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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

Chap. 4. That the Soul discharges her Passions upon false Objects where the true are wanting.

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This other restores the Sense of Repose to a Body without a Soul.

*Neque sepulcrum, quo recipiat, habeat portum corporis :
Ubi, remissa humana vita, Corpus requiescat à malis †.*

Nor with a Tomb as with a Haven blest,
Where, after Life, the Corps in Peace may rest.

As Nature demonstrates to us, that several dead Things retain yet an occult Sympathy and Relation to Life ; Wine changes it's Flavour and Complexion in Cellars, according to the Changes and Seasons of the Vine from whence it came ; and the Flew of Venison alters it's Condition and Taste in the Powdering-tub, according to the Seasons of the living Flesh of it's Kind, as it is observed by the Curious.



C H A P. IV.

*That the Soul discharges her Passions upon false
Objects, where the true are wanting.*

A Gentleman of my Country, who was very often tormented with the Gout, being importun'd by his Physicians totally to reclaim his Appetite from all manner of salt Meats, was wont presently to reply, that he must needs have something to quarrel with in the Extremity of his Fits, and that he fancied, that railing at, and cursing one while the *Bologna* Saufages, and another the dry'd Tongues and the Hams, was some Mitigation to his Pain. And in good Earnest, as the Arm when it is advanced to strike, if it fail of meeting with that upon which it was design'd to discharge the Blow, and spends itself in vain, does offend the Striker himself ; and as also, that to make a pleasant Prospect the Sight should not be lost and dilated in a vast Extent of empty Air, but have some Bounds to limit and circumscribe it at a reasonable Distance.

† *Cicero Tusc. l. 1.*

*Ventus, ut amittit vires, nisi robore densæ
Occurrant Sylvæ, spatio diffusus inani.*

As Winds do lose their Strength, unless withstood
By some dark Grove of strong opposing Wood.

So it appears, that the Soul being transported and discompos'd, turns it's Violence upon itself, if not supply'd with something to oppose it, and therefore always requires an Enemy as an Object on which to discharge it's Fury and Resentment. *Plutarch* says very well of those who are delighted with little Dogs and Monkeys, that the amorous Part which is in us, for want of a legitimate Object, rather than lye idle, does after that manner forge and create one frivolous and false; as we see that the Soul in the Exercise of it's Passions, inclines rather to deceive itself, by creating a false and fantastical Subject, even contrary to it's own Belief, than not to have something to work upon. And after this manner brute Beasts direct their Fury to fall upon the Stone or Weapon that has hurt them, and with their Teeth even execute their Revenge upon themselves, for the Injury they have received from another.

*Pannonis haud aliter post ictum sævior Ursa
Cui jaculum parva Lybs amentavit habena.
Se rotat in vulnus, telumque irata receptum
Impetit, & secum fugientem circuit Hastam*.*

So the fierce Bear, made fiercer by the Smart,
Of the bold *Lybian's* mortal guided Dart,
Turns round upon the Wound, and the tough Spear
Contorted o'er her Breast does flying bear.

What Causes of the Misadventures that befall us do we not invent? What is it that we do not lay the Fault to right or wrong, that we may have something to quarrel with? Those beautiful Tresses, young Lady, you so liberally tear off, are no way guilty, nor is it the Whiteness of those delicate Breasts you so unmercifully beat, that with an unlucky Bullet has slain your beloved Brother; quarrel with something else. *Livy*, speaking of the *Roman* Army in *Spain*, says, that for the Loss of two Brothers,

* *Claudian*.

who were both great Captains, *Flere omnes repente, & offensare capita* *, that they all wept and tore their Hair. 'Tis the common Practice of Affliction. And the Philosopher *Bion* said pleasantly of the King, who by Handfuls pull'd his Hair off his Head for Sorrow, *Does this Man think that Baldness is a Remedy for Grief?* Who has not seen peevish Gamesters worry the Cards with their Teeth, and swallow whole Bales of Dice in Revenge for the Loss of their Money? *Xerxes* whipp'd the Sea, and writ a Challenge to Mount *Atbos!* *Cyrus* employed a whole Army several Days at Work, to revenge himself of the River *Gnidus*, for the Fright it had put him into in passing over; and *Caligula* demolish'd a very beautiful Palace for the Pleasure his Mother had once enjoy'd there. I remember there was a Story current, when I was a Boy, that one of our Neighbouring Kings having receiv'd a Blow from the Hand of *G O D*, swore he would be reveng'd, and in order to it, made Proclamation, that for ten Years to come no one should pray to him, or so much as mention him throughout his Dominions; by which we are not so much to take Measure of the Folly, as the vain-Glory of the Nation of which this Tale was told. They are Vices that indeed always go together; but such Actions as these have in them more of Presumption than want of Wit. *Augustus Cæsar*, having been tost with a Tempest at Sea, fell to defying *Neptune*, and in the Pomp of the *Circenstan* Games, to be reveng'd, depos'd his Statue from the Place it had amongst the other Deities. Wherein he was less excusable than the former, and less than he was afterwards, when having lost a Battle under *Quintilius Varus* in *Germany*, in Rage and Despair he went running his Head against the Walls, and crying out, *O Varus!* give me my Men again! for this exceeds all Folly, forasmuch as Impiety is joined with it, invading God himself, or at least Fortune, as if she had Ears that were subject to our Batteries; like the *Thracians*, who when it thunders, or lightens, fall to shooting against Heaven with *Titanian* Madness as if by Flights of Arrows they intended to reduce God Almighty to Reason. Though the ancient Poet in *Plutarch* tells us,

* *Livy dec. 3. l. 5.*

*Point ne se faut courouer aux Affaires,
Il ne leur chaut de toutes nos cholers †.*

We must not quarrel Heaven in our Affairs,
That little for a Mortal's Anger cares.

But we can never enough decry, nor sufficiently condemn, the senseless and ridiculous Sallies of our unruly Passions.



C H A P. V.

Whether the Governor of a Place besieg'd, ought himself to go out to parley.

Lucius Marcius, the Roman Legate, in the War against Perseus King of Macedon, to gain Time wherein to re-inforce his Army, set on Foot some Overtures of Accommodation, with which the King being lull'd asleep, concluded a Cessation for certain Days; by this Means giving his Enemy Opportunity and Leisure to repair his Army, which was afterward the Occasion of his own Ruin. The elder Sort of Senators, notwithstanding, mindful of their Fore-fathers Virtue, were by no Means satisfisd with this Proceeding; but on the contrary condemn'd it, as degenerating from their ancient Practice, which they said was by Valour, and not by Artifice, Surprizes, and Night Encounters; neither by pretended Flight, Ambuscades, and deceitful Treaties, to overcome their Enemies; never making War till having first denounc'd it, and very often assign'd both the Hour and Place of Battle. Out of this generous Principle it was that they deliver'd up to Pyrrhus his treacherous Physician, and to the *Hetrurians* their disloyal School-Master. And this was indeed a Procedure truly *Roman*, and nothing ally'd to the *Græcian* Subtilty, nor the *Punick* Cunning, where it was reputed a Victory

† *Plutarch.*