

which mankind take a pleasure in believing, however nugatory and unreasonable they may be, they will always believe; yet, as it is the province of history to relate not only the accession of events, and the circumstances of facts, but also the origin of predominant opinions and errors, I think it my indispensable duty, in the History of Man, to examine this favourite idol to which he sacrifices; to consider what the reasons are by which he is prompted to pay that adoration, and to enquire whether virginity, as he understands it, is a real or merely a fabulous divinity.

*Fallopious, Vesalus, Bartholin, Heister, Ruysch* and many other anatomists, pretend, that the membrane of the hymen is a substance which actually exists, and which ought to be numbered among the parts of generation peculiar to women. They maintain further, that this membrane is fleshy, very thin in children, but more thick in grown girls; that it is situated under the orifice of the urethra, and that it partly closes the passage of the vagina; that there is a hole pierced through it, sometimes round, sometimes long, so small that a pea can hardly be passed through in infancy, or a bean at puberty. The hymen, according to *Winslow,*