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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

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Chap. 31. Of Anger.

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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 Cretenfian 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.*

— *rabie jecur incendente feruntur*
Præcipites ut sexa jugis abruta quibus mons
Subtrahitur, clivoque latus pendente recedit.*

With burning Fury they are headlong borne,
 As when great Stones are from the Mountains torn,
 By which the Clifts depriv'd and lessen'd are,
 And their deep Sides are naked left, and bare.

(and according to *Hippocrates*, the most dangerous Maladies are they that disfigure the Countenance) with a roaring and terrible Voice very often against those that are but newly come from Nurse, and there they are lam'd and spoil'd with Blows, whilst our Justice takes no Cognizance of it; as if these Maims and Dislocations were not executed upon Members of our Common-wealth.

Gratum est quod patriæ civem, populoque dedisti,
Si facis ut Patriæ sit idoneus, utilis agris,
Utilis, & bellorum & pacis rebus agendis †.

It is a Gift most acceptable, when
 Thou to thy Country giv'st a Citizen,
 Provided thou hast had the Knack of it
 To make him for his Country's Service fit,
 Useful t' assist the Earth in her Increase,
 And useful in Affairs of War and Peace.

There is no Passion that so much transports Men from their right Judgments, as *Anger*. No one would demur upon punishing a *Judge* with Death, who should condemn a *Criminal* upon the Account of his own Cholera; why then should *Fathers* and *Pedants* be any more allow'd to whip and chastise Children in their Anger? 'Tis then no longer *Correction*, but *Revenge*. Chastisement is instead of *Physick* to Children; and should we suffer a *Physician*, who should be animated against and enrag'd at his *Patient*? We ourselves, to do well, should never lay a Hand upon our Servants whilst our Anger lasts; whilst the Pulse beats, and that we feel an Emotion in ourselves, let us defer the Business; Things will indeed appear otherwise to us when we are Calm and Cool. 'Tis then Passion that

* *Juvenal Sat. 6.*

† *Juvenal Sat. 14.*

commands

commands, 'tis then Passion that speaks, and not we. Faults seen through Passion are magnify'd, and appear much greater to us than they really are, as Bodies do, being seen through a Mist. Who is hungry uses Meat; but he that will make use of Correction should have no Appetite, neither of Hunger or Thirst to it. And moreover, Chastisements that are inflicted with Weight and Discretion, are much better receiv'd, and with greater Benefit by him who suffers. Otherwise he will not think himself justly condemn'd by a Man transported with Anger and Fury, and will alledge his Master's excessive Passion, his inflam'd Countenance, his unwonted Oaths, his Emotion and precipitous Rashness, for his own Justification.

*Ora tument ira, nigrescunt sanguine venæ,
Lumina Gorgonio sævius igne micant* *.

Their Faces swell, and Veins grow black with Ire,
And their Eyes sparkle with Gorgonian Fire.

Suetonius reports, that Caius Rabirius having been condemn'd by Cæsar, the thing that most prevail'd upon the People (to whom he had appeal'd) to determine the Cause in his Favour, was, the Animosity and Vehemency that Cæsar had manifested in that Sentence. Saying is one thing, and Doing is another; we are distinctly to consider the Sermon and the Preacher. Those Men took a pretty Business in hand, who in our Times have attempted to shake the Truth of our Church by the Vices of her Ministers; she extracts her Testimony elsewhere. 'Tis a foolish way of Arguing, and that would throw all Things into Confusion. A Man whose Manners are good, may have false Opinions, and a wicked Man may preach Truth, nay, though he believe it not himself. 'Tis doubtless a fine Harmony when *doing* and *saying* go together; and I will not deny but that Saying, when the Actions follow, are of greater Authority and Efficacy, as Eudamidas said, hearing a Philosopher talk of Military Affairs; *These Things are finely said, but he that speaks them is not to be believ'd, for his Ears have never been used to the Sound of the Trumpet.* And Cleomenes,

* Ovid. de Art. lib. 3.

hearing an Orator declaiming upon Valour, burst out into Laughter, at which the other being angry, *I should*, said he to him, *do the same if it were a Swallow that spoke of this Subject, but if it were an Eagle I should willingly bear him.* I perceive, methinks, in the Writing of the *Ancients*, that he who speaks what he thinks, strikes much more home than he that only dissembles. Hear but *Cicero* speak of the Love of Liberty: Hear *Brutus* speak of it, his very Writings found that this Man would purchase it at the Price of his Life. Let *Cicero*, the Father of Eloquence, treat of the Contempt of Death, and let *Seneca* do the same; the first does languishingly draw it out, so that you perceive he would make you resolve upon a thing on which he is not resolv'd himself. He inspires you not with Courage, for he himself has none; the other animates and inflames you. I never read an Author, even of those who treat of Virtue, and of Actions, that I do

Censure of Cicero and Seneca.

not curiously examine what a kind of Man he was himself. For the *Ephori* at *Sparta* seeing a dissolute Fellow propose a wholesome Advice to the People, commanded him to hold his Peace, and intreated a virtuous Man to attribute to himself the Invention, to propose it. *Plutarch's* Writings, if well understood, sufficiently speak their Author; and so that I think I know him even into his Soul, and yet I could wish that we had some fuller Account of his Life; and am thus far wandred from my Subject, upon the Account of the Obligation I have to *Aulus Gellius*, for having left us in writing this Story of his Manners, that brings me back to my Subject of Anger. *A Slave of his, a vicious, ill-condition'd Fellow, but that had the Precepts of Philosophy often ringing in his Ears, having for some Offence of his been stript by Plutarch's Command, whilst he was whipping, mutter'd at first, that it was without Cause, and that he had done nothing to deserve it; but at last falling in good earnest to exclaim against, and to rail at his Master, he reproach'd him, that he was no Philosopher, as he had boasted himself to be; that he had often heard him say it was indecent to be Angry, nay, had writ a Book to that Purpose; and that the causing him to be so cruelly beaten in the height of his Rage,*

Plutarch reproach'd for Anger by a Slave of his.

totally

totally gave the Lye to all his Writings. To which *Plutarch* calmly and coldly answer'd, *How, Ruffian,* said he, by what dost thou judge that I am now angry; does either my Face, my Colour, or my Voice give any Manifestation of my being mov'd? I do not think my Eyes look Fierce, that my Countenance appears Troubled, or that my Voice is Dreadful; am I Red, do I Foam, does any Word escape my Lips I ought to Repent? Do I Start? Do I Tremble with Fury? For those, I tell thee, are the true Signs of Anger. And so turning to the Fellow that was whipping him, *Ply on thy Work,* said he, whilst this Gentleman and I dispute. This is the Story.

Archytas Tarentinus, returning from a War wherein he had been *Captain General,* found all things in his House in very great Disorder, and his Lands quite out of Tillage, through the ill Husbandry of his *Receiver,* who having caus'd to be called to him, *Go,* said he, *If I were not in Anger, I would soundly drub your Sides.* *Plato* likewise being highly offended with one of his Slaves, gave *Speusippus* order to chastize him, excusing himself from doing it, because he was in Anger.

And *Carrillus,* a *Lacedæmonian,* to a *Helot,* who carried himself so insolently and audaciously towards him; *By the Gods,* said he, *if I were not angry, I would immediately cause thee to be put to Death.* 'Tis a Passion that is pleas'd with, and flatters itself. How oft, being mov'd under a false Cause, if the Person offending makes a good Defence, and presents us with a just Excuse, are we vex'd at Truth and Innocence itself? In proof of which, I remember a marvellous Example of Antiquity. *Piso,* otherwise a Man of very eminent Virtue, being mov'd against a Soldier of his, for that returning alone from Forage, he could give him no Account where he had left a Companion of his, took it for granted that he had kill'd him, and presently condemn'd him to Death. He was no sooner mounted upon the Gibbet, but behold his wandering Companion arrives; at which all the Army were exceedingly glad, and after many Embraces of the two Comrades, the Hangman carried both the one and the other into *Piso's* Presence, all the Assistants believing it would be a great Pleasure even to him himself; but it prov'd quite contrary, for through Shame and Spite, his
Fury,

Fury, which was not yet cool, redoubled; and by a Subtlety which his Passion suddenly suggested to him, he made three Criminal for having found one Innocent, and caus'd them all to be dispatch'd: The first Soldier, because Sentence had pass'd upon him; the Second, who had lost his way, because he was the Cause of his Companion's Death; and the Hangman, for not having obey'd the Order had been given him. Such as have had to do with testy and obstinate Women, may have experimented into what a Rage it puts them, to oppose Silence and Coldness to their Fury, and that a Man disdains to nourish their Anger. The Orator *Celius* was wonderfully Choleric by Nature, and to one who supp'd in his Company, a Man of gentle and sweet Conversation, and who, that he might not move him, approv'd and consented to all he said; he, impatient that his ill Humour should thus spend itself without Aliment; For the Love of the Gods, deny me something, said he, that we may be two. Women in like manner are only angry, that others may be angry again, in Imitation of the Law of Love. *Phocion*, to one that interrupted his speaking by injurious and very opprobrious Words, made no other return than Silence, and to give him full Liberty and Leisure to vent his Spleen; which he having accordingly done, and the Storm blown over, without any mention of this Disturbance, he proceeded in his Discourse where he had left off before. No Answer can nettle a Man like such a Contempt. Of the most choleric Man in *France* (Anger is always an Imperfection, but more excusable in a Soldier, for in that Trade it cannot sometimes be avoided) I must needs say, that he is often the most patient Man that I know, and the most discreet in bridling his Passions; which rises in him with so great Violence and Fury,

— magno veluti cum flamma sonore
 Virgea suggeritur costis undantis abeni,
 Exultansque aestu latices, furit intus aquai,
 Fumidus, atque altè spumis exuberat amnis.
 Nec jam se capit unda, volat vapor ater ad auras*.

* *Aeneid.* l. 7.

As when unto the boiling Caldron's Side
 A crackling Flame of Brushwood is apply'd,
 The bubbling Liquor there like Springs is seen
 To swell and foam to higher Tides within,
 Until it does to overflowing rise,
 And a fuliginous Vapour upward flies.

that he must of necessity cruelly constrain himself to moderate it; and for my part, I know no Passion which I could with so much Violence to myself attempt to cover and conceal. I would not set Wisdom at so high a Price; and do not so much consider what he does, as how much it costs him to do no worse. Another boasted himself to me of *the Regularity and Sweetness of his Manners*, which is in Truth very singular; to whom I reply'd, *That it was indeed something, especially in Persons of so eminent Quality as himself, upon whom every one had their Eyes, to present himself always well-temper'd to the World; but that the principal thing was to make Provision for within, and for himself; and that it was not, in my Opinion, very well to order his Business inwardly to grate himself which I was afraid he did, in putting on an outwardly Maintaining the Visor and regular Appearance.* A Man incorporates Anger by concealing it, as *Diogenes* told *Demosthenes*, who, for fear of being seen in a Tavern, withdrew himself into it, The more you retire, the farther you enter in. I would rather advise that a Man should give his Servant a Box of the Ear a little unseasonably, than wrack his Fancy to represent this grave and compos'd Countenance; and had rather discover my Passions, than brood over them at my own Expence; they grow less in venting and manifesting themselves; and 'tis much better their Point should wound others without, than be turn'd towards ourselves within. *Omnia vitia in aperto leviora sunt; & tunc perniciosissima, quum simulata sanitate subsidunt**. *All Vices are less dangerous when open to be seen, and then most pernicious when they lurk under a disssembled Temper.* I admonish all those who have Authority to be angry in my Family, in the first place to manage their Anger, and not to lavish it upon every Occasion, for that

* *Seneca, Epist. 57.*

both lessens the Value, and hinders the Effect. Rash and customary chafing runs into Custom, and renders itself despicable; and what you lay out upon a Servant for a Theft is not felt, because it is the same he has seen you a hundred Times employ against him for having ill wash'd a Glass, or set a Stool out of order. Secondly, *that they are not angry to no purpose*, but make sure that their Reprehensions reach him at whom they are offended; for ordinarily they rail and bawl before he comes into their Presence, and continue scolding an Age after he is gone;

Et secum petulans amentia certat * :

And petulant Madness with itself contends.

they attack his Shadow, and push the Storm in a Place where no one is either chastised or interested, but in the Clamour of their Voice. I likewise in Quarrels condemn those who huff and vapour without an Enemy; those *Rodomontades* are to be reserv'd to discharge upon the offending Party.

*Mugitus veluti cum prima in praelia taurus
Terrificos ciet, atque irasci in cornua tentat,
Arboris obnixus trunco, ventosque laceffit
Ictibus, & sparsa ad pugnam proludit arena* †.

Like angry Bulls that make the Valleys ring,
Prest to the fight, with dreadful bellowing,
Whetting their Horns against the sturdy Oak,
Who with their kicking Heels the Winds provoke,
And tossing up the Earth a Dust do raise
For furious Preludes to ensuing Frays.

When I am angry, my Anger is very sharp, but withall very Short, and as private as I can; I loose myself indeed in Promptness and Violence, but not in Trouble, so that I throw out all sorts of injurious Words at random, and without Choice, and never consider pertinently to dart my Language where I think it will deepest wound; for I commonly make use of no

*The Author's
Anger in
great and lit-
tle Occasions.*

* *Claudian.*

† *Aeneid. lib. 12.*

other

other Weapon in my Anger than my Tongue. My Servants have a better Bargain of me in great Occasions than in little, the little ones surprize me; and the mischief on't is, that when you are once upon the Precipice, 'tis no matter who gave you the Push, for you always go to the Bottom; the Fall urges, moves and makes haste of itself. In great Occasions this satisfies me, that they are so just every one expects a warrantable Indignation, and then I glorify myself in deceiving their Expectation; against these I fortify and prepare myself, they disturb my Head, and threaten to transport me very far, should I follow them. I can easily contain myself from entering into one of these Passions, and am strong enough when I expect them, to repel their Violence, be the Cause never so great; but if a Passion once prepossess and seize me, it carries me away, be it never so small; which makes me intent with those who may contend with me, when you see me first mov'd, let me alone, right or wrong, I'll do the same for you. The Storm is only begot by Concurrence of Angers, which easily spring from one another, and are not born together. Let every one have his own Way, and we shall be always at Peace. A profitable Advice, but hard to execute. Sometimes also it falls out, that I put on a seeming Anger, for the better governing of my House, without any real Emotion. As Age renders my Humours more sharp, I study to oppose them, and will, if I can, order it so, that for the future I may be so much the less peevish and hard to please, as I have more Excuse and Inclination to be so, altho' I have heretofore been reckoned amongst those that have the greatest Patience. A Word to conclude this Chapter; *Aristotle* says, *That Anger sometimes serves for Arms to Virtue and Valour.* 'Tis likely it may be so, nevertheless they who contradict him pleasantly answer, *That 'tis a Weapon of novel Use, for we move all other Arms, this moves us; our Hands guide it not, 'tis it that guides our Hands; it holds us, we hold not it.*