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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. 23. Of ill Means employed to a good End.

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Road, giving him their own tir'd Horses; to preserve themselves from being weary, they gird themselves straight about the Middle with a broad Girdle, but I could never find any benefit by it.



C H A P. XXIII.

Of Ill Means employed to a good End.

THere is a wonderful Relation and Correspondence in this Universal Government of the Works of Nature, which very well makes it appear that it is neither Accidental, nor carried on by divers Masters. The Diseases and Conditions of our Bodies are in like manner manifest in States, and the various Governments of the World. *Kingdoms* and *Republicks* are Founded, Flourish, and Decay with Age as we do. We are subject to a Repletion of Humours either useles or dangerous, either of those that are good (for even those *Physicians* are afraid of:) And as we have nothing in us that is permanent, they say, *That a too brisk and vigorous Perfection of Health, must be abated by Art, lest as our Nature cannot rest in any certain Condition, and not having whether to rise to mend itself, it makes too sudden and too disorderly a Retreat* (and therefore prescribe Wrestlers to purge and bleed, to qualify that superabundant Health) or else a Repletion of evil Humours, which is the ordinary Cause of Sickness. States are very often sick of the like Repletion, and therefore Sorts of Purgations have commonly been used. Sometimes a great Number of *Families* are turn'd out to clear the Country; who seek out new Abodes elsewhere, and encroach upon others. After this Manner our ancient *Franks* came from the remotest Part of *Germany*, to seize upon *Gaul*, and to drive thence the first Inhabitants; so was that infinite Deluge of Men made up that came into *Italy* under the Conduct of *Brennus*, and others: So the *Goths* and *Vandals*, also the People who now possess *Greece*, left their Native Country to go settle in other Places where they might have more Room; and there is scarce two or three little Corners of the World that have not felt the Effects of

of such Removals. The *Romans* by this Means erected their *Colonies*; for perceiving their City to grow immeasurably populous, they eased it of the most unnecessary People, and sent them to inhabit and cultivate the Lands they had conquer'd: Sometimes also they purposely maintain'd Wars with some of their Enemies, not only to keep their Men in Action, for fear lest Idleness, the Mother of Corruption, should bring upon them some worse Inconvenience,

*Et patimar longe pacis mala, seviror armis
Luxuria incumbit* *.

We suffer th' Ills of a long Peace, by far
Greater, and more pernicious than War.

but also to serve for a Blood-letting to their *Republick*, and a little to evaporate the too vehement Heat of their Youth, to prune and cleanse the Branches from the Stock too luxuriant in Wood; and to this End it was, that they formerly maintain'd so long a War with *Carthage*. In the Treaty of *Britagney*, *Edward* the Third, King of *England*, would not, in the general Peace he then made with our King, comprehend the Controversy about the Dutchy of *Britany*, that he might have a Place wherein to discharge himself of his Soldiers; and that the vast Number of *English* he had brought over to serve him in that Expedition might not return back into *England*. And this also was one Reason why our King *Philip* consented to send his Son *John* that Foreign Expedition, that he might take along with him a great Number of hot young Men that were then in his Pay. There are many in our Times who talk at this Rate, wishing that this hot Emotion that is now amongst us might discharge itself from some neighbouring War, for fear lest all the peccant Humours that now reign in this politick Body of ours may not diffuse themselves further, keep the Fever still in Height, and at last cause our total Ruin; and in Truth, a *Foreign* is much more supportable than a *Civil War*; but I do not believe that God will favour so unjust a Design, as to offend and quarrel with others for our Advantage.

* *Juvenal, Sat. 6.*

*Nil mihi tam valde placeat Rhannusa virgo,
Quod temere invitis suspiciatur heris* *.

In War that does invade another's Right,
Whose End is Plunder, I take no Delight.

And yet the Weakness of our Condition does often push us upon the Necessity of making use of ill Means to a good End. *Lycurgus*, the most virtuous and perfect *Legislator* that ever was, invented this unjust Practice of making the *Helotes*, who were their *Slaves*, drunk by force, by so doing to teach his People *Temperance*, to the End that the *Spartiates* seeing them so overwhelm'd and buried in *Wine*, might abhor the Excess of this beastly Vice. And yet they were more to blame, who of old gave leave, that *Criminals*, to what Sort of Death soever condemn'd, should be cut alive by the *Physicians*, that they might make a true Discovery of our inward Parts, and build their Art upon greater Certainty: For if we must run into Excesses, 'tis more excusable to do it for the Health of the Soul, than that of the Body; as the *Romans* train'd up the People to Valour, and the Contempt of Dangers and Death, by those furious Spectacles of *Gladiators* and *Fencers*, who being to fight it out 'till the last, cut, mangled, and killed one another in their Presence:

*Quid vesani aliud sibi vult ars impia ludi,
Quid mortes juvenum, quid sanguine pasta voluptas* †?

Of such inhuman Sports what further Use?
What Pleasure can Slaughters of Men produce?

And this Custom continued 'till the Emperor *Theodosius*'s Time.

*Arripe dilatam tua dux in tempora famam,
Quodque putris superest successor laudis habeto:
Nullus in Urbe cadat, cujus sit pœna Voluptas,
Jam solis contenta feris infamis arena,
Nulla cruentatis homicidia ludat in armis* ‡.

Prince, take the Honours destin'd for thy Reign,
Inherit of thy Father those remain,
Henceforth let none at Rome for Sport be slain. }

* *Catullus*.

† *Prudentius*.

‡ *Ibid.*

Of Ill Means employ'd to a good End. 411

Let Beasts Blood stain th' infamous Theatre,
And no more Homicides be acted there.

It was in Truth a wonderful Example, and of great Advantage for the training up the People, to see every Day before their Eyes a Hundred, two Hundred; nay, a Thousand Couples of Men arm'd against one another, cut one another to Pieces with so great Constancy of Courage, that they were never heard to utter so much as one Syllable of Weakness or Commiseration; never seen to turn back, nor so much as to make one cowardly Step to evade a Blow, but rather expose their Necks to the Adversaries Sword, and present themselves to receive the Stroke. And many of them, when wounded to Death, have sent to ask the Spectators, *If they were satisfied with their Behaviour?* before they lay down to die upon the Place. It was not enough for them to fight and die bravely, but cheerfully too; inso-much that they were hiss'd and curs'd if they made any Dispute about receiving their Death. The very Maids themselves set them on.

——— *consurgit ad ictus:*

*Et quoties victor ferrum jugulo inserit, illa
Delicias ait esse suas, pectusque jacentis
Virgo modesta jubet conseruo pollice rumpi*.*

The modest Virgin is delighted so
With the fell Sport, that she applauds the Blow;
And when the Victor baths his bloody Brand
In's Fellow's Throat, and lays him on the Sand,
Then she's most pleas'd, and shews by Signs, she'd fain
Have him rip up the Bosom of the Slain.

The first Romans only condemn'd Criminals to this Example: But they have since employ'd innocent Slaves in the Work, and even Freemen too, who sold themselves to this Effect: Nay, moreover *Senators* and *Knights of Rome*; and also Women;

*Nunc caput in mortem vendunt, & funus arenae,
Atque hostem sibi quisque parat cum bella quiescunt †.*

* *Prudentius.*

† *Manil.*

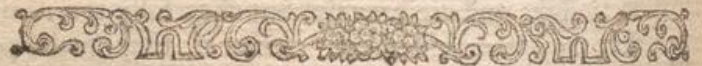
They

They sell themselves to Death, and since the Wars
Are ceas'd, each for himself a Foe prepares.

*Hos inter fremitus, novosque lusus,
Stat sexus rudis, insciusque ferri,
Et pugnat capit improbus viriles*.*

Amidst these Tumults and Alarms
The tender Sex, unskill'd in Arms,
Immodestly will try their Might,
And now engaged in manly Fights.

which I should think strange and incredible, if we were not accustomed every Day to see in our own Wars many Thousands of Men of other Nations, for Money to stake their Blood and their Lives in Quarrels wherein they have no Manner of Concern.



C H A P. XXIV.

Of the Roman Grandeur.

I Will only say a Word or two of this infinite Argument, to shew the Simplicity of those who compare the pitiful Grandeurs of these Times to that of *Rome*. In the seventh Book of *Cicero's* Familiar Epistles (and let the *Grammarians* put out that Sirname of *Familiar* if they please, for in Truth it is not very proper; and they who instead of *familiar* have substituted *ad familiares*, may gather something to justify them for so doing, out of what *Suetonius* says in the Life of *Cæsar*, that he had a Volume of Letters of his *ad familiares*) there is one directed to *Cæsar*, being then in *Gaul*, wherein *Cicero* repeats these Words, which were in the End of another Letter that *Cæsar* had writ to him: *As to what concerns Marcus Furius, whom you have recommended to me, I will make him King of Gaul, and if you would have me advance any other Friend of yours, send him to me.* It was no new Thing for a simple Citizen of *Rome*,

* *Stattus*.