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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. 21. Against Idleness.

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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.

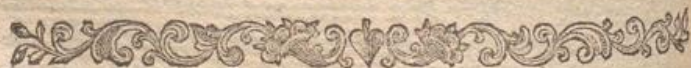
THE Emperor *Vespasian*, being sick of the Disease whereof he dy'd, did not for all that neglect to enquire after the *State* of the Empire; and even in Bed continually dispatch'd very many Affairs of great Consequence; for which being reprov'd by his *Physician*, as a Thing prejudicial to his Health, *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

tience endure such dishonourable Advice, under Colour of
 saving his Head, like the Statue of a Saint; for the Happi-
 ness of his Kingdom, they degrade him from, and make
 him incapable of his Office, which is military throughout.
 I know one who had much rather be beaten, than to sleep
 whilst another fights for him; and who never without Jeal-
 ously heard of any brave Thing done even by his own Of-
 ficers in his Absence. And *Selimus* said, with very good
 Reason, in my Opinion, *That Victories obtain'd without*
the Masters, were never compleat. Much more would he
 have said, that that Master ought to blush for Shame to pre-
 tend to any Share in the Honour, having contributed no-
 thing to the Work, but his Voice and Thought; nor even
 so much as those, considering, that in such Works as that,
 the Direction and Command that deserve Honour, are only
 such as are given upon the Place, and in the Heat of the
 Business. No *Pilot* performs his Office by standing still.
 The *Princes* of the *Ottoman* Family, the chiefest in the
 World in Military Fortune, have warmly embrac'd this
 Opinion; and *Bajazet* the Second, with his Son, that
 swerv'd from it, spending their Time in Sciences, and other
 retir'd Employments, gave great Blows to their Empire:
 And *Amurath* the Third, now reigning, following their Ex-
 ample, begins to find the same. Was it not *Edward* the Third,
 King of *England*, who said this of our *Charles* the Fifth?
There never was King who so seldom put on his Arms, and
yet never King who cut me out so much Work. He had Rea-
 son to think it strange, as an Effect of Chance more than
 of Reason. And let those seek out some other to join with
 them than me, who will reckon the Kings of *Castile* and
Portugal amongst the warlike and magnanimous Conquer-
 ors, because at the Distance of twelve hundred Leagues
 from their lazy Abode, by the Conduct of their *Captains*,
 they made themselves Masters of both *Indies*; of whom it
 will be known, if they have but the Courage to go, and
 in Person to enjoy them. The Emperor *Julian* said yet
 further, *That a Philosopher and a brave Man ought not so*
much as to breathe; that is to say, not to allow any more
 to Bodily Necessities than what we cannot refuse; *keeping*
the Soul and Body still intent and busy about honourable,
great and virtuous Things: He was asham'd if any one in
 publick saw him spit or sweat (which is said by some also

of the *Lacedæmonian* Young Men, and that *Xenophon* says of the *Persian*) forasmuch as he conceiv'd, that Exercise, continual Labour and Sobriety, ought to have dried up all those Superfluities. What *Seneca* says will not be unfit for this Place; which is, *that the Ancient Romans kept their Youth always standing, and taught them nothing that they were to learn sitting.* 'Tis a generous Desire, to wish to dye usefully, and like a Man, but the Effect lies not so much in our Resolution as good Fortune. A thousand have proposed to themselves in Battle, either to overcome or dye, who have fail'd both in the one and the other; Wounds and Imprisonment crossing their Design, and compelling them to live against their Wills. There are Diseases that overthrow so much as our Desires and our Knowledge. Fortune ought not to second the Vanity of the *Roman Legions*, who bound themselves by Oath, *either to overcome, or dye. Victor, Marce Fabi, revertar ex acie: Si falli, Jovem patrem Gradivumque Martem, aliosque iratos invoco Deos.* I will return (Marcus Fabius) a Conqueror from the Army: And if I fail, I wish the Indignation of Jove, Mars, and the other offended Gods, may light upon me. The *Portuguese* say, that in a certain Place of their Conquest of the Indies, they met with Soldiers who had damn'd themselves with horrible Execrations, to enter into no other Composition, but either to cause themselves to be slain, or to remain victorious; and had their Heads and Beards shav'd in token of this Vow. 'Tis to much Purpose to hazard ourselves, and to be obstinate. It seems as if Blows avoided those that present themselves too briskly to Danger; and do not willingly fall upon those who too willingly seek them, and do defeat them of their Design. Such there have been, who after having try'd all Ways, not having been able, with all their Endeavour, to obtain the Favour of dying by the Hand of the Enemy, have been constrain'd to make good their Resolution of bringing home the Honour of Victory, or of losing their Lives, to kill themselves even in the Heat of Battle. Of which there are other Examples, but this is one: *Philistus, General of the Naval Army of Dionysius the Younger, against those of Syracuse, presented them Battle, which was sharply disputed, their Forces being equal. In which Engagement he had the better at first, thro' his own Valour: But, the Syracusans drawing about*

his Admiral Gally to environ him, after having done great Things in his own Person to disengage himself, hoping for no Relief, with his own Hand took away that Life he had so liberally and in vain exposed to the Fury of the Enemy. Muley Moluck, King of Fez, who won the Battle against Sebastian, King of Portugal, so famous for the Death of Three Kings, and by the Transmission of that great Kingdom to the Crown of Castile, was extremely sick when the Portuguese entered in an hostile Manner into his Dominions; and from that Day forward grew worse and worse, still drawing nearer to, and foreseeing his End: Yet never did Man better employ his own Sufficiency more vigorously and bravely than he did upon this Occasion. He found himself too weak to undergo the Pomp and Ceremony of entering into this Camp, which after their Manner is very magnificent, and therefore resign'd that Honour to his Brother; but that was also all of the Office of a General that he resigned, all the rest of greatest Utility and Necessity he most exactly and gloriously perform'd in his own Person; his Body lying upon a Couch, but his Judgment and Courage upright and firm to his last Gasps, and in some sort beyond it. He might have defeated his Enemy, indiscreetly advanc'd into his Dominions, without striking a Blow; and it was a very unhappy Occurrence, that for want of a little Life, or some Body to substitute in the Conduct of this War, and the Affairs of a troubled State, he was compelled to seek a doubtful and bloody Victory, having another by a better and surer Way already in his Hands. Notwithstanding he wonderfully manag'd the Continuance of his Sickness in consuming the Enemy, and in drawing them from the Assistance of the Naval Army they had in the Parts of Africk, even 'till the last Day of his Life, which he designedly reserv'd for this furious Battle. He order'd his Battle in a circular Form, environing the Portugal Army on every Side, which Round coming to close in the Wings, and to draw up close together, did not only hinder them in the Conflict (which was very sharp, thro' the Valour of the young invading King) considering they were every Way to make a Front; but preventing their Flight after the Defeat, so that finding all Passages possess'd and shut up by the Enemy, they were constrain'd to close up together again; *coacervanturque non solum caede, sed etiam fuga;* and there they were slain in Heaps upon one another, leaving

to the Conqueror a very bloody and entire Victory. Dying, he caused himself to be carried and hurried from Place to Place where most Need was; and Passing thro' the Files encouraged the Captains and Soldiers one after another. But a Corner of his Battle being broken, he was not to be held from mounting on Horseback with his Sword in his Hand. He did his utmost to break from those about him, and to rush into the thickest of the Battle, they all the while with-holding him, some by the Bridle, some by his Robe, and others by his Stirrups. This last Effort totally overwhelmed the little Life he had left, they again lay him upon his Bed; but coming to himself again, and starting out of his Swoon, all other Faculties failing to give his People Notice that they were to conceal his Death (the most necessary Command he had then to give, that his Soldiers might not be discourag'd with the News) he expos'd with his Finger upon his Mouth the ordinary Sign of keeping Silence. Who ever liv'd so long and so far in Death? Who ever died more like a Man? The most extreme Degree of entertaining Death, and the most natural, is to look upon it not only without Astonishment, but without Care, continuing the wonted Course of Life even into it. As *Cato* did, who entertain'd himself in Study, and went to Sleep, having a violent and bloody one in his Heart, and the Weapon in his Hand, with which he was resolv'd to dispatch himself.



C H A P. XXII.

Of Posts.

I Have been none of the least able in this Exercise, which is proper for Men of my Pitch, short and well knit; but I give it over, it shakes us too much to continue long. I was just now reading, *That King Cyrus, the better to have*
News brought him from all Parts of the
 Post-horses first set up by Cyrus. *Empire, which was of a vast Extent, caus'd it to be try'd how far a Horse could go in a Day without baiting, and at that Distance appointed Stages and Men, whose Business it was to have*
 Horses