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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

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Chap. 37. We laugh and cry for the same Thing.

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C H A P. XXXVIII.

That we laugh and cry for the same Thing.

WHEN we read in History, that *Antigonus* was very much displeas'd with his Son, for presenting him the Head of King *Pyrrhus* his Enemy, newly slain, fighting against him, and that seeing it he wept; That *Rene*, Duke of *Lorraine*, also lamented the Death of *Charles*, Duke of *Burgundy*, whom he had himself defeated, and appear'd in Mourning at his Funeral: And that in the Battle of *Auroy* (which Count *Monfort* obtain'd over *Charles de Blou*, his Competitor, for the Dutchy of *Brittany*) the Conqueror meeting the dead Body of his Enemy, was very much afflicted at his Death: We must not presently cry out,

*Et così avven che l'animo ciascuna,
Sua Passion sotto el contrario manto,
Ricopre, con la vista hor' chiara, hor' bruma*.*

That every one, whether of Joy or Woe,
The Passion of their Mind can palliate so,
As when most griev'd, to shew a Count'nance clear,
And melancholick, when best pleas'd t'appear.

When *Pompey's* Head was presented to *Cæsar*, the Histories tell us, that he turned away his Face, as from a sad and unpleasing Object. There had been so long an Intelligence and Society betwixt them, in the Management of the publick Affairs, so great a Community of Fortunes, so many mutual Offices, and so near an Alliance, that this Countenance of his ought not to suffer under any Misin-

* *Petrarcha.*

terpretation;

terpretation; or to be suspected for either false or counterfeit, as this other seems to believe:

————— *Tutumque putavit*
Jam bonus esse socer, lachrymas non fonte cadentes
Effudit, gemitusque expressit pectore læto,
Non aliter manifesta putans abscondere mentis
Gaudia, quam Lachrymas.*

————— And now he saw
 'Twas safe to be a pious Father-in-law,
 He shed forc'd Tears, and from a joyful Breast,
 Fetch'd Sighs and Groans; conceiving Tears would best
 Conceal his inward Joy.

For though it be true, that the greatest Part of our Actions are no other than Vizard and Disguise, and yet may sometimes be real and true: That,

Hæredis stetus sub persona risus est †.

The Heir's dissembled Tears behind the Skreen,
 Could one but peep, would joyful Smiles be seen.

So it is, that in judging of these Accidents we are to consider how much our Souls are oftentimes agitated with divers Passions. And as they say, that in our Bodies there is a Congregation of divers Humours, of which, that is the Sovereign, which according to the Complexion we are of, is commonly most predominant in us: So, though the Soul has in it divers Motions to give it Agitation; yet must there of Necessity be one to over-rule all the rest, though not with so necessary and absolute a Dominion, but that through the Flexibility and Inconstancy of the Soul, those of less Authority may, upon Occasion, reassume their Place, and make a little Sally in Turn. Thence it is that we see not only Children, who innocently obey, and follow Nature, often laugh and cry at the same Thing: But not one of us can

* *Lucret. lib. 9.*

† *Aulus Gelli. Noct. boast,*

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boast, what Journey soever he may have in Hand, that he has the most set his Heart upon, but when he comes to part with his Family and Friends, he will find something that troubles him within; and though he refrains his Tears, yet he puts Foot i'th' Stirrup, with a sad and cloudy Countenance, and what gentle Flame soever may have warm'd the Heart of modest, and well-born Virgins, yet are they fain to be forc'd from about their Mothers Necks, to be put to Bed to their Husbands, whatever this boon Companion is pleas'd to say;

*Estne novis nuptiis odio Venus, anne parentum
Frustrantur falsis gaudia lachrymalis,
Uberrim Thalami quas intra limina fundunt?
Non, ita me Divi, vera gemunt, juverint*.*

Does the fair Bride the Sport so mainly dread,
That she takes on so when she's put to Bed?
Her Parents Joys t'allay with a feign'd Tear,
She does not cry in Earnest, I dare swear.

Neither is it strange to lament a Person, whom a Man would by no Means wish to be alive: When I rattle my Man, I do it with all the Mettle I have, and load him with no feign'd, but downright real Curses; but the Heat being over, if he should stand in Need of me, I should be very ready to do him Good: For I instantly turn the Leaf. When I call him Calf and Coxcomb, I do not pretend to entail those Titles upon him for ever; neither do I think I give myself the Lie in calling him an honest Man presently after. Were it not the Sign of a Fool to talk to one's self, there would hardly be a Day or Hour wherein I might not be heard to grumble, and mutter to myself, and against myself, *Turd in the Fool's Teeth*, and yet I do not think that to be my Character. Who for seeing me one while cold, and presently very kind to my Wife, believes the one or the other to be counterfeit, is an Ass. *Nero* taking Leave of his Mother, whom he sent to be drown'd, was

* *Catul. Numb. 67.*

never-

nevertheless sensible of some Emotion at this Farewel, and was struck with Horror and Pity. 'Tis said, that the Light of the Sun is not one continuous Thing, but that he darts new Rays so thick one upon another, that we cannot perceive the Intermission.

*Largus enim liquidi fons luminis æthereus Sol
Irrigat assidue cælum candore recenti,
Suppetit atque novo confestim lumine lumen*.*

For the æthereal Sun that shines so bright,
Being a Fountain large of liquid Light,
With fresh Rays sprinkles still the chearful Sky,
And with new Light the Light does still supply.

Just so the Soul variously and imperceptibly darts out her Passions. *Artabarus* surprizing once his Nephew *Xerxes*, chid him for the sudden Alteration of his Countenance. As he was considering the immeasurable Greatness of his Forces passing over the *Hellepont*, for the *Grecian* Expedition, he was first seiz'd with a Palpitation of Joy, to see so many Millions of Men under his Command, which also appear'd in the Gaiety of his Looks: But his Thoughts at the same Instant suggesting to him, that of so many Lives, there would not be one left, in a Century at most, he presently knit his Brows, and grew sad, even to Tears. We have resolutely pursu'd the Revenge of an Injury receiv'd, and been sensible of a singular Satisfaction at the Victory: But we shall weep notwithstanding: 'Tis not for the Victory, that we shall weep; there is nothing alter'd by that: But the Soul looks upon Things with another Eye, and represents them to itself with another kind of Face; for every Thing has many Faces, and several Aspects, Relations, old Acquaintance, and Friendships, possess our Imaginations, and make them tender for the Time: But the Counterturn is so quick, that 'tis gone in a Moment.

*Nil à Deo fieri celeri ratione videtur,
Qua si mens fieri proponit, & inchoat ipsa.*

* *Lucret. l. 5.*

Ocius

*Ocius ergo animus quam res se perciet ulla,
Ante oculos quarum in promptu natura videtur* *.

No Motions seem so brisk, and quick as those
The working Mind does to be done propose.
Which once propos'd, her violent Motions are
Swifter than any Thing we know by far.

And therefore, while we would make one continued Thing
of all this Succession of Passion, we deceive ourselves.
When *Timoleon* laments the Murther he had committed
upon so mature and generous Deliberation, he does not
lament the Liberty restor'd to his Country, he does not
lament the Tyrant, but he laments his Brother: One Part
of his Duty is perform'd, let us give him Leave to per-
form the other.



C H A P. XXXVIII.

Of Solitude.

LET us pass over that old Comparison, betwixt the
active and the solitary Life, and as for the fine
Saying, with which Ambition and Avarice palliate their
Vices, *That we are not born for our Selves, but for the Pub-
lick*, let us boldly appeal to those who are most interested
in publick Affairs, let them lay their Hands upon their
Hearts, and then say, whether, on the contrary, they do
not rather aspire to Titles and Offices, and that Tumult
of the World, to make their private Advantage at the
publick Expence. But we need not ask them the Question;
for the corrupt Ways by which they arrive at the Height
to which their Ambitions aspire, do manifestly enough

* *Lucret. l. 3.*

declare