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## MISCELLANEOUS THOUGHTS,

BY MONTESQUIEU.

To take delight in reading, is to have the power of changing those moments of lassitude that visit every man, for the most delicious moments of life.

What an unfortunate necessity is it in the constitution of man, that his understanding is scarcely matured when the organs of his body, begin to fail!

A celebrated physician was asked—if the commerce of the sexes was prejudicial to health—"No," said he, "if provocatives are not used." But I should rank variety among provocatives.

It is a proof that merit is of the highest kind, when it continues to shine with accustomed lustre, although merit of as high a rank is in its presence.

I call genius a secret gift of the Deity, which the possessor displays unknown to himself.

He who runs after wit is apt to embrace folly.

I once said to Madam du Chatelet—"You postpone your sleep to read the philosophers; you should read the philosophers to hasten your slumbers."

Hope is the link that unites all our pleasures.

The interval is too short between time of our being too young and too old.

It demands a great deal of study to acquire moderate knowledge.

Of those who make companions of their servants, I have only to say that vice is its own punishment.

Men of talents govern fools; and some fool or other often governs a man of talents.

When I reflect on our discoveries in natural philosophy, I think we have gone very far for human beings.

Idleness ought to be ranked among the punishments of hell; and most people place it among the joys of heaven.

On friends that are tyrannical tho' useful to us, my observation is, that love has compensations which friendship has not.

Ordinary graces lose part of their beauty by being set in competition with each other: graces of the highest rank acquire a brighter lustre when opposed to each other.

Most virtues are relative to individuals, or to parts of; such are friendship, love of one's country, compassion. But justice is relative to the whole; and when any interferes with that, it is vice, though ranked among the virtues.

The success of most enterprizes depends upon knowing how much time is necessary to their success.

That ought not to be attempted by the laws which can be effected by the customs and manners of a people.

I have remarked that, to succeed in the world, one must have a vacant air with a subtle head.

One's dress should be a little inferior to one's condition.

Supper destroys one half of Paris, and dinner the other.

I hate Versailles, because every body is little and mean there; but Paris I love, for there one finds great men.

If we were content to be happy, that would not be difficult; but we are ambitious to be more happy than others, and that is difficult, because others appear to be more happy than they really are.

Some people hate digressions, but I think

he who understands their use is like one with long arms: he has more objects within his reach.

Men are of two sorts: those who think, and those who amuse themselves.

A fine action is one that is beneficial to man, and whose accomplishments require talents.

The common people have generally good intentions and vicious manners.

Histories are romances founded on facts.

A work gives celebrity to a man's name, and after that his name gives celebrity his works.

It is a nice point to know when to quit a company; an accurate knowledge of the world gives readiness in perceiving it.

Bravery and a love of glory are declining amongst us; it is of little moment to our happiness to belong to one master or to another; but formerly, defeat in the field, or the reduction of a man's country, was the loss of all that was dear to him, his country, family and friends.

We shall never arrive at principles in finance, because we never know more than that we do something, and never know what it is we do.

We do not now call a minister great, when he is an intelligent administrator of public revenue, but when he is fertile in expedients to increase the revenue and indefatigable in their application.

People love their grand children better than their children, and it is because they can estimate tolerably well the worth of the latter, but their knowledge of the former being less perfect, they flatter themselves with vain hopes respecting them.

The reason why fools so often succeed in their plans is, that never distrusting themselves, they always persevere. It is worthy to be observed, that the greater part of our pleasures are unreasonable.

Old men, who have studied in youth, need only to resort to the memory for pleasure or use, when others are obliged to begin to study.

Merit is a consolation in every affliction.

A figurative style is so far from difficult, that a nation emerging from ignorance first employs the figurative and swelling style, & afterwards acquire the simple. The difficulty of simplicity is, that it borders on the plain, although in itself most expensive and beautiful; while there is a wide distance between a figurative style and bombast.

There is very little vanity in feeling a necessity for rank or important station to attract notice.

The heroism that results from just mortal interests few; the heroism that is most destructive, is the admiration of the multitude.

Aristotle and Horace have told us of the virtues of their forefathers, and the degeneracy of their own times; and authors, from age to age, have done the same; but if they had spoken the truth, men at this day would be degenerated into brute animals.

Railery is a panegyric on the speaker's wit, at the expence of his humanity.

People whose minds are never profoundly occupied, are generally great talkers.

Obscure people who are ambitious of making a large fortune, are only preparing for the moment when they will be in despair for their want of health.

A greater number of vices are occasioned by our not sufficiently esteeming ourselves, than from a too high opinion of our merit.

In the whole course of my life, I never saw any persons universally keep bad company.

Experiments make the history of physicians, and theories its fables.

Every nation and every man ought to be civilized; but every nation and man ought also to be free.

Modesty becomes every one; but tho' we should give it a place in our minds, we should keep it in subjection to greater qualities.

Be singular, if you will; but let it be in the elevation of your thoughts. He that can distinguish himself no otherwise than by his dress, is a despicable creature in every country.

I once had the curiosity to keep an account of the number of times I heard a story repeated that never deserved to have been related; during three weeks that it occupied the polite world, I heard it told two hundred and twenty five times, which I thought quite sufficient.

Modesty is a species of fund that brings its owner great interest.

I visited the galleys and saw no one unhappy face; here I see many unhappy faces, whose owners are seeking to be happy in the pursuit of blue ribbands.

This is a fine saying of Seneca—"Sic presentibus uaris voluptatibus, ut futuris non nocuas."—"Enjoy the present hour, so as not to injure those that follows."

There is an error which pervades the whole of the Greek philosophy; its physics, morals, and metaphysics were incorrect for want of the distinction between positive and relative qualities. Thus Aristotle falls into mistakes, speaking of the heat and the cold; and Plato and Socrates, of the beautiful, the good, the great and the perfect. It is a great discovery, that there are no positive qualities. The terms beautiful, good, great, &c. are attributes of objects relative only to the beings that contemplate them. This principle is a sponge to wipe away almost every prejudice. The dialogues of Plato are a tissue of sophisms woven through ignorance of this principle. Malebranche committed a thousand mistakes from the same cause.

Never did a philosopher make men more perfectly feel the sweetness of virtue, and the dignity of their nature, than Marcus Antonius; he touches the heart, elevates the mind, enlarges the soul!

We must read the politics of Aristotle, & the two republics of Plato, to have a just idea of the laws and manners of the ancient Greeks. To look for those in their historians, is as fruitless as to look for French laws and customs in the history of Lewis the Fourteenth's wars.

The republic of Plato is not more chimerical than that of Sparta.

To judge justly of men, we must overlook the prejudices of their times.

Our comedies begin to degenerate, because our writers are in search of the ridiculous in the passions, instead of the ridiculous in manners: the passions are not ridiculous in themselves.

I have seldom given my opinion of any authors, but those I admire, having as seldom as possible read any authors but the best.

Fanaticism will find reasons to justify a bad action, that an honest man could not find.

Priests are the sycophants of princes when they cannot be their masters.