



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

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. 20. That we taste nothing pure.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53407](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53407)

seen'd them all before him, he gravely and earnestly admonish'd them to calm those civil Dissentions, and that every one might freely, and without Fear, follow his own Religion. Which he did the more sedulously solicit, in hope that this Licence would augment the Schisms and Faction of their Division, and hinder the People from reuniting, and consequently fortifying themselves against him by their unanimous Intelligence and Concord; having experimented by the Cruelty of some Christians, that there is no Beast in the World so much to be fear'd by Man, as Man. These are very near his Words, wherein this is very worthy of Consideration, that the Emperor Julian made use of the same Receipt of Liberty of Conscience to enflame the civil Dissentions, that our Kings do to extinguish them. So that a Man may say on one Side, *That to give the People the Reins to entertain every Man his own Opinion, Liberty of Conscience.* is to scatter and sow Division, and, as it were, to lend a Hand to augment it, there being no Sense nor Correction of Law to stop and hinder their Career; but on the other Side, a Man may also say, *That to give People the Reins to entertain every Man his own Opinion, is to mollify and appease them by Facility and Toleration, and dull the Point which is whetted and made sharper by Variety, Novelty and Difficulty.* And I think it is better for the Honour of the Devotion of our Kings, that not having been able to do what they would, they have made a Shew of being willing to do what they could.



C H A P. XX.

That we Taste nothing pure.

THE Imbecility of our Condition is such, that Things cannot in their natural Simplicity and Purity fall into our Ute; the Elements that we enjoy are chang'd, even Metals themselves, and Gold must in some sort be debas'd

debased to fit it for our Service. Neither has *Virtue*, so simple as that which *Aristo*, *Pyrrho*, and also the *Stoicks* have made the principal End of Life; nor the *Cereuick* and *Aristippick* Pleasure, been without Mixture useful to it. Of the Pleasure and Goods that we enjoy, there is but one exempt from some Mixture of Ill and Inconvenience.

————— *medio de fonte leporum,*
Surgit amari aliquid, quod in ipsis floribus angat.*

Some think that's bitter will arise,
Even amidst our Jollities.

Our extreamest Pleasure has some Air of Groaning and Complaining in it. Would you not say, that it is dying of Pain? Nay, when we force the Image of it, we stuff it with sickly and painful Epithets, Langour, Softness, Feebleness, Faintness, *Morbidezza*, a great Testimony of their Consanguinity and Consubstantiality. The most profound Joy has more of Severity than Gaiety in it. The most extreme and most full Contentment, more of the Grave and Temperate than of the Wanton. *Ipsa felicitas, se nisi temperat premit †.* Even Felicity, unless it moderates itself, oppresseth. Delight chews and grinds us; according to the old Greek Verse, which says, *That the Gods sell us all the Goods they give us*; that is to say, that they give us nothing pure and perfect, and that we do not purchase them but at the Price of some Evil. Labour and Pleasure, very unlike in Nature, associate nevertheless by I know not what natural Conjunction. *Socrates* says, *That some God try'd to mix in one Mass, and to confound Pain and Pleasure, but not being able to do it, he bethought him, at least to couple them by the Tail.* *Metrodorus* said, *That in Sorrow there is some Mixture of Pleasure*: I know not whether or no he intended any thing else by that Saying: But for my Part, I am of Opinion, that there is Design, Consent and Complacency in giving a Man's self up to Melancholly; I say, that besides Ambition, which may also have a Stroke in the Business, there is some Shadow of Delight and Delicacy

* *Lucr. l. 4.*

† *Seneca. Ep. 74.*

which

which smiles upon, and flatters us, even in the very Lap of Melancholy. Are there not some Complexions that feed upon it?

— *est quædam flere voluptas* *.

A certain Kind of Pleasure 'tis to weep.

And one *Attalus* in *Seneca* says, *That the Memory of our lost Friends is as grateful to us, as Bitterness in Wine too old is to the Palate,*

*Minister veteris puer falerni
Ingere mi calices amariore†.*

Thou, Boy, that fill'st the old *Falernian Wine*,
The Bitt'rest pour into the Bowl that's mine.

And as Apples that have a sweet Tartness. Nature discovers this Confusion to us. *Painters* hold, *That the same Motions and Screwings of the Face that serve for Weeping, serve for Laughter too;* and indeed, before the one or the other be finish'd, do but observe the *Painter's* Manner of handling, and you will be in Doubt to which of the Two the Design does tend. And the Extremity of Laughter does at last bring Tears. *Nullum sine auctora mente malum est* †. *No Evil is without its Compensation.* When I imagine Man abounding with all the Pleasure and Conveniences that are to be desir'd, let us put the Case that all his Members were always seiz'd with a Pleasure like that of Generation in its most excessive Height; I feel him melting under the Weight of his Delight, and see him utterly unable to support so pure, so continual, and so universal a Pleasure. Indeed, he is running away whilst he is there, and naturally makes haste to escape, as from a Place where he cannot stand firm, and where he is afraid of sinking. When I the most strictly and religiously confess myself, I find, that the best Virtue I have has in it some Tincture of Vice: And am afraid, that *Plato*, in his purest Virtue (I who am as sincere and perfect a Lover of Virtue of that Stamp as any other whatever) if he had listned, and laid his Ear close to himself, (and he did so) he would have heard some jarring Sound of Human Mixture; but faint, and remote, and only to be

* *Ovid. Trist.* † *Catullus, Ep. 14.* ‡ *Seneca, Ep. 70.*
perceiv'd

perceiv'd by himself. Man is wholly and throughout but patch'd and motly. Even the *Laws* of Justice themselves cannot subsist without Mixture of Injustice: Infomuch, that *Plato* says, *they undertook to cut off the Hydra's Head, who pretend to clear the Law of all Inconvenience. Omne magnum exemplum habet aliquid ex iniquo, quod contra singulorum utilitate publica rependitur* *. Every great Example has in it some Mixture of Injustice, which recompenses the Wrong done to particular Men by the publick Utility, says *Tacitus*. It is likewise true, that for the Usage of Life, and the Service of publick Commerce, there may be some Excesses in the Purity and Perspicacity of our Minds; that penetrating Light has in it too much of Subtilty and Curiosity: We must a little stupify and blunt and abate them, to render them more obedient to Example and Practice; and a little veil and obscure them, the better to proportion them to this dark and earthy Life. And yet common and less speculative Souls are found to be more proper and more successful in the Management of Affairs; and the elevated and exquisite Opinions of *Philosophy* more unfit for Business. This sharp Vivacity of Soul, and the supple and restless Volubility attending it, disturb our Negotiations. We are to manage Human Enterprizes more superficially and rudely, and leave a great Part to Fortune. It is not necessary to examine Affairs with so much Subtilty and Depth: A Man loses himself in the Consideration of so many contrary Lustres, and so many various Forms. *Voluntatibus res inter se pugnantes, obturbarant animi* †. Whilst they consider'd of Things so indifferent in themselves they were astonish'd, and knew not what to do. 'Tis what the Ancients say of *Simonides*, That by reason his Imagination suggested to him upon the Question King *Hiero* had put to him (to answer, which he had many Days to meditate in) several witty and subtile Considerations, whilst he doubted which was the most likely, he totally despair'd of the Truth. Who dives into, and in his Inquisition comprehends all Circumstances and Consequences, hinders his Election. A little Engine well handled is sufficient for Execution of less or greater Weight and Moment. The best Husbands are those who can worst give Account why they do so; and the greatest Talkers for the

* *Tacit. Annal, lib. 14.*† *Livy.*

most Part do nothing to the Purpose. I know one of this Sort of Men, and a most excellent Director in all Sorts of good Husbandry, who has miserably let an Hundred Thousand Livres Yearly Revenue slip thro' his Hands. I know another, who says, that he is able to give better Advice than any of his Council; and there is not in the World a fairer Shew of a Soul, and of greater Understanding than he has; nevertheless, when he comes to the Test, his Servants find him quite another Thing; not to make any further mention of his Misfortune.



C H A P. XXI.

Against Idleness.

THE Emperor *Vespasian*, being sick of the Disease whereof he dy'd, did not for all that neglect to enquire after the *State* of the Empire; and even in Bed continually dispatch'd very many Affairs of great Consequence; for which being reprov'd by his *Physician*, as a Thing prejudicial to his Health, *An Emperor*, said he, *must die standing*. O fine Saying, in my Opinion, and worthy of a great *Prince*. The Emperor *Adrian* since made use of the same Words; and Kings should be often put in mind of it, to make them know, that the great Office conferr'd upon them of the Command of so many Men, is not an Employment of Ease; and that there is nothing can so justly disgust a Subject, and make him unwilling to expose himself to Labour and Danger for the Service of his *Prince*, than to see him in the mean Time devoted to his Ease and unmanly Delights: And to be solicitous of his Preservation, who so much neglects that of his People. Whoever will take upon him to maintain, that 'tis better for a *Prince* to carry on his Wars by others, than in his own Person; Fortune will furnish him with Examples enough of those whose *Lieutenants* have brought great Enterprizes to a happy Issue, and of those also whose Presence has done more Hurt than Good. But no virtuous and valiant *Prince* can with Pa-
tience