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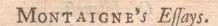
### **Montaigne's Essays**

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. 9. Of Liars.

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### CHAP. IX.

of Liars. your slid you will

HERE is not a Man living, whom it would fo little become to speak of Memory as myself, for I have none at all; and do not think that the World has again another fo treacherous as mine. My other Faculties are all very ordinary and mean; but in this I think myfelf very fingular, and to fuch a Degree of Excellence, that (befides the Inconvenience I fuffer by it, which merits fomething) I deserve, methinks, to be famous for it, and to have more than a common Reputation: Though, in Truth, the necessary Use of Memory confidered, Plato had Reason when he called it a great and powerful Goddess. In my Country, when they would decypher a Man - iat has no Sense, they say, such a one has no Memory; nd when I complain of mine, they feem not to believe I am in earnest, and prefently reprove me, as though I accufed myfelf for a Fool, not difcerning the Difference betwixt Memory and Understanding; wherein they are very wide of my Intention, and do me Wrong, Experience rather daily shewing us on the contrary, that a strong Memory is commonly coupled with infirm Judgment: And they do me moreover (who am so perfect in nothing as the good Friend) at the same time a greater Wrong in this, that they make the fameWords, which accuse my Infirmity, represent me for an ingrateful Person; wherein they bring my Integrity and good Nature into Question upon the Account of my Memory, and from a natural Imperfection, unjuffly derive a Defect of Conscience. He has forgot, lays one, this Request, or that Promise; he no more remembers his Friends, he has forgot, to fay or do, or to conceal fuch and fuch a Thing for my Sake. And truly, I am apt enough to forget many Things, but to neglect any thing my Friend has given me in Charge, I never do it. And it should be enough, methinks, that I

feel the Misery and Inconvenience of it without branding me with Malice, a Vice fo much a Stranger, and fo contrary to my Nature. However, I derive these Comforts from my Infirmity; first, that it is an Evil from which principally I have found Reason to correct a worse, that would eafily enough have grown upon me, namely Ambition; this Defect being intolerable in those who take upon them the Negotiations of the World, an Employment of the greatest Honour and Trust among Men: Secondly, That (as feveral like Examples in the Progress of Nature demonstrate to us) she has fortified me in my other Faculties, proportionably as she has unfurnished me in this; I should otherwise have been apt implicitely to have reposed my Wit and Judgment upon the bare Report of other Men. without ever fetting them to work upon any Inquisition whatever, had the strange Inventions and Opinions of the Authors I have read been ever present with me by the Benefit of Memory: Thirdly, That by this Means I am not so talkative, for the Magazine of the Memory is ever better furnished with Matter than that of the Invention: and had mine been faithful to me, I had e'er this deafned all my Friends with my eternal Babble, the Subjects themfelves roufing and ftirring up the little Faculty I have of handling and applying them, heating and extending my Discourse. 'Tis a great Impersection, and what I have obferved in feveral of my intimate Friends, who, as their Memories supply them with a present and entire Review of Things, derive their Narratives from fo remote a Fountain, and crowd them with so many impertinent Circumstances, that though the Story be good in itself, they make a shift to spoil it; and if otherwise, you are either to curse the Strength of their Memory, or the Weakness of their Judgment: And it is a hard Thing to close up a Discourse, and to cut it short, when you are once in, and have a great deal more to fay. Neither is there any Thing wherein the Force and Readiness of a Horse is so much seen, as in a round, graceful, and fudden Stop; and I see even those who are pertinent enough, who would but cannot stop short in their Career; for whilst they are feeking out a handsom Period to conclude the Sense, they talk at random, and are so perplexed and entangled in their own Eloquence, that they know not what they fay. But above all, old Men, who

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## Montaigne's Esfays.

yet retain the Memory of Things past, and forget how often they have told them, are the most dangerous Company for this Fault; and I have known Stories from the Mouth of a Man of very great Quality, otherwise very pleasant in themselves, becoming very troublesom, by being a hundred Times repeated over and over again. The fourth Obligation I have to this infirm Memory of mine is, that by this Means I less remember the Injuries I have received; infomuch, that (as the Ancient faid) I should have a Protocol, a Register of Injuries, or a Prompter, like Darius, who, that he might not forget the Offence he had received from those of Athens, so oft as he sat down to Dinner, ordered one of his Pages three Times to whoop in his Ear, Sir, Remember the Athenians: And also, the Places which I revisit, and the Books I read over again, still smile upon me with a fresh Novelty. It is not without good Reason said, That he who has not a good Memory should never take upon him the Trade of Lying. I know very well, that the Grammarians diffinguish betwixt an Untruth and a Lie, and say, that to tell an Untruth is to tell a Thing that is false, but that we ourselves believe to be true; and that to lie, is to tella Thing that we know in our Conscience to be utterly falle and untrue; and it is of this last Sort of Liars only that I now speak. Now these do either wholly contrive and invent the Untruths they utter, or so alter and disguise a true Story, that it always ends in a Lie; and when they disguist and often alter the fame Story according to their own Fancy, 'tis very hard for them at one Time or another to escape being trapp'd, by Reason that the real Truth of the Thing having first taken Possession of the Memory, and being there lodged, and imprinted by the Way of Knowledge and Science, it will be ever ready to present itself to the Imagination, and to shoulder out any Falshood of their own contriving, which cannot there have fo fure and fettled Footing as the other; and the Circumstances of the first true Knowledge evermore running in their Minds, will be apt to make them forget those that are illegitimate, and only forged by their own Fancy. In what they wholly invent for a much as there is no contrary Impression to justle their Invention, there feems to be less Danger of Tripping; and yet even this also, by reason it is a vain Body, and with out any other Foundation than Fancy only, is very apt to elcape

escape the Memory, if they be not careful to make themfelves very perfect in their Tale. Of which I have had very pleafant Experience, at the Expence of fuch as profess only to form, and accommodate their Speech to the Affair they have in Hand, or to the Humour of the Person with whom they have to do; for the Circumstances to which these Men slick not to enslave their Consciences, and their Faith being subject to several Changes, their Language must accordingly vary: From whence it happens, that of the same Thing they tell one Man, that it is this, and another, that it is that, giving it feveral Forms and Colours; which Men, if they once come to confer Notes, and find out the Cheat, what becomes of this fine Art? To which may be added, that they must of Necessity very often ridiculously trap themselves; for, what Memory can be fufficient to retain fo many different Shapes as they have forged upon one and the fame Subject? I have known many in my Time, very ambitious of the Repute of this fine Piece of Discretion; but they do not see, that if there be a Reputation of being wife, there is really no Prudence in it. In plain Truth, Lying is a hateful and an accursed Vice. We are not Men, nor have other Tie upon one another, but our Word. If we did but discover the Horror and ill Consequences of it, we should pursue it with Fire and Sword, and more justly than other Crimes. I fee that Parents commonly, and in Discretion enough, correct their Children for little innocent Faults, and torment them for wanton childish Tricks, that have neither Impression, nor tend to any Consequence: Whereas, in my Opinion, Lying only, and (what is of something a lower Form) Stomach, are the Faults which are to be leverely whipped out of them, both in the Infancy and Progress of the Vices, which will otherwise grow up and increase with them; and after a Tongue has once got the Knack of Lying, 'tis not to be imagined how impossible almost it is to reclaim it. Whence it comes to pass, that we see some, who are otherwise very honest Men, so subject to this Vice. I have an honest Lad to my Taylor, who I never knew guilty of one Truth, no not when it had been to his Advantage. If Fallhood had, like Truth, but one Face only, we should be upon better Terms; for we should then take the contrary to what the Liar lays E 3 for

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# Montaigne's Esfays.

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for certain Truth; but the Reverse of Truth has an hundred thousand Figures, and a Field indefinite without Bound or Limit. The Pythagoreans make Good to be certain and finite, and Evil, infinite and uncertain; there are a thoufand Ways to miss the White, there is only one to hit it. For my own Part, I have this Vice in fo great Horror, that I am ture I could prevail with my Conscience to secure myself from the most manifest and extreme Danger by an impudent and folemn Lie. An ancient Father fays, That a Dog we know is better Company than a Man whose Language we do not understand\*. Ut externus non alieno sit hominis vice: As a Foreigner, to one that understands not what he says, cannot be said to supply the Place of a Man, because he can be no Company. And how much less sociable is false Speaking than Silence? King Francis the first bragged, that he had, by this Means, nonplused Francisco Taverna, the Embassador of Francisco Sforza, Duke of Milan, a Man very famous for his Eloquence in those Days. This Gentleman had been sent to excuse his Master to his Majesty about a thing of very great Consequence; which was this: King Francis, to maintain evermore fome Intelligence in Italy, out of which he had been lately driven, and particularly in the Dutchy of Milan, had thought it (to that End) convenient to have evermore a Gentleman on his Behalf to lye Leiger in the Court of that Duke; an Ambassador in Effect, but in outward Appearance no other than a private Person who pretended to refide there upon the fingle Account of his own particular Affairs; which was so carried, by reason that the Duke, much more depending upon the Emperor, especially at a time when he was in a Treaty of a Marriage with his Niece, Daughter to the King of Denmark, and fince Dowager of Lorrain, could not own any Friendship or Intelligence with us, but very much to his own Prejudice. For this Commission then one Merweille, a Milanois Gentleman, and Equerry to the King, being thought very fit, he was accordingly dispatched thither with private Letters of Credence, his Instructions of Ambassador, and other Letters of Recommendation to the Duke about his own private Concerns, the better to colour

\* Plin Nat. Hift. lib. 7. cap. 1.

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the Bufiness; and so long continued in that Court, that the Emperor at last had some Notion of his real Employment there, and complained of it to the Duke, which was the Occasion of what followed after, as we suppose; which was, that under Pretence of a Murther by him committed, his Trial was in two Days dispatched, and his Head in the Night struck off in Prison. Signior Francisco then being upon this Account come to the Court of France, and prepared with a long counterfeit Story to excuse a thing of fo dangerous Example, (for the King had applied himfelf to all the Princes of Christendom, as well as to the Duke himself, to demand Satisfaction for this Outrage upon the Person of his Minister) had his Audience at the Morning Council; where, after he had for the Support of his Caufe, in a long premeditated Oration, laid open feveral plaufible Justifications of the Fact, he concluded, that the Duke his Master had never looked upon this Merveille for other than a private Gentleman, and his own Subject, who was there only in order to his own Business, neither had he ever lived after any other Manner; absolutely difowning that he had ever heard he was one of the King's Domestick Servants, or that his Majesty so much as knew him, so far was he from taking him for an Ambassador. When having made an End, and the King preffing him with feveral Objections and Demands, and fifting him on all Hands, gravelled him at last, by asking, why then the Execution was performed by Night, and as it were by Stealth? At which the poor confounded Ambassador, the more handsomly to disingage himself, made Answer, That the Duke would have been very loth, out of Respect to his Majesty, that such an Execution should have been performed in the Face of the Sun. Any one may guess if he was not well schooled when he came home, for having so grosly tripped in the Presence of a Prince of so delicate a Nostril as King Francis. Pope Julius the Second, having fent an Ambassador to the King of England, to animate him against King Francis, the Ambassador having had his Audience, and the King, before he would give a positive Answer, infisting upon the Difficulties he found in letting on Foot fo great a Preparation as would be necesfary to attack fo potent a King, and urging some Reasons to that Effect, the Ambassador very unseasonably replied,

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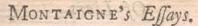
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That he had also himself considered the same Difficulties, and had represented as much to the Pope. From which Saying of his, so directly opposite to the Thing propounded, and the Business he came about, which was immediately to incite him to War, the King sirst derived Argument (which he also afterwards found to be true) that this Ambassador, in his own private Bosom, was a Friend to the French; of which having advertised the Pope, his Estate at his Return home was confiscate, and himself very narrowly escaped the losing of his Head.



#### CHAP. X.

Of quick or flow Speech.

Ont ne fut à tous toutes Graces donnes. All Graces by All-liberal Heaven Were never yet to all Men given.

S we see in the Gift of Eloquence, wherein some have such a Facility and Promptness, and that which we call a present Wit, fo easy, that they are ever ready upon all Occasions, and never to be surpriz'd: And others more heavy and flow, never venture to utter any Thing but what they have long premeditated, and taken great Care and Pains to fit and prepare. Now, as we teach young Ladies those Sports and Exercises which are most proper to fet out the Grace and Beauty of those Parts wherein their chiefest Ornament and Persection lye; so in these two Advantages of Eloquence, to which the Lawyers and Preachers of our Age feem principally to pretend. If I were worthy to advise, the slow Speaker, methinks, should be more proper for the Pulpit, and the other for the Bar; and that because the Employment of the first does naturally allow him all the Leifure he can defire to prepare himself, and besides, his Career is perform'd in an even and unintermitted Line, without Stop or Interruption; whereas, the Pleader's Business and Interest compels