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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. 4. To-morrow's a New Day.

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Company with the Progress of its Operation, and how the Cold, by Degrees, seized the several Parts of her Body one after another, 'till having in the End told them, it began to seize upon her Heart and Bowels, she called her Daughters to do their last Office and close her Eyes. *Pliny* tells us of a certain *Hyperborean* Nation, where, by Reason of the sweet Temperature of the Air, Lives did rarely end but by the voluntary Surrender of the Inhabitants; but that being weary of, and sotted with Living, they had a Custom at a very old Age, after having made good Cheer, to precipitate themselves into the Sea from the Top of a certain Rock, destined from that Service. Pain and the Fear of a worse Death seem to me the most excusable Incitements.



C H A P. IV.

To-morrow's a New Day.

OF all our *French* Writers, I give, with Justice, I think, the Palm to *Jaques Amiot*; as well for the Propriety and Purity of his Language, in which he excels all others, as his Application and Patience in going thro' so long a Work, and the Depth of his Learning and Judgment, in having been able to unravel and explain so difficult an Author; for let People say what they please, I understand nothing of *Greek*, but I meet with Sense so well connected and maintained throughout his own Translation, that certainly he either knew the true Imagination of the Author, or having, by long Conversation with him, planted in his Soul a thorough and lively Idea of that of *Plutarch*, at least he has lent him nothing that either contradicts or dishonours him; but what I am most pleased with him for, is the discreet Choice he has made of so noble and useful a Book, to make a Present of to his Country. We Ignorants had been lost, had not this Book raised us out of the Mire; by this Favour of his we dare not speak and write, the Ladies are able to read to School-masters: 'Tis our Breviary.

The Utility of the French Plutarch.

If this good Man be yet living, I would desire him to do as much for *Xenophon*: 'Tis a much easier Task than the other, and consequently more proper for his Age. And besides, I know not how, methinks, tho' he briskly and clearly enough trips over Steps another would have stumbled at, that nevertheless his Stile is always more his own, where he does not encounter those Difficulties, and rolls away at its own Ease. I was just now reading that Passage, where *Plutarch* says of himself, that *Rusticus* being present at a Declamation of his in *Rome*, he there received a Packet from the Emperor, and deferred to open it 'till all was over: For which, says he, all the Company highly applauded the Gravity of this Person. 'Tis true, that his Discourse being upon Curiosity, and that eager Passion for News, which makes us with so much Indiscretion and Impatience quit all Things, to entertain a new Comer, and without any Manner of Respect or Civility tear open on a sudden, in what Company soever, the Letters that are deliver'd to us, he had Reason to applaud the Gravity of *Rusticus* upon this Occasion; and might moreover had added to it the Commendation of his Civility and Courtesy, that would not interrupt the Course of his Declamation. But I doubt, whether any one can commend his Prudence; for receiving unexpected Letters, and especially from an Emperor, it might have fallen out, that the deferring to read them might have been of great Prejudice. The Vice opposite to Curiosity is Negligence, to which I naturally incline, and which I have seen some Men so extremely guilty of, that one might have found the Letters that had been sent to them three or four Days before, still sealed up in their Pockets. I never open'd any Letters directed to another, not only those intrusted with me, but even such as Fortune has guided to my Hand; and am very angry with myself, if my Eyes unawares steal any Contents of Letters of Importance, which a great Man is reading, when I stand near him. Never was Man less inquisitive, or less prying into other Men's Affairs than I am. In our Fathers Days *Monfieur de Botuieres* had like to have lost *Turin*; for neglecting, he having Company at that Time with him at Supper, to read an Advertisement that was sent him of a Conspiracy against that City where he commanded. And this very *Plutarch* has given

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given me to understand, that *Julius Caesar* had preserved himself, if in going to the Senate, the Day he was assassinated by the Conspirators, he had read a Ticket that was presented to him by the Way. He tells also the Story of *Archias*, the Tyrant of *Thebes*, that the Night before the Execution of the Design *Pelopidas* had laid to kill him, and restore his Country to Liberty, he had an Account sent him in Writing, by another *Archias*, an *Athenian*, of the whole Conspiracy, and that his Packet having been delivered to him while he sat at Supper, he deferred the opening of it, saying, which afterward became a Proverb in *Greece*, *To-morrow is a New Day*. A wise Man may, I confess, out of Respect to another, as not to disturb the Company, as *Rusticus* did, or not to break off another Affair of Importance in Hand, defer to read or hear any new Thing that is brought him; but if for his own Interest, or particular Pleasure, especially if he be a Publick Minister, he will not interrupt his Dinner, or break his Sleep, he is inexcusable. And there was anciently at *Rome* the Consular Place, as they called it, which was the most Honourable at the Table, for being a Place of most Liberty, and of more convenient Access to those who came in to talk with the Person seated there: By which it appears, that for being at Meat, they did not totally abandon the Concern of other Affairs and Accidents. But when all is said, it is very hard in human Actions, to give so exact a Rule upon the best Grounds, that Fortune will not have a Hand in them, and maintain her own Right.



C H A P. V.

Of Conscience.

THE *Sieur de la Prouffe*, my Brother, and I, travelling one Day together during the time of our Civil Wars, met a Gentleman of good Fashion: he was of the contrary Party, tho' I did not know so much, for he pretended otherwise: And the Mischief is, that in this sort of War, the Cards are so shuff'd, an Enemy not being distinguished