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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

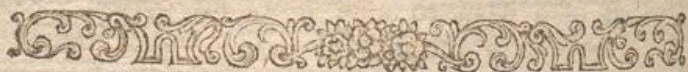
Chap. 14. That the Mind hinders itself.

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He afterwards told *Marcellinus*, that it would not be indecent, as the Remainder of Tables, when we have done, is given to the Assistants; so Life being ended, to distribute something to those who have been our Servants. Now *Marcellinus* was of a free and liberal Spirit; he therefore divided a certain Sum of Money amongst his Attendants, and comforted them. As to the rest, he had no Need of Steel, nor of Blood. He was resolv'd to go out of this Life, and not to run out of it; not to escape from Death, but to essay it. And to give himself Leisure to trifle with it, having forsaken all Manner of Nourishment, the third Day following, after having caused himself to be sprinkled with warm Water, he fainted by Degrees, and not without some Kind of Pleasure, as he himself declar'd. In earnest, such as have been acquainted with these Faintings, proceeding from Weakness, do say, that they are therein sensible of no Manner of Pain, but rather feel a Kind of Delight, as in a Passage to Sleep and Rest. These are study'd and digested Deaths. But to

the End that *Cato* only may furnish out the whole Example of Virtue, it seems as if his good Destiny had put his ill one into his Hand, with which he gave himself the Blow; seeing he had the Leisure to confront and struggle with Death, reinforcing his Courage in the greatest Danger, instead of letting it go less. And if I had been to represent him in his Supreme Station, I should have done it in the Posture of tearing out his bloody Bowels, rather than with his Sword in his Hand, as did the Statuaries of his Time: For this second Murther was much more furious than the First.

Death bravely confronted by Cato.



C H A P. XIV.

That the Mind hinders itself.

TIS a pleasant Imagination to fancy a Mind exactly balanced betwixt two equal Desires: For doubtless it can never pitch upon either, forasmuch as the Choice and Application would manifest an Inequality of Esteem; and were we set betwixt the Bottle and the Ham with an equal Appetite

Appetite to drink and eat, there would doubtless be no Remedy, but we must die for Thirst and Hunger. To provide against this Inconvenience, the *Stoicks*, when they are ask'd whence this Election in the Soul of two different Things does proceed (and that makes us out of a great Number of Crowns rather take one than another, there being no Reason to incline us to such a Preference?) make answer, That this Movement of the Soul is extraordinary and irregular, that it enters into us by a strange, accidental and fortuitous Impulse. It might rather, methinks, be said, that nothing presents itself to us wherein there is not some Difference, how little soever; and that either by the Sight or Touch there is always some Choice, that, tho' it be imperceptibly, tempts and attracts us. Whoever likewise shall presuppose a Packthread equally strong throughout, it is utterly impossible it should break; for, where will you have the Breaking to begin? And that it should break altogether, is not in Nature. Whoever also should hereunto join the *Geometrical* Propositions, that by the Certainty of their Demonstrations conclude the Contained to be greater than the Containing, the Center also to be as great as the Circumference, and that find out two Lines incessantly approaching each other, and that yet can never meet; and the *Philosopher's* Stone, and the *Quadrature* of a Circle, where the Reason and Effect are so opposite; might, peradventure, find some Argument to second this bold Saying of *Pliny*, *Solum certum nihil est certi, & homine nihil miserius aut superbius* *. That it is only certain, there is nothing certain; and that nothing is more miserable, or more proud than Man.



C H A P. XV.

That our Desires are augmented by Difficulty.

There is no Reason that has not his Contrary, say the wisest of *Philosophers*, which puts me upon ruminating on the excellent Sayings one of the Ancients alledges

* *Plin. l. 2. c. 7.*

for