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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. 29. Of Moderation.

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do; as also that there is none who can give it that Spirit and Life your Ladyship does, by that incomparable Voice Nature has added to your other Perfections; you will find, Madam, that these Verses deserve your Esteem, and will, I dare say, concur with me in this, that *Gascony* never yielded more Invention, finer Expression, or any that more evidently shew themselves to have flowed from a masterly Hand: Be not jealous then that you have but the Remainder of what I published some Years since, under the Name of *Monsieur de Foix*, your brave Kinsman; for certainly these have something in them more spritely and luxuriant, as being writ in a greener Youth, and enflamed with that noble Ardour which I will tell your Ladyship in your Ear. The other were writ since, when he was a Suitor in the Honour of his Wife, already relishing I know not what matrimonial Coldness: And for my Part, I am of the same Opinion with those who hold, that Poesy appears no where so gay, as in a wanton and irregular Subject.

*These nine and twenty Sonnets that were inserted here, are since printed with his other Works.*



## CHAP. XXIX.

### *Of Moderation.*

AS if we had an infectious Touch, we, by our Manner of Handling, corrupt Things that in themselves are laudable and good: We may grasp Virtue so hard, 'till it becomes vicious, if we embrace it too streight, and with too violent a Desire. Those who say, there is never any Excess in Virtue, forasmuch as it is no Virtue, when it once becomes Excess, only play upon Words.

*Insani sapiens nomen ferat, æquus iniqui,  
Ultra quam satis est, virtutem si petat ipsam\*.*

\* *Horace l. 1. Epist. 6.*

The Wise for Mad, the Just for Unjust pass,  
When more than needs, ev'n Virtue they embrace.

This is a subtle Consideration in Philosophy. A Man may both be too much in Love with Virtue, and be excessive in a just Action. Holy Writ agrees with this, *Be not wiser than you should*; but be soberly wise. I \* have known a great Man prejudice the Opinion Men had of his Devotion by pretending to be devout beyond all Examples of others of his Condition. I love temperate and moderate Nature. An immoderate Zeal, even to that which is good, though it does not offend, does astonish me, and puts me to study what Name to give it. Neither the Mother of *Pausanias*, who was the first Impeacher of her Son, and threw the first Stone towards his Death; nor *Posthumus* the Dictator, who put his Son to Death, whom the Ardour of Youth had fortunately pusht upon the Enemy a little more advanced than the rest of his Squadron, appear to me altogether as strange; and I should neither advise, nor like to follow, a Virtue so savage in itself, and that costs so dear. The Archer that shoots over misses as well as he that falls short, and 'tis equally troublesom to my Sight, to look up at a great Light, and to look down into a dark Abyss. *Callicles* in *Plato* says, That the Extremity of Philosophy is hurtful, and advises not to dive into it beyond the Limits of Profit; that taken moderately, it is pleasant and useful; but that in the End, it renders a Man brutish and vicious; a Contemner of Religion and the common Laws; an Enemy to civil Conversation, and all human Pleasures; incapable of all publick Administration; unfit either to assist others, or to relieve himself; and a fit Object for all Sorts of Injuries and Affronts, without Remedy or Satisfaction: He says true, for in it's Excess, it enslaves our natural Freedom, and by an impertinent Subtilty, leads us out of the fair and beaten Way that Nature has plained out for us. The Love we bear to our Wives is very lawful, and yet Theology thinks fit to curb and restrain it. As I remember, I have read in one Place of *St. Thomas of Aquinas* where he condemns Marriage within any of the forbidden

\* 'Tis like he means Henry the third of France.

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Degrees,

Degrees, for this Reason, amongst others, that there is some Danger, lest the Friendship a Man bears to such a Woman should be immoderate; for if the conjugal Affection be full and perfect betwixt them, as ought to be, and that it be over and above surcharged with that of Kindred too, there is no Doubt but such an Addition will carry the Husband beyond the Bounds of Reason. Those Sciences that regulate the Manners of Men, Divinity and Philosophy, will have a Saying to every Thing. There is no Action so private that can escape their Inspection and Jurisdiction, but they are best taught, who are best able to censure and curb their own Liberty. 'Tis the Women that expose their Nudities over freely, upon the Account of Pleasure, though in the Necessities of Physick and Chirurgery, they are most shy and more reserved. I will therefore, in their Behalf, teach the Husbands, that is, such as are too extravagant and sensual in the Exercise of the matrimonial Duty, this Lesson, that the very Pleasures they enjoy in the Society of their Wives, are reproachable, if immoderate, and that a licentious and riotous Abuse of them, are Faults, as reproveable here, as illegitimate and adulterous Practices. Those immodest and debauched Tricks and Postures, that the first Ardour suggests to us in this Affair, are not only indecently but inconveniently practised upon our Wives. Let them at least learn Impudency from another Hand; they are always ready enough for our Business, and I, for my Part, always went the plain Way to work. Marriage is a solemn and religious Tie, and therefore the Pleasure we extract from thence should be a sober and serious Delight, and mixed with a certain Kind of Gravity; it should be a Kind of discreet and conscientious Pleasure. And being that the chief End of it is Generation, some make a Question whether, when Men are out of Hopes of that Fruit, as when their Wives are superannuated or already with Child, it be lawful to lye with them. 'Tis Homicide, according to *Plato*, and certain Nations (the *Mahometan* amongst others) abominate all Conjunction with Women with Child, and others also, with those who are unclean. *Zenobia* would never admit her Husband for more than one Encounter, after which she left him to his own Swing for the whole Time of her Conception, and not 'till after that, would any more receive

recieve him : A brave Example of conjugal Continency. It was doubtless from some lascivious Poet, and one that himself was in great Distress for a little of this Sport, that *Plato* borrowed this Story ; that *Jupiter* was one Day so hot upon his Wife, that not having so much Patience, as 'till she could get to the Couch, he threw her upon the Floor, where the Vehemency of Pleasure made him forget the great and important Resolutions he had but newly taken with the rest of the Gods, in his cœlestial Council ; and to brag, that he had had as good a Bout as when he got her Maidenhead unknown to her Parents. The Kings of *Persia* were wont to invite their Wives to the Beginning of their Festivals ; but when the Wine began to work in good Earnest, and that they were to give the Reins to Pleasure, they sent them back to their private Apartment, that they might not participate of their immoderate Lust, sending for other Women in their Stead, with whom they were not obliged to so great a Decorum of Respect. All Pleasures, and all Sorts of Gratifications, are not properly and fitly conferred upon all Sorts of Persons. *Epaminondas* had committed a young Man for certain Debauches ; for whom *Pelopidas* mediated, that at his Request he might be set at Liberty, which, notwithstanding the great Understanding betwixt them, *Epaminondas* resolutely denied to him, but granted it at the first Word to a Wench of his, who made the same Intercession ; saying, that it was a Gratification fit for such a one as she, but not for a Captain. *Sophocles* being joint Prætor with *Pericles*, seeing accidentally a fine Boy pass by, O ! what a delicate Boy is that, said he : Ay, that were a Prize, answered *Pericles*, for any other than a Prætor, who ought not only to have his Hands, but his Eyes chaste. *Elius Verus* the Emperor, answered his Wife, who reproached him with his Love to other Women, That he did it upon a conscientious Account, inasmuch as Marriage was a Name of Honour and Dignity, not of wanton and lascivious Desire. And our Ecclesiastical History preserves the Memory of that Woman in great Veneration, who parted from her Husband, because she would not comply with his indecent and inordinate Desire. In fine, there is no so just and lawful Pleasure, wherein the Intemperance and Excess is not to be condemned. But to speak the Truth, is not Man a most miserable Creature the while ? It is scarce, by his natural Condition, in

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his

his Power to taste one Pleasure pure and entire ; and yet he must be contriving Doctrines and Precepts, to curtail that little he has ; he is not yet wretched enough unless by Art and Study he augments his own Misery.

*Fortunæ miseras auximus arte vias* \*.

We with Misfortune 'gainst ourselves take Part,  
And our own Miseries encrease by Art.

Human Wisdom makes as ill Use of her Talent, when she exercises it in rescinding from the Number and Sweetness of those Pleasures that are naturally our Due, as she employs it favourably and well, in artificially disguising and tricking out the Ills of Life, to alleviate the Sense of them. Had I ruled the Roast, I should have taken another, and more natural Course, which, to say the Truth, is both commodious and sacred, and should, peradventure, have been able to have limited it too. Notwithstanding that both our spiritual and corporal Physicians, as by Compact betwixt themselves, can find no other Way to cure, nor other Remedy for the Infirmities of the Body and the Soul, than what is oft-times worse than the Disease, by tormenting us more, and by adding to our Misery and Pain. To this End Watchings, Fastings, Hair-shirts, remote and solitary Banishments, perpetual Imprisonments, Whips, and other Afflictions, have been introduced amongst Men : But so, that they should carry a Sting with them, and be real Afflictions indeed ; and not fall out so as it once did to one *Gallio*, who having been sent an Exile into the Isle of *Lesbos*, News was not long after brought to *Rome*, that he there lived as merry as the Day was long ; and that what had been enjoined him for a Penance turned to his greatest Pleasure and Satisfaction : Whereupon the Senate thought fit to recal him home to his Wife and Family, and confine him to his own House, to accommodate their Punishment to his Feeling and Apprehension. For to him whom Fasting would make more healthful and more spritely, and to him whose Palate Fish was more acceptable than Flesh, it would

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\* *Propert. l. 3. Ele. 6.*

be no proper nor fanative Receipt ; no more than in the other Sort of Physick, where the Drugs have no Effect upon him who swallows them with Appetite and Pleasure. The Bitterness of the Potion, and the Abhorrence of the Patient, are necessary Circumstances to the Operation. The Nature that would eat Rhubarb like butter'd Turnips, would frustrate the Use and Virtue of it ; it must be something to trouble and disturb the Stomach, that must purge and cure it: And here the common Rule, that Things are cured by their Contraries, fails ; for in this, one ill is cured by another. This Belief a little resembles that other so ancient one, of thinking to gratify the Gods and Nature by Self-murder ; an Opinion universally once received in all Religions, and to this Day retained in some. For in these latter Times wherein our Fathers lived, *Amurath*, at the taking of an *Isthmus*, immolated six Hundred young *Greeks* to his Father's Soul, in the Nature of a propitiatory Sacrifice for the Sins of the Deceased. And in those new Countries discovered in this Age of ours, which are pure, and Virgins yet, in Comparison of ours, this Practice is in some Measure every where received. All their Idols reek with human Blood, not without various Examples of horrid Cruelty. Some they burn alive, and half broiled take them off the Coals to tear out their Hearts and Entrails ; others even Women they flea alive, and with their bloody Skins clothe and disguise others. Neither are we without great Examples of Constancy and Resolution in this Affair : The poor Souls that are to be sacrificed, old Men, Women, and Children, going some Days before to beg Alms for the Offering of their Sacrifice, and so singing and dancing, present themselves to the Slaughter. The Ambassadors of the King of *Mexico*, setting out to *Fernando Cortez* the Power and Greatness of their Master, after having told him that he had thirty Vassals, of which each was able to raise an hundred Thousand fighting Men, and that he kept his Court in the fairest and best fortified City under the Sun, added at last, that he was obliged yearly to offer the Gods fifty Thousand Men. And it is confidently affirmed, that he maintained a continual War with some potent neighbouring Nations, not only to keep the young Men in Exercise, but principally, to have wherewithal to furnish his Sacrifices with his Prisoners of War. At a certain Town in another

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Place,

Place, for the Welcome of the said *Cortez*, they sacrificed fifty Men at once. I will tell you this one Tale more, and I have done; some of these People being beaten by him, sent to compliment him, and to treat with him of a Peace, whose Messengers carried him three Sorts of Presents, which they presented in these Terms: Behold, Lord, here are five Slaves, if thou art a furious God that feedst upon Flesh and Blood, eat these, and we will bring thee more; if thou art an affable God, behold here Incense and Feathers; but if thou art a Man, take these Fowls and these Fruits that we have brought thee.



## C H A P. XXX.

*Of Cannibals.*

WHEN *Pyrrhus* King of *Epirus* invaded *Italy*, having viewed and considered the Order of the Army the *Romans* sent out to meet him; I know not, said he, what Kind of *Barbarians* (for so the *Greeks* called all other Nations) these may be; but the Discipline of this Army that I see has nothing of Barbarity in it. As much said the *Greeks* of that which *Flaminius* brought into their Country; and *Philip* beholding, from an Eminence, the Order and the Disposition of the *Roman* Camp, led into his Kingdom by *Publius Sulpitius Galba*, spake to the same Effect. By which it appears, how cautious Men ought to be, of taking Things upon Trust from vulgar Opinion, and that we are to judge by the Eye of Reason, and not from common Report. I have long had a Man in my House, that lived ten or twelve Years in the new World discovered in these latter Days, and in that Part of it where *Velegaignon* landed, which he called *Antarick France*. This Discovery of so vast a Country seems to be of very great Consideration; and we are not sure, that hereafter there may not be another, so many wiser Men than we having been deceived in this. I am afraid our Eyes are bigger than our Bellies, and that we have more Curiosity than Capacity;