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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. 34. Of one Defect in our Government.

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C H A P. XXXIV.

Of one Defect in our Government.

MY Father, who, for a Man that had no other Advantages, than Experience only, and his own natural Parts, was nevertheless of a very clear Judgment, has formerly told me, that he once had Thoughts of endeavouring to introduce this Practice; that there might be in every City a certain Place assign'd, to which, such as stood in Need of any thing might repair, and have their Business entered by an Officer appointed for that Purpose; as for Example, I enquire for a Chapman to buy my Pearls: I enquire for one that has Pearls to sell: Such a one wants Company to go to *Paris*: Such a one enquires for a Servant of such a Quality: Such a one for a Master; such a one enquires for such an Artificer, some for one Thing, some for another, every one according to what he wants. And doubtless these mutual Advertisements would be of no contemptible Advantage to the publick Correspondency and Intelligence: For there are evermore Conditions that hunt after one another, and for Want of knowing one another's Occasions, leave Men in very great Necessity. I have heard, to the great Shame of the Age we live in, that in our very Sight, two most excellent Men for Learning died so poor, that they had scarce Bread to put in their Mouths, *Lilius Gregorius Giraldus* in *Italy*, and *Sebastianus Castalio* in *Germany*; and do believe, there are a thousand Men would have invited them into their Families, with very advantageous Conditions, or have relieved them where they were, had they known their Wants. The World is not so generally corrupted but that I know a Man that would heartily wish the Estate his Ancestors have left him, might be employ'd, so long as it shall please Fortune to give him leave to enjoy it, to secure rare and remarkable Persons of any kind, whom Misfortune sometimes

times persecutes to the last Degree, from the Danger of Necessity; and at least place them in such a Condition, that they must be very hard to please, if they were not contented. My Father in his oeconomic Government had this Order, (which I know how to commend, but by no Means imitate,) which was, that besides the Day-book, or Memorial of the Household-Affairs, where the small Accounts, Payments and Disbursements, which do not require a Secretary's Hand, were entred, and which a Bailiff always had in Custody; he ordered him whom he kept to write for him, to keep a Paper Journal, and in it, to set down all the remarkable Occurrences, and Day by Day the Memoirs of the Histories of his House; very pleasant to look over, when Time begins to wear Things out of Memory, and very useful sometimes to put us out of Doubt, when such a Thing was begun, when ended, what Courses were debated on, what concluded; our Voyages, Absences, Marriages, and Deaths, the Reception of good or ill News; the Change of principal Servants, and the like. An ancient Custom, which I think it would not be amiss for every one to revive in his own House; and I find I did very foolishly in neglecting the same.



C H A P. XXXV.

Of the Custom of wearing Clothes.

Whatever I shall say upon this Subject, I am of Necessity to invade some of the Bounds of Custom, so careful has she been to shut up all the Avenues. I was disputing with myself in this shivering Season, whether the Fashion of going naked in those Nations lately discovered, is imposed upon them, by the hot Temperature of the Air, as we say of the *Moors* and *Indians*, or whether it be the original Fashion of Mankind; Men of Understanding, forasmuch as all Things under the Sun, as the Holy Writ declares, are subject to the same Laws, were wont in such Considerations as these, where we are to distinguish

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