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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. 36. Of the most excellent Men.

urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-53407

must impose this upon itself, when the Utility of our Friends does fo require: We must sometimes lend ourselves to our Friends, and when we would die for ourselves, must break that Resolution for them. 'Tis a Testimony of Grandeur and Courage to return to Life for the Consideration of another, as many excellent Persons have done; and 'tis a Mark of fingular good Nature to preserve old Age (of which, the greatest Convenience is the Indifferency of its Duration, and a more Stout and Disdainful Use of Life) when a Man perceives that this Office is Pleasing, Agrecable, and Useful to some Person by whom we are very much below'd. And a Man reaps by it a very pleafing Reward; for what can be more Delightful than to be so dear to his Wife, as upon her Account he shall become dear to himself. Thus has my Paulina loaded me not only with her Fears, but my own; it has not been sufficient to confider bow resolutely I could die, but I have also consider'd how irresolutely she would bear my Death. I am enfore'd to live, and sometimes to live is Magnanimity. These are his own Words, as excellent as they every where use to be.

# KING LEEK VINER

#### CHAP. XXXVI.

Of the most Excellent Men.

Should I be ask'd my Opinion and Choice of all the Men who have come to my Knowledge, I should make answer, That methinks I find three more Excellent than all the rest. One of them Homer; not that Aristotle and Varro, for Example, were not perhaps as learned as he; nor that possibly Virgil was not equal to him in his own Art; which I leave to be determined by such as know them both, and are best able to judge. I, who for my part, understand but one of them, can only say this, according to my poor Talent, that I do not believe the Mules themselves did ever go beyond the Roman.

Tale facit carmen docta testudine, quale Cynthius impositis temperat articulus \*.

\* Propert. 1. 2. Eleg. ult.

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Whilst playing to his Lute, he Verse doth sing, 'Tis like Apollo's Voice and fingering.

And yet in this Judgment we are not to forget that it is thiefly from Homer that Virgil derives his Excellence, that he is his Guide and Teacher; and that the Iliad only has upply'd him with Body and Matter, out of which to compose his Great and Divine Eneis. I do not reckon upon that, but mix feveral other Circumstances that render this Put Admirable to me, even as it were above human Condion. And in truth, I often wonder that he who has erected, and by his Authority given fo many Deities Reputation in the World, was not deified himself, being Blind and Poor; being that before the Sciences were reduc'd into Rule and certain Observations, he was so well acquainted with them, that all those who have since taken upon them to establish Governments, to carry on Wars, and to write either of Philosophy or Religion, or what Sect soever, or of the Arts, have made use of him as of a most perfect Intructer in the Knowledge of all Things, and of his Books, 45 of an unexhausted Treasure of all forts of Learning.

Qui quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non Plenius, ac melius Chrysippo at Crantore dixit \*.

Who, what's our good, what not, what brave, what base, Fuller than Crantor, or Chrysippus fays.

and as this other fays,

– a quo ceu fonte perenni Vatum Pieriis labro rigantur aquis +.

From whose ne'er failing Spring the Poet sips, And in Pierian Waters wets his Lips,

and another,

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Adde Heliconiadum Comites, quorum unus Homerus, Astra potitus 1.

Of all Pretenders, Homer is alone Judg'd the most worthy of the Poet's Throne.

\* Hor. lib. 1. Epist. 2. + Ovid. Amor. lib. 3. Eleg. 8. Lucret. lib. 3.

and

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and another,

From whose full flowing Stream, Posterity Have Channels laid to draw out Verses by, And have made bold to draw by those out-lets The Torrent into little Rivulets, All fruitful thorough one Man's Eloquence.

'Tis contrary to the Order of Nature, that he has made the most excellent Production that can possibly be, for the ordinary Birth of Things is imperfect; they usually thrive, and gather Strength by growing: Whereas he has rendred the Infancy of Poefy and other Sciences Mature, Perfect, and Accomplished at first. And for this Reason he may be call'd the first and the last of Poets, according to the fair Testimony Antiquity has left us of him, That as there was none before him whom he could imitate, so there has been none fince that could imitate him. His Words, according to Aristotle, are the only Words that have Motion and Action, and are the only substantial Words. Alexander the Great, having found a rich Cabinet amongst Darius's Spoils, gave order it should be reserv'd for him to keep his Homer in: faying, That he was the best and most faithful Counsellor he had in his Military Affairs. For the fame Reason it was, that Cleomenes, the Son of Alexandrias, faid, That the Lacedæmonian Poet was the best Master for the Discipline of War. This fingular and particular Commendation is allo left of him in the Judgment of Plutarch, That he is the only Author in the World that never glutted nor difgusted his Readers, presenting himself abways another Thing, and always flourishing in some new Grace. That Wanton Akibiades, having ask'd one who pretended to Learning for a Book of Homer, gave him a Box on the Ear because he had none, which he thought as fcandalous, as to take one of our Priests without a Breviary. Xenophanes complain'd one Day to Hiero, the Tyrant of Syracufa, that he was so poor he had not suberewithal to maintain two Servants;

\* Manil. Aftro.

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What, reply'd the Tyrant, Homer, who was much poorer than you are, keeps above ten thousand now he is dead! What did Panctius leave unfaid, when he call'd Plato the Homer of Philosophers? Befides, what Glory can be compar'd to his? Nothing is fo frequent in Men's Mouths as his Name and Works, nothing fo known and receiv'd as Troy, Helen, and the War about her, when perhaps there was never any fuch Thing. Our Children are call'd by Names that he feign'd above three thousand Years ago. Who is ignorant of the Story of Hector and Achilles? Not only fome particular Families, but most Nations also seek Original in his Inventions. Mahomet, the second of that Name, Emperor of the Turks, writing to our Pope Pius the Second; I am aftonish'd, fays he, that the Italians should appear against me, considering that we have our common Descent from the Trojans, and that it concerns me as well as it does them, to revenge the Blood of Hector upon the Greeks, whom they countenance against me. Is it not a noble Farce wherein Kings, Republicks, and Emperors, have fo many Ages play'd their Parts, and to which the vast Universe serves for a Theatre? Seven Grecian Cities contended for his Birth, fo much Honour even his Obscurity help'd him to.

Smyrna, Rhodos, Colophon, Salamis, Chios, Argos, Athena\*.

By Smyrna, Rhodes, Colophon, Salamis,
Chios, Argos, and Athens, he claim'd is.

The other is Alexander the Great. For whoever will consider the Age at which he began his Enterprizes, the small Means by which he effected so glorious a Design; the Authority he obtain'd at so slender an Age, with the greatest and most experienc'd Captains of the World, by whom he was follow'd, and the extraordinary Favour wherewith Fortune embrac'd him, and favour'd so many hazardous, that I may not say rash Designs:

obstaret, gaudensque, viam fecisse ruina †.

Bearing down all his high Designs withstood,
And pleas'd by Ruin to have made them good.

\* Aul. Gellius. 1 i 3 Lucan. l. 1.

That

That Grandeur, to have at the Age of three and thirty Years pass'd Victorious through the whole habitable Earth, and in half a Life to have attain'd to the utmost of what human Nature can do; fo that you cannot imagine his Duration just, and the Continuation of his Increase in Virtue, and Fortune, even to a due Maturity of Age, but that you must withal imagine something more than Man: To have fo many royal Branches to fpring from his Soldiers; leaving the World at his Death, divided amongst four Successors, who were no better than Captains of his Army, whose Posterity have so long continued, and maintain'd that vast Possession; so many excellent Virtues as he was Master of, Justice, Temperance, Liberality, Truth in his Word, Love towards his own, and Humanity towards those he overcame; for his Manners in general seem in truth incapable of any manner of Reproach, tho' fome particular and extraordinary Action of his may perhaps fall under Censure. But it is impossible to carry on such great Things as he did with the strict Rules of Justice; fuch as he are to be judg'd in gross, by the main End of their Actions. The Ruin of Thebes, the Murther of Menander, and of Epheftion's Physician, the Massacre of to many Perfian Prisoners at once, of a Troop of Indian Soldiers, not without Prejudice to his Word, and of the Coffeyans, so much as to the very Children, are indeed Sallies that are not well to be excus'd. For, as to Clytus, the Fault was more than recompene'd in his Repentance, and that very Action, as much as any other whatever, manifests the Sweetness of his Nature, a Nature most excellently form'd to Goodness; and it was ingeniously said of him, That he had his Virtues by Nature, and his Vices by Chance. As to his being given a little to bragging, and a little too impatient of hearing himself ill spoken of; and as to those Mangers, Arms, and Bits he caus'd to be strew'd in the Indies; all those little Vanities, methinks, may very well be allow'd to his Youth, and the prodigious Prosperity of his Fortune. And who will confider withal his 10 many Military Virtues, his Diligence, Forefight, Patience, Discipline, Subtilty, Magnanimity, Resolution, and good Fortune, wherein (though we had not the Authority of Hannibal to affure us) he was the first of Men; the admirable Beauty and Symmetry of his Person even to a Miracle,

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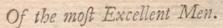
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mole, his Majestick Port, and awful Deportment, in a Face so Young, so Ruddy and so Radiant;

Qualis ubi Oceani perfusus Lucifer unda, Quem Venus ante alios astrorum diligit ignes, Extulit os sacrum cælo, tenebrasque resolvit\*. Such the Day Star does from the Ocean rise, Above all Lights, grateful to Venus' Eyes, When he from Heaven darts his sacred Light, And dissipates the sudden Shades of Night.

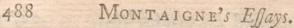
The Excellency of his Knowledge and Capacity; the Duration and Grandeur of his Glory, pure, clean, without Spot or Envy, and that long after his Death it was a Religious Belief, that his very Medals brought good Fortune to all that carried them about them; and that more Kings and Princes have writ his Acts, than other Historians have written the Acts of any other King or Prince whatever; and that to this very Day the Mahometans, who despise all other Histories, admit of, and honour his alone, by a spetial Privilege: Whoever, I fay, will ferioufly confider these Particulars, will confess, that all these Things put together, I had reason to prefer him before Cæsar himself, who alone could make me doubtful in my Choice: And It cannot be denied, but that there was more of his own Exploits, and more of Fortune in those of Alexander. They were in many Things equal, and perhaps Cæfar had the Advantage in some particular Qualities. They were two Fires; or two Torrents to over-run the World by feveral Ways.

Et welut immissi diversis partibus ignes Arentem in sylvam, & virgulta sonantia lauro: Aut ubi decursu rapido de montibus altis Dant sonitum spumosi amnes, & in æquora currunt, Quisque suum populatus iter †.

And like to Fires in feveral Parts apply'd
To a dry Grove of crackling Laurel's fide;
Or like the Cataracts of foaming Rills,
That tumble headlong from the highest Hills
To hasten to the Ocean; even so
They bear all down before them where they go.

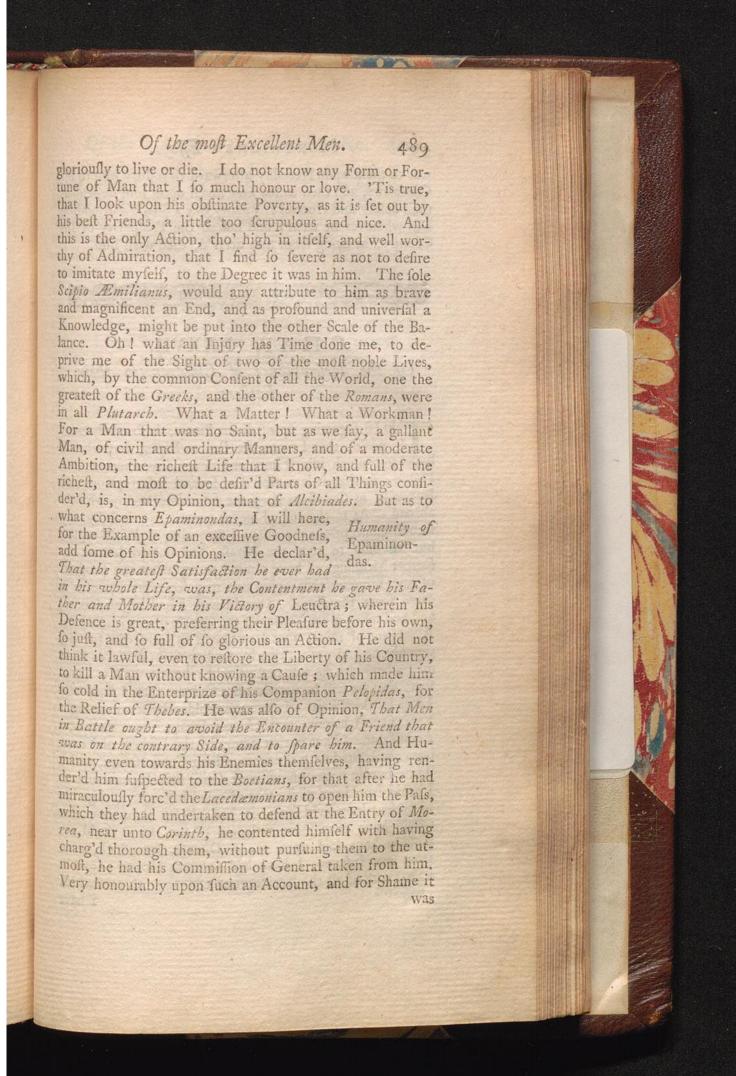
\* Eneid. lib. 8. + Eneid. lib. 12.

But



But the 'Cæsar's Ambition had been more moderate, it would still be so unhappy, having the Ruin of his Country, and the universal Mischief to the World for its abominable Object; that all Things rak'd together, and put into the Balance, I must needs incline to Alexander's Side.

The third, in my Opinion, and the most Excellent of all, is Epaminondas. Of Glory he has not near fo much as the other two (which also is but a Part of the Substance of the Thing) of Valour and Refolution, not of that fort which is push'd on by Ambition, but of that which Wisdom and Reafon can raife in a regular Soul, he had all that could be imagin'd. Of this Virtue of his, he has, in my Thoughts, given as ample Proof, as either Alexander himfelf, or Caefar: For although his Expeditions were neither so frequent nor so renowned, they were yet, if duly confider'd in all their Circumstances, as important, as bravely fought, and carry'd with them as manifest Testimony of Valour and Military Conduct, as those of any whatever. The Greeks have done him the Honour, without Contradiction, to pronounce him the greatest Man of their Nation; and to be the first of Greece, is easily to be the first of the World. As to his Knowledge, we have this arcient Judgment of him, That never any Man knew fo much, and spoke so little as he. For he was of the Pythagorean Sect. But when he did speak, never any Man spoke better; an excellent Orator, and of powerful Infinuation. But as to his Manners and Confcience, he has infinitely furpas'd all Men that ever undertook the Management of Affairs; for in this one thing, which ought chiefly to be consider'd, that alone only denotes us for what we are, and that alone I counter-balance with all the rest put together, he comes not short of any Philosopher whatever, not even of Socrates himself. Innocency in this Man is a Quality, peculiar, fovereign, constant, uniform, and incorruptible; compar'd to which, it appears in Alexander subject to something else above it, uncertain, variable, esseminate, and accidental. Antiquity has judg'd that in throroughly fifting all the other great Captains, there is found in every one some peculiar Quality that illustrates his Name. In this Man only there is a full and equal Virtue throughout, that leaves nothing to be wish'd for in him, whether in private or publick Employment, whether in Peace or War, whether glori-



was to them upon Necessity afterward to restore him to his Command, and then to fee how much upon him depended their Safety and Honour: Victory like a Shadow attending him wherever he went; and indeed the Prosperity of his Country, as being from him deriv'd, died with him.

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# CHAP. XXXVII.

Of the Resemblance of Children to their Fathers.

HIS fagotting up of divers Pieces, is so oddly compos'd, that I never fet Pen to Paper, but when I have too much idle Time, and never any where but at Home; fo that it is compil'd at feveral Interruptions and Intervals, as Occasions keep me fometimes many Months abroad. As to the rest, I never correct my first by any fecond Conceptions; perhaps I may alter a Word or fo; but 'tis only to vary the Phrase, and not to destroy my former Meaning. I have a mind to represent the Progress of my Humour, that every one may fee every Piece as it came from the Forge. I could wish I had begun sooner, and had taken more Notice of the Course of my Mutations. A Servant of mine, that I employ'd to transcribe for me, thought he had got a Prize by flealing feveral Pieces from me, wherewith he was best pleas'd; but it is my Comfort, that he will be no greater a Gainer, than I shall be a Loser by the Theft. I am grown older by seven or eight Years fince I begun; neither has it been without some new Acquisition: I have in that Time, by the Liberty of Years, been acquainted with the Stone, a long Conversation, which Time hardly wears off without some such Inconvenience. I could have been glad, that of other Infirmities, Age has to present long-liv'd Men, it had chosen some one that would have been more welcome to me, for it could not possibly have laid upon me a Disease, for which, even from my Infancy, I have had fo great Horror; and it is in Truth of all the Accidents of Old Age, that of which I have