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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. 30. Of a monstrous Child.

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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.

THIS 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

Under the Breast it was joyned to another Child, but without a Head, and that had the Spine of the Back without Motion, the rest entire; for tho' it had one Arm shorter than the other, it had been broken by accident at their Birth; they were join'd Breast to Breast, as if a lesser Child would reach the Arms about the Neck of one something bigger. The Juncture and Thickness of the Place where they were conjoin'd was not above four Fingers, or thereabouts, so that if you thrust up the imperfect Child you might see the Navel of the other below it, and the joyning was betwixt the Paps and the Navel. The Navel of the imperfect Child could not be seen, but all the rest of the Belly; so that all the rest that was not joyn'd of the imperfect one, as Arms, Buttocks, Thighs and Legs, hung dangling upon the other, and might reach to the Mid-leg. The Nurse moreover told us that it urin'd at both Bodies, and also the Members of the other were nourish'd, sensible, and in the same plight with that she gave suck to, excepting that they were shorter, and less. This double Body, and several Limbs relating to one Head, might be interpreted a favourable Prognostick to the King, of maintaining these various Parts of our State under the Union of his Laws; but lest the event should prove otherwise, 'tis better to let it alone; for in things already past, there is no Divination; *Ut quum facta sunt, tum ad conjecturam aliqua interpretatione revocantur**. So as when they are come to pass, they should then by some Interpretation be recall'd to Conjecture. As 'tis said of Epimenides, that he al-ways prophesied of Things past. I have lately seen a Herdsman in Medoc of about thirty Years of Age, who has no Sign of any Genital Parts; he has three Holes by which he incessantly voids his Water, he is bearded, has Desire, and covets the Society of Women. Those that we call *Monsters*, are not so to God, who sees in the Immensity of his Work, the infinite Forms that he has comprehended therein. And it is to be believed that this Figure which does astonish us, has relation to some other of the same kind unknown to Man. From his All-Wisdom nothing but good, common, and

* Cicero de Divin. l. 2.

regular proceeds; but we do not discern the Disposition and Relation. *Quod crebro videt, non miratur, etiam, cur fiat nescit. Quod autè non videt, id si evenerit, ostentum esse censet* *. What he often sees he does not admire, tho' he be ignorant how it comes to pass. But when a thing happens he never saw before, that he looks upon as a portent. What falls out contrary to Custom, we say is contrary to Nature; but nothing, whatever it be, is contrary to her. Let therefore this universal and natural Reason expel the Error and Astonishment that Novelty brings along with it.



C H A P. XXXI.

Of Anger.

Plutarch is admirable throughout; but especially where he judges of human Actions; the fine things he says in comparison of *Lycurgus* and *Numa*, upon the Subject of our great Folly in abandoning Children to the Care and Government of their Fathers, are very easily discern'd. *The most of our Civil Governments, as Aristotle says, leave, after the Manner of the Cyclops, to every one the ordering of their Wives and Children, according to their own foolish and indiscreet Fancy; and the Lacedæmonian and Cretean are almost the only Governments that have committed the Education of Children to the Laws.* And who does not see that in a State all depends upon their Nurture and bringing up? And yet they are left to the Mercy of Parents, let them be as foolish and ill-natur'd as they will, without any manner of Discretion. Amongst other things, how often have I, as I have pass'd along the Streets, had a good Mind to make a Farce, to revenge the poor Boys whom I have seen flead, knock'd down, and miserably abus'd by some Father or Mother when in their Fury, and mad with Rage? You shall see them come out with Fire and Fury sparkling in their Eyes,

* *Cicero de Divin. l. 2.*