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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. 12. Of Constancy.

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shroud all in Riddle, to the End that Posterity may interpret and apply it according to their own Fancy. *Socrates* *Dæmon*, or *Familiar*, might perhaps be no other but certain Impulsion of the Will, which obtruded itself upon him without the Advice or Consent of his Judgment; and in a Soul so enlightned as his was, and so prepared by a continual Exercise of Wisdom and Virtue, 'tis to be supposed those Inclinations of his, though sudden and undigested, were ever very important, and worthy to be followed. Every one finds in himself some Image of such Agitation of a prompt, vehement, and fortuitous Opinion. 'Tis that am to allow them some Authority, who attribute little to our own Prudence, and who also myself had had some, weak in Reason, but violent in Persuasion and Diffuasion, (which were most frequent with *Socrates*) which I have suffered myself to be carried away so fortunately, and so much to my own Advantage, that they might have been judged to have had something in the of a divine Inspiration.



## C H A P. XII.

*Of Constancy.*

**T**HE Law of Resolution and Constancy does not imply that we ought not, as much as in us lyes, to decline, and to secure ourselves from, the Mischiefs and Inconveniencies that threaten us; nor consequently, that we should not fear lest they should surprize us: On the contrary, all decent and honest Ways and Means of securing ourselves from Harms are not only permitted, but moreover commendable, and the Business of Constancy chiefly is, bravely to stand to, and stoutly to suffer those Inconveniencies which are not otherwise possibly to be avoided. There is no Motion of Body, nor any Guard in the handling of Arms, how irregular or ungraceful soever, that we dislike or condemn, if they serve to deceive or to defend the Blow that is made against us; insomuch, that several very warlike Nations

Nations have made use of a retiring and flying Way of Fight, as a Thing of singular Advantage, and by so doing have made their Backs more dangerous than their Faces to their Enemies. Of which Kind of Fighting the *Turks* yet retain something in their Practice of Arms to this Day; and *Socrates* in *Plato* laughs at *Laches*, who had defin'd Fortitude to be a standing firm in their Ranks against the Enemy: *What* (says he) *would it then be reputed Cowardice to overcome them by giving Ground?* Urging at the same Time the Authority of *Homer*, who commends *Aeneas* for his Skill in running away. And whereas *Laches*, considering better on't, justifies his first Argument upon the Practice of the *Scythians*, and in general all Cavalry whatever, he again attacks him with the Example of the *Lacedæmonian* Foot, (a Nation of all others the most obstinate in maintaining their Ground) who in all the Battle of *Platea*, not being able to break into the *Persian* Phalanx, unbethought themselves to disperse and retire, that by the Enemies supposing they fled, they might break, and disunite that vast Body of Men in the Pursuit, and by that Stratagem obtained the Victory. As for the *Scythians*, 'tis said of them, that when *Darius* went his Expedition to subdue them, he sent, by an Herald, highly to reproach their King, *That he always retired before him and declined a Battle*; to which *Indathyrxis* (for that was his Name) returned Answer, *That it was not for fear of him, or of any Man living, that he did so, but that it was the Way of marching in Practice with his Nation, who had neither till'd Fields, Cities, nor Houses to defend, or to fear the Enemy should make any Advantage of: But that if he had such a Stomach to fight, let him come but to view their ancient Place of Sepulture, and there he should have his Fill.*

Nevertheless as to what concerns Cannon Shot, when a Body of Men are drawn up in the Face of a Train of Artillery, as the Occasion of War does often require, 'tis unhandfom to quit their Post to avoid the Danger, and a foolish Thing to boot, forasmuch as by Reason of it's Violence and Swiftnes we account it inevitable, and many a one, by ducking, stepping aside, and such other Motions of Fear, has been sufficiently laugh'd at by his Companions. And yet in the Expedition that the Emperor *Charles* the Fifth made into *Provence*, the Marquis *de Guast* going to discover the City of *Arles*, and venturing to advance out of

the Blind of a Wind-mill, under Favour of which he had made his Approach, was perceived by the Seigneurs de *Bonneval* and the *Seneschal* of *Agenois*, who were walking

*A Theatre where publick Skows of Riding, Fencing, &c. were exhibited.* upon the *Theatre Aux arenes*; who having shewed him to the *Sieur de Villiers*, Commissary of the Artillery, he traversed a Culverine so admirably well, and levell'd it so exactly right against him, that had not the Marquiss, seeing

Fire to it, slipp'd aside, it was certainly concluded, the Shot had taken him full in the Body. And in like Manner some Years before, *Lorenzo de Medici*, Duke of *Urbis*, and Father to the Queen-Mother of *France*, laying Siege to *Mondolpo*, a Place in the Territories of the *Vicariat* in *Italy*, seeing the Cannoneer give Fire to a Piece that pointed directly against him, it was well for him that he duck'd, for otherwise the Shot, that only ras'd the Top of his Head, had doubtless hit him full in the Breast. To say Truth, I do not think that these Evasions are performed upon the Account of Judgment; for how is any Man living able to judge of high or low Aim on so sudden an Occasion? And it is much more easy to believe, that Fortune favoured their Apprehension, and that it might be a Means at another Time, as well to make them step into the Danger, as to teach them to avoid it. For my own Part, I confess, I cannot forbear starting when the Rattle of a Harquebuse thunders in my Ears on a sudden, and in a Place where I am not to expect it, which I have also observed in others braver Fellows than I; neither do the Stoicks pretend, that the Soul of their Philosopher should be Proof against the first Visions and Fantasies that surprize him; but as a natural Subject consent that he should tremble at the terrible Noise of Thunder, or the sudden Clatter of some falling Ruin, and be affrighted even to Paleness and Convulsion. And so in other Passions, provided a Man's Judgment remain sound and intire, and that the Sight of his Reason suffers no Concussion nor Alteration, and that he yields no Consent to his Fright and Discomposure. To him who is not a Philosopher, a Fright is the same in the first Part of it, but quite another Thing in the second; for the Impression of Passions does not remain only superficially in him, but penetrates farther, even to the very Seat of Reason, and

as to infect and to corrupt it. He judges according to his Fear, and conforms his Behaviour to it. But in this Verse you may see the true State of the wise Stoick learnedly and plainly express'd :

*Mens immota manet, lacrymæ voluntur inanes\**.

The Eye, perhaps, frail, fruitless Showers rains,  
Whilst yet the Mind firm and unshook remains.

The wise Peripatetick is not himself totally free from Perturbations of Mind, but he moderates them by his Wisdom.



C H A P. XIII.

*The Ceremony of the Interview of Princes.*

THERE is no Subject so frivolous, that does not merit a Place in this Rhapsody. According to the common Rule of Civility, it would be a kind of an Affront to an Equal, and much more to a Superior, to fail of being at home, when he has given you Notice he will come to visit you. Nay, *Queen Margaret of Navarre* farther adds, That it would be a Rudeness in a Gentleman to go out to meet any one that is coming to see him, let him be of what Condition soever; and that it is more respectful and more civil to stay at home to receive him, if only upon the Account of missing of him by the Way, and that it is enough to receive him at the Door, and to wait upon him to his Chamber. For my Part, who as much as I can endeavour to reduce the Ceremonies of my House, I very often forgot both the one and the other of these vain Offices, and peradventure some one may take Offence at it; if he do, I am sorry, but I cannot find in my Heart to help it; it is much better to offend him once, than myself every Day, for it would be a perpetual Slavery; and

\* *Virg. Æneid. l. 2.*