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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. 32. That we are to avoid Pleasures, even at the Expence of our Life.

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C H A P. XXXII.

That we are to avoid Pleasures even at the Expence of Life.

I Had long ago observed most of the Opinions of the Ancients to concur in this, That it is happy to die, when there is more Ill than Good in Living, and that to preserve Life to our own Torment and Inconvenience, is contrary to the very Rules of Nature, as these old Laws instruct us.

* Η ζῆν ἀλύτως ἢ θανεῖν εὐδαιμόνως,
Καλὸν διήσκειν οἷς ὕβριν τὸ ζῆν φέρει,
Κρεῖσσον τὸ μὴ ζῆν ἔστιν, ἢ ζῆν ἀβλήως.

Happy is Death, whenever it shall come,
To him who lives in Pain Life's burthensom;
For infinitely better 'tis to die,
Than to prolong a Life of Misery.

But to push this Contempt of Death so far as to employ it to the removing ourselves from the Danger of coveting Honours, Riches, Dignities, and other Favours, and Goods of Fortune, as we call them, as if Reason were not sufficient to persuade us to avoid them, without adding this new Injunction, I had never seen it, either enjoined or practised, till this Passage of *Seneca* fell into my Hands; who advising *Lucilius*, a Man of great Power and Authority about the Emperor, to alter his voluptuous and magnificent Way of Living, and to retire himself from this worldly Vanity and Ambition, to some solitary, quiet, and philosophical Life, and the other alledging some Difficulties; I am of Opinion, says he, either that you leave that Life, or Life itself. I would indeed advise thee to the

the gentle Way, and to untie, rather than to break, the Knot thou hast indiscreetly knit, provided, that if it be not otherwise to be untied, then resolutely break it. There is no Man so great a Coward, that had not rather once fall, than be always falling. I should have found this Counsel conformable enough to the stoical Roughness; but it appears the more strange, for being borrowed from *Epicurus*, who writes the same thing upon the like Occasion to *Idomeneus*. And I think I have observed something like it, but with Christian Moderation, amongst our own People. *St. Hilary*, Bishop of *Poictiers*, that famous Enemy of the *Arian* Heresy, being in *Syria*, had Intelligence thither sent him, that *Abra*, his only Daughter, whom he left at Home under the Eye and Tuition of her Mother, was sought in Marriage by the greatest Nobleman of the Country, as being a Virgin virtuously brought up, fair, rich, and in the Flower of her Age: Whereupon he writ to her, (as it appears upon Record,) that she should remove her Affection from all those Pleasures and Advantages were proposed unto her; for he had in his Travels found out a much greater and more worthy Fortune for her, a Husband of much greater Power and Magnificence, that would present her with Robes and Jewels of inestimable Value; wherein his Design was, to dispossess her of the Appetite and Use of worldly Delights, to join her wholly to God: But the nearest and most certain Way to this, being, as he conceived, the Death of his Daughter; he never ceased, by Vows, Prayers and Oraisons, to beg of the Almighty, that he would please to call her out of this World, and to take her to himself; as accordingly it came to pass; for soon after his Return she died, at which he exprest a singular Joy. This seems to out-do the other, forasmuch as he applies himself to this Means at the first Sight, which they only take subsidiarily, and besides, it was towards his only Daughter. But I will not omit the latter End of this Story, though it be from my Purpose; *St. Hilary's* Wife having understood from him, how the Death of their Daughter was brought about, by his Desires and Design, and how much happier she was, to be removed out of this World, than to have stay'd in it, conceived so lively an Apprehension of the eternal and heavenly Beatitudes, that she begged of her Husband with the
extremest

extremest Importunity, to do as much for her; and God, at their joint Request, shortly after calling her to him, it was a Death embraced on both Sides, with singular Content.



C H A P. XXXIII.

That Fortune is oftentimes observed to act by the Rule of Reason.

THE Inconstancy, and various Motions of Fortune, may reasonably make us expect, she should present us with all Sorts of Faces. Can there be a more express Act of Justice than this? The Duke of *Valentinois*, having resolved to poison Cardinal *Adrian Cornetto*, with whom his Father, Pope *Alexander* the Sixth, and himself, were to go to Supper in the Vatican; he sent before a Bottle of poisoned Wine, and withal, strict Order to the Butler to keep it very safe. The Pope being come before his Son, and calling for Drink, the Butler supposing this Wine had not been so strictly recommended to his Care, but only upon the Account of it's Excellency, presented it immediately to the Pope, and the Duke himself coming in presently after, and being confident they had not meddled with his Bottle, took also his Cup; so that the Father died immediately upon the Spot, and the Son, after having been long tormented with Sickness, was reserved to another, and a worse Fortune: Sometimes she seems to play upon us, just in the Nick of an Affair: Monsieur *d'Estret*, at that time Guidon to Monsieur *de Vendosme*; and Monsieur *de Liques*, Lieutenant to the Duke of *Arscot's* Troop, being both Pretenders to the *Sieur de Foungeffelles's* Sister, though of different Parties, (as it oft falls out amongst frontier Neighbours,) the *Sieur de Liques* carried her; but on the same Day he was married, and which was worse, before he went to Bed to his Wife, the Bridegroom having a Mind to break a Lance in Honour of his new Bride, went out to skirmish, near to *St. Omers*, where the *Sieur d'Estret*