

“You must first see us die,” said he, “before that question can be resolved;”¹ and, in truth, he would infinitely wrong that great man who would weigh him without the honour and grandeur of his end. God has ordered these things as it has best pleased him. But I have, in my time, seen three of the most execrable persons that ever I knew in all manner of abominable living, and the most infamous, who all died a very regular death, and, in all circumstances, composed even to perfection. There are brave and fortunate deaths; I have seen death cut the thread of the progress of a prodigious advancement, and in the flower of its increase, of a certain person,² with so glorious an end that, in my opinion, his ambitious and generous designs had nothing in them so high and great as was their interruption; and he arrived, without completing his course, at the place to which his ambition pretended, with greater glory and grandeur than he could himself have either hoped or desired, and anticipated by his fall the name and power to which he has aspired by perfecting his career. In the judgment I make of another man’s life, I always observed how he carried himself at its close; and the principal concern I have for my own is that I may die handsomely, that is, patiently and without noise.

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT TO STUDY PHILOSOPHY IS TO LEARN TO DIE.

CICERO says that to study philosophy is nothing but to prepare a man’s self to die.³ The reason of what is the study which is because study and contemplation do, of philosophy.

¹ Plutarch, *Apoth. of the Ancient Kings*, &c.

² Montaigne speaks here of his friend, Boetius, at whose death he was present, as appears by a speech which Montaigne caused to be printed at Paris, in 1571, wherein he mentions the most remark-

able particulars of Boetius’s sickness and death. As this speech does honour to both these eminent friends, and is become very scarce, I shall insert it hereafter.

³ *Tuscul. Quæst.* i. 31. The passage is a translation from the *Phædo* of Plato.

in some sort, withdraw from us, and deprive us of our soul, and employ it separately from the body, which is a kind of discipline of, and a resemblance of, death, or else because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world does, in the end, conclude in this point, to teach us not to fear to die. And, to say the truth, either our reason does grossly abuse us, or it ought to have no other aim but our contentment only, nor to endeavour any thing but, in sum, to make us live well, and, as the Holy Scripture says,¹ at our ease. All the opinions of the world agree in this, that pleasure is our end, though we make use of divers means to attain unto it; they would all of them otherwise be rejected at the first motion; for who would give ear to him that should propose affliction and misery for his end? The controversies and disputes of the philosophical sects upon this point are merely verbal; *Transcurramus solertissimas nugas.*² "Let us skip over those learned trifles." There is more in them of opposition and obstinacy than is consistent with so sacred a profession; but what kind of person soever man takes upon him to personate, he ever mixes his own part with it. Let the philosophers say what they will, the main thing at which we all aim, even in virtue itself, is pleasure. It pleases me to rattle in their ears this word, which they so nauseate to hear; and, if it signify some supreme pleasure and excessive delight, it is more due to the assistance of virtue than to any other assistance whatever. This delight for being more gay, more sinewy, more robust, and more manly, is only more seriously voluptuous, and we ought to give it the name of pleasure; as that which is more benign, gentle, and natural, and not that of vigour, from which we have derived it.

The other more mean and sensual part of pleasure, if it could deserve this fair name, it ought to be upon the account of concurrence, and not of privilege; I find it less

¹ "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and do good in this life."—*Ecclesiast.* iii. 12.

² Senec. *Epist.* 117.

exempt from traverses and inconveniences than virtue itself; and, besides that, the enjoyment is more momentary, fluid, and frail; it has its watchings, fasts, and labours, even to sweat and blood; and, moreover, has, particular to itself, so many several sorts of sharp and wounding passions, and so stupid a satiety attending it, as are equal to the severest penance. And we much mistake to think that difficulties serve it for a spur and a seasoning to its sweetness, as in nature, one contrary is quickened by another; and to say, when we come to virtue, that like consequences and difficulties overwhelm and render it austere and inaccessible; whereas, much more aptly than in voluptuousness, they ennoble, sharpen, and heighten the perfect and divine pleasure they procure us. He renders himself unworthy of it who will counterpoise his expense with the fruit, and does neither understand the blessing nor how to use it. Those who preach to us that the quest of it is craggy, difficult, and painful, but the fruition pleasant and grateful, what do they mean by that, but to tell us that it is always unpleasing? What human means ever attained it? the most perfect have been forced to content themselves to aspire unto it, and to approach it only without ever possessing it. But they are deceived, for of all the pleasures we know, the very pursuit is pleasant. The attempt ever relishes of the quality of the thing to which it is directed, for it is a good part of, and consubstantial with, the effect. The felicity and beatitude that glitters in virtue, shines throughout all her avenues and ways, even to the first entry, and utmost pale and limits.

Now, of all the benefits that virtue confers upon us, the contempt of death is one of the greatest, as The contempt of death one of the principal benefits of virtue. the means that accommodates human life with a soft and easy tranquillity, and gives us a pure and pleasant taste of living, without which all other pleasures would be extinct; which is the reason why all the rules of philosophy centre and concur in this one article.¹ And

¹ *Omnis humani incommodi expers* (says Valerius Maximus, viii. 13, in *Ex-*

although they all, in like manner, with one consent, endeavour to teach us also to despise grief, poverty, and the other accidents, to which human life, by its own nature and constitution, is subjected, it is not, nevertheless, with the same earnestness, as well by reason these accidents are not so certain, the greater part of mankind passing over their whole lives without ever knowing what poverty is; and some without sorrow or sickness, as Xenophilus, the musician, who lived a hundred and six years in a perfect and continual health; as also, because at the worst, death can, whenever we please, cut short and put an end to all of these inconveniences. But as to death it is inevitable.

Omnes eodem cogimur; omnium
Versata urnâ; serius, ocius,
Sors exitura, et nos in æternum
Exilium impositura cymbæ.¹

“To the same fate we all must yield in turn,
Sooner or later, all must to the urn;
When Charon calls abroad, we must not stay,
But to eternal exile sail away.”

And consequently, if it frights us, 'tis a perpetual torment, and for which there is no consolation nor redress. There is no way by which we can possibly avoid it; it commands all points of the compass; we may continually turn our heads this way and that, and pry about as in a suspected country; *quæ quasi saxum Tantalò, semper impendet*;² “But it ever, like Tantalus's stone, hangs over us.” Our courts of justice often send back condemned criminals to be executed upon the place where the fact was committed, but carry them to all the fine houses by the way and give them the best entertainment they can.

Non Siculæ dapes
Dulcem elaborabunt saporein;

ternis, sect. 3.) in summo perfectissimæ splendore doctrinæ extinctus est; i. e. After having lived free from every human ailment, he died in the highest reputa-

tion of being perfect master of his science.

¹ Hor. *Od.* ii. 3. 25.

² Cic. *de Finib.* i. 18.

Non avium citharæque cantus
Somnum reducent.¹

“ Choicest Sicilian dainties cannot please,
Nor yet of birds or harps the harmonies
Once charm asleep, or close their watchful eyes.”

Do you think they could relish it? And that the fatal end of their journey being continually before their eyes would not alter and deprave their palate from all relish of these fine things?

Audit iter, numeratque dies, spatioque viarum
Metitur vitam, torquetur peste futurâ.²

“ He time and space computes by length of ways,
Sums up the number of his few sad days;
And his sad thoughts, full of his fatal doom,
Have room for nothing but the blow to come.”

The end of our race is death, 'tis the necessary object of our aim; if it frights us, how is it possible to advance a step without a fit of ague? The remedy the vulgar use is not to think on't; but from what brutish stupidity can they derive so gross a blindness? He must needs bridle the ass by the tail:

Qui capite ipse suo instituit vestigia retro.³

“ He who the order of his steps has laid
To light and natural motion retrograde.”

'Tis no wonder if he be often trapped in the pitfall. They used to fright people with the very mention of death, and must cross themselves as if it were the name of the devil; and because the making a man's will is in reference to dying, not a man will be persuaded to take a pen in hand, to that purpose, till the physician has passed sentence upon him and totally given him over; and then, betwixt grief and terror, God knows in how fit a condition of understanding he is to do it.

¹ Hor. *Od.* iiii. 1, 18.

² Claudian in *Ruf.* ii. 187.

³ Lucret. iv. 474.

The Romans, by reason that this poor syllable death was observed to be so harsh to the ears of the people, and the sound so ominous, found out a way to soften and spin it out by a periphrasis, and instead of pronouncing bluntly "such a one is dead," to say, "such a one has lived," or "such a one has ceased to live." For, provided there was any mention of life in the case, though 'twas past, it carried yet some sound of consolation. And from them it is that we have borrowed our expression of "the late Monsieur such a one."

The author's
birth.

Peradventure, as the saying is, the term is worth the money.¹ I was born betwixt eleven and, twelve o'clock in the forenoon, the last of February, 1533, according to our present computation, beginning the year the first of January,² and it is now just fifteen days since I was complete nine and thirty years old; I may account to live, at least, as many more. In the mean time, to trouble a man's self with the thought of a thing so far off is a senseless foolery. But, after all, young and old die after the very same manner, and no one departs out of life otherwise than as though he had just before entered into it; neither is any so old and decrepid, who has not heard of Methusalem, that does not think he has yet another twenty years of constitution good at least. Fool that thou art, who has assured unto thee the term of thy life? Thou dependest upon physicians, and their old wives' tales, but rather consult fact and experience, and the fragility of human nature. According to the common course of things, 'tis long since that thou livest by extraordinary favour. Thou hast already outlived the ordinary term of life, and, to convince thyself that it is so, reckon up thy acquaintance, how many more have died before they arrived at thy age, than have

¹ This proverb is mostly used by such as, having borrowed money for a long term, take no care for the payment, flattering themselves that something will happen, in the mean time, for their benefit or discharge.

² By an ordonnance of Charles IX. promulgated in 1563, the beginning of

the year was fixed to be on the first of January, instead of on Easter Day, as before. The year 1564, consequently, began on the first of January, 1563. The Parliament, however, did not conform to this ordonnance till two years after.

attained unto it; and of those who have ennobled their lives by their renown, take but an account, and I dare lay a wager thou wilt find more who have died before, than after, five and thirty years of age. It is full both of reason and piety too to take the example of the human existence of Jesus Christ himself, who ended his life at three and thirty years. The greatest man that ever was, who was no more than man, Alexander, died also at the same age. How many several ways has death to surprise us!

Quid quisque vitet, nunquam homini satis
Cautum est in horas.¹

"Man fain would shun, but 'tis not in his power
T' evade the dangers of each threat'ning hour."

To omit fevers and pleurisies, who would ever have imagined that a Duke of Brittany should be pressed to death in a crowd, as that Duke was at the entry of Pope Clement, my neighbour, into Lyons?² Have we not seen one of our kings killed at a tilting;³ and did not one of his ancestors die by the jostle of a hog?⁴ Æschylus, being threatened with the fall of a house, got nothing by going into the fields to avoid that danger, for there he was knocked on the head by a tortoise falling out of an eagle's talons.⁵ Another was choked with a grape-stone.⁶ An emperor was killed with the scratch of a comb, in combing his head; Æmilius Lepidus with a stumble at his own threshold;⁷ Aufidius, with a jostle, against the door, as he entered the council-chamber. And, in the very embrace of women, Cornelius Gallus, the Prætor; Tigillinus, captain of the watch at Rome; Ludovico, son of Guido de Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua; and a

¹ Horace, *Od.* xiii. 13.

² In 1305, in the reign of Philip le Bel. This Duke of Brittany was named John II. The Pope, whom Montaigne mentions as his neighbour, was Bertrand de Got, Archbishop of Bordeaux, who was elected Pope, fifth of June, 1305, and took the title of Clement V.

³ Henry II. of France, mortally wounded in a tournament by the Count de

Montgomery, one of the captains of his guards.

⁴ Philip, or as some say, Lewis VII. son of Louis le Gros, who was crowned in the lifetime of his father.

⁵ Val. Max. ix. 12.

⁶ Anacreon. See Val. Max. ix. 12.

⁷ Pliny, *Nat. H.* vii. 33, whence are also taken the following instances.

still worse example, Speusippus, a platonie philosopher;¹ and one of our Popes. The poor Judge Bibius, in the eight days' reprieve he had given a criminal, was himself caught hold of, his own reprieve of life being expired.² And Caius Julius, the physician, while anointing the eyes of a patient, had death close his own; ³ and if I may bring in an example of my own blood, a brother of mine, Captain St. Martin, a young man of three and twenty years old, who had already given sufficient testimony of his valour, playing a match at tennis, received a blow of a ball a little above his right ear, which, though it was without any manner or sign of wound, or depression of the skull, and though he took no great notice of it, nor so much as sat down to repose himself, he nevertheless died within five or six hours after, of an apoplexy occasioned by that blow.

Which so frequent and common examples passing every day before our eyes, how is it possible a man should disengage himself from the thought of death; or avoid fancying that it has us every moment by the collar? What matter is it, you will say, which way it comes to pass, provided a man does not terrify himself with the expectation? For my part, I am of this mind, and by whatever means one could shield one's self from the blow, were it under a calf's skin, I am not the man to shrink from it; for all I want is to pass my time pleasantly and at my ease, and the recreations that most contribute to it I take hold of; as to the rest, as little glorious and exemplary as you would desire.

Prætulerim . . . delirus inersque videri,
Dum mea delectent mala me, vel denique fallant,
Quam sapere, et ringi.⁴

“As fool, or sluggard, let me censur'd be,
Whilst either fault dost please or cozen me,

¹ Tertullian mentions this in his *Apologetics*, c. 46, but without absolutely affirming it. Diogenes Laertius says, on the contrary, that being shattered with a violent palsy, and broken down with the

weight of old age and vexation, Speusippus put an end to his own life.

² Pliny, vii. 53.

³ Id. ib.

⁴ Horace, *Epis.* ii. 2, 126.

Rather than be thought wise, and feel the smart
Of a perpetual aching anxious heart."

But 'tis folly to think of doing any thing that way. People go and come, and dance and gad about, and not a word of death. All this is very fine while it lasts, but when death does come either to themselves, or their wives, or their children, or their friends, surprising them at unawares, unprepared, then what torments, what outcries, what madness and despair overwhelm them! Did you ever see any thing so subdued, so changed, and so confounded? A man must, therefore, make himself more early ready for it; and this brutish negligence, even could it lodge in the brain of any man of sense, which I think utterly impossible, sells us its merchandise too dear. Were it an enemy that could be avoided, I would then advise to borrow arms, even of cowardice itself, to that effect. But seeing it is not, and that it will catch you as well flying and playing the poltroon, as standing to it, like a man of honour:—

Mors et fugacem persequitur virum,
Nec parcit imbellis juventæ
Poplitibus timidoque tergo.¹

"No speed of foot can rob death of his prize,
He cuts the hamstrings of the man that flies;
Nor spares the fearful stripling's back who starts
To run beyond the reach of 's mortal darts."

And seeing that no temper of arms is of proof to secure us,—

Ille licet ferro cautus se condat et ære,
Mors tamen inclusum protrahet inde caput; ²

"Shield thee with steel or brass, advised by dread,
Death from the casque will pull thy cautious head;"

let us learn bravely to stand our ground and fight him. And, to begin to deprive him of the greatest advantage he has over us, let us take a way quite contrary to the common course. Let us disarm him of his strangeness; let us converse and be familiar with him, and have nothing so frequent

¹ Horace, *Od.* iii. 2, 14.

² Propertius, *lib.* 18, 25.

in our thoughts as death ; let us, upon all occasions, represent him in all his most dreadful shapes to our imagination. At the stumbling of a horse, at the falling of a tile, at the least prick of a pin, let us presently consider, and say to ourselves, " Well, and what if it had been death itself ? " And thereupon let us encourage and fortify ourselves ; let us evermore, amidst our jollity and feasting, keep the remembrance of our frail condition before our eyes, never suffering ourselves to be so far transported with our delights but that we have some intervals of reflecting upon, and considering how many several ways this jollity of ours tends to death, and with how many traps it threatens us. The Egyptians were wont to do after this manner, who, in the height of their feasting and mirth, caused a dried skeleton of a man to be brought into the room to serve for a memento to their guests.¹

Omnem crede diem tibi diluxisse supremum :
Grata superveniet, quæ non sperabitur, hora.²

" Think every day, soon as the day is past,
Of thy life's date that thou hast lived the last ;
The next day's joyful light thine eyes shall see,
As unexpected, will more welcome be."

Where death waits for us is uncertain ; let us every where look for him. The premeditation of death is the premeditation of liberty ; he who has learnt to die has forgot what it is to be a slave. There is nothing of evil in life for him who rightly comprehends that the loss of life is no evil ; to know how to die delivers us from all subjection and constraint. Paulus Æmilius answered him whom the miserable King of Macedon, his prisoner, sent to entreat him that he would not lead him in his triumph, " Let him make that request to himself."³

In truth, in all things, if nature do not help a little, it is very hard for art and industry to perform any thing to purpose. I am, in my own nature, not melancholy, but thoughtful ; and there is nothing I have more continually

¹ Herod. ii. 78.

² Horace, *Epist.* i. 4, 13.

³ Plut. *in Vitâ*, c. 17. Cicero, *Tusc. Quæst.* v. 40.

entertained myself withal than the imaginations of death, even in the gayest and most wanton time of my life :—

*Jucundum cum ætas florida ver ageret.*¹

“ When that my youth rolled on in pleasant spring.”

In the company of ladies, and in the height of mirth, some have perhaps thought me possessed with some jealousy, or meditating upon the uncertainty of some imagined hope, whilst I was only entertaining myself with the remembrance of some one surprised a few days before with a burning fever, of which he died, returning from an entertainment like this, with his head full of idle fancies of love and jollity, as mine was then, and that, for aught I knew, the same destiny was attending me.

*Jam fuerit, neque post unquam revocare licebit.*²

‘ He who of late a being had ’mongst men,
Is gone, and ne’er to be recalled again.’”

Yet did not this thought wrinkle my forehead any more than any other. No doubt it is impossible but we must feel a sting in such imaginations as these, at first ; but with often revolving them in a man’s mind, and having them frequent in our thoughts, they at last become so familiar as to be no trouble at all. Otherwise I, for my part, should be in perpetual fright and frenzy ; for never man was so distrustful of his life, never man so indifferent for its duration. Neither health, which I have hitherto ever enjoyed very strong and vigorous, and very seldom interrupted, prolongs, nor sickness contracts, my hopes. Every minute methinks ’tis about to escape me ; and it eternally runs in my mind that what may be done to-morrow may be done to-day. Hazards and dangers do in truth little or nothing hasten our end ; and if we consider how many more remain and hang over our heads beside the misfortune that immediately threatens us, we shall find that the sound and the sick, those that are abroad at sea, and those that sit by the fire ; those that are in the wars, and

¹ *Catullus*, lxxviii. 16.

² *Lucret.* iii. 928.

those that sit idle at home, are the one as near it as the other : *Nemo altero fragilior est, nemo in crastinum sui certior.*¹ "No man is more frail than another, nor more certain of the morrow." For any thing I have to do before I die, the longest leisure would appear too short, were it but an hour's business I had to do.

A friend of mine, the other day, turning over my table-book, found in it a memorandum of something I would have done after my decease ; whereupon I told him, as was really true, that, though I was no more than a league's distance from my own house, and merry and well, yet when that thing came into my head I made haste to write it down there, because I was not certain to live till I came home. As a man that am eternally brooding over my own thoughts, and who confine them to my own particular concerns, I am at all hours as well prepared as I am ever like to be ; and death, whenever he shall come, can bring nothing along with him I did not expect long before. We should always (as near as we can) be booted and spurred, and ready to go, and, above all things, take care at that time to have no business with any one but one's self.

Quid brevi fortes jaculamur ævo
Multa ?²

"Why cut'st thou out such mighty work, vain man?
Whose life's short date's comprised in one poor span?"

For we shall then find work enough to do, without any need of addition. One complains, more than of death, that he is thereby prevented of a glorious victory ; another that he must die before he has married his daughter, or settled and educated his children ; a third seems only troubled that he must lose the society of his wife ; a fourth the conversation of his son, as the principal concerns of his being. For my part I am, thanks be to God, at this instant in such a condition that I am ready to dislodge, whenever it shall please him, without any manner of regret. I disengage myself

¹ Senec. *Epist.* 91.

² Horace, *Od.* ii. 16, 17.

throughout from all worldly relations; my leave is soon taken of all but myself. Never did any one prepare to bid adieu to the world more absolutely and purely, and to shake hands with all manner of interest in it, than I expect to do. The dearest deaths are the best.¹

Miser! O miser! (aiunt) omnia ademit
Una dies infesta mihi tot præmia vitæ.²

“Wretch that I am (they cry), one fatal day
So many joys of life has snatched away.”

And the builder,

— manent (says he) opera interrupta, minæque
Murorum ingentes, æquataque machina cælo.³

“The mounds, the works, the walls neglected lie,
Short of their promised height, that seemed to threaten the sky.”

A man must design nothing that will require so much time to the finishing, or at least with no such passionate desire to see it brought to a conclusion. We are born to action.

Cùm moriar, medium solvar et inter opus.⁴

“When death shall come, he me will find
Engaged on something I've design'd.”

I would always have a man to be doing, and as much as in him lies, to extend and spin out the offices of life; and then let death take me planting cabbages, but without any careful thought of him, and much less of my garden's not being finished. I saw one die, who, at his last gasp, seemed to be concerned at nothing so much as that destiny was about to cut the thread of a history he was then compiling, when he was got no farther than the fifteenth or sixteenth of our kings.

Illud in his rebus non addunt, nec tibi earum
Jam desiderium rerum super insidet una.⁵

“They tell us not, that, dying, we've no more
The same desire of things as heretofore.”

¹ Death is here considered as the introduction and actual passage to a state of insensibility which puts a period to our life. The more silently and rapidly we arrive to that state the less ought the passage to terrify us. This comes up very near to the import of that bold and

enigmatical expression of Montaigne, viz: “That the dearest deaths are the best.”

² Lucret. iii. 911.

³ *Æneid*, iv. 88. The text has *pendent*.

⁴ Ovid, *Amor.* ii. 10, 36.

⁵ Lucret. iii. 913.

We should discharge ourselves from these vulgar and hurtful humours and concerns. To this purpose it was that men first put the places of sepulture, the dormitories of the dead, near adjoining to the churches, and in the most frequented places of the city, to accustom (says Lycurgus) the common people, women, and children, that they should not be startled at the sight of a dead corpse; and to the end that the continual sight of bones, graves, monuments, and funeral obsequies, should keep us in mind of our frail condition.¹

Quin etiam exhilarare viris convivia cæde
 Mos olim, et miscere epulis spectacula dira
 Certantum ferro, sæpè et super ipsa cadentum
 Pocula, respersis non parco sanguine mensis.²

“’Twas therefore that the ancients at their feasts
 With tragic slaughter used to treat their guests;
 Making their fencers, with their utmost spite,
 Skill, force, and fury in their presence fight;
 Till streams of blood o'erflow'd the spacious hall,
 Crims'ning their tables, drinking-cups, and all.”

And as the Egyptians after their feasts were wont to present the company with a great image of death, by one that cried out to them, “Drink and be merry, for such shalt thou be when thou art dead;” so it is my custom to have death not only in my imagination, but continually in my mouth. Neither is there any thing of which I am so inquisitive, and delight to inform myself, as the manner of men's deaths, their words, looks, and gestures; nor any places in history I am so intent upon; and it is manifest enough, by my crowding in examples of this kind, that I have a particular fancy for that subject. If I were a writer of books, I would compile a register, with a comment, of the various deaths of men; and it could not but be useful, for he who should teach men to die would at the same time teach them to live. Dicearchus made one, to which he gave some such title; but it was designed for another and less profitable end.³ Peradventure some one may object, and say that the pain and

¹ Plutarch, *in Vitâ.*

² Silius Italicus, ii. 51.

³ Cicero *de Offic.* ii. 5.

terror of dying indeed does so infinitely exceed all manner of imagination that the best fencer will be quite out of his play when it comes to the push. But, let them say what they will, to premeditate it is doubtless a very great advantage; and besides, is it nothing to get so far, at least, without any visible disturbance or alteration? But moreover Nature herself does assist and encourage us. If the death be sudden and violent, we have not leisure to fear; if otherwise, I find that as I engage further in my disease, I naturally enter into a certain loathing and disdain of life. I find I have much more ado to digest this resolution of dying when I am well in health than when sick, languishing of a fever; and by how much I have less to do with the comforts of life, I even begin to lose the relish and pleasure of them, and by so much I look upon death with less terror; which makes me hope that the further I remove from the first, and the nearer I approach to the latter, I shall sooner strike a bargain, and with less unwillingness exchange the one for the other. And, as I have experienced in other occurrences what Cæsar says, "That things often appear greater to us at a distance than near at hand,"¹ I have found that, being well, I have had diseases in much greater horror than when really afflicted with them. The vigour wherein I now am, and the jollity and delight wherein I now live, make the contrary estate appear in so great a disproportion to my present condition, that by imagination I magnify and make those inconveniences twice greater than they are, and apprehend them to be much more troublesome than I find them really to be, when they lie the most heavy upon me, and I hope to find death the same.

Let us but observe in the ordinary changes and declinations our constitutions daily suffer, how nature deprives us of all sight and sense of our bodily decay. What remains to an old man of the vigour of his youth and better days?

¹ *De Bello Gallico*, vii. 89.

It is of great advantage to think of death beforehand.

Heu! senibus vitæ portio quanta manet! ¹

“Alas! how small a part of life's short stage
Remains to travellers advanced in age!”

Cæsar, to an old weather-beaten soldier of his guards, who came to ask him leave that he might kill himself, taking notice of his withered body and decrepid motion, pleasantly answered, “Thou fanciest, then, that thou art yet alive!” ² Should a man fall into the aches and impotences of age from a sprightly and vigorous youth, on the sudden, I do not think humanity capable of enduring such a change. But nature, leading us by the hand an easy, and, as it were, an insensible pace, little by little, step by step, conducts us gently to that miserable condition, and by that means makes it familiar to us, so that we perceive not, nor are sensible of the stroke then, when our youth dies in us, though it be really a harder death than the final dissolution of a languishing body, which is only the death of old age; forasmuch as the fall is not so great from an uneasy being to none at all, as it is from a sprightly and florid being to one that is unwieldy and painful. The body, when bowed beyond its natural spring of strength, has less force either to rise with, or support, a burthen; and it is with the soul the same, and therefore it is that we are to raise her up firm and erect against the power of this adversary. For as it is impossible she should ever be at rest or at peace within herself whilst she stands in fear of it, so if she once can assure herself, she may boast (which is a thing, as it were, above human condition) that it is impossible that disquiet, anxiety, or fear, or any other disturbance, should inhabit or have any place in her.

Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solidâ; neque Auster
Dux inquieti turbidus Adriæ,
Nec fulminantis magna Jovis manus. ³

“A soul well settled is not to be shook
With an incensed tyrant's threat'ning look;

¹ Maximian, *Eleg.* i. 16; *Ec. Pseudo-Gallus.*

² Seneca, *Epist.* 77.

³ Horat. *Od.* iii. 3, 3.

Nor can loud Auster once that heart dismay,
The ruffling Prince of stormy Adria;
Nor yet th' uplifted hand of mighty Jove,
Though charg'd with thunder, such a temper move."

She is then become sovereign of all her lusts and passions, mistress of necessity, shame, poverty, and all the other injuries of fortune. Let us, therefore, as many of us as can, get this advantage, which is the true and sovereign liberty here on earth, and that fortifies us wherewithal to defy violence and injustice, and to contemn prisons and chains.

In manicis et
Compedibus, sævo te sub custode tenebo.
Ipse Deus, simul atque volam, me solvet. Opinor,
Hoc sentit: moriar. Mors ultima linea rerum est.¹

"With bolts and chains I'll load thy hands and feet,
And to a surly keeper thee commit.'—
But let him show his worst of cruelty,
The gods propitious soon will set me free;
By death release me, that full comfort brings,
For death's the utmost term of human things."

Our very religion itself has no surer human foundation than the contempt of death. Not only the argument of reason invites us to it,—for why should we fear to lose a thing which, being lost, can never be missed or lamented?—but, also, seeing that we are threatened by so many sorts of deaths, is it not infinitely worse eternally, to fear them all than once to undergo one of them? And what matter is it when it shall happen, since it is inevitable once? To him that told Socrates, "The thirty tyrants have sentenced thee to death"—"And nature them," said he.² What a ridiculous thing it is to trouble and afflict ourselves about taking the only step that is to deliver us from all misery and trouble! As our birth brought us the birth of all things, so in our death is the death of all things included. And therefore to lament and take on that we shall

¹ Horace, *Epist.* i. 16, 76.

² Diog. Laert. *in Vitâ.* Cicero, *Tusc. Quas.* i. 40.

not be alive a hundred years hence, is the same folly as to be sorry we were not alive a hundred years ago. Death is the beginning of another life. So did we weep, and so much it cost us to enter into this, and so did we put off our former veil in entering into it. Nothing can be grievous that is but once; and is it reasonable so long to fear a thing that will so soon be dispatched? A long life and a short are by death made all one; for there is no long nor short to things that are no more. Aristotle tells us that there are certain little beasts upon the banks of the river Hypanis that never live above a day; they which die at eight of the clock in the morning die in their youth, and those that die at five in the evening in their extremest age.¹ Which of us would not laugh to see this moment of continuance put into the consideration of weal or woe? Yet the most, and the least of ours, in comparison of eternity, or even to the duration of mountains, rivers, stars, trees, nay, of some animals, is no less ridiculous.² But Nature

compels us to it: "Go out of this world," says she, "as you entered it; the same passage you made from death to life, without passion or fear, the same, after the same manner, repeat from life to death. Your death is a part of the order of the universe, 'tis a part of the life of the world.

Inter se mortales mutua vivunt;

Et, quasi cursores, vitæ lampada tradunt.³

"Among themselves mankind alternate live,
And life's bright torch to the next runner give."

"Shall I change, to please you, so admirable a system? 'Tis the condition of your creation; death is a part of you, and whilst you endeavour to evade it, you avoid yourselves. This very being of yours, that you now enjoy, is equally

¹ Cicero, *Tusc. Quæst.* i. 39.

² Seneca, *Consol. ad Marc.* c. 20.

³ Lucretius, ii. 75. Alluding to the Athenian games, wherein those that ran

a race carried torches in their hands; and their race being done, delivered them into the hands of those that ran next.

divided betwixt life and death. The day of your birth is one day's advance towards the grave.

Prima, quæ vitam dedit, hora carpsit.¹

"The hour that first gave life its breath,
Was a whole hour's advance to death."

Nascentes morimur; finisque ab origine pendet.²

"As we are born, we die; and our life's end
Upon our life's beginning doth depend."

"Every day that you live you purloin from life, you live at the expense of life itself; the perpetual work of your whole life is but to lay the foundation of death; you are in death whilst you live, because you still are after death when you are no more alive. Or if you had rather have it so, you are dead after life, but dying all the while you live; and death handles the dying more rudely, and more feelingly, and essentially than the dead. If you have made your profit of life you have had enough of it, go your way satisfied.

Cur non ut plenus vitæ convivia recedis? ³

"Why should'st not go, like a full gorged guest,
Sated with life, as he is with a feast?"

If you have not known how to make the best use of it, and if it was unprofitable to you, what need you care to lose it? to what end would you desire longer to keep it?

Cur amplius addere quæris

Rursum quod pereat male, et ingratum occidat omne.⁴

"Why wouldst renew thy time? to what intent
Live o'er again a life that was ill spent?"

"Life in itself is neither good nor evil; it is the scene of good or evil, as you make it; and if you have lived a long day you have seen all. One day is equal and like to all other days; there is no other light, no other night. This very sun, this moon, these very stars, this very order and revolution of things, are all the same your ancestors enjoyed, and that shall also entertain your posterity.

¹ Seneca, *Hercul. fur.* act. iii. chor. verse, 874.

² Manilius, *Astronom.* iv. 16.

³ Lucret. iii. 951.

⁴ Id. ib. 945.

Non alium videre patres, aliumve nepotes
Aspicient.¹

“Your grandsires saw no other things of old,
Nor shall your grandsons other things behold.”

“And come the worst that can come, the distribution and variety of all the acts of my comedy is performed in a year. If you have observed the revolution of four seasons, they comprehend the infancy, the youth, the virility, and the old age of the world. The year has played his part, and knows no other trick than to begin and repeat the same again; it will always be the same thing.

Versamur ibidem, atque insumus usque.²

“We yearly tread but one perpetual round,
We ne'er strike out, but beat the former ground.”

Atque in se sua per vestigia volvitur annus.³

“The year rolls on within itself again.”

“I have no mind to create you any new recreations.

Nam tibi præterea quod machiner, inveniamque
Quod placeat, nihil est: eadem sunt omnia semper.⁴

“More pleasures than are made time will not frame,
For to all times all things shall be the same.”

“Give place to others, as others have given place to you. Equality is the soul of equity.⁵ Who can complain of being comprehended in the same destiny wherein all are involved? Besides, live as long as you can, you shall by that nothing shorten the time that you are to lie dead; 'tis all to no purpose; you shall be every whit as long in the condition you so much fear, as though you had died at nurse.

Licet quot vis vivendo vincere sæcla,
Mors æterna tamen nihilominus illa manebit.⁶

“And, live as many ages as you will,
Death ne'ertheless shall be eternal still.”

“And yet I will place you in such a condition as you shall have no reason to be displeased:—

¹ Manilius, i. 529.

² Lucret. iii. 1093.

³ Virg. *Georg.* ii. 402.

⁴ Lucret. iii. 957.

⁵ Senec. *Epist.* 30.

⁶ Lucret. iii. 1103.

In verâ nescis nullum fore morte alium te,
Qui possit vivus tibi te lugere peremptum,
Stansque jacentem.¹

When dead, a living self thou canst not have,
Or to lament or trample on thy grave."

"Nor shall you so much as wish for the life you are so concerned about.

Nec sibi enim quisquam tum se vitamque requirit.

Nec desiderium nostri nos afficit ullum.²

"Life nor ourselves we wish in that estate,
Nor thoughts of what we were at first create."

"Death were less to be feared than nothing, if there could be any thing less than nothing.

Multo . . . mortem minus ad nos esse putandum,
Si minus esse potest quàm quod nihil esse videmus.³

"If less than nothing any thing can show,
Death then would both appear and would be so."

"Neither can it any way concern you whether you are living or dead; living, by reason that you are still in being; dead, because you are no more. Moreover, no one dies before his hour; and the time you leave behind was no more yours than that was lapsed and gone before you came into the world; nor does it any more concern you.

Respice enim quàm nil ad nos anteacta vetustas
Temporis æterni fuerit.⁴

"Look back, and tho' times past eternal were,
In those before us, yet had we no share."

"Wherever your life ends, it is all there; neither does the utility of living consist in the length of days, but in the well husbanding and improving of time; and a man may have continued in the world longer than the ordinary age of man that has yet lived but a little while. Make use of time while it is present with you. It depends upon your will, and not

¹ Lucret. iii. 898.

² Id. ib. 932.

³ Id. ib. 939.

⁴ Id. ib. 985.

upon the number of days, to have a sufficient length of life. Is it possible you can ever imagine you will not arrive at the place towards which you are continually going? and yet there is no journey but hath its end. And, if company will make it more pleasant or more easy to you, does not all the world go the self-same way?

. . . Omnia te vitâ perfuncta sequentur.¹

“When thou dost die, let this thy comfort be,
That all the world, by turn, must follow thee.”

“Does not all the world dance the same dance that you do? Is there any thing that does not grow old as well as you? A thousand men, a thousand animals, and a thousand other creatures, die at the same moment that you expire.

Nam nox nulla diem, neque noctem aurora, sequuta est,
Quæ non audierit mistos vagitibus ægris
Ploratus mortis comites et funeris atri.²

“No night succeeds the day, nor morning’s light
Rises to chase the sullen shades of night;
Wherein there is not heard the dismal groans
Of dying men mix’d with the woful moans
Of living friends, and with the mournful cries
And dirges fitting fun’ral obsequies.”

“To what end should you recoil, since you cannot go back? You have seen examples enough of those who have been glad to die, thereby being manifestly delivered from intolerable miseries; but have you talked with any of those who found a disadvantage by it? It must therefore needs be very foolish to condemn a thing you have neither experienced in your own person, nor by that of any other. Why dost thou complain of me and destiny? Do we do thee any wrong? Is it for thee to govern us, or for us to dispose of thee? Though peradventure thy age may not be accomplished, yet thy life is. A man of low stature is a whole man as well as a giant; neither men nor their lives are measured by the ell. Chiron refused to be immortal, when he was acquainted with the conditions under which he was to enjoy it, by the god of

¹ Lucret. iii. 98.

² Id. ii. 579.

time itself and its duration, his father Saturn. Do but seriously consider how much more insupportable an immortal and painful life would be to man than what I have already designed him.¹ If you had not death to ease you of your pains and cares, you would eternally curse me for having deprived you of the benefit of dying. I have, 'tis true, mixed a little bitterness in it, to the end that, seeing of what conveniency and use it is, you might not too greedily and indiscreetly seek and embrace it; and that you might be so established in this moderation, as neither to nauseate life, nor have any antipathy for dying, which I have decreed you shall once do, I have tempered the one and the other betwixt pleasure and pain. 'Twas I that first taught Thales, the most eminent of all your sages, that to live and die were indifferent; which made him very wisely answer him who asked him, "Why then did he not die?" "Because," said he, "it is indifferent."² The elements of water, earth, fire, and air, and the other parts of this creation of mine, are no more the instruments of thy life than they are of thy death. Why dost thou fear thy last day? it contributes no more to thy dissolution than every one of the rest. The last step is not the cause of lassitude; it does but confess it. Every day travels towards death; the last only arrives at it."³ These are the good lessons our Mother Nature teaches.

I have often considered with myself whence it should proceed that in war the image of death, whether we look upon it as to our own particular danger or that of another, should without comparison appear less dreadful than at home in our own houses (for if it were not so, it would be an army of whining milksops); and that being still in all places the same, there should be, notwithstanding, much more assurance in peasants

Why death appears less dreadful on the field of battle than at home.

¹ "Si nous étions immortels, nous serions des êtres très misérables. Si l'on nous offrait l'immortalité sur la terre qui est-ce qui voudrait accepter ce triste présent?"—Rousseau, *Emile*, liv. ii.

² Diog. Laertius, *in Vitâ.*

³ Lucret. iii. 945, &c. Seneca, *Epist.*

12. Id. *on the Shortness of Life.*

and the meaner sort of people than in others of better quality and education ; and I do verily believe that it is those terrible ceremonies and preparations wherewith we set it out that more terrify us than the thing itself. An entirely new way of living, the cries of mothers, wives, and children, the visits of astonished and afflicted friends, the attendance of pale and blubbering servants, a dark room set round with burning tapers, our beds environed with physicians and divines ; in short, nothing but ghostliness and horror round about us, render it so formidable that a man almost fancies himself dead and buried already. Children are afraid even of those they love best, and are best acquainted with, when disguised in a vizard, and so are we : the vizard must be removed as well from things as persons ;¹ which being taken away, we shall find nothing underneath but the very same death that a mean servant or a poor chambermaid died a day or two ago, without any manner of apprehension or concern. Happy therefore is the death that deprives us of the leisure for such grand preparations !



CHAPTER XX.

OF THE FORCE OF IMAGINATION.

Fortis imaginatio generat casum. “A strong imagination creates what it imagines,” say the schoolmen. I am one of those who are most sensible of the power of imagination : every one is jostled, but some are quite overthrown by it. It has a very great impression upon me ; and I make it my business to avoid, wanting force to resist it. I could live by the sole help of healthful and jolly company. The very sight of another’s pain greatly pains me ; and I often go entirely

¹ Seneca, *Epist.* 24.