

been given in explaining the signs of virginity.

Mankind, jealous of every kind of pre-eminence, have always put a superior value on what they could first possess, and that to the exclusion of others. This species of folly has given a positive entity to the virginity of women. Virginity, which is nothing but a *moral*, being a virtue that solely consists in the purity of the heart, men have, as with one consent, converted into a *physical* object, and in which they also fancy themselves much interested. From these absurd opinions, usages, ceremonies, superstitions, and even awards and punishments, have been established: abuses the most illicit, and customs the most shocking and disgraceful, have been authorized. To ignorant matrons, and to prejudiced physicians, have young women been obliged to submit the most secret parts of Nature for examination, without their reflecting that such acts of indecency is a downright attack upon chastity, and that every immodest, every indelicate situation, which caused an internal blush, was little less than prostitution.

The prejudices that have been formed on this head I despair of removing. Things
which