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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. 29. Of Virtue.

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*Diversos diversa juvant, non omnibus annis,  
Omnia conveniunt* \*.

For several Things do several Men delight;  
And all Things are not for all Ages right.

If we must study, let us study what is fuitable to our present Condition, that we may answer as he did, who being ask'd to *what End he studied in his decrepid Age?*

*What ought to be an old Man's Study.* That I may go out better, said he, and at greater Ease. Such a Study was that of the younger Cato, feeling his End approach, and which he met with in *Plato's*

Discourse of the *Immortality of the Soul*: Not as we are to believe, that he was not long before-hand furnished with all Sorts of Ammunition for such a Departure; for of Assurance, an established Will and Instruction, he had more than *Plato* had in all his Writings; his Knowledge and Courage were in this Respect above *Philosophy*. He apply'd himself to his Study, not for the Service of his Death, but as a Man whose Sleeps were never disturb'd in the Importance of such a Deliberation, he also, without Choice or Change, continued his Studies with the other accustomed Actions of his Life. The Night that he was deny'd the *Prætorship*, he spent in *Play*. That wherein he was to die, he spent in *Reading*. The Loss either of Life or of Office was all one to him.



## C H A P. XXIX.

### *Of Virtue.*

**I** Find, by Experience, that there is a vast Difference betwixt the Starts and Sallies of the Soul, and a resolute and constant Habit; and very well perceive there is nothing we may not do; nay, even to the surpassing the Divinity itself, says a certain Person, forasmuch as it is

\* *Gall. Eleg.*

more to render a Man's self impassable by his own Study and Industry, than to be so by his natural Condition; and even to be able to conjoyn to Man's Imbecility and Frailty a Godly Resolution and Assurance. But it is by Fits and Starts, and in the Lives of those *Heroes* of Times past there are sometimes miraculous Sallies, and that seem infinitely to exceed our Natural Force, but they are indeed but Sallies; and 'tis hard to believe, that in these so elevated Qualities a Man can so thoroughly tinct and imbue the Soul, that they should become Constant, and as it were, Natural in him. It accidentally happens even to us, who are but abortive Births of Men, sometimes to dart out our Souls, when rous'd by the Discourses and Examples of others, much beyond their ordinary Stretch; but 'tis a kind of Passion that pushes and pricks them on, and in some Sort ravishes them from themselves; but this Whirlwind once blown over, we see that they insensibly flag, and slacken of themselves, if not to the lowest Degree, at least so as to be no more the same; insomuch as that upon every trivial Occasion, the losing of a Hawk, or the breaking of a Glasse, we suffer ourselves to be mov'd little less than one of the common People. I am of Opinion, that Order, Moderation and Constancy excepted, all things are to be done by a Man that is indifferent and defective in general. *Therefore it is, say the Sages, that to make a right Judgment of a Man, you are chiefly to pry into his common Actions, and surprize him in his every Day Habit.* Pyrrho, he who erected so pleasant a Knowledge upon Ignorance, endeavour'd, as all the rest who were really *Philosophers* did, to make his *Life* correspond with his *Doctrine*. And because he maintain'd the Imbecillity of Human Judgment to be so extreme, as to be incapable of any Choice or Inclination, and would have it wavering and suspended, considering and receiving all Things as indifferent, 'tis said, *that he always comported himself after the same Manner and Countenance: If he had begun a Discourse, he would always end what he had to say, tho' the Person he was speaking to was gone away: And if he walked, he never stop'd for any Impediment that stood in his Way, being preserv'd from Precipices, the Jumble of Carts, and other like Accidents, by the Care of his Friends: For, to fear, or to avoid any Thing, had been to jumble his own Propositions,*  
which

which depriv'd the Senses themselves of all Certainty and Election. Sometimes he suffer'd Incisions and Cauteries with so great Constancy, as never to be seen so much as to wince or stir. 'Tis something to bring the Soul to these Imaginations, more to join the Effects, and yet not impossible; but to conjoin them with such Perseverance and Constancy as to make them habitual, is certainly, in Attempts so remote from common Custom, almost incredible to be done. Therefore it was, that being one Day taken in his House terribly scolding with his Sister, and being reproach'd that he therein transgressed his own Rules of Indifference: What, said he, must this foolish Woman also serve for a Testimony to my Rules? Another Time, being to defend himself against a Dog, It is, said he, very hard totally to put off Man; and we must endeavour and force ourselves to resist and encounter Things, first by Effects, but at least by Reason. About seven or eight Years since, a Husbandman, yet living but two Leagues from my House, having been long tormented with his Wife's Jealousy, coming one Day home from his Work, and she welcoming him with her accustomed Railing, entred into so great Fury, that with a Sickle he had yet in his Hand, he totally cut off all those Parts that she was jealous of, and threw them into her Face. And, 'tis said, that a young Gentleman of our Nation, brisk and amorous, having by his Perseverance at last mollified the Heart of a fair Mistress, enrag'd that upon the Point of Fruition he found himself unable to perform, and that,

— non viriliter

*Iners senile penis extulerat caput \**,

so soon as ever he came home he deprived himself of it, and sent it his Mistress, a cruel and bloody Victim for the Expiation of his Offence. If this had been done upon a mature Consideration, and upon the Account of Religion, as the Priests of Cybele did, what should we say of so high an Action? A few Days since, at Bergerac, within five Leagues of my House, up the River Dordogne, a Woman having over Night been beaten and abused by her Husband, a choleric ill-condition'd Fellow, resolv'd to escape from his ill Usage at the Price of her Life; and going so soon as she was up

\* *Tib. lib. 4. Eleg. pen.*

the next Morning to visit her Neighbours, as she was wont to do, and having let some Words fall of the Recommendation of her Affairs, she took a Sister of hers by the Hand and led her to the Bridge; whither being come, as it were in Jest, without any Manner of Alteration in her Countenance, there taking leave of her, she threw herself Headlong from the Top into the River, and was there drown'd. That which is the most remarkable in this, is, that this Resolution was a whole Night forming in her Head: But it is quite another Thing with the Indian Women; for it being the Custom there for the Men to have many Wives, and the best beloved of them to kill herself at her Husband's Decease, every one of them makes it the Business of her whole Life to obtain this Priviledge and gain this Advantage over her Companions, and the good Offices they do their Husbands; aim at no other Recompence, but to be preferr'd in accompanying him in Death.

*Ubi mortifero jacta est fax ultima lecto,  
Uxorum fufis stat pia turba comis:  
Et certamen habent lethi quæ viva sequatur  
Conjugium, pudor est non licuisse mori,  
Ardent Victrices, & flammæ pectora præbent,  
Imponuntque suis ora perusta viris\*.*

When to the Pile they throw the kindling Brand,  
The pious Wives with Hair dishevell'd stand,  
Striving which living shall accompany  
Her Spouse, and are asham'd they may not die;  
Who are preferr'd, their Breasts to Flame expose,  
And their scorch'd Lips to their dead Husband's close.

A certain Author of our Times reports, that he has seen in those Oriental Nations this Custom in Practice, that not only the Wives bury themselves with their Husbands, but even the Slaves he has enjoyn'd also; which is done after this Manner: The Husband being dead, the Widow may if she will (but few will) demand two or three Months Respite wherein to order her Affairs. The Day being come, she mounts on Horse-back, dressed as fine as at her Wedding, and with a cheerful Countenance says, She is going to sleep with her Spouse, holding a Looking-Glass in

\* Propertius. l. 3. Eleg. 11.

her Left-hand, and an Arrow in the other. Being thus conducted in Pomp, accompanied with her Kindred and Friends, and a great Concourse of People, with great Joy, she is at last brought to the publick Place appointed for such Spectacles: This is a spacious Place, in the Midst of which is a Pit full of Wood, and adjoining to it a Mount raised four or five Steps, upon which she is brought and served with a magnificent Repast; which being done, she falls to Dancing and Singing, and gives Order when she thinks fit to kindle the Fire; which being perform'd, she descends, and taking the nearest of her Husband's Relations by the Hand, they walk together to the River close by, where she strips herself stark naked, and having distributed her Cloaths and Jewels to her Friends, plunges herself into the Water, as if there to cleanse herself from her Sins; coming out thence, she wraps herself in a yellow Linnen of five and Twenty Ells long, and again giving her Hand to this Kinsman of her Husband's, they return back to the Mount, where she makes a Speech to the People, and recommends her Children to them, if she have any. Betwixt the Pit and the Mount there is commonly a Curtain drawn to screen the burning Furnace from their Sight, which some of them, to manifest their great Courage, forbid. Having ended what she was to say, a Woman presents her with a Vessel of Oil, wherewith to anoint her Head and her whole Body; which having done with, she throws into the Fire, and in an Instant precipitates herself after. Immediately the People throw a great many Billets and Logs upon her, that she may not be long in dying, and convert all their Joy into Sorrow and Mourning. If they are Persons of meaner Condition, the Body of the Defunct is carry'd to the Place of Sepulture, and there plac'd sitting, the Widow kneeling before him, which so soon as it is raised to the Height of the Woman's Shoulders, some of her Relations come behind her, and taking hold of her Head, writhe her Neck in two, and so soon as she is dead, the Wall is presently raised up and closed, where they remain entomb'd. There was in the same Country something like

The Gymnosophists voluntarily burnt.

this in their Gymnosophists; for not by Constraint of others, nor by the Impetuosity of a sudden Humour, but by the expresse Profession of their Order, their Custom was, That so soon as they arriv'd at a certain Age,

Age, or that they saw themselves threatned by any Disease, to cause a funeral Pile to be erected for them, and on the Top a stately Bed, where, after having joyfully feasted their Friends and Acquaintance, they lay them down with so great Resolution, that Fire being apply'd to it, they were never seen to stir Hand or Foot; and after this Manner one of them, Calanus by Name, expir'd in the Presence of the whole Army of Alexander the Great; and he was neither reputed holy nor happy amongst them, that did not thus destroy himself; dismissing his Soul, purged and purified by the Fire, after having consumed all that was earthly and mortal. This constant Pre-meditation of the whole Life is that which makes the Wonder amongst our other Controversies, that of *Fatum* is also crept in, and to tye Things to come, and even our own Wills to a certain and inevitable Necessity, we are yet upon this Argument of Time past; Since God foresees, that all Things shall so fall out, as doubtless he does, it must then necessarily follow, that they must so fall out: To which our Masters reply, That the seeing any Thing come to pass, as we do, and as God himself also does (for all Things being present with him, he rather sees than foresees) is not to compel an Event: That is, we see because Things do fall out, but Things do not fall out because we see. Events cause Knowledge, but Knowledge does not cause Events. That which we see happen, does happen; but it might have happened otherwise: And God, in the Catalogue of the Causes of Events, which he has in his Presence, has also those which we call accidental and involuntary, which depend upon the Liberty he has given our Free-will, and knows that we do amiss, because we would do so. I have seen a great many Commanders encourage their Soldiers with this fatal Necessity; for if our Time be limited to a certain Hour, neither the Enemies Shot, nor our own Boldness, nor our Flight and Cowardize, can either shorten or prolong our Lives. This is easily said, but see who will be so perswaded; and if it be so, that a strong and lively Faith draws along with it Actions of the same, certainly this Faith we so much brag of is very light in this Age of ours, unless the Contempt it has of Works makes it disdain their Company. So

Causes of  
Events in the  
Presence of  
Almighty God.  
Fortuitous  
and volun-  
tary Causes.

it is, that to this very Purpose the *Sieur de Joinville*, as credible a Witness as any other whatever, tells us of the *Bedoins*, a Nation amongst the *Saracens*, with whom the King *St. Lewis* had to do in the *Holy-Land*, that they in their Religion did so firmly believe the Number of every Man's Days to be from all Eternity prefix'd and set down by an inevitable Decree, that they went naked to the Wars, excepting a Turkish Sword, and their Bodies only cover'd with a white Linnen Cloth: And for the greatest Curse they could invent when they were angry, this was always in their Mouth, *Accursed be thou, as he that arms himself for fear of Death*. This is a Testimony of Faith very much beyond ours. And of this Sort is that also that two religious Men of *Florence* gave in our Fathers Days. Being engag'd in some Controversy of Learning, they agreed to go both of them into the Verification of his Argument, and all Things were already prepar'd, and the Things just upon the Point of Execution, when it was interrupted by an unexpected Accident. A young *Turkish* Lord, having perform'd a notable Exploit in his own Person, in the Sight of both Armies, that of *Amurath* and that of *Hunniades*, ready to join Battle, being asked by *Amurath*, who in so tender and unexperienced Years (for it was his first Sally into Arms) had inspir'd him with so brave a Courage, reply'd, that his chief Tutor for Valour was a Hare. For being, said he, one Day a Hunting I found a Hare sitting, and tho' I had a Brace of excellent Grey hounds with me, yet methought it would be best for Sureness to make use of my Bow; for she sat very fair. I then fell to letting fly my Arrows, and shot forty that I had in my Quiver, not only without hurting, but without startling her from her Form. At last I slipt my Dogs after her, but to no more Purpose than I had shot: By which I understood, that she had been secur'd by her Destiny; and that neither Darts nor Swords can wound without the Permission of Fate, which we can neither hasten or defer. This Story which I am going to tell, may serve by the Way to let us see how flexible our Reason is to all Sorts of Images. A Person of great Years, Name, Dignity and Learning, boasted to me to have been induced to a certain very important Mutation in his Faith, by a strange, whimsical Incitement, and otherwise so very ill concluding, that I thought it much stronger being taken the contrary Way: He



He call'd it a Miracle, I look upon it quite otherwise. The *Turkish* Historians say, that the Persuasion those of their Nation have imprinted in them of the fatal and unalterable Prescription of their Days, does manifestly conduce to the giving them great Assurance in Dangers. And I know a great Prince, who makes very fortunate Use of it; whether it be, that he does really believe it, or that he makes it his Excuse for so wonderfully hazarding himself, provided Fortune be not too soon weary of her Favour to him. There has not happened in our Memory a more admirable Effect of Resolution than in those two who conspired the Death of the Prince of *Orange*. 'Tis to be wonder'd at, how the Second that executed it could ever be persuaded into an Attempt, wherein his Companion, who had done his utmost, had had so ill Success; and after the same Method, and with the same Arms, to go attack a Lord, arm'd with a late Instruction of Distrust, powerful in Followers and bodily Strength, in his own Hall, amidst his Guards, and in a City wholly at his Devotion. He doubtless employ'd a very resolute Arm and Courage, enflam'd with furious Passions: A *Poignard* is sure for striking home, but by reason that more Motion and Force of Hand is requir'd than with a Pistol, the Blow is more subject to be put by and hindred. That this Man did not run to a certain Death, I make no great Doubt; for the Hopes any one could flatter him withal could not find Place in any sober Understanding; and the Conduct of his Exploit does sufficiently manifest, that he had no Want of That, no more than Courage. The Motives of so powerful a Persuasion may be divers; for our Fancy does what it will both with itself and us. The Execution that was done near *Orleans* was nothing like this, there was in that more of Chance than Vigour; the Wound was not mortal, if Fortune had not made it so; and to attempt to shoot on Horseback, and at a great Distance, and at one whose Body was in Motion by the moving of his Horse, was the Attempt of a Man who had rather miss his Blow than fail of saving himself, as was apparent by what follow'd after; for he was so astonish'd and stupify'd with the Thought of so high an Execution, that he totally lost his Judgment, both to

*Assassination  
of the Prince  
of Orange.*

*The Duke of  
Guise.*

find his Way and to govern his Tongue. What needed he to have done more than to fly back to his Friends cross a River? 'Tis what I have done in less Dangers, and I think of very little Hazard, how broad soever the River may be, provided your Horse have good going in, and that you see on the other Side good Landing according to the Stream. The other, when they pronounced his dreadful Sentence. *I was prepared for this, said he, before-hand, and I will make you wonder at my Patience.* The *Assassins*, a Nation bordering upon *Phœnicia*, are reputed amongst the *Mabometans*, a People of great Devotion, and Purity of Manners. They hold, *That the nearest Way to gain Paradise is to kill some one of a contrary Religion*; which is the Reason they have often been seen, being but one or two, without Arms, to attempt against powerful Enemies at the Price of a certain Death, and without any Consideration of their own Danger. So was our Count *Raimond of Tripoly* assassinated (which Word is deriv'd from their Name) in the Heart of his City, during our Enterprizes of the Holy War; and likewise *Conrade*, Marquis of *Montferrat*, the Murderers at their Execution carrying themselves with great Pride and Glory that they had perform'd so brave an Exploit.



## C H A P. XXX.

*Of a Monstrous Child.*

**T**HIS Story shall go by itself; for I will leave it to Physicians to discourse of. Two Days ago I saw a Child which two Men and a Nurse, who said themselves to be the Father, the Uncle and the Aunt of it, carry'd about to get Money by shewing it, by reason it was so strange a Creature. It was, as to all the rest, of a common Form, and could stand upon its Feet; could go, and gabble much like other Children of the Age; it had never as yet taken any other Nourishment but from the Nurse's Breasts, and what, in my Presence, they tried to put into the Mouth of it, it only chew'd a little and spit it out again without swallowing; the Cry of it, indeed, seem'd a little odd and particular, and it was just fourteen Months old.

Under