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Montaigne's Essays

In Three Books. With Notes and Quotations. And an Account of The Author's Life ; With a short Character of the Author and Translator, by the late Marquis of Halifax; With the Addition of A Complete Table to each Volume

Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de

London, 1743

The Life Of Michael Seigr. de Montaigne.

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THE
L I F E
O F

Michael Seig^r. de Montaigne.



THE Race of *Michael Seigneur de Montaigne* in *Perigord*, was Noble, but Noble without any great Lustre till his Time: As to Estate, he was seized of above 2000 Crowns of yearly Revenue. He was born to his Father, the Third, in order of Birth, of his Children, and by him delivered to Gossips of the meanest Condition to be baptized, with a Design rather to oblige and link him to those who were likely to stand in Need of him, than to such as he might stand in Need of: He moreover sent him from his Cradle, to be brought up in a poor Village of his, and there continued him all the while he was at Nurse, and longer, forming him to the lowest and most common Manner of Living: Wherein he certainly so well enured himself to Frugality and Austerity, that they had much ado, during all the Time of his Infancy especially, to correct the Refusals he made of Things that Children of his Age are greedy of; as Sugars, Sweetmeats, Marchpanes, and the like.

No

Michael Seigneur de Montaigne.

No doubt the *Greek* and *Latin* Tongues are a very fair, and a very great Advance; but, as he himself observes, they are now-a-days too dear bought. His Father made all diligent Inquiry that possibly could be, amongst the learned Men, for an exquisite Method of Education, was cautioned of the Inconvenience then in Use, and told, that the tedious Time that is employed in the Languages of the ancient *Greeks* and *Romans*, which cost them nothing, is the only Reason we cannot arrive to that Grandeur of Soul, and Perfection of Knowledge that was in them. The Expedient that he found out for this, is that, whilst he was at Nurse, and before he began to speak, he delivered him to the Care of a *German*, (who since died a famous Physician in *France*) totally ignorant of our Languages, and very well versed in the *Latin* Tongue. This Man he had brought out of his own Country, and entertained with a very great Salary for this Purpose, had the Child continually in his Arms, to whom there were added two others more moderately learned, to attend him, and to relieve the first; which three entertained him with no other Language but *Latin*. As to the rest of the Family, it was an inviolable Rule, that neither his Father, nor so much as his Mother, Man, or Maid, spoke any Word in his Hearing, but such as every one had learned only to prattle with him. And it is not to be believed how all of them profited by this Method; his Father and Mother learned, by this Means, *Latin* enough to understand, and serve themselves withal at Need, as all those Servants did, who were most about his Person. To be short, they did *Latin* it at such a Rate, that it overflowed the neighbouring Villages, where, by Use, several Appellations of Artizans, and their Tools, have got footing, and there remain to this Day. For his Part, he was above six Years old before he understood any more of *French* or *Perigorden* than of

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Arabick; and, without Art, Books, Grammar, or Precepts, without Whipping, and without Tears, he had learned to speak as pure *Latin* as his Master, for he could neither alter it nor mix it. If, for Example, they gave him after the College Mode, they gave it to others in *French*, but they were forced to give it him in ill *Latin* to put it into good: And *Nicholas Gronchi*, who has writ a Book *De Comitibus Romanorum*; *Guillaume Guerente*, who has writ a Commentary upon *Aristotle*; *George Buchanan*, that great Scotch Poet; and *Mark Anthony de Mureta*, whom both *France* and *Italy* acknowledge for the best Orator of his Time, his domestic Tutors, have oft since told him, that he had that Language in his Childhood so ready, and at hand, they were afraid to accost him.

As to the *Greek*, his Father designed to have taught him by Art; but, by a new Method, and that by Way of Sport and Recreation, they tost their Declensions to and fro, after the manner of those who, by certain Tricks upon the Chess-board, learn *Arithmetick* and *Geometry*: So, amongst other Things, he had been advised to make him relish Learning and Duty, by an unforced Will, and his own Device, and to educate his Soul with all Sweetness and Liberty, without Austerity or Compulsion. Which he also did to such a Degree of Superstition, that seeing some are of Opinion, that it troubles the Brains of Children to be suddenly roused in a Morning, and to be snatched away from Sleep, wherein they are much deeper plunged than Men, with Haste and Violence; he always caused him to be waked by the Sound of some musical Instrument, and was never unprovided of a Musician for that Purpose.

But as they who are impatient to be cured, submit to all Sorts of Remedies, and every one's Advice; the good Man, being extremely timorous of failing in a Thing he had so much set his Heart upon, suffered

Michael *Seigneur de Montaigne*:

ferred himself at last to be carried away by the common Opinion, which like Cranes always follow that which went before, and submitted to custom, having now no more those Persons about him, who had given him the first Instructions, that he had bought of *Italy*; and about the sixth Year of his Age sent him to the College of *Guyenne*, at that time very flourishing, and the best in *France*. And there it was not possible to add any Thing to the Care had in choosing for him the best Chamber-Tutors, and in all other circumstances of Education, wherein he reserved several particular Forms, contrary to the College Usance; but so it was, that it was a College still, and this unusual Method of Education was here of no other Advantage to him, than at his first coming to prefer him to one of the higher Classes; for at thirteen Years of Age he had run through his whole Course.

At the Age of three and thirty he married a Wife, tho' might he have been left free to his own Choice, he would have avoided marrying, even with *Wisdom* herself, had she been willing. But 'tis not much to the Purpose, says he, to resist Custom, for the common Usance of Life will be so. Nevertheless, this Marriage of his was not spontaneous, he was put upon it, and led to it by odd Accidents. And as great a Libertine as he professes himself to be, he more particularly observed his matrimonial Vow than he expected from, or had proposed to, himself.

His Father had left him *Montaigne* in Pattage, as the eldest of his Sons, prophesying that he would ruin it, considering his Humour; so little disposed to live at home: But he was deceived, for he lived upon it as he entered into it, excepting that it was something better, and yet without Office, or any other foreign Helps. As to the rest, if *Fortune* never did him any violent or extraordinary Office, so she never shewed him any signal Favour: Whatever

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he had in his House that proceeded from her Liberality was before he came to it, and above a hundred Years before his Time: He never, in his own particular, had any solid and essential Advantages, for which he stood indebted to her Bounty: She shewed him airy, honorary, and titular Favours, without Substance; she procured for him the Collar of the Order of *St. Michael*, which, when young, he coveted above all other Things, it being at that Time the utmost Mark of Honour of the *French Nobles*, and very rare. But of all her Favours, there was none with which he was so well pleased, as an authentick Bull of a *Roman Burgefs*, that was granted to him, with great Civility and Bounty, in a Journey he made to *Rome*, which is transcribed in Form in the sixth Chapter of the third Book of his Essays.

Messieurs de Bourdeaux elected him Mayor of their City, being then out of the Kingdom, and at *Rome*, and yet more remote from any such Expectation, which made him excuse himself; but that would not serve his Turn, and moreover the King interposed his Command. 'Tis an Office that ought to be looked upon with the greatest Esteem, as it has no other Perquisites and Benefits belonging to it, than the mere Honour of its Execution. It lasts but two Years; but may, by a second Election, be continued longer, though that rarely happens. It was to him, and had been so twice before; once some Years since to *Monfieur de Lausac*, and more lately to *Monfieur de Byron*, Mareschal of *France*, in which Place he succeeded, and left his to *Monfieur de Matignon*, also Mareschal of *France*, proud of so noble Fraternity. His Father, a Man of great Honour and Equity, had formerly also had the same Dignity. All the Children his Wife brought died at Nurse, saving *Leonora*, an only Daughter, whom he disposed in Marriage some two Years before his Death.

The

Michael *Seigneur de Montaigne*.

The first printing of his *Essays* was in the Year 1580, at which Time the publick Applause gave him, as he says, a little more Assurance than he expected. He has since added, but corrected nothing: His Book having been always the same, saving that upon every new Impression he took the Privilege to add something, that the Buyer might not go away with his Hands quite empty. His Person was strong and well knit; his Face not fat but full; his Complexion betwixt jovial and melancholick, moderately sanguine and hot; his Constitution healthful and sprightly, rarely troubled with Diseases, till he grew into Years, that he began to be afflicted with the Cholick and Stone: As to the rest, very obstinate in his Hatred and Contempt of Physicians Prescriptions: An hereditary Antipathy; his Father having lived threescore and fourteen Years, his Grandfather threescore and nine, and his great Grandfather almost fourscore Years, without having ever tasted any Sort of Medicine.

He died in the Year 1592, the 13th of *September*, a very constant and philosophical Death, being aged fifty-nine Years, six Months, and eleven Days; and was buried at *Bordeaux*, in the Church of a Commandery of *St. Anthony*, now given to the Religious *Feullentines*; where his Wife, *Françoise de la Castaigne*, and his Daughter, have erected for him an honourable Monument, having, like his Ancestors, passed over his Life and Death in the Catholick Religion.