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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. 33. The Story of Spurina.

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## C H A P. XXXIII.

*The Story of Spurina.*

**P***hilosophy* thinks she has not made an ill use of her Talent, when she has given the Sovereignty of the Soul, and the Authority of restraining our Appetites to *Reason*. Amongst which, they who judge that there are none more violent than those which spring from Love, have this Opinion also, *that they seize both Body and Soul, and possess the whole Man*; so that even Health itself depends upon them, and Medicine is sometimes constrained to pimp for them. But a Man might on the contrary also say, that the Mixture of the Body brings an Abatement and Weakning; for such Desires are subject to Satiety, and capable of material Remedies. Many being determined to rid their Soul from the continual Alarms of this Appetite, have made use of Incision and Amputation of the rebelling Members. Others have subdued their Force and Ardour, by the frequent Application of cold Things, as Snow and Vinegar. The Sack-cloths of our Ancestors were for this Purpose, which is a Cloth woven of Horses Hair, of which some of them made Shirts, and others Girdles to torture and correct their Reins. A Prince not long ago told me, *that in his Youth, upon a solemn Festival in the Court of King Francis the First, where every Body was very finely dress'd, he would needs put on his Father's Hair Shirt, which was still kept in the House*; but how great soever his Devotion was, he had not Patience to wear it till Night, and was sick a long time after, adding withal, *that he did not think there could be any youthful Heat so fierce that the use of this Receipt would not mortify*, and yet perhaps he never essay'd the most Violent; for Experience shews us, that such Emotions are often seen under rude and slovenly Clothes, and that a Hair Shirt does not always render those chaste that wear it. *Xenocrates* proceeded with greater Severity  
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in this Affair, for his Disciples to make trial of his Continency, having slipt *Lais*, that beautiful and famous *Courtezan* into his Bed quite naked, excepting the Arms of her Beauty, and her wonton Allurements, her *Philters*, finding, that in Spight of his Reason and Philosophical Rules, his unruly Flesh began to mutiny, he caus'd those Members of his to be burn'd that he found consenting to this Rebellion. Whereas the Passions which wholly reside in the Soul, as Ambition, Avarice, and the rest, find the Reason much more to do, because it cannot there be reliev'd but by its own means; neither are those Appetites capable of Satiety, but grow sharper and increase by Fruition. The sole Example of *Julius Cæsar* may suffice to demonstrate to us the Disparity of those Appetites; for never was Man more addicted to amorous Delights than he: Of which the delicate Care he had of his Person, to that degree of Effeminacy, as to make use of the most lascivious means to that end, as to have the Hairs of his Body pluck'd off certain Parts, and larded all over with Perfumes, with the extreamest Curiosity, is one Testimony; and he was a Beautiful Person in himself, of a fair Complexion, tall and sprightly, full Fac'd, with quick hazel Eyes, if we may believe *Suetonius*; for the Statues that we see at *Rome* do not in all points answer this Description. Besides his Wives which he four times chang'd, without reckoning the *Amours* of his Childhood with *Nicomedes* King of *Bythinia*, he had the Maiden-head of the Renowned *Cleopatra*, Queen of *Egypt*; witness the little *Cæsario* that he had by her. He also made Love to *Eunoe*, Queen of *Mauritania*, and at *Rome*, to *Posthumia*, the Wife of *Servius Sulpitius*, to *Lollia*, the Wife of *Gabinus*, to *Tortulla*, the Wife of *Crassus*, and even to *Mutia*, Wife to the Great *Pompey*: Which was the Reason the *Roman* Historians say, that she was repudiated by her Husband, which *Plutarch* confesses to be more than he knew. And the *Curios*, both Father and Son, afterwards reproach'd *Pompey*, when he married *Cæsar's* Daughter, that he had made himself Son-in-Law to a Man who had made him a Cuckold, and one that he himself was wont to call *Ægyftus*. Besides all these, he entertain'd *Servillia*, *Cato's* Sister, and Mother to *Marcus Brutus*, from whence every one believes, proceeded the great Affection he had to *Brutus*, by reason that he was born in a Time when it was likely it might be  
his

his Son. So that I have Reason, methinks, to take him for a Man extremely given to this Debauch, and of a very amorous Constitution. But the other Passion of Ambition, with which he was exceedingly infected, arising in him to contend with the former, it was soon compell'd to give way. And here calling to mind *Mahomet*, who won *Constantinople*, and totally exterminated the *Grecian* Name; I do not know where these two Passions were so evenly balanc'd, equally an indefatigable Letcher and Soldier, but where they both meet in his Life, and juttle one another, the quarrelling Ardour always gets the better of the amorous Passion. And this, though it was out of its natural Season, never regained an absolute Sovereignty over the other, till he was arriv'd at an extreme old Age, and unable to undergo the Fatigues of War. What is related for a contrary Example, of *Ladislaus* King of *Naples*, is very Remarkable; that being a great Captain, Valiant, and Ambitious, he propos'd to himself for the principal End of his Ambition, the Execution of his Pleasure, and the Enjoyment of some rare and excellent *Beauty*. His Death seal'd up all the rest: For having by a close and tedious Siege, reduc'd the City of *Florence* to so great Distress, that the Inhabitants were compell'd to Capitulate about *Surrender*; he was content to let them alone, provided they would deliver up to him a Beautiful Maid he had heard of in their City. They were forc'd to yield to it, and by a private Injury to divert the Publick Ruin. She was the Daughter of a Famous Physician of his Time, who finding himself involv'd in so foul a Necessity, resolv'd upon a high Attempt; for as every one was laying a Hand to trick up his Daughter, and to adorn her with Ornaments and Jewels, to render her more agreeable to this new Lover, he also gave her a Handkerchief most richly wrought, and of an exquisite Perfume, (an Implement they never go without in those Parts) which she was to make use of at their first Approaches. This Handkerchief, empoisoned with his chiefest Art, coming to be rubb'd between the chaf'd Flesh and open Pores, both of the one and the other, so suddenly infus'd the Poison, that immediately converting their warm into a cold Sweat, they presently died in one another's Arms. But I return to *Cæsar*. His Pleasures never made him steal one Minute

Minute of an Hour, nor step one Step aside from Occasions that might conduce any way to his Advancement. That Passion was so sovereign in him over all the rest, and with so absolute an Authority possess'd his Soul, that it guided him at Pleasure. In reality, it troubles me when (as to every thing else I consider the Greatness of this Man, and the wonderful Parts wherewith he was endued, learn'd to that degree in all Sorts of Knowledge, that there is hardly any one Science of which he has not written: He was so great an *Orator*, that many have preferr'd his Eloquence to that of *Cicero*; and he, I conceive, did not think himself inferior to him in that Particular: For his two *Anti-Catos* were chiefly writ to counterbalance the Elocution that *Cicero* had expended in his *Cato*. As to the rest, was ever Soul so vigilant, so active, and so patient of Labour as his? and doubtless it was embellish'd with many rare Seeds of Virtue, I mean innate and natural, and not put on. He was singularly Sober, so far from being delicate in his Diet, that *Opius* relates, how *that having one Day at Table Physical instead of common Oyl, in some Sawce set before him, he did eat heartily of it, that he might not put his Entertainer out of Countenance.* Another time he caus'd his Baker to be whip'd for serving him with a finer than ordinary sort of Bread. *Cato* himself us'd to say of him, *that he was the first Sober Man that ever made it his Business to ruin his Country.* And as to the same *Cato's* calling him one Day *Drunkard*, it fell out thus: Being both of them in the Senate, at a Time when *Cataline's* Conspiracy was in Question, for which *Cæsar* was suspected, one came and brought him a Ticket seal'd up: *Cato* believing that it was something the Conspirators gave him notice of, *call'd to him to deliver it into his Hand*, which *Cæsar* was constrain'd to do to avoid further Suspicion. It was by Fortune a Love-letter that *Servilia*, *Cato's* Sister, had written to him; which *Cato* having read, he threw it back to him, saying *there Drunkard.* This, I say, was rather *Cæsar called* a Word of Disdain and Anger, than an *Drunkard.* express Reproach of this Vice, as we often rate those that anger us with the first injurious Words that come into our Mouths, tho' nothing due to those we are offended at. To which may be added, that the Vice which *Cato* cast in his Dish is wonderfully near a-kin to that

Venus accom-  
panies Bac-  
chus.

Cæsar's Cle-  
mency to-  
wards his  
Enemies.

that wherein he had trap'd *Cæsar*; for *Bacchus* and *Venus*, according to the *Proverb*, do very willingly agree; but with me *Venus* is most spritely when I am most Sober. The Examples of his Sweetness and Clemency to those by whom he had been offended are Infinite; I mean besides those he gave during the Time of the *Civil Wars*, which, as plainly enough appears by his Writings, he practis'd to cajole his Enemies, and to make them less afraid of his future Dominion and Victory. But I must also say, that if these Examples are not sufficient Proofs of his natural Mildness, they at least manifest a marvellous Confidence and Grandeur of Courage in this Person. He has often been known to dismiss whole Armies, after having overcome them, to his Enemies, without Ransom, or deigning so much as to bind them by Oath, if not to favour him, at least no more to bear Arms against him. He has three or four Times taken some of *Pompey's* Captains Prisoners, and as oft set them at Liberty. *Pompey* declar'd all those to be his *Enemies* who did not follow him to the War, and he proclaim'd all those to be his *Friends*, who sat still and did not actually take Arms against him. To such Captains of his as run away from him to go over to the other side, he sent moreover their Arms, Horses, and Equipage. The *Cities* he had taken by Force, he left at full Liberty to take which side they pleas'd, imposing no other Garrison upon them but the Memory of his Generosity and Clemency. He gave strict and express Charge the Day of his great Battle of *Pharsalia*, that without the utmost Necessity no one should lay a Hand upon the *Citizens* of *Rome*. These in my Opinion, were very hazardous Proceedings, and 'tis no wonder if those in our *Civil War*, who, like him, fight against the ancient Estate of their Country, do not follow his Example; they are extraordinary Means, which only belong to *Cæsar's* Fortune and his admirable Fore-sight in the Conduct of Affairs. When I consider the incomparable Grandeur of his Soul, I excuse Victory that it could not disengage itself from him, even in so unjust and so wicked a Cause.

To return to his Clemency; we have many natural Examples in the Time of his Government; when all Things

Things being reduc'd to his Power, he had no more need to dissemble. *Caius Memmius* had writ very severe Oration against him, which he had as sharply answer'd: Yet did not soon after forbear to use his Interest to make him *Consul*. *Caius Calvus*, who had compos'd several injurious Epigrams against him, having employed many of his Friends to mediate a Reconciliation with him, *Cæsar* voluntarily persuaded himself to write first to him. And our good *Catullus*, who had so rudely ruffled him under the Name of *Mamurra*, coming to make his Excuses to him, he made him the same Day sit at his Table. Having Intelligence of some who spoke Ill of him, he did no more, but only in a publick Oration declare, that he had Notice of it. He also less fear'd his Enemies than he hated them. Some Conspiracies and Cabals that were made against his Life, being discovered to him, he satisfied himself in publishing by Proclamation, *that they were known to him*, without further prosecuting the Conspirators.

As to the Respect he had to his Friends; *Caius Oppius*, being with him upon a Journey, and finding himself Ill, he left him the only Lodging he had for himself, and lay all Night upon the hard Ground in the open Air. As to what concerns his Justice; he put a beloved Servant of his to Death for lying with a noble Roman's Wife, tho' there was no Complaint made. Never had Man more Moderation in his Victory, nor more Resolution in his adverse Fortune. But all these good Inclinations were stifled and spoil'd by his furious Ambition, by which he suffer'd himself to be so transported and misled, that a Man may easily maintain, that that Passion guided the Rudder of all his Actions. Of a liberal Man, it made him a publick Thief to supply his Bounty and Profusion, and made him utter this vile and unjust Saying, *That if the most wicked and profligate Persons in the World had been faithful in serving him towards his Advancement, he would cherish and prefer them to the utmost of his Power, as much as the best of Men*: It intoxicated him with so excessive a Vanity, as to dare to boast, in the Presence of his Fellow Citizens, *That he had made the great Common-wealth of Rome a Name without Form, and without Body*; and to say, *that his Answer for the future should stand for Laws,*  
and

*Ambition the  
only Ruin of  
Cæsar's  
Actions.*

and also to receive the Body of the Senate coming towards him *sitting*; to suffer himself to be ador'd, and to have Divine Honours paid to him in his own Presence. To conclude: This sole Vice, in my Opinion, spoil'd in him the most rich and beautiful Nature that ever was, and has render'd his Name abominable to all good Men, in that he would erect his Glory upon the Ruins of his Country, and the Subversion of the greatest and most flourishing Republick the World shall ever see.

There might on the contrary many Examples be produc'd, of great Men whom Pleasures have made to neglect the Conduct of their Affairs, as *Mark Anthony* and others; but where *Love* and *Ambition* should be in equal Balance, and come to juggle with equal Forces, I make no doubt but the last would win the Prize.

But to return to my Subject: 'Tis much to bridle our Appetites by the Discourse of Reason, or by Violence to contain our Members within their Duty: But to lash ourselves for our Neighbours Interest, and not only to divest ourselves of the charming Passion that tickles us, with the Pleasure we feel of being agreeable to others, and courted and beloved of every one; but also to conceive a Hatred against the Graces that produce that Effect, and to condemn our Beauty because it inflames others; of this, I confess, I have met with few Examples: This indeed is one; *Spurina, a young Man of Tuscany,*

*Qualis gemma micat fulvum quæ dividet aurum,  
Aut collo decus, aut capiti, vel quale per artem  
Inclusum buxo, aut Ericia Terebintho,  
Lucet ebur\*.* —————

As a Gem shines in yellow Gold enchac'd,  
On Neck, or Head, for Decoration plac'd;  
Or as by Art Iv'ry does Lustre get  
In the *Erician Terebinthus* set.

*being endow'd with a singular Beauty, and so excessive, that the chastest Eyes could not chastly behold its Rays; not contenting himself with leaving so much Flame and Fever as he every where kindled, without Relief, enter'd into a furious*

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\* *Aeneid. lib. 10.*



Spite against himself, and those great Endowments Nature had so liberally conferr'd upon him; as if a Man were responsible to himself for the Faults of others: And purposely slash'd and disfigur'd, with many Wounds and Scars, the perfect Symmetry and Proportion that Nature had so curiously imprinted in his Face. To give my free Opinion, I more admire than honour such Actions: Such Excesses are Enemies to my Rules. The Design was Conscientious and Good, but certainly a little defective in Prudence. What if his Deformity serv'd afterwards to make others guilty of the Sin of Hatred, or Contempt, or of Envy, at the Glory of so commendable an Action, or of Calumny, interpreting this Humour a mad Ambition! Is there any Form, from whence Vice cannot, if it will, extract Occasion to exercise itself one way or other? It had been more Just, and also more Noble, to have made of these Gifts of God a Subject of regular and exemplary Virtue. They who retire themselves from the common Offices, from that infinite Number of Vices, and manifest Rules that fetter a Man of exact Honesty in the Civil Life, are in my Opinion very Discreet, what peculiar Sharpness of Constraint soever they impose upon themselves in so doing. 'Tis in some sort a kind of dying to avoid the Pain of living well. They may have no other Reward, but the Reward of the Difficulty I fancy they can never have, nor that in Uneasiness there can be any thing beyond keeping himself upright in the Waves of the World, truly and exactly performing all Parts of his Duty. 'Tis peradventure more easy to live clean from the whole Sex, than to maintain a Man's self exactly in all Points in the Society of a Wife. And a Man may more incuriously slip into Want than Abundance duly dispens'd. Custom, carried on according to Reason, has in it more of Sharpness than Abstinence. Moderation is a Virtue that has more Work than Sufferance. The well-living of *Scipio* has a thousand Fashions, that of *Diogenes* but one. This as much excels the ordinary Lives in Innocency, as the most accomplish'd excel them in Utility and Force.