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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. 17. Of Fear.

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the Kings of *Persia*, to give their Lieutenants and Agents so little Rein, that upon the least arising Difficulties they must evermore have Recourse to their farther Commands; this Delay in so vast an Extent of Dominion, having often very much prejudiced their Affairs. And *Crassus* writing to a Man, whose Profession it was best to understand those Things, and pre-acquainting him to what Use this Mast was designed, did he not seem to consult his Advice, and in a Manner invite him to interpose his better Judgment?



## C H A P. XVII.

## Of Fear.

*Obstupui, steteruntque comæ & vox faucibus hæsit* \*.

I was amaz'd, struck speechless, and my Hair  
On end upon my Head did wildly stare.

I Am not so good a Naturalist as to discern by what secret Springs *Fear* has it's Motion in us; but I am wise enough to know, that it is a strong Passion, and such a one, that the Physicians say, there is no other whatever that sooner dethrones our Judgment from it's proper Seat; which is so true, that I myself have seen very many become frantick through Fear; and even in those of the best settled Temper, it is most certain, that it begets a terrible Astonishment and Confusion during the Fit. I omit the vulgar Sort, to whom it one while represents their Great-Grandfirs, risen out of their Graves in their Shrowds, another while *Hobgoblins*, *Spettres*, and *Chimæra's*, but even amongst Soldiers (a Sort of Men over whom, of all others, it ought to have the least Power) how often has it converted Flocks of Sheep into armed Squadrons, Reeds and Bull-rushes into Pikes and Launces, Friends into Enemies, and the *French White* into the *Red Crossies of Spain*! When *Monsieur de Bourbon* took

\* *Virg. Æneid. l. 2.*

the City of *Rome*, an Ensign who was upon the Guard at the Bourg *St. Pierre*, was seized with such a Fright upon the first Alarm, that he threw himself out at a Breach with his Colours upon his Shoulder, ran directly upon the Enemy, thinking he had retreated toward the inward Defences of the City, and with much ado, seeing Monsieur de *Bourbon's* People, who thought it had been a Sally upon them, draw up to receive him, at last came to himself, and saw his Error; and then facing about, he retreated full Speed thro' the same Breach by which he had gone out; but not 'till he had first blindly advanced above three hundred Paces into the open Field. It did not however fall out so well with Captain *Julius's* Ensign at the Time when *St. Paul* was taken from us by the Count de *Bures* and Monsieur du *Reu*, for he, being so astonished with Fear, as to throw himself and his Fellows out at a Skyt-Gate, was immediately cut to Pieces by the Enemy; and in the same Siege it was a very memorable Fear, that so seized, contracted, and froze up the Heart of a young Gentleman, that he sunk down stone dead in the Breach, without any Manner of Wound or Hurt at all. The like Madnes does sometimes push on a whole Multitude; for in one of the Encounters that *Germanicus* had with the *Germans*, two great Parties were so amazed with Fear, that they ran two opposite Ways, the one and the other to the same Place, from which either of them had fled before. Sometimes it adds Wings to the Heels, as in the two first, and sometimes nails them to the Ground, and fetters them from moving; as we read of the Emperor *Theophilus*, who in a Battle he lost against the *Agarens*, was so astonished and stupified, that he had no Power to fly; *adeo pavor etiam auxilia formidat* \*, so much does Fear dread even the Means of Safety; 'till such Time as *Manuel*, one of the principal Commanders of his Army, having jogged and shaken him so as to rouse him out of his Trance, said to him, *Sir, if you will not follow me, I will kill you: For it is better you should lose your Life, than, by being taken, to lose your Empire.* But Fear does then manifest it's utmost Power and Effect, when it throws us upon a valiant Despair, having before deprived us of all Sense both of

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\* *Quint. Curt. l. 3.*

Duty and Honour. In the first pitched Battle the *Romans* lost against *Hannibal*, under the Consul *Sempronius*, a Body of ten thousand Foot, that had taken a Fright, seeing no other Escape for their Cowardice, went, and threw themselves head-long upon the great Battalion of the Enemies, which also with wonderful Force and Fury they charged through and through, and routed with a very great Slaughter of the *Carthaginians*, by that Means purchasing an ignominious Flight at the same Price they might have done a glorious Victory. The Thing in the World I am most afraid of is *Fear*, and with good Reason, that Passion alone, in the Trouble of it, exceeding all other Accidents. What Affliction could be greater or more just than that of *Pompey's* Followers and Friends, who, in his Ship, were Spectators of that horrid and inhuman Murder? Yet so it was, that the Fear of the *Egyptian* Vessels they saw coming to board them, possessed them with so great a Fear, that it is observed they thought of Nothing, but calling upon the Mariners to make Haste, and by Force of Oars to escape away, 'till being arrived at *Tyre*, and delivered from the Apprehension of farther Danger, they then had Leisure to turn their Thoughts to the Loss of their Captain, and to give Vent to those Tears and Lamentations that the other more prevalent Passion had 'till then suspended.

*Tum pavor sapientiam omnem mihi ex animo expectorat.*

My Mind with great and sudden Fear oppress'd,  
Was for the Time of Judgment disposs'd.

Such as have been well banged in some Skirmish, may yet, all wounded and bloody as they are, be brought on again the next Day to charge: But such as have once conceived a good sound Fear of the Enemy, will never be made so much as to look him in the Face. Such as are in immediate Fear of losing their Estates, of Banishment, or of Slavery, live in perpetual Anguish and lose all Appetite and Repose; whereas such as are actually poor, Slaves, and Exiles, oft-times live as merrily as Men in a better Condition: And so many People, who, impatient of the perpetual Alarms of Fear, have hanged and drowned themselves, give us sufficiently to understand, that it is more importunate and insupportable than Death itself. The *Greeks* acknowledge another Kind of Fear exceeding any we have spoken

spoken of yet, a Passion that surpriseth us without any visible Cause, by an Impulse from Heaven; so that whole Armies and Nations have been struck with it. Such a one was that, which brought so wonderful a Desolation upon *Carthage*, where nothing was to be heard but Voices and Outcries of Fear, where the Inhabitants were seen to fall out of their Houses as to an Alarm, and there to charge, wound, and kill one another, as if they had been Enemies come to surprize their City. All Things were in strange Disorder and Fury, 'till with Prayers and Sacrifices they had appeas'd their Gods: And this is that they call a Panick Terror.



C H A P. XVIII.

*That Men are not to judge of our Happiness  
'till after Death.*

— *scilicet ultima semper  
Expectanda dies homini est, dicique beatus,  
Ante obitum nemo supremaque funera debet* \*.

Men's last Days still to be expected are,  
E'er we of them our Judgments do declare;  
Nor can't of any one be rightly said,  
That he is happy, 'till he first be dead.

**E**Very one is acquainted with the Story of King *Cræsus* to this Purpose, who being taken Prisoner by *Cyrus*, and by him condemned to die, as he was going to Execution, cried out, O *Solon*, *Solon*! which being presently reported to *Cyrus*, and he sending to enquire of him what it meant, *Cræsus* gave him to understand, that he now found the Advertisement *Solon* had formerly given him true to his Cost, which was, That Men, however Fortune may smile upon them, could never be said to be happy, 'till they had

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\* *Ovid. Met. l. 3.*

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