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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

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Chap. 1. That Men by various Ways arrive at the same End.

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ESSAYS

OF

Michael Seig^r. de Montaigne.

The First BOOK.

CHAP. I.

That Men by various Ways arrive at the same End.

THE most likely and most usual Way in Practice, of appeasing the Indignation of such as we have any Way offended, when we see them in Possession of the Power of Revenge, and find that we absolutely lye at their Mercy, is by Submission (than which, nothing more flatters the Glory of an Adversary) to move them to Commiseration and Pity: *Submission mollifies the Hearts of the offended.* And yet Bravery, Constancy, and Resolution, however quite contrary Means, have sometimes served to produce the same Effect. *Edward the Black Prince of Wales* (the same who so long governed our Province of *Guienne*, a Person whose high Condition, excellent Qualities, and remarkable Fortune,

tune, have in them a great deal of the most noble and most considerable Parts of Grandeur) having through some Misdemeanours of theirs, been highly incensed by the *Limosins*, and in the Heat of that Resentment taken their City by Assault, was not, in the Riot commonly attending such Executions, either by the Outcries of the People, or the Prayers and Tears of the Women and Children, abandoned to Slaughter and prostitute at his Feet for Mercy, to be stayed from prosecuting his Revenge; till penetrating farther into the Body of the Town,

Remarkable Valour of 3 French Gentlemen.

he at last took Notice of three *French Gentlemen*, who with incredible Bravery alone sustained the whole Power of his victorious Army: And then it was, that the Consideration of, and the Respect unto so remarkable a Virtue, first stopt the Torrent of his Fury, and that his Clemency, beginning in the Preservation of these three Cavaliers, was afterwards extended to all the remaining Inhabitants of the City. *Scanderbeg*, Prince of *Epirus*, in great Wrath pursuing one of his Soldiers, with a resolute Purpose to kill him, and the Soldier having in vain tried by all the Ways of Humility and Supplication to appease him, seeing him notwithstanding obstinately bent to his Ruin, resolved, as his last Refuge, to face about and expect him with his Sword in his Hand; which Behaviour of his gave a sudden Stop to his Captain's Fury, who, seeing him assume so noble a Resolution, received him to Grace: An Example, however, that might suffer another Interpretation with such as have not read of the prodigious Force and Valour of that invincible Prince. The Emperor *Conrade III.* having besieged *Guelpho* Duke of *Bavaria*, would not be prevailed upon, what mean and unmanly Satisfaction soever had been tendered to him, to condescend to milder Conditions, than that the *Ladies* and *Gentlewomen* only who were in the Town might go out without Violation of their Honour on Foot, and with so much only as they could carry about them. Which was no sooner known, but that out of Magnanimity of Heart, and an Excess of good Nature, they presently contrived to carry out upon their Shoulders, their Husbands and Children, and even the Duke himself; a Sight at which the Emperor was so pleased, that ravished with

with the Generosity of the Action, he wept for Joy, and immediately extinguishing in his Heart the mortal and implacable Hatred he had conceiv'd against this Duke, he from that Time forward treated him and his with all Humanity and Affection. The one, or the other, of these two ways, would with great Facility work upon my Nature; for I have a marvellous Propensity to Mercy and Mildness, and to such a Degree of Tenderneſs, that I fancy, of the two I ſhould ſooner ſurrender my Anger to *Compaſſion* than *Eſteem*: And yet Pity is reputed a Vice amongſt the *Stoicks*, who will that we ſuccour the Afflicted, but not that we ſhould be ſo affected with their Sufferings, as to ſuffer with them. I conceiv'd theſe Examples not ill ſuited to the Queſtion in Hand, and the rather becauſe therein we obſerve theſe great Souls, aſſaulted and try'd by theſe two ſeveral ways to reſiſt the one without relenting, and to be ſhook and ſubjected by the other. It is true, that to ſuffer a Man's Heart to be totally ſubdu'd by *Compaſſion*, may be imputed to Facility, Effeminacy, and Over-tenderneſs; whence it comes to paſs, that the weakeſt Natures, as of Women, Children, and the common Sort of People, are the moſt ſubject to it: But after having reſiſted, and diſdain'd the Power of Sighs and Tears, to ſurrender a Man's Animosity to the ſole Reverence of the ſacred Image of Virtue; this can be no other than the Effect of a ſtrong and inflexible Soul, enamour'd of, and raviſh'd with a Maſculine and obſtinate Valour. Nevertheleſs, Aſtoniſhment and Admiration may in leſs generous Minds beget a like Effect. Witneſs the People of *Thebes*, who having put two of their Generals upon Trial for their Lives, for having continued in Arms beyond the precise Term of their Commiſſion, very hardly pardon'd *Pelopidas*, who bowing under the Weight of ſo dangerous an Accuſation, had made no manner of Defence for himſelf, nor produc'd other Arguments than Prayers and Supplications to ſecure his Head; whereas, on the contrary, *Epa-minondas* being brought to the Bar, and falling to magnify the Exploits he had perform'd in their Service, and after a haughty and arrogant manner reproaching them with Ingratitude and Injuſtice, they had not the Heart to proceed any further in his Trial, but broke up the Court

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and departed, the whole Assembly highly commending the Courage and Confidence of this Man *Dionysius* the Elder, after having by a tedious Siege, and through exceeding great Difficulties, taken the City of *Rbegium*, and in it the Governor *Phyton*, a very gallant Man, who had made so obstinate a Defence, he was resolv'd to make him a tragical Example of his Revenge; in order whereunto, and the more sensibly to afflict him, he first told him, *That he had the Day before caus'd his Son and all his Kindred to be drown'd*: To which *Phyton* return'd no other Answer but this, *That they were then by one Day happier than he*. After which, causing him to be stripp'd, and delivering him into the Hands of the Tormentors, he was by them not only dragg'd through the Streets of the Town, and most ignominiously and cruelly whipp'd, but moreover, vilified with most bitter and contumelious Language: Yet still, in the Fury of all this Persecution, he maintain'd his Courage entire all the Way, with a strong Voice and undaunted Countenance proclaiming the glorious Cause of his Death; namely, for that he would not deliver up his Country into the Hands of a merciless Tyrant; at the same Time denouncing against him a sudden Chastisement from the offended Gods. At which the Tyrant rolling his Eyes about, and reading in his Soldiers Looks, that instead of being incens'd at the haughty Language of this conquer'd Enemy, to the Contempt of him their Captain and his Triumph, they not only seem'd struck with Admiration of so rare a Virtue, but moreover inclin'd to mutiny, and were even ready to rescue the Prisoner out of the Hangman's Hands, he caus'd the Execution to cease, and afterwards privately caus'd him to be thrown into the Sea. Man (in good Earnest) is a marvellous, vain, fickle, and unstable Subject, and on whom it is very hard to form any certain or proportionate Judgment. For *Pompey* could pardon the whole City of the *Mammertines*, though furiously incens'd against it, upon the single Account of the Virtue and Magnanimity of one Citizen, *Zeno*, who took the Fault of the Publick wholly upon himself; neither intreated other Favour, but alone to undergo the Punishment for all: And yet *Sylla's* Host, having in the City of *Perusia* manifested the same Virtue, obtain'd nothing by it, either
for

for himself or his Fellow Citizens. And directly contrary to my first Examples, the bravest of all Men, and who was reputed so gracious and civil to all those he overcame. *Alexander the Great*, having after many great Difficulties forc'd the City of *Gaza*, and entering found *Betis*, who commanded there, and of whose Valour in the Time of this Siege he had most noble and manifest Proofs, alone, forsaken by all his Soldiers, his Arms hack'd and hew'd to Pieces, covered all over with Blood and Wounds, and yet still fighting in the Croud of a great Number of *Macedonians*, who were laying on him on all Sides, he said to him, nettled at so dear bought Victory, and two fresh Wounds he had newly received in his own Person, *Thou shalt not die Betis so honourably as thou dost intend, but shall assuredly suffer all the Torments that can be inflicted on a miserable Captive.* To which Menaces the other returning no other Answer, but only a fierce and disdainful Look; What, says the Conqueror (observing his obstinate Silence) *Is he too stiff to bend a Knee! Is he too proud to utter one suppliant Word! I shall certainly conquer this Silence; and if I cannot force a Word from his Mouth, I shall at least extract a Groan from his Heart.* *Obstinate Silence of Betis.* And thereupon converting his Anger into Fury, presently commanded his Heels to be bored through, causing him to be dragg'd, mangled, and dismembred at an infamous Cart's-Tail. Was it that the Height of Courage was so natural and familiar to this Conqueror, that because he could not admire, he should the less esteem this *Hero*? Or was it that he conceiv'd Valour to be a Virtue so peculiar to himself, that his Pride could not, without Envy, endure it in another? Or was it that the natural Impetuosity of his Fury was incapable of Opposition? Certainly had it been capable of any manner of Moderation or Satiety, it is to be believ'd, that in the Sack and Desolation of *Thebes*, to see so many valiant Men lost and totally Deftitute of any farther Defence, cruelly massacred before his Eyes, would have appeas'd it. Where there were above six thousand put to the Sword, of which not one was seen to fly, or heard to cry out for Quarter; but on the contrary every one running here and there to seek out and to provoke the victorious Enemy to help them to an honourable End: Not one who did not to his last Gasp, yet endeavour

to revenge himself, and with all the Arms of a brave Despair to sweeten his own Death in the Death of an Enemy. Yet did their Virtue create no Pity, and the Length of one Day was not enough to satiate the Thirst of the Conqueror's Revenge; but the Slaughter continued to the last Drop of Blood that was capable of being shed, and stopp'd not till it met with none but naked and impotent Persons, old Men, Women, and Children, of them to carry away to the Number of thirty thousand Slaves.



C H A P. II.

Of Sorrow.

NO Man living is more free from this Passion than I, who neither like it in myself, nor admire it in others, and yet generally the World, (I know not why) is pleas'd to grace it with a particular Esteem, endeavouring to make us believe, that Wisdom, Virtue and Conscience shroud themselves under this grave and affected Appearance. Foolish and sordid Disguise! The *Italians* however, under the Denomination of *Un Tristo*, decypher a clandestine Nature, a dangerous and ill-natured Man: And with good Reason, it being a Quality always hurtful, always idle and vain, and as cowardly, mean, and base, by the *Stoicks* expressly, and particularly forbidden their Sages: But the Story nevertheless says, that *Psammenitus*, King of *Egypt*, being defeated and taken Prisoner by *Cambyfes* King of *Persia*, seeing his own Daughter pass by him in a wretched Habit, with a Bucket to draw Water, though his Friends about him were so concerned as to break out into Tears and Lamentations at the miserable Sight, yet he himself remain'd unmov'd, without uttering a Word of Discontent, with his Eyes fix'd upon the Ground: And seeing moreover his Son immediately after led to Execution, still maintain'd the same Gravity and Indifference; till spying at last one of his Domesticks dragg'd away amongst the Captives, he could then hold no longer, but fell to tearing his Hair, and beating his Breast, with all the other Extravagancies