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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. 7. That the Intention is Judge of our Actions.

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Hand upon their Adversary to stop him, nor to set a Leg before him to throw him down. And yet more generous was the Answer of that Great *Alexander* to *Polypercon*, who persuaded him to take the Advantage of the Night's Obscurity to fall upon *Darius*; by no means (said he) it is not for such a Man as I am to steal a Victory, *Malo me fortunæ pœniteat, quam victoriæ pudeat**, I had rather repent me of my Fortune, than be ashamed of my Victory.

*Atque idem fugientem haud est dignatus Orodem
Sternere, nec jacta cæcum dare Cuspide vulnus :
Obvius, adversoque occurrit, seque viro vir
Contulit, haud furto melior, sed fortibus armis †.*

His Heart disdain'd to strike *Orodes* dead,
Or, unseen, basely wound him as he fled;
But gaining first his Front, wheels round, and there
Bravely oppos'd himself to his Career :
And fighting Man to Man, would let him see
His Valour scorn'd both Odds and Policy.



C H A P. VII.

That the Intention is Judge of our Actions.

TIS a Saying, *That Death discharges us of all our Obligations*. However, I know some who have taken it in another Sense. *Henry* the Seventh, King of *England*, articed with *Don Philip*, Son to *Maximilian* the Emperor, and Father to the Emperor *Charles* the Fifth, when he had him upon *English* Ground, that the said *Philip* should deliver up the Duke of *Suffolk* of the *White Rose*, his mortal Enemy, who was fled into the *Low Countries*, into his Hands; which *Philip* (not knowing how to evade it) accordingly promised to do, but upon Condition nevertheless, that *Henry* should attempt nothing against the Life of

* *Quint. Curt.* 1. 4. † *Virg. Æneid.* l. 10.

the said Duke, which during his own Life he perform'd; but coming to die, in his last Will, commanded his Son to put him to Death immediately after his Decease. And lately, in the Tragedy, that the Duke of *Alva* presented to us in the Persons of the two Counts, *Egmont*, and *Horne* at *Brussels*, there were very remarkable Passages, and one amongst the rest, that the said Count *Egmont* (upon the Security of whose Word and Faith Count *Horne* had come and surrendered himself to the Duke of *Alva*) earnestly entreated that he might first mount the Scaffold, to the End that Death might disengage him from the Obligation he had pass'd to the other. In which Case, methinks Death did not acquit the former of his Promise, and the Second was satisfi'd in the good Intention of the other, even though he had not died with him: For we cannot be oblig'd beyond what we are able to perform, by Reason that the Effects and Intentions of what we promise are not at all in our Power, and that indeed we are Masters of nothing but the Will, in which, by Necessity, all the Rules and whole Duty of Mankind is founded and establish'd. And therefore Count *Egmont*, conceiving his Soul and Will bound and indebted to his Promise, although he had not the Power to make it good, had doubtless been absolv'd of his Duty, even though he had out-liv'd the other; but the King of *England* wilfully and permeditately breaking his Faith, was no more to be excus'd for deferring the Execution of his Infidelity till after his Death, than *Herodotus's* Mason, who having inviolably, during the Time of his Life, kept the Secret of the Treasure of the King of *Ægypt* his Master, at his Death discover'd it to his Children. I have taken Notice of several in my Time, who, convinc'd by their Consciences of unjustly detaining the Goods of another, have endeavoured to make Amends by their Will, and after their Decease: But they had as good do nothing as delude themselves both in taking so much Time in so pressing an Affair, and also in going about to repair an Injury with so little Demonstration of Resentment and Concern. They owe over and above something of their own, and by how much their Payment is more strict and incommodious to themselves, by so much is their Restitution more perfect, just, and meritorious; for Penitency requires Penance: But they yet do worse than these, who reserve the Declaration

tion of a mortal Animosity against their Neighbour to the last Gasp, having concealed it all the Time of their Lives before, wherein they declare to have little Regard of their own Honour whilst they irritate the Party offended against their Memory; and less to their Conscience, not having the Power, even out of Respect to Death itself, to make their Malice die with them; but extended the Life of their Hatred even beyond their own. Unjust Judges, who defer Judgment to a Time wherein they can have no Knowledge of the Cause! For my Part I shall take Care, if I can, that my Death discover nothing that my Life has not first openly manifested, and publickly declared.



C H A P. VIII.

Of Idleness.

AS we see some Grounds that have long lain idle and untilled, when grown rank and fertile by rest, to abound with and spend their Virtue in the Product of innumerable Sorts of Weeds and wild Herbs that are unprofitable, and of no wholesom Use, and that to make them perform their true Office, we are to cultivate and prepare them for such Seeds as are proper for our Service. And as we see Women that without the Knowledge of Men do sometimes of themselves bring forth inanimate and formless Lumps of Flesh, but that to cause a natural and perfect Generation they are to be husbanded with another Kind of Seed; even so it is with Wits, which if not applied to some certain Study that may fix and restrain them, run into a thousand Extravagancies, and are eternally roving here and there in the inextricable Labyrinth of restless Imagination.

*Sicut aquæ tremulum labris ubi lumen ahenis
Sole repercussum, aut radiantis imagine Lunæ,
Omnia pervolat latè loca, jamque sub auras
Erigitur, summique ferit laquearia tecti*.*

* *Virg. Æneid. l. 8.*

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