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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. 42. Of the Inequality amongst us.

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C H A P. XLII.

Of the Inequality amongst us.

Plutarch says somewhere, that he does not find so great a Difference betwixt Beast and Beast, as he does betwixt Man and Man. Which is said in Reference to the internal Qualities and Perfections of the Soul. And in Truth, I find, (according to my poor Judgment,) so vast a Distance betwixt *Epaminondas*, and some that I know, (who are yet Men of common Sense,) that I would willingly enhance upon *Plutarch*, and say, that there is more Difference betwixt such and such a Man, than there is betwixt such a Man and such a Beast :

*Hem vir viro quid præstat *!*

— How much alas,
One Man another doth surpass !

And that there are as many and innumerable Degrees of Wits, as there are Cubits betwixt this and Heaven. But as touching the Estimate of Men, 'tis strange, that, ourselves excepted, no other Creature is esteemed beyond it's proper Qualities. We commend a Horse for his Strength and Sureness of Foot,

————— *Volucrum*
Sic laudamus equum, facili cui plurima palma
Fervet, & exultat rauco victoria circo †.

So we commend the Horse for being fleet,
Who many Palms by Breath and Speed does get,
And which the Trumpets in the Circle grace,
With their hoarse Clangors for his well-run Race.

* *Ter. For. Act. 5. Sc. 3.* † *Juvenal, Sat. 8.*

and not for his rich Caparisons; a Greyhound for his Share of Heels, not for his fine Collar; a Hawk for her Wing, not for her Gesses and Bells. Why, in like Manner, do we not value a Man for what is properly his own? He has a great Train, a beautiful Palace, so much Credit, so many thousand Pounds a Year, and all these are about him, but not in him. You will not buy a Pig in a Poke: If you cheapen a Horse, you will see him stript of his Houfing-clothes, you will see him naked and open to your Eye; or if he be clothed, as they anciently were wont to present them to Princes to sell, 'tis only on the less important Parts, that you may not so much consider the Beauty of his Colour, or the Breadth of his Crupper, as principally to examine his Limbs, Eyes and Feet, which are the Members of greatest Use:

*Regibus hic mos est, ubi equos mercantur, opertos
Suspiciunt, ne si facies, ut sæpe, decora
Molli fulta pede est, emptorem inducat hiantem,
Quod pulchræ clunes, breve quod caput, ardua cervix*.*

When Kings Steeds cloth'd, as 'tis their Manner, buy,
They straight examine very curiously,
Lest a short Head, a thin and well rais'd Crest,
A broad spread Buttock, and an ample Chest,
Should all be propt with an old beaten Hoof,
To gull the Buyer when they come to Proof.

Why in giving your Estimate of a Man, do you prize him wrapt and muffled up in Clothes? He then discovers nothing to you, but such Parts as are not in the least his own; and conceals those, by which alone one may rightly judge of his Value. 'Tis the Price of the Blade that you enquire into, and not of the Scabbard: You would not, peradventure, bid a Farthing for him, if you saw him stripped. You are to judge him by himself, and not by what he wears. And as one of the Ancients very pleasantly said, Do you know why you repute him tall? You reckon withal the

Heighth of his Chepines, whereas the Pedestal is no Part of the Statue. Measure him without his Stilts, let him lay aside his Revenues and his Titles, let him present himself in his Shirt, then examine if his Body be found and spritely, active and disposed to perform it's Functions? What Soul has he? Is it beautiful, capable, and happily provided of all her Faculties? Is she rich of what is her own, or of what she has borrowed? Has Fortune no Hand in the Affair? Can she, without winking, stand the Lightning of Swords? Is she indifferent, whether her Life expire by the Mouth, or through the Throat? Is she settled, even and content? This is what is to be examined, and by that you are to judge of the vast Differences betwixt Man and Man. Is he

Sapiens, sibi que imperiosus
Quem neque pauperies, neque mors, neque vincula terrent,
Responsare cupidinibus, contemnere honores
Fortis, & in seipso totus teres atque rotundus,
Externi nequid valeat per læve morari,
*In quem manca ruit semper fortuna *?*

Wise, and commanding o'er his Appetite.
 One whom, nor Want, nor Death, nor Bonds can fright,
 To check his Lusts, and Honours scorn, so stout,
 And in himself so round and clear throughout,
 That no external Thing can stop his Course,
 And on whom Fortune vainly tries her Force.

such a Man is raised five hundred Fathoms above Kingdoms and Dutchies, he is an absolute Monarch in and to himself.

Sapiens Pol ipse fingit fortunam sibi †.

The wise Man his own Fortune makes.

What remains for him to covet or desire?

* *Hor. lib. 2. Sat. 7.* † *Plaut. Tri. Act. 2. Sc. 2.*
Nonne

Nonne videmus
 Nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi ut quoi
 Corpore sejunctus dolor absit, mente fruatur
 Jucundo sensu, cura semotus metuque * ?

We see that Nature to no more aspires ;
 Nor to herself a greater Good requires,
 Than that, whose Body is from Dolors free,
 He should his Mind with more Serenity,
 And a more pleasing Sense enjoy, quite clear,
 From those two grand Disturbers, Grief and Fear.

Compare with such a one the common Rabble of Mankind, stupid and mean-spirited, servile, instable, and continually floating with the Tempest of various Passions, that tosses and tumbles them to and fro, and all depending upon others, and you will find a greater Distance than betwixt Heaven and Earth; and yet the Blindness of common Usage is such, that we make little or no Account of it. Whereas, if we consider a Peasant and a King, a Nobleman and a Clown, a Magistrate and a private Man, a rich Man and a poor, there appears a vast Disparity, though they differ no more (as a Man may say) than in their Breeches. In *Thrace* the King was distinguished from his People after a very pleasant Manner; he had a Religion by himself, a God of his own, and which his Subjects were not to presume to adore, which was *Mercury*; whilst, on the other Side, he disdained to have any Thing to do with theirs, *Mars*, *Bacchus*, and *Diana*. And yet they are no other than Pictures, that make no essential Dissimilitude; for as you see Actors in a Play, representing the Person of a Duke or an Emperor, upon the Stage, and immediately after, in the Tiring-Room, return to their true and original Condition; so the Emperor, whose Pomp and Lustre does so dazzle you in Publick,

Silicet, & grandes viridi cum luce smaragdi
 Auro includuntur, teriturque Thalassina vestis
 Assidue, & veneris sudorem exercita petat †.

* Luc. l. 2.

† Luc. l. 4.

Great Emeralds richly are in Gold enchain'd,
To dart green Lustre, and the Sea-green Vest
Continually is worn and rubb'd to Frets,
Whilst it imbibes the Juice that *Venus* sweats.

do but peep behind the Curtain, and you'll see nothing more than an ordinary Man, and peradventure more contemptible than the meanest of his Subjects. *Ille beatus introrsum est, istius bracteata felicitas est* * : True Happiness lyes within, the other is but a counterfeit Felicity. Cowardice, Irresolution, Ambition, Spite and Envy, are as predominant in him as in another.

*Non enim gazæ, neque consularis
Summovet licitor, miseros tumultus
Mentis, Et curas laqueata circum
Tecta volantes †.*

For neither Wealth, Honours, nor Offices,
Can the wild Tumults of the Mind appease,
Nor chase those Cares, that with unwearied Wings
Hover about the Palaces of Kings.

Nay, Solitude and Fear attack him, even in the Center
of his Battalions.

*Revera que metus hominum, curæque sequaces,
Nec metuunt sonitus armorum, nec fera tela,
Audaçterque inter Reges, rerumque potentes
Versantur, neque fulgorem reverentur ab auro †.*

For Fears and Cares warring with human Hearts,
Fear not the Clash of Arms, nor Points of Darts;
But with great Kings and Potentates make bold,
Maugre their Purple and their glitt'ring Gold.

Do Fevers, Gouts and Apoplexies spare them any more
than one of us? When old Age hangs heavy upon a Prince;

* *Seneca, Ep. 115.* † *Horace, lib. 2. Ode 16.* † *Luc. l. 2. Shoulders,*

Shoulders, can the Yeomen of his Guard ease him of the Burthen? When he is astonish'd with the Apprehension of Death, can the Gentlemen of his Bed-Chamber comfort and assure him? When Jealousy, or any other Capricio, swims in his Brain, can our Compliments and Ceremonies restore him to his good Humour? The Canopy embroidered with Pearl and Gold he lyes under, has no Virtue against a violent Fit of the Stone or Colick.

*Nec calidæ citius decedunt corpore febres
Textilibus si in picturis, ostroque rubenti
Facteris, quam si plebeia in veste cubandum est*.*

Nor sooner will a Calenture depart,
Altho' in figur'd Tissues lodg'd thou art,
Than if thy homely Couch were meanly spread
With poorest Blankets of the coarsest Thread.

The Flatterers of *Alexander the Great* possessed him, that he was the Son of *Jupiter*: But being one Day wounded, and observing the Blood stream from his Wound, What say you now, (my Friends) said he, is not this Blood of a crimson Colour, and purely Human? This is not of the Complexion with that which *Homer* makes to issue from the wounded Gods. The Poet *Hermedorus* had writ a Poem in Honour of *Antigonus*, wherein he called him the Son of the Sun: But he that has the emptying of my Close-stool (said *Antigonus*) will find to the contrary. He is but a Man at best, and if he be deformed, or ill qualified from his Birth, the Empire of the Universe can neither mend his Shape nor his Nature;

Puellæ
Hunc rapiant, quidquid calcaverit hic, rosa fiat †.

Tho' Maids should ravish him, and where he goes,
In ev'ry Step he takes should spring a Rose;

* *Luc. l. 2.*

† *Persius, Sat. 2.*

what of all that, if he be a Fool and a Sot, even Pleasure and good Fortune are not relished without Vigour and Understanding.

*Hæc perinde sunt, ut illius animus, qui ea possidet,
Qui uti scit, ei bona, illi, qui non utitur recte, mala*.*

Things to the Souls of their Possessors square ;
Goods if well us'd, if ill, they Evils are.

Whatever the Benefits of Fortune are, they yet require a Palate fit to relish and taste them : 'Tis Fruition, and not Possession, that renders us happy.

*Non domus, & fundus, non æris acervus & auri,
Ægroto domini deduxit corpore febres,
Non animo curas, valeat possessor oportet,
Qui comportatis rebus bene cogitat uti,
Qui cupit, aut metuit, jurvat illum sic domus aut res,
Ut lippum pictæ Tabulæ, fomenta podagram †.*

Manners, or Heaps of Brass and Gold, afford
No Ease at all to their Febrifick Lord ;
Nor can they cure his Cares ; 'tis requisite
The Good's Possessor know the Use of it.
Who fears or covets, these so help him out,
As Pictures blind Folks, Cataplasms the Gout.

He is a Sot, his Taste is palled and flat ; he no more enjoys what he has, than one that has a Cold relishes the Flavour of Canary ; or than a Horse is sensible of his rich Caparison. Plato is in the right, when he tells us, that Health, Beauty, Vigour and Riches, and all the other Things called Goods, are equally Evil to the Unjust, as Good to the Just, and the Evil on the contrary the same. And therefore, where either the Body or the Mind are in Disorder, to what Use serve these external Conveniencies ? Considering, that the least Prick with a Pin, or the least Passion of the Soul, is

* *Ter. Heaut. Act. 1.*

† *Horace, lib. 1. Epist. 2.*
sufficient

sufficient to deprive us of the Pleasure of being sole Monarch of the World. At the first Twitch of the Gout, it signifies much to be called Sire, and your Majesty;

Totus, & argento conflatus, totus & auro.*

Altho' his Chests are cramm'd, whilst they will hold,
With immense Sums of Silver Coin and Gold.

does he not forget his Palaces and Grandeurs? If he be angry, can his being a Prince keep him from looking red, and looking pale, and grinding his Teeth like a Mad-man? Now if he be a Man of Parts, and well descended, Royalty adds very little to his Happiness:

*Si ventri bene, si lateri est pedibusque tuis, nil
Divitiæ poterant regales addere majus †.*

If thou art right and sound from Head to Foot,
A King's Revenue can add nothing to't.

He discerns, 'tis nothing but Counterfeit and Gallery. Nay, perhaps, he would be of King *Seleucus's* Opinion, That he that knew the Weight of a Scepter, would not deign to stoop to take it up; which he said, in Reference to the great and painful Duty incumbent upon a good King. Doubtless it can be no easy Task to rule others, when we find it so hard a Matter to govern ourselves. And as to the Thing Dominion, that seems so sweet and charming, the Frailty of human Wisdom, and the Difficulty of Choice in Things that are new and doubtful, to us considered, I am very much of Opinion, that it is much more pleasant to follow than to lead; and that it is a great Settlement and Satisfaction of Mind, to have only one Path to walk in, and to have none to answer for, but for a Man's self;

*Ut satius multo jam sit, parere quietum,
Quam regere imperio res velle †.*

* *Hor. lib. 1. El. 2.* † *Hor. lib. 1. Ep. 12.* ‡ *Lucret. lib. 5.*
Y 4 So

So that 'tis better calmly to obey,
Than in the Storms of State to rule and fway.

To which we may add that Saying of *Cyrus*, That no Man was fit to rule, but he, who in his own Worth, was of greater Value than all those he was to govern: But King *Hiero* in *Xenophon*, says farther, That in the Fruition even of Pleasure itself, they are in a worse Condition than private Men; forasmuch as the Opportunities and Facility they have of commanding those Things at Will, takes off from the Delight:

*Pinguis amor, nimiumque potens, in tædia nobis
Vertitur, & Stomacho dulcis ut esca necet*.*

Too potent Love, in Loathing never ends,
As highest Sauce the Stomach most offends.

Can we think, that the Singing-Boys of the Quire take any great Delight in their own Musick? The Satiety does rather render it troublesom and tedious to them. Feasts, Balls, Masquerades and Tiltings, delight such as but rarely see, and desire to be at such Solemnities: But having been frequent at such Entertainments, the Relish of them grows flat and insipid: Nay, Women (the greatest Temptation) do not so much delight those who make a common Practice of the Sport. He who will not give himself Leisure to be thirsty, can never find the true Pleasure of Drinking. Farces and tumbling Tricks are pleasant to the Spectators, but a Pain to those by whom they are performed. And that this is effectually so, we see that Princes divert themselves sometimes in disguising their Qualities, a-while to depose themselves, and to stoop to the poor and ordinary Way of Living of the meanest of their People.

*Plerumque gratæ Principibus vires
Mundæque parvo sub lare pauperum
Cœnæ sine aulæis, & ostro,
Sollicitum explicuere frontem †.*

* *Ovid. Amor. l. 2. Eleg. 19.* † *Hor. car. lib. 3. Ode 29.*
E'er

E'en Princes with Variety tempted are,
Which makes them oft feed on clean homely Fare,
In a poor Hut, laying aside the State,
Purple and Pomp, which should on Grandeur wait,
In such a Solitude to smooth the Frown,
Forc'd by the weighty Pressure of a Crown.

Nothing is so distastful and disappointing, as Abundance. What Appetite would not be baffled, to see three hundred Women at his Mercy, as the *Grand Seigneur* has in his *Seraglio*? And what Fruition of Pleasure, or Taste of Recreation of his Ancestors, did he reserve to himself, who never went a Hawking without seven thousand Falconers? And besides all this, I fancy that this Lustre of Grandeur brings with it no little Disturbance and Uneasiness upon the Enjoyment of the most tempting Pleasures: They are too conspicuous, and lye too open to every one's View. Neither do I know to what End they should any more require them to conceal their Errors, since what is only reputed Indiscretion in us, they know very well the People brand with the Names of Tyranny, and Contempt of the Laws in them; and besides their Proclivity to Vice, are apt to censure that as a heightning Pleasure to themselves to insult over the Laws, and to trample upon public Ordinances. *Plato*, indeed, in his *Gorgeas* defines a Tyrant to be one, who in a City has Licence to do whatever his own Will leads him to. And by reason of his Impunity, the over-acting and Publication of their Vices, does oft-times more Mischief than the Vice itself. Every one fears to be pry'd into, and discover'd in their evil Courses; but Princes are, even to their very Gestures, Looks, and Thoughts, the People conceiving they have Right and Title to censure, and be Judges of them: Besides, that the Blemishes of the Great, naturally appear greater, by reason of the Eminency and Lustre of the Place where they are seated; and that a Mole or a Wart appears greater in them, than the greatest Deformity in others. And this is the Reason why the Poets feign the Amours of *Jupiter* to be perform'd in the Disguises of so many borrow'd Shapes, that amongst the many amorous Practices they lay to his Charge, there is only one,

one, as I remember, where he appears in his own Majesty and Grandeur. But let us return to *Hiero*, who complains of the Inconveniencies he found in his Royalty, in that he could not look abroad, and travel the World at Liberty, being as it were a Prisoner to the Bounds and Limits of his own Dominion: And that in all his Actions he was evermore surrounded with an importunate Crowd. And in Truth, to see our Kings sit all alone at Table, environed with so many People prating about them, and so many Strangers staring upon them, as they always are, I have often been mov'd, rather to pity than to envy their Condition. King *Alphonfus* was wont to say, that in this, Asses were in a better Condition than Kings, their Masters permitting them to feed at their own Ease and Pleasure; a Favour that Kings cannot obtain of their Servants. And it would never come into my Head, that it could be of any great Benefit to the Life of a Man of Sense, to have twenty People prating about him, when he is at Stool; or that the Services of a Man of ten thousand *Livres* a Year, or that has taken *Casal*, or defended *Siena*, should be either more commodious or more acceptable to him, than those of a good Groom of the Chamber, that understands his Place. The Advantages of Sovereignty are but imaginary upon the Matter: Every Degree of Fortune has in it some Image of Principality. *Cæsar* calls all the Lords of *France*, having Free-Franchise within their own Demains *Roylets*; and in Truth, the Name of *Sire* excepted, they go pretty far towards Kingship; for do but look into the Provinces remote from Court, as *Brittany* for Example, take Notice of the Attendance, the Vassals, the Officers, the Employments, Service, Ceremony and State of a Lord that lives retir'd from Court, is constant to his own House, and that has been bred up amongst his own Tenants and Servants; and observe withal, the Flight of his Imagination, there is nothing more royal; he hears talk of his Master once a Year, as of a King of *Persia*, or *Peru*, without taking any farther Notice of him, than some remote Kindred, his Secretary keeps in some musty Record. And, to speak the Truth, our Laws are easy enough, so easy, that a Gentleman of *France* scarce feels the Weight of Sovereignty pinch his Shoulders above twice in his Life. Real and effectual

Sub-

Subjection only concerns such amongst us as voluntarily thrust their Necks under the Yoke, and who design to get Wealth and Honours by such Services: For a Man that loves his own Fire-side, and can govern his House without falling by the Ears with his Neighbours, or engaging in Suits of Law, is as free as a Duke of *Venice*. *Paucos servitus, plures servitutem tenet. Servitute seizes on few, but many seizes on her.* But that which *Hiero* is most concern'd at, is, that he finds himself stripp'd of all Friendship, and depriv'd of all natural Society, wherein the true and most perfect Fruition of human Life consists. For what Testimony of Affection and good Will can I extract from him, that owes me, whether he will or no, all that he is able to do? Can I form any Assurance of his real Respect to me, from his humble Way of speaking, and submissive Behaviour, which when they are Ceremonies, it is not in his Choice to deny? The Honour we receive from those that fear us, is not Honour, those Respects are paid to my Royalty, and not to me.

*Maximum hoc Regni bonum est,
Quod facta domini cogitur populus sui
Quam ferre, tam laudare*.*

'Tis the great Benefit of Kings, that they,
Who are by Law subjected to their Sway,
Are bound in all their Princes say or do,
Not only to submit, but praise it too.

Do I not see, that the wicked and the good King, he that is hated and he that is belov'd, has the one as much Reverence paid him as the other? My Predecessor was, and my Successor shall be serv'd with the same Ceremony and State. If my Subjects do me no Harm, 'tis no Evidence of any good Affection; why should I look upon it as such, seeing it is not in their Power if they would? No one follows me, or obeys my Commands upon the Account of any Friendship betwixt him and me; there can be no contract-

* *Seneca Theist. Act. 2. Scæ. 1.*

ing of Friendship, where there is so little Relation and Correspondence: My own Height has put me out of the Familiarity of, and Intelligence with Men: There is too great Disparity and Disproportion betwixt us; they follow me either upon the Account of Decency and Custom: or rather my Fortune than me, to encrease their own: All they say to me, or do for me, is forc'd and dissembled, their Liberty being on all Parts restrain'd by the great Power and Authority I have over them. I see nothing about me but what is dissembled and disguised. The Emperor *Julian* being one Day applauded for his exact Justice; I should be proud of these Praises, said he, did they come from Persons that durst condemn, or disapprove the contrary, in Case I should do it. All the real Advantages of Princes are common to them with Men of meaner Condition. 'Tis for the Gods to mount winged Horses, and feed upon *Ambrosia*: Earthly Kings have no other Sleep, nor other Appetite than we; the Steel they arm themselves withal, is of no better Temper than that we also use; their Crowns do neither defend them from the Rain, nor Sun. *Dioclesian*, who wore a Crown so fortunate and rever'd, resign'd it, to retire himself to the Felicity of a private Life: And some Time after, the Necessity of publick Affairs requiring that he should re-assume his Charge, he made Answer to those who came to court him to it, You would not offer, (said he) to persuade me to this, had you seen the fine Order of Trees I have planted in my Orchard, and the fair Melons I have sowed in my Garden. In the Opinion of *Anacharsis*, the happiest State of Government would be, where all other Things being equal, Precedency should be measur'd out by the Virtues, and Repulses by the Vices of Men. When King *Pyrrhus* prepar'd for his Expedition into *Italy*, his wise Counsellor *Cyneas*, to make him sensible of the Vanity of his Ambition: Well, Sir, (said he) to what End do you make all this mighty Preparation? To make myself Master of *Italy*, (reply'd the King). And what after that is done, (said *Cyneas*?) I will pass over into *Gaul* and *Spain*, said the other. And what then? I will then go to subdue *Africk*; and lastly, when I have brought the whole World to my Subjection, I will sit down, and rest content at my own Ease. For God Sake, Sir, (reply'd *Cyneas*) tell me what

what hinders you, if you please, from being now in the Condition you speak of? Why do you not now at this Instant, settle yourself in the State you seem to aim at, and spare the Labour and Hazard you interpose?

Nimirum quia non bene norat quæ esset habendi Finis, & omnino quoad crescat vera voluptas.*

The End of being rich he did not know;
Nor to what Pitch Felicity should grow.

I will conclude with an old Verse, that I think very pertinent to the Purpose.

Mores cuique sui fingunt fortunam.*

Himself, not Fortune, ev'ry one must blame,
Since Men's own Manners do their Fortunes frame.



CHAP. XLIII.

Of Sumptuary Laws.

THE Way by which our Laws attempt to regulate idle and vain Expences in Meat and Clothes, seem to be quite contrary to the End design'd. The true Way would be to beget in Men a Contempt of Silks and Gold, as vain, frivolous, and useles; whereas we augment to them the Honours and enhance the Value of such Things, which sure is a very improper Way to create a Disgust. For to enact, that none but Princes shall eat Turbes, shall wear Velvet, or Gold Lace, and interdict these Things to the People, what is it but to bring them into a greater Esteem, and to set every one more agog to eat and wear them? Let Kings (in God's Name) leave off these Ensigns of Grandeur, they have others enough besides; those Excesses are more excusable in any other, than a Prince. We may learn by

* *Lucret. l. 5.* § *Corn Nep. in vit. A. Hici.*

the