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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. 8. Of Idleness.

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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.*

like

Like as the quivering Reflection
Of Fountain Waters, when the Morning Sun
Darts on the Bason, or the Moon's pale Beam
Gives Light and Colour to the captive Stream,
Whips with fantastick Motion round the Place,
And Walls and Roof strikes with it's trembling Rays.

In which wild and irregular Agitation, there is no
Folly, nor idle Fancy they do not light upon :

————— *velut ægri somnia, vanae
Finguntur species* —————*

Like sick Men's Dreams, that from a troubled Brain
Phantasms create, ridiculous and vain.

The Soul that has no established Limit to circumscribe
it, loses itself, as the Epigrammatist says,

Quisquis ubique habitat, maxime nusquam habitat †.

He that lives every where, does no where live.

When I lately retired myself to my own House, with a
Resolution, as much as possibly I could, to avoid all man-
ner of Concern in Affairs, and to spend in Privacy and
Repose the little Remainder of Time I have to live: I
fancied I could not more oblige my Mind than to suffer it
at full Leisure to entertain and divert itself, which I also
now hoped it might the better be entrusted to do, as being
by Time and Observation become more settled and ma-
ture; but I find,

————— *variâ semper dant otia mentem* †.

————— Even in the most retir'd Estate

Leisure itself does various Thoughts create.

that, quite contrary, it is like a Horse that has broke from
his Rider, who voluntarily runs into a much more violent
Career than any Horseman would put him to, and creates
me so many *Chimæras* and fantastick Monsters one upon
another, without Order or Design, that, the better at
Leisure to contemplate their Strangeness and Absurdity, I
have begun to commit them to Writing, hoping in time
to make them ashamed of themselves.

* *Hor. de Arte Poetica.* † *Martial, lib. 7. Epig. 72.*

† *Lucan. l. 4.*