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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. 15. That our Desires are augmented by Difficulties.

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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

for the Contempt of Life; No Gold can bring Pleasure, if not that for the Loss of which we are before-hand prepar'd: *In æquo est dolor amissæ rei, & timor amittendæ\**, The Grief of losing a Thing, and the Fear of losing it, are equal. Meaning by that, that the Fruition of Life cannot be truly pleasant to us, if we are in Fear of losing it. It might, however, be said on the contrary, that we hug and embrace this Good by so much the more tenderly, and with so much greater Affection, by how much we see it the less assur'd, and fear to have it taken from us; for as it is evident, that Fire burns with greater Fury when Cold comes to mix with it, so our Wills are more obstinate by being oppos'd:

*Si nunquam Danaen habuisset abenea turris,  
Non esset Danae de Jove facta parens †.*  
A brazen Tow'r if Danae had not had,  
She ne'er by Jove had been a Mother made.

And that there is nothing naturally contrary to our Taste but Satiety, which proceeds from Facility; nor any Thing that so much whets it as Rarity and Difficulty. *Omnium rerum voluptas ipso quo debet fugare periculo crescit ‡.* The Pleasure of all Things increases by the same Danger that should deter it.

*Galla nega, satiatur amor nisi gaudia torquent ||.*

Galla deny, be not too eas'ly gain'd,  
For Love will glut with Joys too soon obtain'd.

To keep Love in Breath, *Lycurgus* made a Decree, that the marry'd People of *Lacedæmonia* should never enjoy one another but by stealth; and that it should be as great a Shame to be taken in Bed together, as committing with others. The Difficulty of Assignations, the Danger of Surprize, and the Shame of the Morning.

*Et languor, & silentium,  
Et latere petitus imo spiritus §.*

The Languor, Silence, and the far-fetch'd Sighs,  
That fearing to be heard do trembling rise.

\* *Sen. Ep.* 98.

† *Ovid. Am. lib.* 2. *El.* 19.

‡ *Sen. de Ben. lib.* 7. *cap.* 9. || *Mart. lib.* 4. *Epiq.* 38.

§ *Hor. Ep.* 11.

These are they that give the *Haut-gout* to the Sawce. How many very wantonly pleasant Plays are made from the cleanly and modest Way of speaking of the Works of Love? Even Pleasure itself would be heightned with Pain. It is much sweeter when it smarts, and has the Skin rippled. The Courtezan, *Flora*, said, *she never lay with Pompey, but she made him wear the Prints of her Teeth.*

*Quod petiere, premunt arctè, faciuntque dolorem  
Corporis, & dentes incidunt sæpe labellis:  
Et stimuli subsunt, qui instigant lædere ad ipsum  
Quodcumque est, rabies unde illæ germina surgunt\*.*

And so it is in every Thing: Difficulty gives all Things their Estimation. Those of the *Marque of Ancona* most cheerfully make their Vows to *St. James*, and those of *Galicia* to our Lady of *Loretta*; they make wonderful Boasts at *Liege* of the Baths of *Luques*, and in *Tuscany* of those of *Aspa*: There are few *Romans* seen in the Fencing-Schools of *Rome*, which are full of *French*. The Great *Cato* also, as well as we, nauseated his Wife while she was his, and long'd for her when in the Possession of another. I was fain to turn out an old Stallion into the Paddock, being he was vicious and not to be govern'd when he smelt a Mare: The Facility presently fated him, as towards his own, but towards strange Mares, and the first that pass'd by the Pale of his Pasture, he would again fall to his importunate Neighings, and his furious Heats, as before. Our Appetite contemns, and passes by what it has in Possession, to run after that it has not.

*Transvolat in medio posita, & fugientia captat †.*

Thou scorn'st that Lass thou mayst with Ease enjoy;

And court'st those that are difficult and coy.

To forbid us any Thing, is to make us have a Mind to't.

*nisi tu servare puellam*

*Incipis, incipiet desinere esse mea ‡.*

If thou no better guard that Girl of thine,  
She'll soon begin to be no longer mine.

\* *Lucr. l. 4.* † *Hor. Sat. 2.* ‡ *Ovid. Amor. l. 2. El. 19.*  
To

To give it wholly up to us, is to beget in us Contempt, Want, and Abundance fall into the same Inconvenience.

*Tibi quod superest, mihi quod desit, dolet* \*,  
Thy Superfluities do trouble thee,  
And what I want and pant for, trouble me.

Desire and Fruition do equally afflict us. The Rigours of Mistresses are troublesome, but Facility, to say Truth, is more; forasmuch as Discontent and Anger springing from the Esteem we have of the Thing desired, heat and actuate Love; but Satiety begets Disgust; 'tis a blunt, dull, stupid, tir'd and slothful Passion.

*Si qua volet regnare diu, contemnat amentam.*  
—— *contemnite amantes,*

*Sic hodie venit, si qua negavit heri* †.

The Lady that would keep her Servant still,  
Must, in Discretion, sometimes use him ill.  
And the same Policy with Men will do,  
If they sometimes do slight their Misses too;  
By which Means she that Yesterday said Nay,  
Will come and offer up herself To-day.

Why did *Poppea* invent the Use of a Mask to hide the Beauties of her Face, but to enhance it to her Lovers? Why have they veil'd, even below the Heels, those Beauties that every one desires to shew, and that every one desires to see? Why do they cover, with so many Hindrances one over another, the Parts where our Desires and their own have their principal Seat? And to what Serve those great *Bassian* Farthingals, with which our Ladies fortify their Haunches, but to allure our Appetite, and to draw us on by removing them farther from us?

*Et fugit ad salices, & se cupit ante-videri* ‡.

And to the Osiers flies herself to hide,  
But does desire to have her Flight descry'd.

*Interdum tunica duxit operata moram* ||.

Things being laid too open to the Sight,  
Do sometimes put a Stop to the Delight.

\* *Terence.* † *Ovid. Amor.* ‡ *Virg. Ecl. 3.*  
|| *Propert. l. 2. Eleg. 12.*

To what Use serves the Artifice of this Virgin Modesty? This grave Coldness, this severe Countenance, this Profession to be ignorant of Things that they know better than we who instruct them in them, but to increase in us the Desire to overcome, controul and trample under Foot at Pleasure, all this Ceremony, and all these Obstacles? For there is not only Pleasure, but moreover, Glory, to conquer and debauch that soft Sweetness, and that childish Modesty, and to reduce a cold and Matron-like Gravity to the Mercy of our ardent Desires: 'Tis a Glory, say they, to triumph over Modesty, Chastity, and Temperance; and whoever dissuades Ladies from those Qualities, betray both them and themselves. They are to believe, that their Hearts tremble with Affright, that the very Sound of our Words offend the Purity of their Ears, that they hate us for talking so, and only yield to our Importunity by a compulsive Force. Beauty, as powerful as it is, has not wherewithal to make itself relish'd, without the Mediation of these little Arts; look into *Italy*, where there is the most and the finest Beauty to be sold, how it is nevertheless necessitated to have Recourse to other Means and other Artifices to render itself charming, and in Truth, whatever it may do, being venial and publick, it does not remain feeble and languishing in itself. Even as in Virtue itself, of two like Effects, we notwithstanding look upon that as the best and most worthy, wherein the most Trouble and Hazard is proposed. 'Tis an Effect of the Divine Providence to suffer the *Holy Church* to be afflicted, as we see it, with so many Storms and Troubles, by this Opposition to rouse pious Souls, and to awake them from that drowsy Lethargy whereinto, by so long Tranquility, they had been immerg'd. If we should lay the Loss we have sustained in the Number of those who have gone astray in the Balance, against the Benefit we have had by being again put in Breath, and by having our Zeal and Forces exercised by reason of this Opposition; I know not whether the Utility would not surmount the Damage. We have thought to tie the Nuptial Knot of our Marriages more fast and firm, for having taken away all Means of dissolving it; but the Knot of the Will and Affection is so much the more slackned and made loose, by how much that of Constraint is drawn closer together. And on the contrary, that which kept the *Marriages at Rome* so long in Honour

Honour

Honour and Inviolate, was the Liberty every one that would, had to break them. They kept their Wives the better, because they might part with them if they would; and in the full Liberty of *Divorces* they liv'd fifty Years and more, before any one made use on't.

*Quod licet, ingratum est, quod non licet, acrius vitat\*.*

What's free we are disgusted at, and flight,  
What is forbidden whets the Appetite.

We might here introduce the Opinion of an Ancient upon this Occasion, *That Executions rather whet than dull the Edge of Vices: That they do not beget the Care of doing well, that being the Work of Reason and Discipline; but only a Care not to be taken in doing ill.*

*Latius excise pestis contagia serpunt †.*

The Plague-fore being launc'd, th'Infection spreads.

I do not know that it is true; but I experimentally know, that never *Civil Government* was by that Means reform'd. The Order and Regiment of Manners depend upon some other Expedient. The *Greek Histories* make mention of the *Agrippians*, Neighbours to *Scythia*, who live either without Rod or Stick to offend; that not only no one attempts to attack them, but whoever can fly thither is safe, by reason of their Virtue and Sanctity of Life, and no one is so bold as there to lay Hands upon them; and they have Applications made to them to determine the Controversies that arise betwixt Men of other Countries. There is a certain Nation, where the Inclosures of Gardens and Fields they would preserve, is made only of a String of Cotton-yarn; and so fenc'd, is more firm and secure than our Hedges and Ditches. *Furem signata sollicitant. Aperta effractarius preterit †.* Things seal'd up, invite a Thief. House-breakers pass by open Doors. Peradventure, the Facility of entering my House, amongst other Things, has been a Means to preserve it from the Violence of our Civil Wars. Defence allures Attempt, and Defiance provokes an Enemy. I enervated the Soldiers Design, by depriving the Exploit of Danger, and all Matter of Military Glory, which is wont to

\* *Ovid. Amor. l. 2 E. 19.* † *Rutilius in Itinerario*

‡ *Senec. Ep. 68.*

serve them for Pretence and Excuse. Whatever is bravely, is ever honourably done, at a Time when Justice is dead. I render them the Conquest of my House cowardly and base; it is never shut to any one that knocks. My Gate has no other Guard than a Porter, and that of ancient Custom and Ceremony; who does not so much serve to defend it, as to offer it with more Decency, and the better Grace. I have no other *Guard* or *Centinel* than the Stars. A Gentleman would play the Fool to make a Shew of Defence, if he be not really in a Condition to defend himself. He that lies open on one Side, is every where so. Our Ancestors did not think of building frontier Garrisons. The Means of Assaulting, I mean, without Battery, or Army, and of surprizing our Houses, increase every Day above all the Means to guard them. Men's Wits are generally bent that Way. Invasion every one is concern'd in, none but the Rich in Defence. Mine was strong for the Time when it was built, I have added nothing to it of that Kind, and should fear that its Strength should turn against myself; to which we are to consider, that a peaceable Time would require it should be dismantled. There is Danger never to be able to regain it, and it would be very hard to keep. For in intestine Dissentions your Man may be of the Party you fear; and where Religion is the Pretext, even a Man's nearest Relation becomes unfaithful with a Colour of Justice. The publick *Exchequer* will not maintain our domestick Garrisons; they would exhaust it. We ourselves have not Means to do it without Ruin, or which is more inconvenient and injurious, without ruining the People. As to the rest, you there lose all, and even your Friends will be more ready to accuse your want of Vigilancy, and your Improvidence, than to lament you. That so many garrison'd Houses have been lost, whereas this of mine remains, makes me apt to believe, that they were only lost by being guarded. This gives an Enemy both an Invitation and Colour of Reason. All Defence shews a Face of War. Let who will come to me in God's Name; but I shall not invite them. 'Tis the Retirement I have chosen for my Repose from War. I endeavour to withdraw this Corner from the publick Tempest, as I also do another Corner in my Soul. Our War may put on what Forms it will, multiply and diversify itself into new Parties; for my own Part, I shall not



not budge. Amongst so many garrison'd Houses, I am the only Person of my Condition, that I know of, who have purely intrusted mine to the Protection of Heaven; without removing either Plate, Deeds, or Hangings. I will neither fear, nor save myself by halves. If a full Acknowledgment can acquire the Divine Favour, it will stay with me to the End: If not, I have, however, continued long enough, to render my Continuance remarkable, and fit to be recorded. How? Why I have lived Thirty Years.



## C H A P. XVI.

*Of Glory.*

**T** Here is the Name and the Thing: The Name is a Voice which denotes and signifies the Thing; the Name is no Part of the Thing, or of the Substance; 'tis a Foreign Piece joyn'd to the Thing; and without it, God, who is all Fulness in himself, and the Height of all Perfection cannot augment or add any Thing to himself within; but his Name may be augmented and increased by the Blessing and Praise we attribute to his Exterior Works. Which Praise, seeing we cannot incorporate it in him, forasmuch as he can have no Accession of Good, we attribute it to his Name; which is the Part out of him that is nearest to us. Thus is it, that to God alone Glory and Honour appertain; and there is nothing so remote from Reason, as that we should go in quest of it for ourselves; for being indigent and necessitous within, our Essence being imperfect, and having Need of Melioration, 'tis to that that we ought to employ all our Endeavours. We are all hollow and empty: 'Tis not with Wind and Voice that we are to fill ourselves; we want a more solid Substance to repair us: A Man starv'd with Hunger, would be very simple to seek rather to provide himself of a gay Garment than a good Meal: We are to look after that whereof we have most Need. As we have it in our ordinary Prayers, *Gloria in excelsis Deo, in terra pax hominibus* \*. *Glory be to God on high, and on Earth*

\* *St. Luke, chap. 2.*