, where he lies under no restraints in the publication of his works, but the *Laws of the Land*; without considering that the strict *Letter* of most *Law*; is often very different from the *interpretation* which is put upon them, in some sort of prosecutions.

The practice of *Libelling* is a thing of such pernicious consequence, that there have been Laws made to punish it in all civilized Societies; which Laws ought to be put strictly in execution; but the misfortune is, that the nature and several species of *Libels* are not ascertain'd by any of these laws, but are left to the judgment and discretion of
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the Courts of justice ; from whence it comes to pass that, in bad Reigns, many real Patriots have been severely punished under the character of infamous Libellers ; some of whom have lost their ears, and others their lives, for what, in a good reign, they ought to have their Statues erected in Brass. A person who applies himself to writing, especially upon political subjects, should never forget the case of the great ALGERNOON SYDNEY, which is sufficient to convince us that no man is safe against the subtilities and finesses of Lawyers and State-Chymists, who can extract poison out of the most innocent things, and, by tortured constructions, apply the penalties of Statutes, where the Legislators never design'd them. There are certain Adepts in this profession, who can prove any thing from any thing, and maintain a point to be Law, or not to be Law, just as the present occasion, at any time, requires ; upon which account, they are constantly retain'd by another set of men, who find them to be of great advantage in the conduct of their political Schemes.

We have seen, in some Reigns, remote allegories, ironical expressions, and the most distant innuendo's explain'd, by such methods, to a man's destruction ; we have seen Printers and Booksellers menaced and intimidated with arbitrary seizures, illegal

confinements, and groundless, vexatious prosecutions; nay, we have seen some great men stoop so low, as to colloque with common News-writers and Journalists, in order to obstruct all avenues to Truth, and induce them, by bribes, to serve their corrupt purposes with fictitious intelligence and false representations.

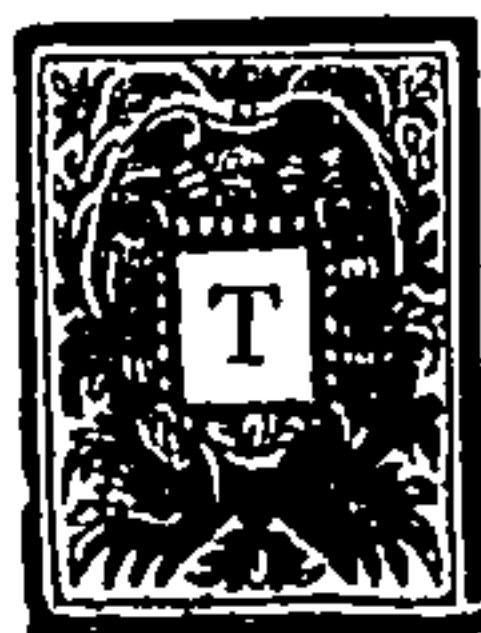
From this negative state of the question, we may judge when the *Liberty of the Press* really subsists in any nation; for where such methods are practised, in any degree, there can be no such *Liberty*; since a privilege which is invaded and superceded, in this manner, is no privilege at all; it is indeed only the *manes* of departed *Liberty*, which makes the loss of the *substance* the more grievous to us, and is a melancholy proof that wicked men in authority will stick at nothing to invalidate the just rights and privileges of their fellow-subjects, when they stand in competition with their corrupt designs.



The CRAFTSMAN. N^o III.

——— *quod Medicorum est,*
Promittunt Medici, Hor.

MONDAY, *December 12.*



HERE is a general Complaint of abuses and corruptions in all Professions, which is most frequently urged by those men themselves, who are the chief authors and occasions of them. If you employ the most infamous tool of the Law, he will begin with exclaiming against *foul practice*, and congratulate you on your good fortune, which did not let you fall into the hands of some *Pettifogers* about Town. In like manner, we never meet with the term *mercenary Scriblers, wretched Hackney-writers, Sciolists, Poetasters*, and so forth, any where so often as in the works of those miserable vermin themselves. What is more common, than to hear a *City-Captain* inveigh against our late military promotions? or to see the learning, integrity, and me-

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