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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. 19. That to study Philosophy is to learn to die.

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which of the three he had in greatest Esteem, *Chabrias*, *Iphicrates*, or himself; *You must first see us die* (said he) *before that Question can be resolved*: And in Truth, he would infinitely wrong that great Man, who would weigh him without the Honour and Grandeur of his End. God Almighty has ordered all Things as it has best pleased him: But I have in my Time seen three of the most execrable Persons that ever I knew, in all Manner of abominable Living, and the most infamous to boot, who all died a very regular Death, and in all Circumstances composed even to Perfection. There are brave and fortunate Deaths. I have seen Death cut the Thread of the Progress of a prodigious Advancement, and in the Height and Flower of it's Encrease of a certain Person, with so glorious an End, that, in my Opinion, his ambitious and generous Designs had nothing in them so high and great as their Interruption; and he arrived, without completing his Course, at the Place to which his Ambition pretended with greater Glory, than he could himself either hope or desire, and anticipated by his Fall the Name and Power to which he aspired, by perfecting his Career. In the Judgment I make of another Man's Life, I always observe how he carried himself at his Death; and the principal Concern I have for my own, is, that I may die handsomly, that is, patiently, and without Noise.



C H A P. XIX.

That to study Philosophy is to learn to die.

Cicero says, *That to study Philosophy is nothing but to prepare a Man's self to die.* The Reason of which is, because Study and Contemplation do in some sort withdraw from us, and deprive us of our Souls, and employ it separately from the Body, which is a kind of learning to die, and a Resemblance of Death, or else because all the Wisdom and Reasoning in the World does in the End conclude in this Point, to teach us not to fear to die. And to say the Truth, either our Reason does grossly abuse us, or it ought to have no other Aim but our Contentment only, nor to endeavour

deavour any Thing, but in Sum to make us live well, and, as the holy Scripture says, at our Ease. All the Opinions of the World agree in this, That Pleasure is our End, though we make use of divers Means to attain unto it, they would otherwise be rejected at the first Motion; for who would give ear to him that should propose Affliction and Misery for his End? The Controversies and Disputes of the Philosophical Sects upon this Point are merely verbal, *Transcurramus solertissimas nugas* *, Let us skip over these learned and subtle Fooleries and Trifles; there is more in them of Opposition and Obstinacy than is consistent with so sacred a Profession: But what Kind of Person soever Man takes upon him to personate, he over-mixes his own Part with it; and let the Philosophers all say what they will, the main Thing at which we all aim, even in Virtue itself, is Pleasure. It pleases me to rattle in their Ears this Word, which they so nauseate to hear; and if it signify some supreme Pleasure and excessive Delight, it is more due to the Assistance of Virtue than to any other Assistance whatever. This Delight, for being more gay, more sinewy, more robust, and more manly, is only to be more seriously voluptuous, and we ought to give it the Name of Pleasure; as that which is more benign, gentle, and natural; and not that of Vigour, from which we have derived it: The other more mean and sensual Part of Pleasure, if it could deserve this fair Name, it ought to be upon the Account of Concurrence, and not of Privilege; I find it less exempt from Traverses and Inconveniencies, than Virtue itself; and besides that, the Enjoyment is more momentary, fluid, and frail; it has it's Watchings, Fasts, and Labours, even to Sweat and Blood; and moreover, has particular to itself so many several Sorts of sharp and wounding Passions, and so stupid a Satiety attending it, as are equal to the severest Penance. And we mistake to think that Difficulties should serve it for a Spur and a Seasoning to it's Sweetness, as in Nature, one contrary is quickened by another; and to say when we come to Virtue, that like Consequences and Difficulties overwhelm and render it austere and inaccessible; whereas, much more aptly than in Voluptuousness, they

* *Seneca Epist.*

enable, sharpen and heighten the perfect and divine Pleasure they procure us. He renders himself unworthy of it who will counterpoise his Expence with the Fruit, and does neither understand the Blessing, nor how to use it. Those who preach to us, that the Quest of it is craggy, difficult, and painful, but the Fruition pleasant and grateful, what do they mean by that, but to tell us, that it is always unpleasing? The most Perfect have been forc'd to content themselves to aspire unto it, and to approach it only without ever possessing it. But they are deceived, and do not take Notice, that of all the Pleasures we know, the very Pursuit is pleasant: The Attempt ever relishes of the Quality of the Thing to which it is directed; for it is a good Part of, and consubstantial with the Effect. The Felicity and Beatitude that glitters in Virtue, shines throughout all her Apartments and Avenues, even to the first Entry, and utmost Pale and Limits. Now of all the Benefits that Virtue confers upon us, the Contempt of Death is one of the greatest, as the Means that accommodates human Life with a soft and easy Tranquillity, and gives us a pure and pleasant Taste of living, without which, all other Pleasures would be extinct; which is the Reason why all the Rules by which we are to live centre and concur in this one Article. And although they all in like Manner with one Consent endeavour to teach us also to despise Grief, Poverty, and the other Accidents to which human Life, by it's own Nature and Constitution, is subjected, it is not nevertheless with the same Importunity, as well by Reason the fore-named Accidents are not of so great Necessity, the greater Part of Mankind passing over their whole Lives, without ever knowing what Poverty is; and some without Sorrow or Sicknes, as *Xenophilus* the Musician, who lived a hundred and six Years in a perfect and continual Health; as also because at the worst, Death can, whenever we please, cut short, and put an End to all these Inconveniencies. But as to Death, it is inevitable.

*Omnes eodem cogimur; omnium
Versata Urna; serius, ocyus
Sors exitura, et nos in æternum
Exilium impostura Cymbæ*.*

* *Hor. l. 2. Ode 3.*

To study Philosophy is to learn to die. 77

We all are to one Voyage bound; by Turn,
Sooner or later, all must to the Urn:
When *Charon* calls abroad, we must not stay,
But to eternal Exile fail away.

And consequently, if it frights us, 'tis a perpetual Torment, and for which there is no Consolation nor Redress. There is no Way by which we can possibly avoid it; it commands all Points of the Compass: We may continually turn our Heads this Way and that, and pry about as in a suspected Country, *quæ quasi saxum Tantalò, semper impendet* *, but it, like Tantalus's Stone, hangs over us. Our Courts of Justice often send back condemn'd Criminals to be executed upon the Place where the Fact was committed, but carry them to all fine Houses by the Way, and prepare for them the best Entertainment they can.

————— *non Siculæ Dapes*

Dulcem elaborabunt saporem:

Non avium citharæque cantus

Somnum reducent §.

————— the Tastes of such as these

Choicest *Sicilian* Dainties cannot please,
Nor yet of Birds or Harps, the Harmonies
Once charm asleep, or close their watchful Eyes.

Do you think they could relish it? And that the fatal End of their Journey being continually before their Eyes, would not alter and deprave their Palate from tasting these Regalio's?

Audit iter numeratque dies spatique viarum

Metitur vitam, torquetur peste futura ||.

He Time and Space computes, by Length of Ways,
Sums up the Number of his few sad Days;
And his sad Thoughts, full of his fatal Doom,
Can dream of nothing but the Blow to come.

The End of our Race is Death, 'tis the necessary Object of our Aim, which if it frights us, how is it possible to advance a Step, without a Fit of an Ague? The Remedy the Vulgar use, is not to think on't: But from what brutish Stupidity can they derive so gross a Blindness? They must bridle the As's by the Tail.

* *Cicero de finib. l. 1.* § *Hor. l. 3. Ode 1.* || *Claud. Qui*

Qui capite ipse suo instituit vestigia retro *.

He who the Order of his Steps has laid
To Light, and natural Motion retrograde.

'Tis no Wonder, if he be often trapp'd in the Pitfall. They use to fright People with the very Mention of Death, and many cross themselves, as if it were the Name of the Devil; and because the making a Man's Will, is in Reference to dying, not a Man will be persuaded to take a Pen in Hand to that Purpose, 'till the Physician has pass'd Sentence upon him, and totally given him over; and then, betwixt Grief and Terror, God knows in how fit a Condition of Understanding he is to do it. The *Romans*, by Reason that this poor Syllable *Death* was observed to be so harsh to the Ears of the People and the Sound so ominous, had found out a Way to soften and spin it out by a *Periphrasis*, and instead of pronouncing bluntly, such a one is dead, to say, *such a one has lived, or, such a one has ceased to live*: For, provided there was any Mention of Life in the Case, tho' past, it carried yet some Sound of Consolation. And from them it is that we have borrowed our Expression of *the late Monsieur such and such a one*. Peradventure (as the Saying is) the Term we have lived is worth our Money. I was born betwixt eleven and twelve o'Clock in the Forenoon, the last of *February*, 1533, according to our Computation, beginning the Year the first of *January*, and it is now but just fifteen Days since I was compleat nine and thirty Yearsold; I make account to live at least as many more. In the mean Time, to trouble a Man's self with the Thought of a Thing so far off, is a senseless Foolery. But what, Young and Old die after the very same Manner, and no one departs out of Life otherwise, than if he had but just before entered into it; neither is any so old and decrepid, who has heard of *Metbusalem*, that does not think he has yet twenty Years of Constitution good at least. Fool that thou art, who has assured unto thee the Term of Life? Thou dependest upon Physicians Tales and Stories, but rather consult Experience, and the Fragility of human Nature: For, according to the common

* *Lucret. l. 4.*

Course of Things, 'tis long since that thou livedst by extraordinary Favour. Thou hast already out-lived the ordinary Term of Life, and that it is so, reckon up thy Acquaintance, how many more have died before they arrived at thy Age, than have attained unto it, and of those who have ennobled their Lives by their Renown; take but an Account, and I dare lay a Wager thou wilt find more who have died before, than after five and thirty Years of Age. It is full both of Reason and Piety too, to take Example by the Humanity of *Jesus Christ* himself, who ended his Life at three and thirty Years. The greatest Man that ever was, was no more than a Man, *Alexander*, died also at the same Age. How many several Ways has Death to surprize us?

*Quid quisque vitet, nunquam homini satis.
Cautum est in horas*.*

Man fain would shun, but 'tis not in his Power
T' evade the Dangers of each threat'ning Hour.

To omit Fevers and Pleurifies, who would ever have imagined, that a Duke of *Britany* should be pressed to Death in a Crowd, as that Duke was at the Entry of Pope *Clement* into *Lions*? Have we not seen one of our † Kings killed at a Tilting; and did not one of his † Ancestors die by the Juffle of a Hog? *Æscbylus* being threatned with the Fall of a House, was to much Purpose so circumspect to avoid that Danger, when he was knock'd o'th' Head by a Tortoise-shell falling out of an Eagle's Talons in the Fields. Another was choaked with a Grape-stone; an Emperor killed with the Scratch of a Comb, in combing his Head. *Æmilius Lepidus*, with a Stumble at his own Threshold; and *Aufidius* with a Juffle against the Door, as he entered the Council-Chamber. And betwixt the very Thighs of Women, *Cornelius Gallus*, the *Prætor*; *Tigillinus*, Captain of the Watch at *Rome*; *Ludovico*, Son of *Guido de Gonzaga*, Marquis of *Mantua*; and (of worse Example) *Speusippus*, a *Platonick* Philosopher, and one of our Popes. The poor Judge *Bibius*, whilst he

† Henry II.
of France, running against
Montgomery.

† Philip, the
eldest Son of
Lewis the
Gross, the 40th
King of France.

* *Hor. l. 2. Ode 13.*

retrieved a Criminal for eight Days only, was himself condemned to Death, and his own Day of Life was expired. Whilst *Caius Julius* the Physician was anointing the Eyes of a Patient, Death closed his own; and if I may bring in an Example of my own Blood, a Brother of mine, Captain *St. Martin*, a young Man of three and twenty Years old, who had already given sufficient Testimony of his Valour, playing a Match at Tennis, received a Blow of a Ball a little above his right Ear, which, though it was without any Manner or Sign of Wound, or Depression of the Skull, and though he took no great Notice of it, nor so much as sat down to repose himself, he nevertheless died within five or six Hours after of an Apoplexy, occasioned by that Blow. Which so frequent and common Examples passing every Day before our Eyes, how is it possible a Man should disengage himself from the Thought of Death; or avoid fancying, that it has us every Moment by the Collar? What Matter is it, you will say, which Way it comes to pass, provided a Man does not terrify himself with the Expectation? For my Part, I am of this Mind, that if a Man could by any Means avoid it, though by creeping under a Calf's Skin, I am one that should not be ashamed of the Shift: All I aim at is, to pass my Time pleasantly, and without any great Reproach, and the Recreations that most contribute to it, I take hold of; as to the rest, as little glorious and exemplary as you would desire.

*prætulerim——delirus inersque videri,
Dum mea delectant mala me, vel denique fallant,
Quam sapere, & ringi*.*

A Fool, or Coward, let me censur'd be,
Whilst either Vice does please or cozen me,
Rather than be thought wise, and feel the Smart
Of a perpetual aching anxious Heart.

But 'tis Folly to think of doing any thing that Way. They go, they come, they gallop and dance, and not a Word of Death. All this is very fine, but withal, when it comes either to themselves, their Wives, their Children, or Friends, surprizing them at unawares, unprepared,

* *Hor. Epist. 2. l. 2.*

then what Torment, what Outcries, what Madnes and Despair! Did you ever see any thing so subdued, so changed and so confounded? A Man must therefore make more early Trial of it; and this brutish Negligence, could it possibly lodge in the Brain of any Man of Sense, (which I think utterly impossible) sells us his Merchandize too dear. Were it an Enemy that could be avoided, I would then advise to borrow Arms even of Cowardice itself to that Effect: But seeing it is not, and that it will catch you as well flying, and playing the Poltron, as standing to it, like a Man of Honour:

*Mors & fugacem persequitur Virum,
Nec parcat imbellis juventæ
Poplitibus, timidoque tergo †.*

No Speed of Foot prevents Death of his Prize,
He cuts the Hamstrings of the Man that flies;
Nor spares the tender Stripling's Back does start
T' out-run the Distance of his mortal Dart.

And seeing that no Temper of Arms is of Proof to secure us,

*Ille licet ferro, cautus se condat, & ære
Mors tamen inclusum protrahet inde caput ‡.*

Shell thee with Steel, or Brass, advis'd by Dread,
Death from the Cask will pull thy cautious Head.

let us learn bravely to stand our Ground and fight him. And to begin to deprive him of the greatest Advantage he has over us, let us take a Way quite contrary to the common Course. Let us disarm him of his Novelty and Strangeness; let us converse and be familiar with him, and have nothing so frequent in our Thoughts as Death: Let us, upon Occasions, represent him in all his most dreadful Shapes to our Imagination: At the Stumbling of a Horse, at the Falling of a Tile, at the least Prick of a Pin, let us presently consider, and say to ourselves, Well, and what if it had been Death itself? And thereupon let us encourage and fortify ourselves. Let us evermore, amidst our Jollity and Feasting, set the Remembrance of our frail Condition before our Eyes, never suffering ourselves

† *Hor. l. 3. Ode 2.* ‡ *Propert. l. 3. Eleg. 17. alias 16.*
to

to be so far transported with our Delight, but that we have some Intervals of reflecting upon, and considering how many several Ways this Jollity of ours tends to Death, and with how many Dangers it threatens us. The *Egyptians* were wont to do after this Manner, who, in the Height of their Feasting and Mirth, caused a dried Skeleton of a Man to be brought into the Room, to serve for a *Memento* to their Guests.

*Omnem crede diem tibi diluxisse supremum,
Grata superveniet, quæ non sperabitur hora* *.

Think every Day, soon as the Day is past,
Of thy Life's Date, that thou hast liv'd the last;
The next Day's joyful Light thine Eyes shalt see,
As unexpected, will more welcome be.

Where Death waits for us, is uncertain; let us everywhere look for him. The Premeditation of Death, is the Premeditation of Liberty; who has learnt to die, has forgot to serve. There is nothing of Evil in Life, for him who rightly comprehends, that Death is no Evil; to know how to die, delivers us from all Subjection and Constraint. *Paulus Æmilius* answered him whom the miserable King of *Macedon*, his Prisoner, sent to entreat him that he would not lead him in his Triumph, *Let him make that Request to himself*. In Truth, in all Things, if Nature do not help a little, it is very hard for Art and Industry to perform any thing to Purpose. I am, in my own Nature, not melancholy, but thoughtful; and there is nothing I have more continually entertained myself withal, than the Imaginations of Death, even in the gayest and most wanton Time of my Age;

Jucundum cum ætas florida vir agere †.

Of florid Age in the most pleasant Spring.

In the Company of Ladies, and in the Height of Mirth, some have perhaps thought me possessed with some Jealousy, or meditating upon the Uncertainty of some imagined Hope, whilst I was entertaining myself with the Remembrance of some one surprized a few Days before with a

* *Horat. l. 1. Epist. 4.*

† *Catullus, Num. 69.*
burning

burning Fever, of which he died, returning from an Entertainment like this, with his Head full of idle Fancies of Love and Jollity, as mine was then, and that, for ought I knew, the same Destiny was attending me.

Jam fuerit, nec post unquam revocare licebit *.

But now he had a Being amongst Men,
Now gone, and ne'er to be recall'd agen.

Yet did not this Thought wrinkle my Forehead any more than any other. It is impossible but we must feel a Sting in such Imaginations as these at first; but with often revolving them in a Man's Mind, and having them frequent in our Thoughts, they at last become so familiar as to be no Trouble at all: Otherwise I, for my Part, should be in a perpetual Fright and Frenzy; for never Man was so distrustful of his Life, never Man so indifferent of it's Duration. Neither Health, which I have hitherto ever enjoy'd very strong and vigorous, and very seldom interrupted, does prolong, nor Sicknes contract my Hopes. Methinks I escape every Minute, and it eternally runs in my Mind, that what may be done To-morrow, may be done To-day. Hazards and Dangers do, in Truth, little or nothing hasten our End, and if we consider how many more remain, and hang over our Heads, besides the Accident that immediately threatens us, we shall find that the Sound and the Sick, those that are abroad at Sea, and those that sit by the Fire, those that are engaged in Battle, and those that sit idle at Home, are the one as near it as the other: *Nemo altero fragilior est: Nemo in crastinum sui certior* †: *No Man is more frail than another: No more certain of the Morrow.* For any thing I have to do before I die, the longest Leisure would appear too short, were it but an Hour's Business I had to do. A Friend of mine the other Day, turning over my Table-Book, found in it a *Memorandum* of something I would have done after my Decease; whereupon I told him, as it was really true, that though I was no more than a League's Distance only from my own House, and merry and well, yet when that Thing came into my Head, I made haste to write it down there, because

* *Lucret. l. 3.*

† *Senec. Ep. 19.*

I was

I was not certain to live 'till I came Home. As a Man that am eternally brooding over my own Thoughts, and who confine them to my own particular Concerns; I am upon the Matter at all Hours as well prepared as I am ever like to be, and Death, whenever he shall come, can bring nothing along with him I did not expect long before. We should always (as near as we can) be booted and spurred and ready to go, and above all Things, to take Care at the Time to have no Business with any one, but a Man's self.

*Quid brevi fortes jaculamur ævo
Multa *?*

Why cut'st thou out such mighty Work vain Man?

Whose Life's short Date's compriz'd in one poor Span
For we shall there find Work enough to do, without any need of Addition; one complains more than of Death that he is thereby prevented of a glorious Victory; another that he must die before he has married his Daughter or settled and provided for his Children; a third seems only troubled that he must lose the Society of his beloved Wife; a fourth, the Conversation of his Son, as the principal Concerns of his Being. For my Part, I am, thank be to God, at this Instant, in such a Condition, that I am ready to dislodge, whenever it shall please him, without any Manner of Regret. I disengage myself throughout from all worldly Relations, my Leave is soon taken of all but myself. Never did any one prepare to bid Adieu to the World more absolutely and purely, and to shake Hands with all Manner of Interest in it, than I expect to do. The dearest Deaths are the best.

— *miser, O miser (aiunt) omnia ademit
Una dies infesta mihi tot præmia vitæ †;*

Wretch that I am (they cry) one fatal Day
So many Joys of Life has snatch'd away.

And the Builder,

— *manent (dit il) opera interrupta, minæque
Murorum ingentes, æquataque machina Cælo ‡.*

Stupendious Piles (says he) neglected lye,
And Tow'rs, whose Pinnacles do pierce the Sky.

* *Hor. l. 2. Ode 16.* † *Lucret. l. 3.* ‡ *Virg. Æneid. l. 4.*
A Man

A Man must design nothing that will require so much Time to the finishing, or at least with no such passionate Desire to see it brought to Perfection. We are born to Action.

Cum moriar, medium solvar & inter opus.*

When Death shall come, he me will doubtless find
Doing of something that I had design'd.

I would always have a Man to be doing, and as much as in him lyes, to extend and spin out the Offices of Life; and then let Death take me planting Cabbages, but without any careful Thought of him, and much less of my Garden's not being finished. I saw one die, who at his last Gasp seem'd to be concerned at nothing so much, as that Destiny was about to cut the Thread of a Chronicle History he was then compiling, when he was gone no farther than the fifteenth or sixteenth of our Kings,

*Illud in his rebus non addunt, nec tibi earum
Jam desiderium rerum, superinsidet una †.*

They tell us not, that dying we've no more
The same Desires and Thoughts that heretofore.

We are to discharge ourselves from these vulgar and hurtful Humours and Concerns. To this Purpose it was, that Men first appointed the Places of Sepulture, and Dormitories of the Dead, near adjoining to the Churches, and in the most frequent Places of the City, to accustom (says *Lycurgus*) the common People, Women, and Children, that they should not be startled at the Sight of a dead Corps; and to the End, that the continual Objects of Bones, Graves, Monuments, and Funeral Obsequies, should put us in Mind of our frail Condition.

*Quinetiam exhilarare viris convivio cæde
Mos olim, & miscere epulis spectacula dira
Certatum ferro, sæpe & super ipsa cadentum
Pocula, respersis non parco sanguine mensis †.*

'Twas therefore that the Ancients at their Feasts
With tragick Objects us'd to treat their Guests,

* *Ovid. Amor. lib. 2. Eleg. 10.* † *Lucret. l. 3.*
† *Silius Italicus, l. 11.*

Making their Fencers with their utmost Spite,
Skill, Force, and Fury, in their Presence fight,
Till Streams of Blood of those at last must fall,
Dash'd o'er their Tables, Dishes, Cups, and all.

And as the *Aegyptians* after their Feasts were wont to present the Company with a great Image of *Death*, by one that cried out to them, *Drink and be merry, for such shalt thou be when thou art dead*; so it is my Custom to have *Death* not only in my Imagination, but continually in my Mouth; neither is there any Thing of which I am so inquisitive, and delight to inform myself, as the Manner of Men's Deaths, their Words, Looks, and Gestures, nor any Places in History I am so intent upon; and it is manifest enough, by my crowding in Examples of this Kind, that I have a particular Fancy for that Subject. If I were a Writer of Books, I would compile a Register, with the Comment of the various Deaths of Men, and it could not but be useful, for who should teach Men to die, would at the same Time teach them to live. *Dicæarchus* made one, to which he gave that Title; but it was designed for another, and less profitable End. Peradventure some one may object, and say, that the Pain and Terror of Dying indeed does so infinitely exceed all Manner of Imagination, that the best Fencer will be quite out of his Play when it comes to the Push: But let them say what they will, to premeditate is doubtless a very great Advantage; and besides, is it nothing to come so far, at least, without any visible Disturbance or Alteration? But moreover, Nature herself does assist and encourage us. If the Death be sudden and violent, we have not Leisure to fear; if otherwise, I find, that as I engage farther in my Disease, I naturally enter into a certain Loathing and Disdain of Life. I find I have much more ado to digest this Resolution of Dying when I am well in Health, than when sick, languishing of a Fever; and by how much I have less to do with the Commodities of Life, by Reason I even begin to lose the Use and Pleasure of them, by so much I look upon Death with less Terror and Amazement; which makes me hope, that the farther I remove from the first, and the nearer I approach to the latter, I shall sooner strike a Bargain, and with less Unwillingness exchange the one for the other. And, as I have experimented in other Occurrences;

Occurrences, that, as *Cæsar* says, Things often appear greater to us at a Distance than near at Hand, I have found, that being well, I have had Diseases in much greater Horror than when really afflicted with them. The Vigour wherein I now am, and the Jollity and Delight wherein I now live, make the contrary Estate appear in so great a Disproportion to my present Condition, that by Imagination I magnify and make those Inconveniencies twice greater than they are, and apprehend them to be much more troublesom than I find them really to be, when they lye the most heavy upon me, and I hope to find Death the same. Let us but observe in the ordinary Changes and Declinations our Constitutions daily suffer; how Nature deprives us of all Sight and Sense of our bodily Decay. What remains to an old Man of the Vigour of his Youth and better Days?

*Heu senibus vitæ portæ quanta manet * ?*

Alas! To Men of youthful Heat bereft,
How small a Portion of Life is left?

Cæsar, to an old Weather-beaten Soldier of his Guards, who came to ask him Leave that he might kill himself, taking Notice of his wither'd Body and decrepid Motion, pleasantly answered, *Thou fanciest then that thou art yet alive*. Should a Man fall into the Aches and Impotencies of Age, from a sprightly and vigorous Youth on the Sudden, I do not think Humanity capable of enduring such a Change: But Nature leading us by the Hand, an easy, and as it were an insensible Pace, Step by Step, conducts us to that miserable Condition, and by that Means makes it familiar to us, so that we perceive not, nor are sensible of the Stroke then, when our Youth dies in us, though it be really a harder Death, than the final Dissolution of a languishing Body, which is only the Death of old Age, forasmuch as the Fall is not so great from an uneasy Being to none at all, as it is from a spritely and florid Being to one that is unweildy and painful. The Body, when bowed beyond it's natural Spring of Strength, has less Force either to rise with, or support a Burthen; and it is with the Soul the same, and therefore it is that we are to raise her up firm

* *Corn. Gall. vel potius Maximian Eleg. 1.*

and

and erect against the Power of this Adversary: For, as it is impossible she should ever be at Rest, or at Peace within herself, whilst she stands in Fear of it; so if she once can assure herself, she may boast (which is a Thing as it were above human Condition) that it is impossible that Disquiet, Anxiety, or Fear, or any other Disturbance, should inhabit, or have any Place in her,

*Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solida: neque Auster
Dux inquieti turbidus Adriæ,
Nec fulminantis magna Jovis manus*.*

A Soul well settled is not to be shook
With an incensed Tyrant's threatning Look;
Nor can loud *Auster* once that Heart dismay,
The ruffling Prince of stormy *Adria*;
Nor yet th'uplifted Hand of mighty *Jove*,
Though charg'd with Thunder, such a Temper move.
She is then become Sovereign of all her Lusts and Passions,
Mistress of Necessity, Shame, Poverty, and all the other
Injuries of Fortune. Let us therefore, as many of us as
can, get this Advantage, which is the true and sovereign
Liberty here on Earth, and that fortifies us wherewithal
to defy Violence and Injustice, and to contemn Prisons
and Chains.

— in *Manicis* &

*Compeditibus, sævo te sub custode tenebo.
Ipse Deus, simul atque volam, me solvet, opinor;
Hoc sentit, moriar: Mors ultima linea rerum est †.*

With rugged Chains I'll load thy Hands and Feet,
And to a surly Keeper thee commit.
Why let him show his worst of Cruelty,
God will, I think, for asking, set me free;
Ay, but he thinks I'll die; that Comfort brings,
For Death's the utmost Line of human Things.

*The Contempt of
Death, a cer-
tain Foundation
of Religion.*

Our very Religion itself has no surer
human Foundation than the Contempt of
Death. Not only the Argument of Rea-
son invites us to it; for why should we fear
to lose a Thing, which being lost, can

* *Horat. l. 3. Ode 3.* † *Ibid. l. 1. Epist. 16.*

never be missed or lamented ; but also seeing that we are threatned by so many Sorts of Deaths, is it not infinitely worse eternally to fear them all, than once to undergo one of them? And what matter is it when it shall happen, since it is once inevitable? To him that told *Socrates*, *The Thirty Tyrants hath sentenced thee to Death; and Nature them*, said he, What a ridiculous Thing it is to trouble and afflict ourselves about taking the only Step that is to deliver us from all Misery and Trouble? As our Birth brought us the Birth of all Things, so, in our Death, is the Death of all Things included. And therefore to lament and take on that we shall not be alive a hundred Years hence, is the same Folly as to be sorry we were not alive a hundred Years ago. Death is the Beginning of another Life. So did we weep, and so much it cost us to enter into this, and so did we put off our former Veil in entering into it. Nothing can be grievous that is but once, and is it reasonable so long to fear a Thing, that will so soon be dispatch'd? Long Life and short are by Death made all one; for there is no long nor short to Things that are no more. *Aristotle* tells us, that there are certain little Beasts upon the Banks of the River *Hypanis*, that never live above a Day: They which die at eight of the Clock in the Morning, die in their Youth, and those that die at five in the Evening, in their extremest Age: Which of us would not laugh to see this Moment of Continuance put into the Consideration of Weal or Woe? The most, and the least of ours, in Comparison of Eternity, or yet to the Duration of Mountains, Rivers, Stars, Trees, and even of some Animals, is no less ridiculous. But Nature compels us to it, *Go out of this World, says she, as you entered into it; the same Pass you made from Death to Life, without Passion or Fear, the same, after the same Manner, repeat from Life to Death.* Your Death is a Part of the Order of the Universe, 'tis a Part of the Life of the World.

— *Inter se mortales mutua vivunt,
Et quasi cursores vitæ lampada tradunt* *.

* *Lucret. l. 2.*

Mortals among themselves by Turns do live,
And Life's bright Torch to the next Runner give*.

'Tis the Condition of your Creation; Death is a Part
of you, and whilst you endeavour to evade it, you avoid
yourselves. This very Being of yours, that you now en-
joy, is equally divided betwixt Life and Death. The
Day of your Birth is one Day's Advance towards the
Grave.

Prima, quæ vitam dedit, hora carpsit †.

The Hour that gave of Life the Benefit,
Did also a whole Hour shorten it.

Nascentes morimur, finisque ab origine pendet ‡.

As we are born, we die, and our Life's End
Upon our Life's Beginning does depend:

All the whole Time you live, you purloin from Life, and
live at the Expence of Life itself; the perpetual Work of
our whole Life is but to lay the Foundation of Death; you
are in Death whilst you live, because you still are after
Death, when you are no more alive. Or if you had ra-
ther have it so, you are dead after Life, but dying all the
while you live; and Death handles the Dying more rudely
than the Dead. If you have made your Profit of Life,
you have had enough of it, go your Way satisfied.

Cur non ut plenus vitæ conviua recedis ||.

Why should'st thou not go, like a full gorg'd Guest,
Sated with Life, as he is with a Feast?

If you have not known how to make the best Use of it,
and if it was unprofitable to you, what need you care to
lose it; to what End would you desire longer to keep it?

— *cur amplius addere quæris (omne)*

Rursum quod pereat male & ingratum occidat §?

And why renew thy Time, to what Intent,
Live o'er again a Life that was ill spent?

Life in itself is neither good nor evil, it is the Scene of
good or evil, as you make it; and if you have lived

* Alluding to the Athenian Games, wherein those that run
a Race carried Torches in their Hands; and the Race being done,
delivered them into the Hands of those that were to run next.

† Senec. *Her. fur. chor.* 3.

‡ Manil. *Ast.* 4.

|| *Lucret.* l. 3.

§ *Ibid.*

To study Philosophy is to learn to die. 91

Day you have seen all; one Day is equal and like to all other Days; there is no other Light, no other Shade, this very Sun, this Moon, these very Stars, this very Order, and Revolution of Things is the same your Ancestors enjoyed, and that shall also entertain your Posterity.

*Non alium videre patres, aliumve nepotes
Aspicient **

Your Grandfires saw no other Things of old,
Nor shall your Nephews other Things behold.

And come the worst that can come, the Distribution and Variety of all the Acts of my Comedy is performed in a Year. If you have observed the Revolution of the four Seasons, they comprehend the Infancy, Youth, Virility, and old Age of the World. The Year has play'd his Part, and knows no other Way, has no new Farce but must begin, and repeat the same again; it will always be the same Thing.

Versamur ibidem, atque insumus usque †.

Where still we plot, and still contrive in vain;
For in the same State still we do remain.

Atque in se sua per vestigia volvitur Annus ‡.

By it's own Foot-steps led, the Year doth bring
Both Ends together in an annual Ring.

Time is not resolv'd to create you any new Recreations.

Nam tibi præterea quod machiner, inveniamque

Quod placet nihil est; eadem sunt omnia semper ||.

More Pleasures than are made Time will not frame,
For to all Times all Things shall be the same.

Give Place to others, as others have given Place to you.
Equality is the Soul of Equity. Who can complain of being comprehended in the same Destiny wherein all Things are involved? Besides, live as long as you can, you shall by that nothing shorten the Space you are to lye dead in the Grave; 'tis all to no Purpose; you shall be every whit as long in the Condition you so much fear, as if you had died at Nurse.

— licet quot vis vivendo vincere secla,

Mors æterna tamen, nihilominus illa manebit §.

* *Lucret. vel Manil.* † *Lucret. l. 3.* ‡ *Virg. Georg. l. 2.*

¶ *Lucret. l. 3. § Ibid.*

H 2

And

And live as many Ages as you will,
Death ne'ertheless shall be eternal still.

And yet I will place you in such a Condition as you shall
have no Reason to be displeas'd ;

*In vera nescis nullum fore morte alium te
Qui possit vivus tibi te lugere peremptum.
Stansque jacentem **.

When dead, a living Self thou canst not have,
Or to lament, or trample on thy Grave.

Nor shall you so much as wish for the Life you are so con-
cerned about.

*Nec sibi enim quisquam tum se vitamque requirit,
Nec desiderium nostri nos afficit ullum †.*

Life, nor ourselves we wish in that Estate,
Nor Thoughts of what we were at first create.

Death were less to be feared than Nothing, if there
could be any Thing less than Nothing.

*— multo mortem minus ad nos esse putandum,
Si minus esse potest quam quod nihil esse videmus ‡.*

If less-than Nothing any Thing can show,
Death then would both appear, and would be so.

Neither can it any Way concern you, whether you are
living or dead : Living, by Reason that you are still in Being,
Dead because you are no more. Moreover, no one
before his Hour ; and the Time you leave behind was
more yours, than that was lapsed and gone before you came
into the World ; nor does it any more concern you.

*Respice enim quam nil ad nos antea cta vetustas
Temporis aeterni fuerit ||.*

Look back, and tho' Times past eternal were,
In those before us, yet we had no Share.

Wherever your Life ends, it is all there ; neither do
the Utility of Living consist in the Length of Days,
in the well husbanding and improving of Time, and
as one may have been, who has longer continued in
World, than the ordinary Age of Man ; that has

* *Lucret. l. 3.* † *Ibidem.* ‡ *Ibidem.* || *Ibidem.*

lived but a little while. Make Use of Time while it is present with you. It depends upon your Will, and not upon the Number of Days, to have a sufficient Length of Life. Is it possible you can ever imagine to arrive at the Place towards which you are continually going? and yet there is no Journey but hath it's End. But if Company will make it more pleasant, or more easy to you, does not all the World go the self same Way?

————— *omnia te vita perfuncta sequentur*.*

When thou art dead, let this thy Comfort be,
That all the World, by turn, must follow thee.

Does not all the World dance the same Brawl that you do? Is there any Thing that does not grow old as well as you? A thousand Men, a thousand Animals, and a thousand other Creatures die at the same Moment that you expire.

*Nam nox nulla diem, neque noctem aurora secuta est,
Quæ non audierit mistos vagitibus ægris
Ploratus, mortis comites, & funeris atri †.*

No Night succeeds the Day, nor Morning's Light
Rises, to chase the sullen Shades of Night;
Wherein there is not heard the dismal Groans
Of dying Men mix'd with the woful Moans
Of living Friends, as also with the Cries
And Dirges fitting Fun'ral Obsequies.

To what End should you endeavour to avoid, unless there were a Possibility to evade it? You have seen Examples enough of those who have received so great a Benefit by Dying, as thereby to be manifestly delivered from infallible Miseries; but have you talked with any of those who feared a Disadvantage by it? It must therefore needs be very foolish to condemn a Thing you neither experimented in your own Person, nor by that of any other. Why (says *Nature*) dost thou complain of me and Destiny? Do we do thee any Wrong? Is it for thee to govern us, or for us to dispose of thee? Though peradventure thy Age may not be accomplished, yet thy Life is. A Man of low Stature is as much a Man as a Giant; neither Men nor their Lives are measured by the Ell. *Chiron* refused to be immortal, when he was acquainted with the Conditions

* *Lucret. l. 3.*

† *Ibid. l. 2.*

under which he was to enjoy it, by the God of Time itself, and it's Duration, his Father *Saturn*. Do but seriously consider how much more insupportable an immortal and painful Life would be to Man than what I have already designed him. If you had not Death to ease you of your Pains and Cares, you would eternally curse me for having deprived you of the Benefit of Dying. I have, 'tis true, mixt a little Bitterness to it, to the End, that seeing of what Conveniency and Use it is, you might not too greedily and indiscreetly seek and embrace it: And that you might be so established in this Moderation, as neither to nauseate Life, nor have any Antipathy for dying, which I have decreed you shall once do, I have tempered the one and the other betwixt Pleasure and Pain; and 'twas I that first taught *Thales*, the most eminent of all your Sages, that to live and to die were indifferent; which made him very wisely answer him who asked him, Why then did he not die? Because (says he) *it is indifferent*. The Elements of Water, Earth, Fire, and Air, and the other Parts of this Creation of thine, are no more the Instruments of thy Life than they are of thy Death. Why dost thou fear thy last Day, it contributes no more to thy Dissolution than every one of the rest? The last Step is not the Cause of Lassitude, it does but confess it. Every Day travels towards Death, the last only arrives at it. These are the good Lessons our Mother Nature teaches. I have often considered with myself whence it should proceed, that in War, the Image of Death, whether we look upon it as to our own particular Danger, or that of another, should without Comparison appear less dreadful than at Home, in our own Houses, (for if it were not so, it would be as an Army of whining Milk-sops) and that being still in all Places the same, there should be notwithstanding much more Assurance in Peasants and the meaner Sort of People than others of better Quality and Education; and I can verily believe, that it is those terrible Ceremonies and Preparations wherewith we set it out, that more terrify us than the Thing itself; a new quite contrary Way of Living, the Cries of Mothers, Wives, and Children, the Visits of astonished and afflicted Friends, the Attendance of pale and blubbered Servants, a dark Room set round with burning Tapers, our Beds environed with Physicians and Divines;

Divines; in fine, nothing but Ghostliness and Horror round about us, render it so formidable, that a Man almost fancies himself dead and buried already. Children are afraid even of those they love best, and are best acquainted with, when disguised in a Vizor, and so are we; the Vizor must be removed as well from Things as Persons; which being taken away, we shall find nothing underneath but the very same Death that a mean Servant, or a poor Chamber-maid died a Day or two ago, without any manner of Apprehension or Concern. Happy therefore is the Death that deprives us of the Leisure to prepare Things requisite for this unnecessary Pomp, a Pomp that only renders that more terrible, which ought not to be feared, and that no Man upon Earth can possibly avoid.



CHAP. XX.

Of the Force of Imagination.

Fortis Imaginatio generat casum, *A strong Imagination begets Accident*, say the Schoolmen. I am one of those who are most sensible of the Power of Imagination: Every one is jostled, but some are overthrown by it. It has a very great Impression upon me; and I make it my Business to avoid wanting Force to resist it. I could live by the sole Help of healthful and jolly Company. The very Sight of another's Pain does materially work upon me, and I naturally usurp the Sense of a third Person to share with him in his Torment. A perpetual Cough in another tickles my Lungs and Throat. I more unwillingly visit the Sick I love, and am by Duty interested to look after, than those I care not for, and from whom I have no Expectation. I take Possession of the Disease I am concerned at, and lay it too much to Heart, and do not at all wonder that Fancy should distribute Fevers, and sometimes kill such as allow too much Scope, and are too willing to entertain it. *Simon Thomas* was a great Physician of his Time: I remember, that hap-

*Axiom.
Scholast.*

H 4

pening