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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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C H A P. X.

Of B O O K S.

I Make no doubt, but that I often happen to speak of Things that are much better, and more truly handled by those who are Masters of the Trade. This here is purely an Essay of my natural, and not acquired, Parts: And whoever shall take me tripping in my Ignorance, will not in any sort displease me; for I should be very unwilling to become responsible to another for my Writings, who am not so to myself, nor satisfied with them. Whoever goes in Quest of Knowledge, let him fish for it where it is to be found; there is nothing I so little profess. These are Fancies of my own, by which I do not pretend to discover Things, but to lay open myself: They may, perhaps, one Day be known to me, or have formerly been, according as my Fortune has been able to bring me in Place where they have been explain'd; but I have utterly forgot them: And if I am a Man of some Reading, I am a Man of no Retention; so that I can promise no Certainty, if not to make known to what certain Mark the Knowledge I now have does rise. Therefore let no body insift upon the Matter I write, but my Method in Writing: Let them not observe in what I borrow, if I have known how to chuse what is proper to raise, or relieve the Invention, which is always my own: For I make others say for me, what, either for want of Language, or want of Sense, I cannot so well myself express, I do not number my Borrowings, I weigh them. And, had I design'd to raise their Value by their Number, I had made them twice as many. They are all, or within a very few, so fam'd and ancient Authors, that they seem, methinks, themselves sufficiently to tell who they are, without giving me the Trouble. In Reasons, Comparisons and Arguments, if I transplant any into my own Soil, and confound them amongst my own, I purposely conceal the Author to awe the Temerity of

of those forward Censurers, that fall upon all Sorts of Writings; particularly the late ones, of Men yet living, and in the vulgar Tongue. which put every one into a Capacity of Censuring, and which seem to convince the Authors themselves of vulgar Conception and Design. I will have them wound *Plutarch* through my Sides, and rail against *Seneca* when they think they rail at me. I must shelter my own Weakness under these great Reputations; I shall love any one that can plume me, that is, by Clearness of Understanding and Judgment, and by the sole Distinction of the Force and Beauty of Discourse. For I, who, for Want of Memory, am at every Turn at a Loss to pick them out of their National Livery, am yet wise enough to know, by the Measure of my own Abilities, that my Soil is incapable of producing any of those rich Flowers that I there find set and growing; and that all the Fruits of my own Growth are not worth any one of them. For this, indeed, I hold myself very responsible, though the Confession makes against me; if there be any Vanity and Vice in my Writings, which I do not of myself perceive, nor can discern, when pointed out to me by another; for many Faults escape the Eye, but the Infirmary of Judgment consists in not being able to discern them, when, by another, laid open to us. Knowledge and Truth may be in us without Judgment, and Judgment also without them; but the Confession of Ignorance is one of the fairest and surest Testimonies of Judgment that I know; I have no other Officer to put my Writings in Rank and File but only Fortune. As Things come into my Head, I heap them one upon another, which sometimes advance in whole Bodies, sometimes in single Files: I am content that every one should see my natural and ordinary Pace, as ill as it is. I suffer myself to jog on at my own Rate and Ease. Neither are these Subjects which a Man is not permitted to be ignorant in, or casually, and at a Venture, to discourse of. I could wish to have a more perfect Knowledge of Things, but I will not buy it so dear as it will cost. My Design is to pass over easily and not laboriously, the Remainder of my Life. There is nothing that I will break my Brains about; no, not Knowledge, of what Price soever. I seek, in the Reading of Books, only to please myself, by an irreproachable Diversion: Or, if I study, it is for no other Science

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than

than what treats of the Knowledge of myself, and instructs me how to live and die well.

Has meus ad metas sudet oportet equus.

————— I to this only *Course*
Train up, and in it only breathe my Horse.

I do not bite my Nails about the Difficulties I meet with in my Reading; after a Charge or two I give them over. Should I insist upon them, I should both lose myself and Time; for I have an impatient Understanding that must be satisfy'd at first: What I do not discern at first, is, by Persistency, rendred more obscure. I do nothing without Gaiety; Continuation, and a too obstinate Endeavour, darkens, stupifies and tires my Judgment. My Sight is confounded, and dissipated with poring; I must withdraw it, and refer my Discovery to new Attempts: Just, as to judge rightly of the Lustre of Scarlet, we are taught to pass it lightly with the Eye, in running it over at several sudden and reiterated Views and Glances. If one Book does not please me, I take another, and never meddle with any but at such Times as I am weary of doing nothing. I care not much for new ones, because the old seem fuller, and of stronger Reasons; neither do I much tamper with *Greek* Authors, my Knowledge in that Language being too superficial to read them with any Delight. Amongst those that are simply pleasant of the Moderns, *Boccace's Decameron*, *Rabelais*, and the *Bassa* of *Johannes Secundus* (if those may be ranged under that Title) are worth reading. As to *Amadis de Gaul*, and such Kind of Stuff, they had not the Credit to take me, so much as in my Childish Years. And I will no more over say (whether boldly, or rashly) that this old, heavy Soul of mine is now no longer delighted with *Ariosto*; no, nor with *Ovid*; and that his Facility and Invention, with which I was formerly so ravish'd, are now of no more Relish, and I can hardly have the Patience to read him. I speak my Opinion freely of all Things, even of those that, perhaps, exceed my Capacity, and that I do not conceive to be, in any wise, under my Jurisdiction. And accordingly, the Judgment I deliver, is to shew the Measure of my own Sight, and not of the Things I make so bold to censure: when I find myself disgusted with *Plato's Axiochus*, as with a Work (with due Respect to such an Author

be

be it spoken) without Force, my Judgment does not believe itself: It is not so arrogant as to oppose the Authority of so many other famous Judgments of Antiquity, which it considers as its Regents and Masters, and with whom it is rather content to err. In such a Case it condemns itself, either for stopping at the outward Bark, not being able to penetrate to the Heart, or for considering it by some false Light, and is content with securing itself from Trouble and Error only; and, as to its own Weakness, does frankly acknowledge and confess it. It thinks it gives a just Interpretation, according to the Appearances, by its Conceptions presented to it; but they are weak and imperfect. Most of the Fables of *Æsop* have in them several Senses and Meanings, of which the *Mythologists* chose some one that quadrates well to the Fable; but, for the most Part, 'tis but the first Face that presents itself, and is superficial only. There yet remain others more lively, essential and profound, into which they have not been able to penetrate; and just so do I.

But to pursue the Business of this Essay, I have always thought, that in Poesy, *Virgil*, *Lucretius*, *Catullus* and *Horace*, do many Degrees excel the rest; and signally, *Virgil* in his *Georgicks*, which I look upon for the most finish'd Piece of Poetry; and, in Comparison of which, a Man may easily discern, that there are some Places in his *Æneids* to which the Author would have given a little more of the File, had he had Leisure: And the fifth Book of his *Æneids* seems to me the most perfect. I also love *Lucan*, and him; not so much for his Style, as for his own Worth, and the Truth and Solidity of his Opinions and Judgments. As for *Terence*, I find the Queintness and Eloquencies of the *Latin* Tongue so admirable lively to represent our Manners and the Movements of the Soul, that our Actions throw me, at every Turn, upon him; and cannot read him so oft, that I do not still discover some new Grace and Beauty. Such as lived near *Virgil's* Time were scandaliz'd, that some should compare him with *Lucretius*. I am, I confess, of Opinion, that the Comparison is, in Truth, very unequal; a Belief that, nevertheless, I have much ado to assure myself in, when

*Censure of
Virgil.*

willingly read
Of Lucan.

Of Terence.

Of Lucretius.

when I meet with some excellent Passages in *Lucretius*: But if they were so angry at this Comparison, what would they have said of the brutish and barbarous Stupidity of those, who, at this Hour, compare him with *Ariosto*? Or would not *Ariosto* himself say?

*O sæclum inspiens, & infacetum *!*

I think the Ancients had more Reason to be angry with those who compared *Plautus* with *Terence*, than *Lucretius* with *Virgil*. It makes much for the Honour and Preference of *Terence*, that the Father of the *Roman* Eloquence had him so often in his Mouth; and the Sentence that the best Judge of *Roman* Poets has pass'd upon the other. I have often observ'd, that those of our Times, who take upon them to write Comedies (in Imitation of the *Italians*, who are happy enough in that Way of Writing) take in *Of Terence*. three or four Arguments of those of *Plautus* or *Terence*, to make one of theirs, and crowd five or six of *Boccace's* Novels into one single Comedy. And that which makes them so load themselves with Matter, is the Diffidence they have of being able to support themselves with their own Strength. They must find out something to lean to; and having not of their own wherewith to entertain the Audience, bring in the Story, to supply the Defect of Language. It is quite otherwise with my Author; the Elegancy and Perfection of his Way of Speaking makes us lose the Appetite of his Plot. His fine Expression, Elegance and Queintness is every where taking: He is so pleasant throughout.

Liquidus, puroque simillimus amni †.

Liquid, and like a Crystal running Stream.

And does so possess the Soul with his Graces, that we forget those of his *Fable*. This very Consideration carries me further: I observe, that the best and most ancient Poets have avoided the Affectation and hunting after, not only of fantastic *Spanish*, and *Petrarchick* Elevations, but even the softest and most gentle Touches, which are the only Ornaments of succeeding Poesy. And yet there is no good

* *Catullus*, *Epig.* 40. † *Hor.* *lib.* 2. *Epist.* 2.

Judgment that will condemn this in the Ancients, and that does not incomparably more admire the equal Politeness, and that perpetual Sweetness and flourishing Beauty, that appears in *Catullus's* Epigrams, than all the Stings with which *Martial* arms the Tails of his. This is by the same Reason that I gave before, and as *Martial* says of himself; *Minus ille ingenio laborandum fuit, in cujus locum materia successerat* *. These first, without being mov'd, or making themselves angry, make themselves sufficiently felt; they have Matter enough of Laughter throughout, they need not tickle themselves: The others have need of Foreign Assistance; as they have the less Wit, they must have the more Body; they mount on Horseback, because they are not able to stand on their own Legs. As in our Balls, those mean Fellows that teach to Dance, not being able to represent the Presence and Decency of our Nobility and Gentry, are fain to supply it with dangerous Leaps and other strange Motions and Fantastick Tricks. And the Ladies are less put to it in Dances where there are several *Coupees*, Changes and quick Motions of Body, than in some other of a more solemn Kind, where they are only to move a natural Pace, and to represent their ordinary Grace and Presence. And, as I have also seen good Tumblers, who, in their own every Day Cloaths, and with the same Face they always wear, give us all the Pleasure of their Art, when their Apprentices, not yet arriv'd to such a Pitch of Perfection, are fain to meal their Faces, put themselves into ridiculous Disguises, and make a hundred Mimick Faces, to prepare us for Laughter. This Conception of mine is no where more demonstrable than in comparing the *Aeneid* with *Orlando Furioso*; of which, we see the First, by Dint of Wing, flying in a brave and lofty Height, and always following his Point; the latter, fluttering and hopping from Tale to Tale, as from Branch to Branch, not daring to trust his Wings but in very short Flights, and perching at every Turn, lest his Breath and Force should fail.

Excursusque breves tentat †.

* *Mart. præ. lib. 8.*

† *Virg. Georg. 4.*

These

Comparison
betwixt Ca-
tullus and
Martial.

These then, as to this Sort of Subjects, are the Authors that best please me. As to what concerns my other Reading, that mixes a little more Profit with the Pleasure, and from whence I learn how to marshal my Opinions and Qualities; the Books that serve me to this purpose, are

The *Characters of Plutarch and Seneca.* *Plutarch* (since translated into *French*) and *Seneca*: Both of which have this great Convenience suited to my Humour, that the Knowledge I there seek, is discoursed in loose Pieces, that do not engage me in any great Trouble of reading long, of which I am impatient. Such are the *Opusculums* of the first, and the *Epistles* of the latter, which are also the best, and most profiting of all their Writings. 'Tis no great Attempt to take one of them in Hand, and I give over at pleasure; for they have no Chain or Dependance upon one another. These Authors, for the most Part, concur in useful and true Opinions: And there is this Parallel betwixt them, that Fortune brought them into the World about the same Age: They were both Tutors to two *Roman* Emperors: Both sought out from Foreign Countries: Both rich, and both great Men. Their Instruction is the Cream of Philosophy, and delivered after a plain and pertinent Manner. *Plutarch* is more uniform and constant; *Seneca* more various and wavering. The last toil'd, fet himself, and bent his whole Force to fortify Virtue against Frailty, Fear and vitious Appetites: The other seems more to slight their Power; he disdains to alter his Pace, and stand upon his Guard. *Plutarch's* Opinions are *Platonick*, sweet, and accommodated to Civil Society: Those of the other are *Stoical* and *Epicurean*, more remote from common Use; but, in my Opinion, more especially proper, and more firm. *Seneca* seems to lean a little to the Tyranny of the Emperors of his Time, and only seems; for I take it for granted, that he spake against his Judgment, when he condemns the generous Action of those who assassinated *Cæsar*. *Plutarch* is frank throughout; *Seneca* abounds with brisk Touches and Sallies: *Plutarch* with Things that heat and move you more; this contents and pays you better. This guides us, the other pushes us on. As to *Cicero*, those of his Works that are most useful to my Design, are they that treat of Philosophy, especially Moral: But boldly to confess

confess the Truth, his way of Writing, and that of all other long-winded Authors, appears to me very tedious: For his Preface, Definitions, Divisions and Etymologies take up the greatest part of his Work: Whatever there is of Life and Marrow, is smother'd and lost in the Preparation. When I have spent an Hour in reading him (which is a great deal for me) and recollect what I have thence extracted of Juice and Substance; for the most Part I find nothing but Wind; for he is not yet come to the Arguments that serve to his Purpose, and the Reasons that should properly help to loose the Knot I would untie. For me, who only desire to become more Wise, not more Learned or Eloquent, these Logical or *Aristotelian* Dispositions of Parts are of no use. I would have a Man begin with the main Proposition; and that wherein the Force of the Argument lies: I know well enough what Death and Pleasure are, let no Man give himself the trouble to anatomize them to me; I look for good and solid Reasons at the first Dash to instruct me how to stand the Shock, and resist them; to which purpose, neither Grammatical Subtilties nor the quaint Contexture of Words and Arguments are of any use at all: I am for Discourses that give the first Charge into the Heart of the Doubt; His languish about his Subjects, and delay our Expectation. Those are proper for the Schools, for the Bar, and for the Pulpit, where we have Leisure to nod, and may awake a Quarter of an Hour after, Time enough to find again the Thread of the Discourse. It is necessary to speak after this manner to Judges, whom a Man has a Design, Right or Wrong, to incline to Favour his Cause; to Children and Common-people, to whom a Man must say all he can, and try what Effects his Eloquence can produce. I would not have an Author make it his Business to render me attentive? Or that he should cry out fifty times, *O yes*, as the Clerks and Heralds do. The *Romans* in their Religious Exercises, began with *Hoc age*: As we in ours do with *Sursum corda*, which are so many Words lost to me: I come thither already fully prepared from my Chamber, I need no Allurement, no Invitation, no Sauce; I eat the Meat raw, so that, instead of whetting my Appetite by these Preparatives, they tire, and pall it. Will the Licence of the Time excuse the sacrilegious Boldness

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*Censure of
Plato.*

ness to censure the *Dialogisms* of *Plato* himself, for as dull and heavy as the other before named, whilst he too much stifles his Matter? And to lament so much Time lost by a Man who had so many better Things to say, in so many long and needless Preliminary Interlocutions: My Ignorance will better excuse me in that I understand not *Greek* so well, as to discern the Beauty of his Language. I would generally chuse Books that use Sciences, not such as only lead to them. The two first, and *Pliny*, and their like, have nothing of this *Hoc age*, they will have to do with Men already instructed; or if they have, 'tis a substantial *Hoc age*, and that has a Body by itself. I also delight in reading his *Epistles ad Atticum*; not only because they contain a great deal of History and the Affairs of his Time; but much more because I therein discover much of his own private Humour. For I have a singular Curiosity (as I have said elsewhere) to pry into the Souls, and the natural and true Judgments of the Authors with whom I converse. A Man may indeed judge of their Parts, but not of their Manners, nor of themselves, by the Writings they expose upon the Theater of the World. I have a thousand times lamented the Loss of the Treatise *Brutus* writ upon Virtue; for it is best learning the *Theory* of those who best know the *Practice*. But seeing the Thing preached, and the Preacher are different Things, I would as willingly see *Brutus* in *Plutarch*, as in a Book of his own. I would rather chuse to be certainly inform'd of the Conference he had in his Tent, with some particular Friends of his, the Night before a Battle, than of the Harangue he made the next Day to his Army; and of what he did in his Closet and his Chamber, than what he did in the publick Place, and in the Senate. As to *Cicero*, I am of the common Opinion that (Learning excepted) he had no great natural Parts. He was a good Citizen, of an affable Nature, as all fat, heavy Men, such as he was, usually are: But given to Ease, and had a mighty share of Vanity and Ambition. Neither do I know how to excuse him for thinking his Poetry fit to be publish'd. 'Tis no great Imperfection to make ill Verses; but it is an Imperfection, not to be able to judge how unworthy his Verses were of the Glory of his Name. For what concerns his Eloquence, that is totally out of Comparison

parison, and I believe it will never be equall'd. The younger Cicero, who resembled his Father in nothing but in Name, whilst commanding in *Asia* had several Strangers one Day at his Table, and among the rest, *Cestius* seated at the lower End, as Men often intrude to the open Tables of the Great: Cicero ask'd one of Waiters *who that Man was?* Who presently told him his Name: But he, as one who had his Thoughts taken up with something else, and that he had forgot the Answer made him, asking three or four times, over and over again the same Question; the Fellow to deliver himself from so many Questions, and to make him know him by some particular Circumstance: 'Tis that *Cestius*, said he, of whom it was told you, that he makes no great account of your Father's Eloquence in Comparison of his own. At which Cicero being suddenly nettled, commanded poor *Cestius* presently to be seized, and caus'd him to be very well whipt in his own Presence; a very discourteous Entertainer! Yet even amongst those, who, all Things consider'd, have reputed his Eloquence incomparable, there have been some however, who have not stuck to observe some Faults in his Writing: As that Great *Brutus* his Friend, for Example, who said 'twas a broken and feeble Eloquence, *fractam & clumbem*. The Orators also nearest to the Age wherein he liv'd, reprehended in him the Care he had of a certain long Cadence in his Periods, and particularly took notice of these Words, *esse videatur*, which he there so oft makes use of. For my Part, I better approve of a shorter Stile, and that comes more roundly off. He does nevertheless, sometimes shuffle his Parts more briskly together, but 'tis very seldom. I have myself taken notice of this one Passage, *Ego verò me minus diu senem malle, quam esse senem, antequam essem*. The Historians are my true Province, for they are pleasant and easy; where immediately Man in general, the Knowledge of whom I hunt after, does there appear more lively and entire than any where besides: The Variety and Truth of his internal Qualities, in gross and piece-meal, the Diversity of Means by which he is united and knit, and the Accidents that threaten him. Now those that write Lives, by reason they insist more upon Counsels than Events, more upon what sallies from within, than upon that which happens without, are the most proper for my reading; and

and therefore above all others, *Plutarch* is the Man for me. I am very sorry we have not a Dozen *Laertii*, or that he was not further extended, and better understood. For I am equally curious to know the Lives and Fortunes of these great Instructors of the World, as to know the Diversities of their Doctrines and Opinions. In this Kind of Study (the Reading of Histories) a Man must tumble over, without Distinction, all Sorts of Authors, both antique and modern; as well barbarous and obsolete, as those of current Language, there to know the Things of which they variously treat; But *Cæsar*, in my Opinion, particularly deserves to be study'd, not for the Knowledge of the History only, but for himself, so great an Excellence and Perfection he has above all the rest, tho' *Sallust* be one of the Number. In earnest, I read this Author with more Reverence and Respect than is usually allow'd to human Writings; I one while considering him in his Person, by his Actions and miraculous Greatness, and another in the Purity and inimitable Neatness of his Language and Style, wherein he not only excels all other Historians, as *Cicero* confesses, but peradventure, even *Cicero* himself; speaking of his Enemies with so much Sincerity in his Judgment, that the false Colours with which he strives to palliate his ill Cause, and the Ordure of his pestilent Ambition excepted, I think there is no Fault to be objected against him, saying this, *that he speaks too sparingly of himself*, seeing so many great Things could not have been perform'd under his Conduct, but that his own Personal Valour must necessarily have had a greater Share in the Execution than he attributes to himself. I love Historians, who are either very sincere or very excellent. The Sincere, who have nothing of their own to mix with it, and who only make it their Business to make a faithful Collection of all that comes to their Knowledge, and faithfully to record all Things without Choice or Prejudice leaving to us the entire Judgment of discerning the Truth of Things. Such, for example amongst others, as honest *Froissard*, who has proceeded in his Undertaking with so frank a Plainness, that having committed an Error, he is not ashamed to confess, and correct it in the Place where the Finger has been laid, and who represents to us even the Variety of Rumors that

Cæsar's Commentaries commended.

that were then spread abroad, and the different Reports that were made to him; which is the naked and unaf-fected Matter of History, and of which every one may make his Profit according to his Proportion of Understand-ing. The more excellent Sort of Historians have Judgment to pick out what is most wortky to be known; and of two Reports, to examine which is the most likely to be true: From the Condition of Princes and their Humours, they conclude the Counsels, and attribute to them Words pro- per for the Occasion; and such have Title to assume the Authority of regulating our Belief to what they themselves believe; but certainly this Privilege belongs not to every one. For the middle Sort of Historians (of which the most Part are) they spoil all; they will chew our Meat for us, they take upon them to judge of, and consequently, to incline the History to their own liking; for if the Judg- ment partially lean to one Side, a Man cannot avoid wretl- ing and writhing his Narrative to that Biass. They un- dertake to chuse Things worthy to be known, and yet very often conceal from us such a Word, such a private Action, as would much better instruct us; omit, as incredible, such Things as they do not understand, and, perhaps, some be- cause they cannot exprefs them well in good *French* or *Latin*. Let them, in God's Name, display their Eloquence, and judge according to their own Fancy: But let them, withal, leave us something to judge of after them, and neither alter nor disguise by their Abridgments, and at their own Choice, any thing of the Substance of the Matter; but deliver it to us pure and entire in all its Dimensions. For the most part, and especially in these latter Ages, Persons are cull'd out for this Work from amongst the common People, upon the sole Consideration of Well-speaking, as if we were to learn Grammar from thence; and the Men so chosen have also Reason, being hired for no other End, and pretending to nothing but Babble, not to be very solicitous of any Part but that, and so, with a fine Gingle of Words, pre- pare us a pretty Contexture of Reports they pick up in the Streets. The only good Histories are those that have been writ by the Persons themselves who commanded in the Af- fairs whereof they write, or who have participated in the Conduct of them, or, at least, who have had the Conduct of others of the same Nature. Such almost are all the

Greek and Roman: For several Eye-witnesses having writ of the same Subject (in the Time when Grandeur and Learning frequently met in the same Person) if there happens to be an Error, it must of necessity be a very slight one, and upon a very doubtful Accident. What can a Man expect from a *Physician*, who will undertake to write of War; or from a meer Scholar, treating upon the Designs of Princes? if we could take notice how religious the *Romans* were in this, there would need but this Example: *Asinius Pollio* found in the History of *Cæsar* himself, something mis-reported; a Mistake occasioned, either by reason he could not have his Eye in all Parts of his Army at once, and had given credit to some particular Person, who had not delivered him a very true Account; or else, for not having had too perfect Notice given him by his Lieutenants, of what they had done in his Absence. By which we may see, whether the Inquisition after Truth be not very delicate, when a Man cannot believe the Report of a Battle from the Knowledge of him who there commanded, nor from the Soldiers who were engaged in it, unless, after the Method of Judicatory Information, the Witnesses be confronted, and the Challenges received upon the Proof of the Punctilio's of every Accident. The Knowledge we have of our own private Affairs, is, indeed, still much weaker and more obscure: But that has been sufficiently handled by *Bodin*, and according to my own Sentiment. A little to relieve the Weakness of my Memory (a Weakness so extreme, that it has happen'd to me more than once, to take Books again into my Hand for new, and unseen, which I had carefully read over a few Years before, and scribbled with my Notes) I have taken a Custom of late, to fix at the End of every Book (that is, of those I never intended to read again) the Time when I made an End of it, and the Judgment I had made of it, to the End that that might, at least, represent to me the Air and general Idea I had conceived of the Author in reading it: And I will here transcribe some of those Annotations. I writ this, some ten Years ago, in my *Guicciardin*

Censure of (in what Language soever my Books speak
Guicciardin. to me in, I always speak to them in my
 own): *He is a diligent Historiographer, and*
from whom, in my Opinion, a Man may learn the Truth of

the Affairs of his Time, as exactly as from any other; in the most of which he was himself also a personal Actor, and in honourable Command. 'Tis not to be imagined, that he should have disguised any Thing, either upon the Account of Hatred, Favour, or Vanity; of which, the liberal Censure he passes upon the Great Ones, and particularly those by whom he was advanced, and employed in Commands of great Trust and Honour (as Pope Clement the Seventh) give ample Testimony. As to that Part, which he thinks himself the best at, namely, his Digressions and Discourses, he has indeed very good Ones, and enriched with fine Expressions; but he is too fond of them: For to leave nothing unsaid, having a Subject so plain, ample, and almost infinite, he degenerates into Pedantry, and relishes a little of the Scholastick Prattle. I have also observed this in him, that of so many Persons, and so many Effects; so many Motives, and so many Counsels as he judges of, he never attributes any one of them to Virtue, Religion, or Conscience; as if all those were utterly extinct in the World: And of all the Actions, how brave and outward Shew soever they make themselves, he always throws the Cause and Motive upon some vicious Occasion, or some Prospect of Profit. It is impossible to imagine but that, amongst such an infinite Number of Actions, as he makes mention of, there must be some one produced by the Way of Reason. No Corruption could so universally have infected Men, that some of them would not have escaped the Contagion: Which makes me suspect that his own Taste was vicious; from whence it might happen, that he judged other Men by himself. In my *Philip de Comines*, there is this written: You will here find the Language sweet and delightful, of a native Simplicity, the Narration pure, in which the Veracity of the Author evidently shines; free from Vanity, when speaking of himself, and from Affection or Envy, when speaking of Others: His Discourses and Exhortations more accompanied with Zeal and Truth, than with any exquisite Self-sufficiency; and throughout, with Authority and Gravity, which speak him a Man of Extraction, and bred up in great Affairs. Upon the Memoirs of Monsieur du Bellay, I find this; 'Tis always pleasant to read Things writ by those that have experienced how they ought to be carried on; but withal, it cannot be deny'd but there is a manifest Fall in these two Lords from the Freedom and Liberty of Writing,

that shines in the ancient Historians: Such as the Sire de Jounville, a Domestick to St. Louis: Eginard, Chancellor to Charlemain; and of later Date, in Philip de Comines. This here is rather an Apology for King Francis, against the Emperor Charles the Fifth, than an History. I will not believe that they have falsified any Thing, as to Matter of Fact; but they make a common Practice of wresting the Judgment of Events (very often Contrary to Reason) to our Advantage, and of omitting every Thing that is nice to be handled in the Life of their Master; witness the Relations of Messieurs de Montmorency, and de Brion, which were here omitted: Nay, so much as the very Name of Madam d'Estampes is not here to be found. Secret Actions an Historian may conceal; but to pass over in Silence what all the World knows, and Things that have drawn after them publick Consequences, is an inexcusable Defect. In fine, Whoever has a Mind to have a perfect Knowledge of King Francis, and the Revolution of his Reign, let him seek it elsewhere, if my Advice may prevail. The only Profit a Man can reap from Guicciardin and Bellay is, from the particular Narrative of Battles and other Exploits of War, wherein those Gentlemen were personally engaged; some Words, and private Actions of the Princes of their Time, and the Practices and Negotiations carried on by the Seigneur de Lancy; where, indeed, there are, every where, Things worthy to be known, and Discourses above the vulgar Strain.



C H A P. XI.

Of Cruelty.

Inclinations to Goodness. I Take Virtue to be distinct from, and something more noble, than those Inclinations to Generosity, and that good Nature which we are born with. Well dispos'd and well descended Souls pursue, indeed, the same Methods, and represent the same Face that Virtue itself does: But the Word *Virtue* imports, I know not how, something more great and active, than meerly for a Man to suffer himself, by a happy Disposition, to be gently and quietly drawn to the Rule of Reason.