
The Essays of Montaigne,
Book III



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Contents

| | | | |
|-------------|-----|--------------|-----|
| CHAPTER I | 1 | CHAPTER VIII | 138 |
| CHAPTER II | 17 | CHAPTER IX | 161 |
| CHAPTER III | 31 | CHAPTER X | 220 |
| CHAPTER IV | 43 | CHAPTER XI | 244 |
| CHAPTER V | 54 | CHAPTER XII | 256 |
| CHAPTER VI | 114 | CHAPTER XIII | 285 |
| CHAPTER VII | 133 | | |

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CHAPTER I

OF PROFIT AND HONESTY

NO man is free from speaking foolish things; but the worst on't is, when a man labours to play the fool:

*"Nae iste magno conatu magnas nugas dixerit."*¹

This does not concern me; mine slip from me with as little care as they are of little value, and 'tis the better for them. I would presently part with them for what they are worth, and neither buy nor sell them, but as they weigh. I speak on paper, as I do to the first person I meet; and that this is true, observe what follows.

To whom ought not treachery to be hateful, when Tiberius refused it in a thing of so great importance to him? He had word sent him from Germany that if he thought fit, they would rid him of Arminius by poison: this was the most potent enemy the Romans had, who had defeated them so ignominiously under Varus, and who alone prevented their aggrandisement in those parts.

He returned answer, "that the people of Rome were wont to revenge themselves of their enemies by open ways, and with their swords in their hands, and not clandestinely and by fraud": wherein he quitted the profitable for the honest. You will tell me that he was a braggadocio; I believe so too: and 'tis no great miracle in men of his profession. But the acknowledgment of virtue is not less valid in the mouth of him who hates it, forasmuch as truth forces it from him, and if he will not inwardly receive it, he at least puts it on for a decoration.

¹"Truly he, with a great effort will shortly say a mighty trifle." —Terence, *Heaut.*, act iii., s. 4.

Our outward and inward structure is full of imperfection; but there is nothing useless in nature, not even inutility itself; nothing has insinuated itself into this universe that has not therein some fit and proper place. Our being is cemented with sickly qualities: ambition, jealousy, envy, revenge, superstition, and despair have so natural a possession in us, that its image is discerned in beasts; nay, and cruelty, so unnatural a vice; for even in the midst of compassion we feel within, I know not what tart-sweet titillation of ill-natured pleasure in seeing others suffer; and the children feel it:

*“Suave mari magno, turbantibus aequora ventis,
E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem:”²*

of the seeds of which qualities, whoever should divest man, would destroy the fundamental conditions of human life. Likewise, in all governments there are necessary offices, not only abject, but vicious also. Vices there help to make up the seam in our piecing, as poisons are useful for the conservation of health. If they become excusable because they are of use to us, and that the common necessity covers their true qualities, we are to resign this part to the strongest and boldest citizens, who sacrifice their honour and conscience, as others of old sacrificed their lives, for the good of their country: we, who are weaker, take upon us parts both that are more easy and less hazardous. The public weal requires that men should betray, and lie, and massacre; let us leave this commission to men who are more obedient and more supple.

In earnest, I have often been troubled to see judges, by fraud and false hopes of favour or pardon, allure a criminal to confess his fact, and therein to make use of cozenage and impudence. It would become justice, and Plato himself, who countenances this manner of proceeding, to furnish me with other means more suitable to my own liking: this is a malicious kind of justice, and I look upon it as no less wounded by itself than by others. I said not long since to some company in discourse, that I should hardly be drawn to betray my prince for a particular man, who should be much ashamed to betray any particular man for my prince; and I do not only hate deceiving myself, but that any one should deceive through me; I will neither afford matter nor occasion to any such thing.

²“It is sweet, when the winds disturb the waters of the vast sea, to witness from land the peril of other persons.” —Lucretius, ii. I.

In the little I have had to mediate betwixt our princes³ in the divisions and subdivisions by which we are at this time torn to pieces, I have been very careful that they should neither be deceived in me nor deceive others by me. People of that kind of trading are very reserved, and pretend to be the most moderate imaginable and nearest to the opinions of those with whom they have to do; I expose myself in my stiff opinion, and after a method the most my own; a tender negotiator, a novice, who had rather fail in the affair than be wanting to myself. And yet it has been hitherto with so good luck (for fortune has doubtless the best share in it), that few things have passed from hand to hand with less suspicion or more favour and privacy. I have a free and open way that easily insinuates itself and obtains belief with those with whom I am to deal at the first meeting. Sincerity and pure truth, in what age soever, pass for current; and besides, the liberty and freedom of a man who treats without any interest of his own is never hateful or suspected, and he may very well make use of the answer of Hyperides to the Athenians, who complained of his blunt way of speaking: "Messieurs, do not consider whether or no I am free, but whether I am so without a bribe, or without any advantage to my own affairs." My liberty of speaking has also easily cleared me from all suspicion of dissembling by its vehemency, leaving nothing unsaid, how home and bitter soever (so that I could have said no worse behind their backs), and in that it carried along with it a manifest show of simplicity and indifference. I pretend to no other fruit by acting than to act, and add to it no long arguments or propositions; every action plays its own game, win if it can.

As to the rest, I am not swayed by any passion, either of love or hatred, towards the great, nor has my will captivated either by particular injury or obligation. I look upon our kings with an affection simply loyal and respectful, neither prompted nor restrained by any private interest, and I love myself for it. Nor does the general and just cause attract me otherwise than with moderation, and without heat. I am not subject to those penetrating and close compacts and engagements. Anger and hatred are beyond the duty of justice; and are passions only useful to those who do not keep themselves strictly to their duty by simple reason:

*"Utatur motu animi, qui uti ratione non potest."*⁴

³Between the King of Navarre, afterwards Henry IV., and the Duc de Guise. See De Thou, *De Vita Sua*, iii. 9.

⁴"He may employ his passion, who can make no use of his reason." —Cicero, *Tusc.*

All legitimate intentions are temperate and equable of themselves; if otherwise, they degenerate into seditious and unlawful. This is it which makes me walk everywhere with my head erect, my face and my heart open. In truth, and I am not afraid to confess it, I should easily, in case of need, hold up one candle to St. Michael and another to his dragon, like the old woman; I will follow the right side even to the fire, but exclusively, if I can. Let Montaigne be overwhelmed in the public ruin if need be; but if there be no need, I should think myself obliged to fortune to save me, and I will make use of all the length of line my duty allows for his preservation. Was it not Atticus who, being of the just but losing side, preserved himself by his moderation in that universal shipwreck of the world, amongst so many mutations and diversities? For private man, as he was, it is more easy; and in such kind of work, I think a man may justly not be ambitious to offer and insinuate himself. For a man, indeed, to be wavering and irresolute, to keep his affection unmoved and without inclination in the troubles of his country and public divisions, I neither think it handsome nor honest:

“Ea non media, sed nulla via est, velut eventum expectantium, quo fortunae consilia sua applicent.”⁵

This may be allowed in our neighbours' affairs; and thus Gelo, the tyrant of Syracuse, suspended his inclination in the war betwixt the Greeks and barbarians, keeping a resident ambassador with presents at Delphos, to watch and see which way fortune would incline, and then take fit occasion to fall in with the victors. It would be a kind of treason to proceed after this manner in our own domestic affairs, wherein a man must of necessity be of the one side or the other; though for a man who has no office or express command to call him out, to sit still I hold it more excusable (and yet I do not excuse myself upon these terms) than in foreign expeditions, to which, however, according to our laws, no man is pressed against his will. And yet even those who wholly engage themselves in such a war may behave themselves with such temper and moderation, that the storm may fly over their heads without doing them any harm. Had we not reason to hope such an issue in

Quaes., iv. 25.

⁵“That is not a middle way, but no way, to await events, by which they refer their resolutions to fortune.” –Liv., xxxii. 21.

the person of the late Bishop of Orleans, the *Sieur de Morvilliers*?⁶

And I know, amongst those who behave themselves most bravely in the present war, some whose manners are so gentle, obliging, and just, that they will certainly stand firm, whatever event Heaven is preparing for us. I am of opinion that it properly belongs to kings only to quarrel with kings; and I laugh at those spirits who, out of lightness of heart, lend themselves to so disproportioned disputes; for a man has never the more particular quarrel with a prince, by marching openly and boldly against him for his own honour and according to his duty; if he does not love such a person, he does better, he esteems him. And notably the cause of the laws and of the ancient government of a kingdom, has this always annexed to it, that even those who, for their own private interest, invade them, excuse, if they do not honour, the defenders.

But we are not, as we nowadays do, to call peevishness and inward discontent, that spring from private interest and passion, duty, nor a treacherous and malicious conduct, courage; they call their proneness to mischief and violence zeal; 'tis not the cause, but their interest, that inflames them; they kindle and begin a war, not because it is just, but because it is war.

A man may very well behave himself commodiously and loyally too amongst those of the adverse party; carry yourself, if not with the same equal affection (for that is capable of different measure), at least with an affection moderate, well tempered, and such as shall not so engage you to one party, that it may demand all you are able to do for that side, content yourself with a moderate proportion of their, favour and goodwill; and to swim in troubled waters without fishing in them.

The other way, of offering a man's self and the utmost service he is able to do, both to one party and the other, has still less of prudence in it than conscience. Does not he to whom you betray another, to whom you were as welcome as to himself, know that you will at another time do as much for him? He holds you for a villain; and in the meantime hears what you will say, gathers intelligence from you, and works his own ends out of your disloyalty; double-dealing men are useful for bringing in, but we must have a care they carry out as little as is possible.

⁶An able negotiator, who, though protected by the Guises, and strongly supporting them, was yet very far from persecuting the Reformists. He died 1577.

I say nothing to one party that I may not, upon occasion, say to the other, with a little alteration of accent; and report nothing but things either indifferent or known, or what is of common consequence. I cannot permit myself, for any consideration, to tell them a lie. What is intrusted to my secrecy, I religiously conceal; but I take as few trusts of that nature upon me as I can. The secrets of princes are a troublesome burthen to such as are not interested in them. I very willingly bargain that they trust me with little, but confidently rely upon what I tell them. I have ever known more than I desired. One open way of speaking introduces another open way of speaking, and draws out discoveries, like wine and love. Philippides, in my opinion, answered King Lysimachus very discreetly, who, asking him what of his estate he should bestow upon him? "What you will," said he, "provided it be none of your secrets." I see every one is displeas'd if the bottom of the affair be conceal'd from him wherein he is employ'd, or that there be any reservation in the thing; for my part, I am content to know no more of the business than what they would have me employ myself in, nor desire that my knowledge should exceed or restrict what I have to say. If I must serve for an instrument of deceit, let it be at least with a safe conscience: I will not be reputed a servant either so affectionate or so loyal as to be fit to betray any one: he who is unfaithful to himself, is excusably so to his master. But they are princes who do not accept men by halves, and despise limited and conditional services: I cannot help it: I frankly tell them how far I can go; for a slave I should not be, but to reason, and I can hardly submit even to that. And they also are to blame to exact from a freeman the same subjection and obligation to their service that they do from him they have made and bought, or whose fortune particularly and expressly depends upon theirs. The laws have deliver'd me from a great anxiety; they have chosen a side for me, and given me a master; all other superiority and obligation ought to be relative to that, and cut, off from all other. Yet this is not to say, that if my affection should otherwise incline me, my hand should presently obey it; the will and desire are a law to themselves; but actions must receive commission from the public appointment.

All this proceeding of mine is a little dissonant from the ordinary forms; it would produce no great effects, nor be of any long duration; innocence itself could not, in this age of ours, either negotiate without dissimulation, or traffic without lying; and, indeed, public employments are by no means for my palate: what my profession requires, I perform after the most private manner that I can. Being young, I was

engaged up to the ears in business, and it succeeded well; but I disengaged myself in good time. I have often since avoided meddling in it, rarely accepted, and never asked it; keeping my back still turned to ambition; but if not like rowers who so advance backward, yet so, at the same time, that I am less obliged to my resolution than to my good fortune, that I was not wholly embarked in it. For there are ways less displeasing to my taste, and more suitable to my ability, by which, if she had formerly called me to the public service, and my own advancement towards the world's opinion, I know I should, in spite of all my own arguments to the contrary, have pursued them. Such as commonly say, in opposition to what I profess, that what I call freedom, simplicity, and plainness in my manners, is art and subtlety, and rather prudence than goodness, industry than nature, good sense than good luck, do me more honour than disgrace: but, certainly, they make my subtlety too subtle; and whoever has followed me close, and pryed narrowly into me, I will give him the victory, if he does not confess that there is no rule in their school that could match this natural motion, and maintain an appearance of liberty and licence, so equal and inflexible, through so many various and crooked paths, and that all their wit and endeavour could never have led them through. The way of truth is one and simple; that of particular profit, and the commodity of affairs a man is entrusted with, is double, unequal, and casual. I have often seen these counterfeit and artificial liberties practised, but, for the most part, without success; they relish of AEsop's ass who, in emulation of the dog, obligingly clapped his two fore-feet upon his master's shoulders; but as many caresses as the dog had for such an expression of kindness, twice so many blows with a cudgel had the poor ass for his compliment:

*"Id maxime quemque decet, quod est cujusque suum maxime."*⁷

I will not deprive deceit of its due; that were but ill to understand the world: I know it has often been of great use, and that it maintains and supplies most men's employment. There are vices that are lawful, as there are many actions, either good or excusable, that are not lawful in themselves.

The justice which in itself is natural and universal is otherwise and

⁷"That best becomes every man which belongs most to him;" —Cicero, De Offic., i. 31.

more nobly ordered than that other justice which is special, national, and constrained to the ends of government,

*“Veri juris germanaeque justitiae solidam et expressam effigiem nullam tenemus; umbra et imaginibus utimur;”*⁸

insomuch that the sage Dandamis, hearing the lives of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Diogenes read, judged them to be great men every way, excepting that they were too much subjected to the reverence of the laws, which, to second and authorise, true virtue must abate very much of its original vigour; many vicious actions are introduced, not only by their permission, but by their advice:

*“Ex senatus consultis plebisquescitis scelera exercentur.”*⁹

I follow the common phrase that distinguishes betwixt profitable and honest things, so as to call some natural actions, that are not only profitable but necessary, dishonest and foul.

But let us proceed in our examples of treachery two pretenders to the kingdom of Thrace¹⁰ were fallen into dispute about their title; the emperor hindered them from proceeding to blows: but one of them, under colour of bringing things to a friendly issue by an interview, having invited his competitor to an entertainment in his own house, imprisoned and killed him. Justice required that the Romans should have satisfaction for this offence; but there was a difficulty in obtaining it by ordinary ways; what, therefore, they could not do legitimately, without war and without danger, they resolved to do by treachery; and what they could not honestly do, they did profitably. For which end, one Pomponius Flaccus was found to be a fit instrument. This man, by dissembled words and assurances, having drawn the other into his toils, instead of the honour and favour he had promised him, sent him bound hand and foot to Rome. Here one traitor betrayed another, contrary to common custom: for they are full of mistrust, and ‘tis hard to

⁸“We retain no solid and express portraiture of true right and germane justice; we have only the shadow and image of it.” —Cicero, *De Offic.*, iii. 17.

⁹“Crimes are committed by the decrees of the Senate and the popular assembly.” — Seneca, *Ep.*, 95.

¹⁰Rhescuporis and Cotys. Tacitus, *Annal.*, ii. 65

overreach them in their own art: witness the sad experience we have lately had.¹¹

Let who will be Pomponius Flaccus, and there are enough who would: for my part, both my word and my faith are, like all the rest, parts of this common body: their best effect is the public service; this I take for presupposed. But should one command me to take charge of the courts of law and lawsuits, I should make answer, that I understood it not; or the place of a leader of pioneers, I would say, that I was called to a more honourable employment; so likewise, he that would employ me to lie, betray, and forswear myself, though not to assassinate or to poison, for some notable service, I should say, "If I have robbed or stolen anything from any man, send me rather to the galleys." For it is permissible in a man of honour to say, as the Lacedaemonians did,¹² having been defeated by Antipater, when just upon concluding an agreement: "You may impose as heavy and ruinous taxes upon us as you please, but to command us to do shameful and dishonest things, you will lose your time, for it is to no purpose." Every one ought to make the same vow to himself that the kings of Egypt made their judges solemnly swear, that they would not do anything contrary to their consciences, though never so much commanded to it by themselves. In such commissions there is evident mark of ignominy and condemnation; and he who gives it at the same time accuses you, and gives it, if you understand it right, for a burden and a punishment. As much as the public affairs are bettered by your exploit, so much are your own the worse, and the better you behave yourself in it, 'tis so much the worse for yourself; and it will be no new thing, nor, peradventure, without some colour of justice, if the same person ruin you who set you on work.

If treachery can be in any case excusable, it must be only so when it is practised to chastise and betray treachery. There are examples enough of treacheries, not only rejected, but chastised and punished by those in favour of whom they were undertaken. Who is ignorant of Fabricius sentence against the physician of Pyrrhus?

But this we also find recorded, that some persons have commanded a thing, who afterward have severely avenged the execution of it upon him they had employed, rejecting the reputation of so unbridled an

¹¹Montaigne here probably refers to the feigned reconciliation between Catherine de Medici and Henri, Duc de Guise, in 1588.

¹²Plutarch, Difference between a Flatterer and a Friend, c. 21.

authority, and disowning so abandoned and base a servitude and obedience. Jaropelk, Duke of Russia, tampered with a gentleman of Hungary to betray Boleslaus, king of Poland, either by killing him, or by giving the Russians opportunity to do him some notable mischief. This worthy went ably to work: he was more assiduous than before in the service of that king, so that he obtained the honour to be of his council, and one of the chiefest in his trust. With these advantages, and taking an opportune occasion of his master's absence, he betrayed Vislicza, a great and rich city, to the Russians, which was entirely sacked and burned, and not only all the inhabitants of both sexes, young and old, put to the sword, but moreover a great number of neighbouring gentry, whom he had drawn thither to that end. Jaropelk, his revenge being thus satisfied and his anger appeased, which was not, indeed, without pretence (for Boleslaus had highly offended him, and after the same manner), and sated with the fruit of this treachery, coming to consider the fulness of it, with a sound judgment and clear from passion, looked upon what had been done with so much horror and remorse that he caused the eyes to be bored out and the tongue and shameful parts to be cut off of him who had performed it.

Antigonus persuaded the Argyraspides to betray Eumenes, their general, his adversary, into his hands; but after he had caused him, so delivered, to be slain, he would himself be the commissioner of the divine justice for the punishment of so detestable a crime, and committed them into the hands of the governor of the province, with express command, by whatever means, to destroy and bring them all to an evil end, so that of that great number of men, not so much as one ever returned again into Macedonia: the better he had been served, the more wickedly he judged it to be, and meriting greater punishment.

The slave who betrayed the place where his master, P. Sulpicius, lay concealed, was, according to the promise of Sylla's proscription, unmitted for his pains; but according to the promise of the public justice, which was free from any such engagement, he was thrown headlong from the Tarpeian rock.

Our King Clovis, instead of the arms of gold he had promised them, caused three of Cararie's servants to be hanged after they had betrayed their master to him, though he had debauched them to it: he hanged them with the purse of their reward about their necks; after having satisfied his second and special faith, he satisfied the general and first.

Mohammed II. having resolved to rid himself of his brother, out of jealousy of state, according to the practice of the Ottoman family, he

employed one of his officers in the execution, who, pouring a quantity of water too fast into him, choked him. This being done, to expiate the murder, he delivered the murderer into the hands of the mother of him he had so caused to be put to death, for they were only brothers by the father's side; she, in his presence, ripped up the murderer's bosom, and with her own hands rifled his breast for his heart, tore it out, and threw it to the dogs. And even to the worst people it is the sweetest thing imaginable, having once gained their end by a vicious action, to foist, in all security, into it some show of virtue and justice, as by way of compensation and conscientious correction; to which may be added, that they look upon the ministers of such horrid crimes as upon men who reproach them with them, and think by their deaths to erase the memory and testimony of such proceedings.

Or if, perhaps, you are rewarded, not to frustrate the public necessity for that extreme and desperate remedy, he who does it cannot for all that, if he be not such himself, but look upon you as an accursed and execrable fellow, and conclude you a greater traitor than he does, against whom you are so: for he tries the malignity of your disposition by your own hands, where he cannot possibly be deceived, you having no object of preceding hatred to move you to such an act; but he employs you as they do condemned malefactors in executions of justice, an office as necessary as dishonourable. Besides the baseness of such commissions, there is, moreover, a prostitution of conscience. Seeing that the daughter of Sejanus could not be put to death by the law of Rome, because she was a virgin, she was, to make it lawful, first ravished by the hangman and then strangled: not only his hand but his soul is slave to the public convenience.

When Amurath I., more grievously to punish his subjects who had taken part in the parricide rebellion of his son, ordained that their nearest kindred should assist in the execution, I find it very handsome in some of them to have rather chosen to be unjustly thought guilty of the parricide of another than to serve justice by a parricide of their own. And where I have seen, at the taking of some little fort by assault in my time, some rascals who, to save their own lives, would consent to hang their friends and companions, I have looked upon them to be of worse condition than those who were hanged. 'Tis said, that Witold, Prince of Lithuania, introduced into the nation the practice that the criminal condemned to death should with his own hand execute the sentence, thinking it strange that a third person, innocent of the fault, should be made guilty of homicide.

A prince, when by some urgent circumstance or some impetuous and unforeseen accident that very much concerns his state, compelled to forfeit his word and break his faith, or otherwise forced from his ordinary duty, ought to attribute this necessity to a lash of the divine rod: vice it is not, for he has given up his own reason to a more universal and more powerful reason; but certainly 'tis a misfortune: so that if any one should ask me what remedy? "None," say I, "if he were really racked between these two extremes: 'sed videat, ne quoeratur latebya perjurio', he must do it: but if he did it without regret, if it did not weigh on him to do it, 'tis a sign his conscience is in a sorry condition." If there be a person to be found of so tender a conscience as to think no cure whatever worth so important a remedy, I shall like him never the worse; he could not more excusably or more decently perish. We cannot do all we would, so that we must often, as the last anchorage, commit the protection of our vessels to the simple conduct of heaven. To what more just necessity does he reserve himself? What is less possible for him to do than what he cannot do but at the expense of his faith and honour, things that, perhaps, ought to be dearer to him than his own safety, or even the safety of his people. Though he should, with folded arms, only call God to his assistance, has he not reason to hope that the divine goodness will not refuse the favour of an extraordinary arm to just and pure hands? These are dangerous examples, rare and sickly exceptions to our natural rules: we must yield to them, but with great moderation and circumspection: no private utility is of such importance that we should upon that account strain our consciences to such a degree: the public may be, when very manifest and of very great concern.

Timoleon made a timely expiation for his strange exploit by the tears he shed, calling to mind that it was with a fraternal hand that he had slain the tyrant; and it justly pricked his conscience that he had been necessitated to purchase the public utility at so great a price as the violation of his private morality. Even the Senate itself, by his means delivered from slavery, durst not positively determine of so high a fact, and divided into two so important and contrary aspects; but the Syracusans, sending at the same time to the Corinthians to solicit their protection, and to require of them a captain fit to re-establish their city in its former dignity and to clear Sicily of several little tyrants by whom it was oppressed, they deputed Timoleon for that service, with this cunning declaration; "that according as he should behave himself well or ill in his employment, their sentence should incline either to favour the

deliverer of his country, or to disfavour the murderer of his brother." This fantastic conclusion carries along with it some excuse, by reason of the danger of the example, and the importance of so strange an action: and they did well to discharge their own judgment of it, and to refer it to others who were not so much concerned. But Timoleon's comportment in this expedition soon made his cause more clear, so worthily and virtuously he demeaned himself upon all occasions; and the good fortune that accompanied him in the difficulties he had to overcome in this noble employment, seemed to be strewed in his way by the gods, favourably conspiring for his justification.

The end of this matter is excusable, if any can be so; but the profit of the augmentation of the public revenue, that served the Roman Senate for a pretence to the foul conclusion I am going to relate, is not sufficient to warrant any such injustice.

Certain cities had redeemed themselves and their liberty by money, by the order and consent of the Senate, out of the hands of L. Sylla: the business coming again in question, the Senate condemned them to be taxable as they were before, and that the money they had disbursed for their redemption should be lost to them. Civil war often produces such villainous examples; that we punish private men for confiding in us when we were public ministers: and the self-same magistrate makes another man pay the penalty of his change that has nothing to do with it; the pedagogue whips his scholar for his docility; and the guide beats the blind man whom he leads by the hand; a horrid image of justice.

There are rules in philosophy that are both false and weak. The example that is proposed to us for preferring private utility before faith given, has not weight enough by the circumstances they put to it; robbers have seized you, and after having made you swear to pay them a certain sum of money, dismiss you. 'Tis not well done to say, that an honest man can be quit of his oath without payment, being out of their hands. 'Tis no such thing: what fear has once made me willing to do, I am obliged to do it when I am no longer in fear; and though that fear only prevailed with my tongue without forcing my will, yet am I bound to keep my word. For my part, when my tongue has sometimes inconsiderately said something that I did not think, I have made a conscience of disowning it: otherwise, by degrees, we shall abolish all the right another derives from our promises and oaths:

*"Quasi vero forti viro vis possit adhiberi."*¹³

¹³"As though a man of true courage could be compelled." —Cicero, *De Offic.*, iii. 30.

And 'tis only lawful, upon the account of private interest, to excuse breach of promise, when we have promised something that is unlawful and wicked in itself; for the right of virtue ought to take place of the right of any obligation of ours.

I have formerly placed Epaminondas in the first rank of excellent men, and do not repent it. How high did he stretch the consideration of his own particular duty? he who never killed a man whom he had overcome; who, for the inestimable benefit of restoring the liberty of his country, made conscience of killing a tyrant or his accomplices without due form of justice: and who concluded him to be a wicked man, how good a citizen soever otherwise, who amongst his enemies in battle spared not his friend and his guest. This was a soul of a rich composition: he married goodness and humanity, nay, even the tenderest and most delicate in the whole school of philosophy, to the roughest and most violent human actions. Was it nature or art that had intenerated that great courage of his, so full, so obstinate against pain and death and poverty, to such an extreme degree of sweetness and compassion? Dreadful in arms and blood, he overran and subdued a nation invincible by all others but by him alone; and yet in the heat of an encounter, could turn aside from his friend and guest. Certainly he was fit to command in war who could so rein himself with the curb of good nature, in the height and heat of his fury, a fury inflamed and foaming with blood and slaughter. 'Tis a miracle to be able to mix any image of justice with such violent actions: and it was only possible for such a steadfastness of mind as that of Epaminondas therein to mix sweetness and the facility of the gentlest manners and purest innocence. And whereas one told the Mamertini that statutes were of no efficacy against armed men; and another told the tribune of the people that the time of justice and of war were distinct things; and a third said that the noise of arms deafened the voice of laws, this man was not precluded from listening to the laws of civility and pure courtesy. Had he not borrowed from his enemies the custom of sacrificing to the Muses when he went to war, that they might by their sweetness and gaiety soften his martial and rigorous fury? Let us not fear, by the example of so great a master, to believe that there is something unlawful, even against an enemy, and that the common concern ought not to require all things of all men, against private interest:

“Manente memoria, etiam in dissidio publicorum foederum,

*privati juris:*¹⁴

“Et nulla potentia vires

*Praestandi, ne quid peccet amicus, habet;*¹⁵

and that all things are not lawful to an honest man for the service of his prince, the laws, or the general quarrel:

*“Non enim patria praestat omnibus officiis... et ipsi conducit
pios habere cives in parentes.”*¹⁶

Tis an instruction proper for the time wherein we live: we need not harden our courage with these arms of steel; 'tis enough that our shoulders are inured to them: 'tis enough to dip our pens in ink without dipping them in blood. If it be grandeur of courage, and the effect of a rare and singular virtue, to contemn friendship, private obligations, a man's word and relationship, for the common good and obedience to the magistrate, 'tis certainly sufficient to excuse us, that 'tis a grandeur that can have no place in the grandeur of Epaminondas' courage.

I abominate those mad exhortations of this other discomposed soul,

“Dum tela micant, non vos pietatis imago

Ulla, nec adversa conspecti fronte parentes

*Commoveant; vultus gladio turbate verendos.”*¹⁷

Let us deprive wicked, bloody, and treacherous natures of such a pretence of reason: let us set aside this guilty and extravagant justice, and stick to more human imitations. How great things can time and example do! In an encounter of the civil war against Cinna, one of Pompey's soldiers having unawares killed his brother, who was of the contrary party, he immediately for shame and sorrow killed himself: and some

¹⁴“The memory of private right remaining even amid public dissensions.” –Livy, xxv. 18.

¹⁵“No power on earth can sanction treachery against a friend.” –Ovid, De Ponto, i. 7, 37.

¹⁶“The duty to one's country does not supersede all other duties. The country itself requires that its citizens should act piously toward their parents.” –Cicero, De Offic., iii. 23.

¹⁷“While swords glitter, let no idea of piety, nor the face even of a father presented to you, move you: mutilate with your sword those venerable features” –Lucan, vii. 320.

years after, in another civil war of the same people, a soldier demanded a reward of his officer for having killed his brother.

A man but ill proves the honour and beauty of an action by its utility: and very erroneously concludes that every one is obliged to it, and that it becomes every one to do it, if it be of utility:

*“Omnia non pariter rerum sunt omnibus apta.”*¹⁸

Let us take that which is most necessary and profitable for human society; it will be marriage; and yet the council of the saints find the contrary much better, excluding from it the most venerable vocation of man: as we design those horses for stallions of which we have the least esteem.

¹⁸“All things are not equally fit for all men.” –Propertius, iii. 9, 7.

CHAPTER II

OF REPENTANCE

OTHERS form man; I only report him: and represent a particular one, ill fashioned enough, and whom, if I had to model him anew, I should certainly make something else than what he is but that's past recalling. Now, though the features of my picture alter and change, 'tis not, however, unlike: the world eternally turns round; all things therein are incessantly moving, the earth, the rocks of Caucasus, and the pyramids of Egypt, both by the public motion and their own. Even constancy itself is no other but a slower and more languishing motion. I cannot fix my object; 'tis always tottering and reeling by a natural giddiness; I take it as it is at the instant I consider it; I do not paint its being, I paint its passage; not a passing from one age to another, or, as the people say, from seven to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute, I must accommodate my history to the hour: I may presently change, not only by fortune, but also by intention. 'Tis a counterpart of various and changeable accidents, and of irresolute imaginations, and, as it falls out, sometimes contrary: whether it be that I am then another self, or that I take subjects by other circumstances and considerations: so it is that I may peradventure contradict myself, but, as Demades said, I never contradict the truth. Could my soul once take footing, I would not essay but resolve: but it is always learning and making trial.

I propose a life ordinary and without lustre: 'tis all one; all moral philosophy may as well be applied to a common and private life, as to one of richer composition: every man carries the entire form of human condition. Authors communicate themselves to the people by some especial and extrinsic mark; I, the first of any, by my universal being; as Michel de Montaigne, not as a grammarian, a poet, or a lawyer. If the world find fault that I speak too much of myself, I find fault that they

do not so much as think of themselves. But is it reason that, being so particular in my way of living, I should pretend to recommend myself to the public knowledge? And is it also reason that I should produce to the world, where art and handling have so much credit and authority, crude and simple effects of nature, and of a weak nature to boot? Is it not to build a wall without stone or brick, or some such thing, to write books without learning and without art? The fancies of music are carried on by art; mine by chance. I have this, at least, according to discipline, that never any man treated of a subject he better understood and knew than I what I have undertaken, and that in this I am the most understanding man alive: secondly, that never any man penetrated farther into his matter, nor better and more distinctly sifted the parts and sequences of it, nor ever more exactly and fully arrived at the end he proposed to himself. To perfect it, I need bring nothing but fidelity to the work; and that is there, and the most pure and sincere that is anywhere to be found. I speak truth, not so much as I would, but as much as I dare; and I dare a little the more, as I grow older; for, methinks, custom allows to age more liberty of prating, and more indiscretion of talking of a man's self. That cannot fall out here, which I often see elsewhere, that the work and the artificer contradict one another: "Can a man of such sober conversation have written so foolish a book?" Or "Do so learned writings proceed from a man of so weak conversation?" He who talks at a very ordinary rate, and writes rare matter, 'tis to say that his capacity is borrowed and not his own. A learned man is not learned in all things: but a sufficient man is sufficient throughout, even to ignorance itself; here my book and I go hand in hand together. Elsewhere men may commend or censure the work, without reference to the workman; here they cannot: who touches the one, touches the other. He who shall judge of it without knowing him, will more wrong himself than me; he who does know him, gives me all the satisfaction I desire. I shall be happy beyond my desert, if I can obtain only thus much from the public approbation, as to make men of understanding perceive that I was capable of profiting by knowledge, had I had it; and that I deserved to have been assisted by a better memory.

Be pleased here to excuse what I often repeat, that I very rarely repent, and that my conscience is satisfied with itself, not as the conscience of an angel, or that of a horse, but as the conscience of a man; always adding this clause, not one of ceremony, but a true and real submission, that I speak inquiring and doubting, purely and simply

referring myself to the common and accepted beliefs for the resolution. I do not teach; I only relate.

There is no vice that is absolutely a vice which does not offend, and that a sound judgment does not accuse; for there is in it so manifest a deformity and inconvenience, that peradventure they are in the right who say that it is chiefly begotten by stupidity and ignorance: so hard is it to imagine that a man can know without abhorring it. Malice sucks up the greatest part of its own venom, and poisons itself. Vice leaves repentance in the soul, like an ulcer in the flesh, which is always scratching and lacerating itself: for reason effaces all other grief and sorrows, but it begets that of repentance, which is so much the more grievous, by reason it springs within, as the cold and heat of fevers are more sharp than those that only strike upon the outward skin. I hold for vices (but every one according to its proportion), not only those which reason and nature condemn, but those also which the opinion of men, though false and erroneous, have made such, if authorised by law and custom.

There is likewise no virtue which does not rejoice a well-descended nature: there is a kind of, I know not what, congratulation in well-doing that gives us an inward satisfaction, and a generous boldness that accompanies a good conscience: a soul daringly vicious may, peradventure, arm itself with security, but it cannot supply itself with this complacency and satisfaction. 'Tis no little satisfaction to feel a man's self preserved from the contagion of so depraved an age, and to say to himself: "Whoever could penetrate into my soul would not there find me guilty either of the affliction or ruin of any one, or of revenge or envy, or any offence against the public laws, or of innovation or disturbance, or failure of my word; and though the licence of the time permits and teaches every one so to do, yet have I not plundered any Frenchman's goods, or taken his money, and have lived upon what is my own, in war as well as in peace; neither have I set any man to work without paying him his hire." These testimonies of a good conscience please, and this natural rejoicing is very beneficial to us, and the only reward that we can never fail of.

To ground the recompense of virtuous actions upon the approbation of others is too uncertain and unsafe a foundation, especially in so corrupt

and ignorant an age as this, wherein the good opinion of the vulgar is injurious: upon whom do you rely to show you what is recommend-

able? God defend me from being an honest man, according to the descriptions of honour I daily see every one make of himself:

*“Quae fuerant vitia, mores sunt.”*¹⁹

Some of my friends have at times schooled and scolded me with great sincerity and plainness, either of their own voluntary motion, or by me entreated to it as to an office, which to a well-composed soul surpasses not only in utility, but in kindness, all other offices of friendship: I have always received them with the most open arms, both of courtesy and acknowledgment; but to say the truth, I have often found so much false measure, both in their reproaches and praises, that I had not done much amiss, rather to have done ill, than to have done well according to their notions. We, who live private lives, not exposed to any other view than our own, ought chiefly to have settled a pattern within ourselves by which to try our actions: and according to that, sometimes to encourage and sometimes to correct ourselves. I have my laws and my judicature to judge of myself, and apply myself more to these than to any other rules: I do, indeed, restrain my actions according to others; but extend them not by any other rule than my own. You yourself only know if you are cowardly and cruel, loyal and devout: others see you not, and only guess at you by uncertain conjectures, and do not so much see your nature as your art; rely not therefore upon their opinions, but stick to your own:

“Tuo tibi iudicio est utendum...”

*Virtutis et vitiorum grave ipsius conscientiae pondus est:
qua sublata, jacent omnia.”*²⁰

But the saying that repentance immediately follows the sin seems not to have respect to sin in its high estate, which is lodged in us as in its own proper habitation. One may disown and retract the vices that surprise us, and to which we are hurried by passions; but those which by a long habit are rooted in a strong and vigorous will are not subject to contradiction. Repentance is no other but a recanting of the will and an opposition to our fancies, which lead us which way they please. It makes this person disown his former virtue and continency:

¹⁹“What before had been vices are now manners.” –Seneca, Ep., 39.

²⁰“Thou must employ thy own judgment upon thyself; great is the weight of thy own conscience in the discovery of virtues and vices: which taken away, all things are lost.” – Cicero, De Nat. Dei, iii. 35; Tusc. Quaes., i. 25.

*“Quae mens est hodie, cur eadem non puero fait?
Vel cur his animis incolumes non redeunt genae?”²¹*

’Tis an exact life that maintains itself in due order in private. Every one may juggle his part, and represent an honest man upon the stage: but within, and in his own bosom, where all may do as they list, where all is concealed, to be regular, there’s the point. The next degree is to be so in his house, and in his ordinary actions, for which we are accountable to none, and where there is no study nor artifice. And therefore Bias, setting forth the excellent state of a private family, says: “of which a the master is the same within, by his own virtue and temper, that he is abroad, for fear of the laws and report of men.” And it was a worthy saying of Julius Drusus, to the masons who offered him, for three thousand crowns, to put his house in such a posture that his neighbours should no longer have the same inspection into it as before; “I will give you,” said he, “six thousand to make it so that everybody may see into every room.” ’Tis honourably recorded of Agesilaus, that he used in his journeys always to take up his lodgings in temples, to the end that the people and the gods themselves might pry into his most private actions. Such a one has been a miracle to the world, in whom neither his wife nor servant has ever seen anything so much as remarkable; few men have been admired by their own domestics; no one was ever a prophet, not merely in his own house, but in his own country, says the experience of histories:²²’tis the same in things of nought, and in this low example the image of a greater is to be seen. In my country of Gascony, they look upon it as a drollery to see me in print; the further off I am read from my own home, the better I am esteemed. I purchase printers in Guienne; elsewhere they purchase me. Upon this it is that they lay their foundation who conceal themselves present and living, to obtain a name when they are dead and absent. I had rather have a great deal less in hand, and do not expose myself to the world upon any other account than my present share; when I leave it I quit the rest. See this functionary whom the people escort in state, with wonder and applause, to his very door; he puts off the pageant with his robe, and falls so much the lower by how much he was higher exalted: in himself within, all is tumult and degraded. And though all should be regular there, it will require a vivid and well-chosen judgment to perceive it in

²¹“What my mind is, why was it not the same, when I was a boy? or why do not the cheeks return to these feelings?” –Horace, *Od.*, v. 10, 7.

²²No man is a hero to his valet-de-chambre, said Marshal Catinat

these low and private actions; to which may be added, that order is a dull, sombre virtue. To enter a breach, conduct an embassy, govern a people, are actions of renown; to reprehend, laugh, sell, pay, love, hate, and gently and justly converse with a man's own family and with himself; not to relax, not to give a man's self the lie, is more rare and hard, and less remarkable. By which means, retired lives, whatever is said to the contrary, undergo duties of as great or greater difficulty than the others do; and private men, says Aristotle, 'serve virtue more painfully and highly than those in authority do: we prepare ourselves for eminent occasions, more out of glory than conscience. The shortest way to arrive at glory, would be to do that for conscience which we do for glory: and the virtue of Alexander appears to me of much less vigour in his great theatre, than that of Socrates in his mean and obscure employment. I can easily conceive Socrates in the place of Alexander, but Alexander in that of Socrates, I cannot. Who shall ask the one what he can do, he will answer, "Subdue the world": and who shall put the same question to the other, he will say, "Carry on human life conformably with its natural condition"; a much more general, weighty, and legitimate science than the other.²³

The virtue of the soul does not consist in flying high, but in walking orderly; its grandeur does not exercise itself in grandeur, but in mediocrity. As they who judge and try us within, make no great account of the lustre of our public actions, and see they are only streaks and rays of clear water springing from a slimy and muddy bottom so, likewise, they who judge of us by this gallant outward appearance, in like manner conclude of our internal constitution; and cannot couple common faculties, and like their own, with the other faculties that astonish them, and are so far out of their sight. Therefore it is that we give such savage forms to demons: and who does not give Tamerlane great eyebrows, wide nostrils, a dreadful visage, and a prodigious stature, according to the imagination he has conceived by the report of his name? Had any one formerly brought me to Erasmus, I should hardly have believed but that all was adage and apothegm he spoke to his man or his hostess. We much more aptly imagine an artisan upon his close-stool, or upon his wife, than a great president venerable by his port and sufficiency: we fancy that they, from their high tribunals, will not abase themselves so much as to live. As vicious souls are often incited by some foreign impulse to do well, so are virtuous souls to do ill; they

²³Montaigne added here, "To do for the world that for which he came into the world," but he afterwards erased these words from the manuscript.—Naiageon.

are therefore to be judged by their settled state, when they are at home, whenever that may be; and, at all events, when they are nearer repose, and in their native station.

Natural inclinations are much assisted and fortified by education; but they seldom alter and overcome their institution: a thousand natures of my time have escaped towards virtue or vice, through a quite contrary discipline:

*“Sic ubi, desuetae silvis, in carcere clausae
Mansuevere ferx, et vultus posuere minaces,
Atque hominem didicere pati, si torrida parvus
Venit in ora cruor, redeunt rabiesque fororque,
Admonitaeque tument gustato sanguine fauces
Fervet, et a trepido vix abstinet ira magistro;”²⁴*

these original qualities are not to be rooted out; they may be covered and concealed. The Latin tongue is as it were natural to me; I understand it better than French; but I have not been used to speak it, nor hardly to write it, these forty years. Unless upon extreme and sudden emotions which I have fallen into twice or thrice in my life, and once seeing my father in perfect health fall upon me in a swoon, I have always uttered from the bottom of my heart my first words in Latin; nature deafened, and forcibly expressing itself, in spite of so long a discontinuation; and this example is said of many others.

They who in my time have attempted to correct the manners of the world by new opinions, reform seeming vices; but the essential vices they leave as they were, if indeed they do not augment them, and augmentation is therein to be feared; we defer all other well doing upon the account of these external reformatations, of less cost and greater show, and thereby expiate good cheap, for the other natural, consubstantial, and intestine vices. Look a little into our experience: there is no man, if he listen to himself, who does not in himself discover a particular and governing form of his own, that jostles his education, and wrestles with the tempest of passions that are contrary to it. For my part, I seldom find myself agitated with surprises; I always find myself in my

²⁴“So savage beasts, when shut up in cages and grown unaccustomed to the woods, have become tame, and have laid aside their fierce looks, and submit to the rule of man; if again a slight taste of blood comes into their mouths, their rage and fury return, their jaws are erected by thirst of blood, and their anger scarcely abstains from their trembling masters.” —Lucan, iv. 237.

place, as heavy and unwieldy bodies do; if I am not at home, I am always near at hand; my dissipations do not transport me very far; there is nothing strange or extreme in the case; and yet I have sound and vigorous turns.

The true condemnation, and which touches the common practice of men, is that their very retirement itself is full of filth and corruption; the idea of their reformation composed, their repentance sick and faulty, very nearly as much as their sin. Some, either from having been linked to vice by a natural propension or long practice, cannot see its deformity. Others (of which constitution I am) do indeed feel the weight of vice, but they counterbalance it with pleasure, or some other occasion; and suffer and lend themselves to it for a certain price, but viciously and basely. Yet there might, haply, be imagined so vast a disproportion of measure, where with justice the pleasure might excuse the sin, as we say of utility; not only if accidental and out of sin, as in thefts, but in the very exercise of sin, or in the enjoyment of women, where the temptation is violent, and, 'tis said, sometimes not to be overcome.

Being the other day at Armagnac, on the estate of a kinsman of mine, I there saw a peasant who was by every one nicknamed the thief. He thus related the story of his life: that, being born a beggar, and finding that he should not be able, so as to be clear of indigence, to get his living by the sweat of his brow, he resolved to turn thief, and by means of his strength of body had exercised this trade all the time of his youth in great security; for he ever made his harvest and vintage in other men's grounds, but a great way off, and in so great quantities, that it was not to be imagined one man could have carried away so much in one night upon his shoulders; and, moreover, he was careful equally to divide and distribute the mischief he did, that the loss was of less importance to every particular man. He is now grown old, and rich for a man of his condition, thanks to his trade, which he openly confesses to every one. And to make his peace with God, he says, that he is daily ready by good offices to make satisfaction to the successors of those he has robbed, and if he do not finish (for to do it all at once he is not able), he will then leave it in charge to his heirs to perform the rest, proportionably to the wrong he himself only knows he has done to each. By this description, true or false, this man looks upon theft as a dishonest action, and hates it, but less than poverty, and simply repents; but to the extent he has thus recompensed he repents not. This is not that habit which incorporates us into vice, and conforms even our understanding itself to it; nor is it that impetuous whirlwind that

by gusts troubles and blinds our souls, and for the time precipitates us, judgment and all, into the power of vice.

I customarily do what I do thoroughly and make but one step on't; I have rarely any movement that hides itself and steals away from my reason, and that does not proceed in the matter by the consent of all my faculties, without division or intestine sedition; my judgment is to have all the blame or all the praise; and the blame it once has, it has always; for almost from my infancy it has ever been one: the same inclination, the same turn, the same force; and as to universal opinions, I fixed myself from my childhood in the place where I resolved to stick. There are some sins that are impetuous, prompt, and sudden; let us set them aside: but in these other sins so often repeated, deliberated, and contrived, whether sins of complexion or sins of profession and vocation, I cannot conceive that they should have so long been settled in the same resolution, unless the reason and conscience of him who has them, be constant to have them; and the repentance he boasts to be inspired with on a sudden, is very hard for me to imagine or form. I follow not the opinion of the Pythagorean sect, "that men take up a new soul when they repair to the images of the gods to receive their oracles," unless he mean that it must needs be extrinsic, new, and lent for the time; our own showing so little sign of purification and cleanness, fit for such an office.

They act quite contrary to the stoical precepts, who do indeed command us to correct the imperfections and vices we know ourselves guilty of, but forbid us therefore to disturb the repose of our souls: these make us believe that they have great grief and remorse within: but of amendment, correction, or interruption, they make nothing appear. It cannot be a cure if the malady be not wholly discharged; if repentance were laid upon the scale of the balance, it would weigh down sin. I find no quality so easy to counterfeit as devotion, if men do not conform their manners and life to the profession; its essence is abstruse and occult; the appearance easy and ostentatious.

For my own part, I may desire in general to be other than I am; I may condemn and dislike my whole form, and beg of Almighty God for an entire reformation, and that He will please to pardon my natural infirmity: but I ought not to call this repentance, methinks, no more than the being dissatisfied that I am not an angel or Cato. My actions are regular, and conformable to what I am and to my condition; I can do no better; and repentance does not properly touch things that are not in our power; sorrow does.. I imagine an infinite number of natures more

elevated and regular than mine; and yet I do not for all that improve my faculties, no more than my arm or will grow more strong and vigorous for conceiving those of another to be so. If to conceive and wish a nobler way of acting than that we have should produce a repentance of our own, we must then repent us of our most innocent actions, forasmuch as we may well suppose that in a more excellent nature they would have been carried on with greater dignity and perfection; and we would that ours were so. When I reflect upon the deportment of my youth, with that of my old age, I find that I have commonly behaved myself with equal order in both according to what I understand: this is all that my resistance can do. I do not flatter myself; in the same circumstances I should do the same things. It is not a patch, but rather an universal tincture, with which I am stained. I know no repentance, superficial, half-way, and ceremonious; it must sting me all over before I can call it so, and must prick my bowels as deeply and universally as God sees into me.

As to business, many excellent opportunities have escaped me for want of good management; and yet my deliberations were sound enough, according to the occurrences presented to me: 'tis their way to choose always the easiest and safest course. I find that, in my former resolves, I have proceeded with discretion, according to my own rule, and according to the state of the subject proposed, and should do the same a thousand years hence in like occasions; I do not consider what it is now, but what it was then, when I deliberated on it: the force of all counsel consists in the time; occasions and things eternally shift and change. I have in my life committed some important errors, not for want of good understanding, but for want of good luck. There are secret, and not to be foreseen, parts in matters we have in hand, especially in the nature of men; mute conditions, that make no show, unknown sometimes even to the possessors themselves, that spring and start up by incidental occasions; if my prudence could not penetrate into nor foresee them, I blame it not: 'tis commissioned no further than its own limits; if the event be too hard for me, and take the side I have refused, there is no remedy; I do not blame myself, I accuse my fortune, and not my work; this cannot be called repentance.

Phocion, having given the Athenians an advice that was not followed, and the affair nevertheless succeeding contrary to his opinion, some one said to him, "Well, Phocion, art thou content that matters go so well?"—"I am very well content," replied he, "that this has happened so well, but I do not repent that I counselled the other." When any of

my friends address themselves to me for advice, I give it candidly and clearly, without sticking, as almost all other men do, at the hazard of the thing's falling out contrary to my opinion, and that I may be reproached for my counsel; I am very indifferent as to that, for the fault will be theirs for having consulted me, and I could not refuse them that office.²⁵

I, for my own part, can rarely blame any one but myself for my oversights and misfortunes, for indeed I seldom solicit the advice of another, if not by honour of ceremony, or excepting where I stand in need of information, special science, or as to matter of fact. But in things wherein I stand in need of nothing but judgment, other men's reasons may serve to fortify my own, but have little power to dissuade me; I hear them all with civility and patience; but, to my recollection, I never made use of any but my own. With me, they are but flies and atoms, that confound and distract my will; I lay no great stress upon my opinions; but I lay as little upon those of others, and fortune rewards me accordingly: if I receive but little advice, I also give but little. I am seldom consulted, and still more seldom believed, and know no concern, either public or private, that has been mended or bettered by my advice. Even they whom fortune had in some sort tied to my direction, have more willingly suffered themselves to be governed by any other counsels than mine. And as a man who am as jealous of my repose as of my authority, I am better pleased that it should be so; in leaving me there, they humour what I profess, which is to settle and wholly contain myself within myself. I take a pleasure in being uninterested in other men's affairs, and disengaged from being their warranty, and responsible for what they do.

In all affairs that are past, be it how it will, I have very little regret; for this imagination puts me out of my pain, that they were so to fall out they are in the great revolution of the world, and in the chain of stoical 'causes: your fancy cannot, by wish and imagination, move one tittle, but that the great current of things will not reverse both the past and the future.

As to the rest, I abominate that incidental repentance which old age brings along with it. He, who said of old, that he was obliged to his age for having weaned him from pleasure, was of another opinion than I am; I can never think myself beholden to impotency for any good it can do to me:

²⁵We may give advice to others, says Rochefoucauld, but we cannot supply them with the wit to profit by it.

*“Nec tam aversa unquam videbitur ab opere suo providentia,
ut debilitas inter optima inventa sit.”²⁶*

Our appetites are rare in old age; a profound satiety seizes us after the act; in this I see nothing of conscience; chagrin and weakness imprint in us a drowsy and rheumatic virtue. We must not suffer ourselves to be so wholly carried away by natural alterations as to suffer our judgments to be imposed upon by them. Youth and pleasure have not formerly so far prevailed with me, that I did not well enough discern the face of vice in pleasure; neither does the distaste that years have brought me, so far prevail with me now, that I cannot discern pleasure in vice. Now that I am no more in my flourishing age, I judge as well of these things as if I were.²⁷

I, who narrowly and strictly examine it, find my reason the very same it was in my most licentious age, except, perhaps, that 'tis weaker and more decayed by being grown older; and I find that the pleasure it refuses me upon the account of my bodily health, it would no more refuse now, in consideration of the health of my soul, than at any time heretofore. I do not repute it the more valiant for not being able to combat; my temptations are so broken and mortified, that they are not worth its opposition; holding but out my hands, I repel them. Should one present the old concupiscence before it, I fear it would have less power to resist it than heretofore; I do not discern that in itself it judges anything otherwise now than it formerly did, nor that it has acquired any new light: wherefore, if there be convalescence, 'tis an enchanted one. Miserable kind of remedy, to owe one's health to one's disease! 'Tis not that our misfortune should perform this office, but the good fortune of our judgment. I am not to be made to do anything by persecutions and afflictions, but to curse them: that is, for people who cannot be roused but by a whip. My reason is much more free in prosperity, and much more distracted, and put to't to digest pains than pleasures: I see best in a clear sky; health admonishes me more cheerfully, and to better purpose, than sickness. I did all that in me lay to reform and regulate myself from pleasures, at a time when I had health and vigour to enjoy them; I should be ashamed and envious that the misery and

²⁶“Nor can Providence ever seem so aversa to her own work, that debility should be found to be amongst the best things.” —Quintilian, *Instit. Orat.*, v. 12.

²⁷“Old though I am, for ladies' love unfit, The power of beauty I remember yet.” —Chaucer.

misfortune of my old age should have credit over my good healthful, sprightly, and vigorous years, and that men should estimate me, not by what I have been, but by what I have ceased to be.

In my opinion, 'tis the happy living, and not (as Antisthenes' said) the happy dying, in which human felicity consists. I have not made it my business to make a monstrous addition of a philosopher's tail to the head and body of a libertine; nor would I have this wretched remainder give the lie to the pleasant, sound, and long part of my life: I would present myself uniformly throughout. Were I to live my life over again, I should live it just as I have lived it; I neither complain of the past, nor do I fear the future; and if I am not much deceived, I am the same within that I am without. 'Tis one main obligation I have to my fortune, that the succession of my bodily estate has been carried on according to the natural seasons; I have seen the grass, the blossom, and the fruit, and now see the withering; happily, however, because naturally. I bear the infirmities I have the better, because they came not till I had reason to expect them, and because also they make me with greater pleasure remember that long felicity of my past life. My wisdom may have been just the same in both ages, but it was more active, and of better grace whilst young and sprightly, than now it is when broken, peevish, and uneasy. I repudiate, then, these casual and painful reformations. God must touch our hearts; our consciences must amend of themselves, by the aid of our reason, and not by the decay of our appetites; pleasure is, in itself, neither pale nor discoloured, to be discerned by dim and decayed eyes.

We ought to love temperance for itself, and because God has commanded that and chastity; but that which we are reduced to by catarhs, and for which I am indebted to the stone, is neither chastity nor temperance; a man cannot boast that he despises and resists pleasure if he cannot see it, if he knows not what it is, and cannot discern its graces, its force, and most alluring beauties; I know both the one and the other, and may therefore the better say it. But; methinks, our souls in old age are subject to more troublesome maladies and imperfections than in youth; I said the same when young and when I was reproached with the want of a beard; and I say so now that my grey hairs give me some authority. We call the difficulty of our humours and the disrelish of present things wisdom; but, in truth, we do not so much forsake vices as we change them, and in my opinion, for worse. Besides a foolish and feeble pride, an impertinent prating, froward and insociable humours, superstition, and a ridiculous desire of riches when we have

lost the use of them, I find there more envy, injustice, and malice. Age imprints more wrinkles in the mind than it does on the face; and souls are never, or very rarely seen, that, in growing old, do not smell sour and musty. Man moves all together, both towards his perfection and decay. In observing the wisdom of Socrates, and many circumstances of his condemnation, I should dare to believe that he in some sort himself purposely, by collusion, contributed to it, seeing that, at the age of seventy years, he might fear to suffer the lofty motions of his mind to be cramped and his wonted lustre obscured. What strange metamorphoses do I see age every day make in many of my acquaintance! 'Tis a potent malady, and that naturally and imperceptibly steals into us; a vast provision of study and great precaution are required to evade the imperfections it loads us with, or at least to weaken their progress. I find that, notwithstanding all my entrenchments, it gets foot by foot upon me: I make the best resistance I can, but I do not know to what at last it will reduce me. But fall out what will, I am content the world may know, when I am fallen, from what I fell.

CHAPTER III

OF THREE COMMERCES

WE must not rivet ourselves so fast to our humours and complexions: our chiefest sufficiency is to know how to apply ourselves to divers employments. 'Tis to be, but not to live, to keep a man's self tied and bound by necessity to one only course; those are the bravest souls that have in them the most variety and pliancy. Of this here is an honourable testimony of the elder Cato:

*"Huic versatile ingenium sic pariter ad omnia fuit, ut natum ad id unum diceret, quodcumque ageret."*²⁸

Had I liberty to set myself forth after my own mode, there is no so graceful fashion to which I would be so fixed as not to be able to disengage myself from it; life is an unequal, irregular and multiform motion. 'Tis not to be a friend to one's self, much less a master 'tis to be a slave, incessantly to be led by the nose by one's self, and to be so fixed in one's previous inclinations, that one cannot turn aside nor writh the one's neck out of the collar. I say this now in this part of my life, wherein I find I cannot easily disengage myself from the importunity of my soul, which cannot ordinarily amuse itself but in things of limited range, nor employ itself otherwise than entirely and with all its force; upon the lightest subject offered it expands and stretches it to that degree as therein to employ its utmost power; wherefore it is that idleness is to me a very painful labour, and very prejudicial to my health. Most men's minds require foreign matter to exercise and enliven them; mine has rather need of it to sit still and repose itself,

²⁸"His parts were so pliable to all uses, that one would say he had been born only to that which he was doing." —Livy, xxxix. 49.

*“Vitia otii negotio discutienda sunt,”*²⁹

for its chiefest and hardest study is to study itself. Books are to it a sort of employment that debauch it from its study. Upon the first thoughts that possess it, it begins to bustle and make trial of its vigour in all directions, exercises its power of handling, now making trial of force, now fortifying, moderating, and ranging itself by the way of grace and order. It has of its own wherewith to rouse its faculties: nature has given to it, as to all others, matter enough of its own to make advantage of, and subjects proper enough where it may either invent or judge.

Meditation is a powerful and full study to such as can effectually taste and employ themselves; I had rather fashion my soul than furnish it. There is no employment, either more weak or more strong, than that of entertaining a man’s own thoughts, according as the soul is; the greatest men make it their whole business,

*“Quibus vivere est cogitare;”*³⁰

nature has therefore favoured it with this privilege, that there is nothing we can do so long, nor any action to which we more frequently and with greater facility addict ourselves. ‘Tis the business of the gods, says Aristotle,’ and from which both their beatitude and ours proceed.

The principal use of reading to me is, that by various objects it rouses my reason, and employs my judgment, not my memory. Few conversations detain me without force and effort; it is true that beauty and elegance of speech take as much or more with me than the weight and depth of the subject; and forasmuch as I am apt to be sleepy in all other communication, and give but the rind of my attention, it often falls out that in such poor and pitiful discourses, mere chatter, I either make drowsy, unmeaning answers, unbecoming a child, and ridiculous, or more foolishly and rudely still, maintain an obstinate silence. I have a pensive way that withdraws me into myself, and, with that, a heavy and childish ignorance of many very ordinary things, by which two qualities I have earned this, that men may truly relate five or six as ridiculous tales of me as of any other man whatever.

But, to proceed in my subject, this difficult complexion of mine renders me very nice in my conversation with men, whom I must cull and

²⁹“The vices of sloth are to be shaken off by business.” —Seneca, Ep. 56.

³⁰“To whom to live is to think.” —Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., v. 28.

pick out for my purpose; and unfits me for common society. We live and negotiate with the people; if their conversation be troublesome to us, if we disdain to apply ourselves to mean and vulgar souls (and the mean and vulgar are often as regular as those of the finest thread, and all wisdom is folly that does not accommodate itself to the common ignorance), we must no more intermeddle either with other men's affairs or our own; for business, both public and private, has to do with these people. The least forced and most natural motions of the soul are the most beautiful; the best employments, those that are least strained. My God! how good an office does wisdom to those whose desires it limits to their power! that is the most useful knowledge: "according to what a man can," was the favourite sentence and motto of Socrates. A motto of great solidity.

We must moderate and adapt our desires to the nearest and easiest to be acquired things. Is it not a foolish humour of mine to separate myself from a thousand to whom my fortune has conjoined me, and without whom I cannot live, and cleave to one or two who are out of my intercourse; or rather a fantastic desire of a thing I cannot obtain? My gentle and easy manners, enemies of all sourness and harshness, may easily enough have secured me from envy and animosities; to be beloved, I do not say, but never any man gave less occasion of being hated; but the coldness of my conversation has, reasonably enough, deprived me of the goodwill of many, who are to be excused if they interpret it in another and worse sense.

I am very capable of contracting and maintaining rare and exquisite friendships; for by reason that I so greedily seize upon such acquaintance as fit my liking, I throw myself with such violence upon them that I hardly fail to stick, and to make an impression where I hit; as I have often made happy proof. In ordinary friendships I am somewhat cold and shy, for my motion is not natural, if not with full sail: besides which, my fortune having in my youth given me a relish for one sole and perfect friendship, has, in truth, created in me a kind of distaste to others, and too much imprinted in my fancy that it is a beast of company, as the ancient said, but not of the herd.³¹ And also I have a natural difficulty of communicating myself by halves, with the modifications and the servile and jealous prudence required in the conversation of numerous and imperfect friendships: and we are principally enjoined to these in this age of ours, when we cannot talk of the world but either with danger or falsehood.

³¹Plutarch, *On the Plurality of Friends*, c. 2.

Yet do I very well discern that he who has the conveniences (I mean the essential conveniences) of life for his end, as I have, ought to fly these difficulties and delicacy of humour, as much as the plague. I should commend a soul of several stages, that knows both how to stretch and to slacken itself; that finds itself at ease in all conditions whither fortune leads it; that can discourse with a neighbour, of his building, his hunting, his quarrels; that can chat with a carpenter or a gardener with pleasure. I envy those who can render themselves familiar with the meanest of their followers, and talk with them in their own way; and dislike the advice of Plato, that men should always speak in a magisterial tone to their servants, whether men or women, without being sometimes facetious and familiar; for besides the reasons I have given, 'tis inhuman and unjust to set so great a value upon this pitiful prerogative of fortune, and the polities wherein less disparity is permitted betwixt masters and servants seem to me the most equitable. Others study how to raise and elevate their minds; I, how to humble mine and to bring it low; 'tis only vicious in extension:

*“Narras et genus AEaci,
Et pugnata sacro bella sub Ilio
Quo Chium pretio cadum
Mercur, quis aquam temperet ignibus,
Quo praebente domum, et quota,
Pelignis caream frigoribus, taces.”³²*

Thus, as the Lacedaemonian valour stood in need of moderation, and of the sweet and harmonious sound of flutes to soften it in battle, lest they should precipitate themselves into temerity and fury, whereas all other nations commonly make use of harsh and shrill sounds, and of loud and imperious cries, to incite and heat the soldier's courage to the last degree; so, methinks, contrary to the usual method, in the practice of our minds, we have for the most part more need of lead than of wings; of temperance and composedness than of ardour and agitation. But, above all things, 'tis in my opinion egregiously to play the fool, to put on the grave airs of a man of lofty mind amongst those who are nothing of the sort: ever to speak in print (by the book),

³²“You tell us long stories about the race of AEacus, and the battles fought under sacred Ilium; but what to give for a cask of Chian wine, who shall prepare the warm bath, and in whose house, and when I may escape from the Pelignian cold, you do not tell us.” – Horace, Od., iii. 19, 3.

*"Favellare in puma di forchetta."*³³

You must let yourself down to those with whom you converse; and sometimes affect ignorance: lay aside power and subtilty in common conversation; to preserve decorum and order 'tis enough-nay, crawl on the earth, if they so desire it.

The learned often stumble at this stone; they will always be parading their pedantic science, and strew their books everywhere; they have, in these days, so filled the cabinets and ears of the ladies with them, that if they have lost the substance, they at least retain the words; so as in all discourse upon all sorts of subjects, how mean and common soever, they speak and write after a new and learned way,

*"Hoc sermone pavent, hoc iram, gaudia, curas,
Hoc cuncta effundunt animi secreta; quid ultra?
Concumbunt docte;"*³⁴

and quote Plato and Aquinas in things the first man they meet could determine as well; the learning that cannot penetrate their souls hangs still upon the tongue. If people of quality will be persuaded by me, they shall content themselves with setting out their proper and natural treasures; they conceal and cover their beauties under others that are none of theirs: 'tis a great folly to put out their own light and shine by a borrowed lustre: they are interred and buried under *'de capsula totae'*³⁵ It is because they do not sufficiently know themselves or do themselves justice: the world has nothing fairer than they; 'tis for them to honour the arts, and to paint painting. What need have they of anything but to live beloved and honoured? They have and know but too much for this: they need do no more but rouse and heat a little the faculties they have of their own. When I see them tampering with rhetoric, law, logic, and other drugs, so improper and unnecessary for their business, I begin to suspect that the men who inspire them with such fancies, do it that they may govern them upon that account; for what other excuse can I contrive? It is enough that they can, without our instruction, compose the graces of their eyes to gaiety, severity,

³³"To talk with the point of a fork," (affectedly)

³⁴"In this language do they express their fears, their anger, their joys, their cares; in this pour out all their secrets; what more? they lie with their lovers learnedly." —Juvenal, vi. 189.

³⁵Painted and perfumed from head to foot." (Or:) "as if they were things carefully deposited in a band-box."—Seneca, Ep. 115

sweetness, and season a denial with asperity, suspense, or favour: they need not another to interpret what we speak for their service; with this knowledge, they command with a switch, and rule both the tutors and the schools. But if, nevertheless, it angers them to give place to us in anything whatever, and will, out of curiosity, have their share in books, poetry is a diversion proper for them; 'tis a wanton, subtle, dissembling, and prating art, all pleasure and all show, like themselves. They may also abstract several commodities from history. In philosophy, out of the moral part of it, they may select such instructions as will teach them to judge of our humours and conditions, to defend themselves from our treacheries, to regulate the ardour of their own desires, to manage their liberty, to lengthen the pleasures of life, and gently to bear the inconstancy of a lover, the rudeness of a husband; and the importunity of years, wrinkles, and the like. This is the utmost of what I would allow them in the sciences.

There are some particular natures that are private and retired: my natural way is proper for communication, and apt to lay me open; I am all without and in sight, born for society and friendship. The solitude that I love myself and recommend to others, is chiefly no other than to withdraw my thoughts and affections into myself; to restrain and check, not my steps, but my own cares and desires, resigning all foreign solicitude, and mortally avoiding servitude and obligation, and not so much the crowd of men as the crowd of business. Local solitude, to say the truth, rather gives me more room and sets me more at large; I more readily throw myself upon affairs of state and the world when I am alone. At the Louvre and in the bustle of the court, I fold myself within my own skin; the crowd thrusts me upon myself; and I never entertain myself so wantonly, with so much licence, or so especially, as in places of respect and ceremonious prudence: our follies do not make me laugh, it is our wisdom which does. I am naturally no enemy to a court, life; I have therein passed a part of my own, and am of a humour cheerfully to frequent great company, provided it be by intervals and at my own time: but this softness of judgment whereof I speak ties me perforce to solitude. Even at home, amidst a numerous family, and in a house sufficiently frequented, I see people enough, but rarely such with whom I delight to converse; and I there reserve both for myself and others an unusual liberty: there is in my house no such thing as ceremony, ushering, or waiting upon people down to the coach, and such other troublesome ceremonies as our courtesy enjoins (O the servile and importunate custom!). Every one there governs him-

self according to his own method; let who will speak his thoughts, I sit mute, meditating and shut up in my closet, without any offence to my guests.

The men whose society and familiarity I covet are those they call sincere and able men; and the image of these makes me disrelish the rest. It is, if rightly taken, the rarest of our forms, and a form that we chiefly owe to nature. The end of this commerce is simply privacy, frequentation and conference, the exercise of souls, without other fruit. In our discourse, all subjects are alike to me; let there be neither weight, nor depth, 'tis all one: there is yet grace and pertinency; all there is tinted with a mature and constant judgment, and mixed with goodness, freedom, gaiety, and friendship. 'Tis not only in talking of the affairs of kings and state that our wits discover their force and beauty, but every whit as much in private conferences. I understand my men even by their silence and smiles; and better discover them, perhaps, at table than in the council. Hippomachus said, very well, "that he could know the good wrestlers by only seeing them walk in the street." If learning please to step into our talk, it shall not be rejected, not magisterial, imperious, and importunate, as-it commonly is, but suffragan and docile itself; we there only seek to pass away our time; when we have a mind to be instructed and preached to, we will go seek this in its throne; please let it humble itself to us for the nonce; for, useful and profitable as it is, I imagine that, at need, we may manage well enough without it, and do our business without its assistance. A well-descended soul, and practised in the conversation of men, will of herself render herself sufficiently agreeable; art is nothing but the counterpart and register of what such souls produce.

The conversation also of beautiful and honourable women is for me a sweet commerce:

*"Nam nos quoque oculos eruditos habemus."*³⁶

If the soul has not therein so much to enjoy, as in the first the bodily senses, which participate more of this, bring it to a proportion next to, though, in my opinion, not equal to the other. But 'tis a commerce wherein a man must stand a little upon his guard, especially those, where the body can do much, as in me. I there scalded myself in my youth, and suffered all the torments that poets say befall those who

³⁶"For we also have eyes that are versed in the matter." —Cicero, Paradox, v. 2.

precipitate themselves into love without order and judgment. It is true that that whipping has made me wiser since:

*“Quicumque Argolica de classe Capharea fugit,
Semper ab Euboicis vela retorquet aquis.”³⁷*

’Tis folly to fix all a man’s thoughts upon it, and to engage in it with a furious and indiscreet affection; but, on the other hand, to engage there without love and without inclination, like comedians, to play a common part, without putting anything to it of his own but words, is indeed to provide for his safety, but, withal, after as cowardly a manner as he who should abandon his honour, profit, or pleasure for fear of danger. For it is certain that from such a practice, they who set it on foot can expect no fruit that can please or satisfy a noble soul. A man must have, in good earnest, desired that which he, in good earnest, expects to have a pleasure in enjoying; I say, though fortune should unjustly favour their dissimulation; which often falls out, because there is none of the sex, let her be as ugly as the devil, who does not think herself well worthy to be beloved, and who does not prefer herself before other women, either for her youth, the colour of her hair, or her graceful motion (for there are no more women universally ugly, than there are women universally beautiful, and such of the Brahmin virgins as have nothing else to recommend them, the people being assembled by the common crier to that effect, come out into the market-place to expose their matrimonial parts to public view, to try if these at least are not of temptation sufficient to get them a husband). Consequently, there is not one who does not easily suffer herself to be overcome by the first vow that they make to serve her. Now from this common and ordinary treachery of the men of the present day, that must fall out which we already experimentally see, either that they rally together, and separate themselves by themselves to evade us, or else form their discipline by the example we give them, play their parts of the farce as we do ours, and give themselves up to the sport, without passion, care, or love;

“Neque afl’ectui suo, aut alieno, obnoxiae;”³⁸

³⁷“Whoever of the Grecian fleet has escaped the Capharean rocks, ever takes care to steer from the Euboean sea.” –Ovid, *Trist.*, i. i, 83.

³⁸“Neither amenable to their own affections, nor those of others.” –Tacitus, *Annal.*, xiii. 45.

believing, according to the persuasion of Lysias in Plato, that they may with more utility and convenience surrender themselves up to us the less we love them; where it will fall out, as in comedies, that the people will have as much pleasure or more than the comedians. For my part, I no more acknowledge a Venus without a Cupid than, a mother without issue: they are things that mutually lend and owe their essence to one another. Thus this cheat recoils upon him who is guilty of it; it does not cost him much, indeed, but he also gets little or nothing by it. They who have made Venus a goddess have taken notice that her principal beauty was incorporeal and spiritual; but the Venus whom these people hunt after is not so much as human, nor indeed brutal; the very beasts will not accept it so gross and so earthly; we see that imagination and desire often heat and incite them before the body does; we see in both the one sex and the other, they have in the herd choice and particular election in their affections, and that they have amongst themselves a long commerce of good will. Even those to whom old age denies the practice of their desire, still tremble, neigh, and twitter for love; we see them, before the act, full of hope and ardour, and when the body has played its game, yet please themselves with the sweet remembrance of the past delight; some that swell with pride after they have performed, and others who, tired and sated, still by vociferation express a triumphing joy. He who has nothing to do but only to discharge his body of a natural necessity, need not trouble others with so curious preparations: it is not meat for a gross, coarse appetite.

As one who does not desire that men should think me better than I am, I will here say this as to the errors of my youth. Not only from the danger of impairing my health (and yet I could not be so careful but that I had two light mischances), but moreover upon the account of contempt, I have seldom given myself up to common and mercenary embraces: I would heighten the pleasure by the difficulty, by desire, and a certain kind of glory, and was of Tiberius's mind, who in his amours was as much taken with modesty and birth as any other quality, and of the courtesan Flora's humour, who never lent herself to less than a dictator, a consul, or a censor, and took pleasure in the dignity of her lovers. Doubtless pearls and gold tissue, titles and train, add something to it.

As to the rest, I had a great esteem for wit, provided the person was not exceptionable; for, to confess the truth, if the one or the other of these two attractions must of necessity be wanting, I should rather have quitted that of the understanding, that has its use in better things; but

in the subject of love, a subject principally relating to the senses of seeing and touching, something may be done without the graces of the mind: without the graces of the body, nothing. Beauty is the true prerogative of women, and so peculiarly their own, that ours, though naturally requiring another sort of feature, is never in its lustre but when youthful and beardless, a sort of confused image of theirs. 'Tis said that such as serve the Grand Signior upon the account of beauty, who are an infinite number, are, at the latest, dismissed at two-and-twenty years of age. Reason, prudence, and the offices of friendship are better found amongst men, and therefore it is that they govern the affairs of the world.

These two engagements are fortuitous, and depending upon others; the one is troublesome by its rarity, the other withers with age, so that they could never have been sufficient for the business of my life. That of books, which is the third, is much more certain, and much more our own. It yields all other advantages to the two first, but has the constancy and facility of its service for its own share. It goes side by side with me in my whole course, and everywhere is assisting me: it comforts me in old age and solitude; it eases me of a troublesome weight of idleness, and delivers me at all hours from company that I dislike: it blunts the point of griefs, if they are not extreme, and have not got an entire possession of my soul. To divert myself from a troublesome fancy, 'tis but to run to my books; they presently fix me to them and drive the other out of my thoughts, and do not mutiny at seeing that I have only recourse to them for want of other more real, natural, and lively commodities; they always receive me with the same kindness. He may well go a foot, they say, who leads his horse in his hand; and our James, King of Naples and Sicily, who, handsome, young and healthful, caused himself to be carried about on a barrow, extended upon a pitiful mattress in a poor robe of grey cloth, and a cap of the same, yet attended withal by a royal train, litters, led horses of all sorts, gentlemen and officers, did yet herein represent a tender and unsteady authority: "The sick man has not to complain who has his cure in his sleeve." In the experience and practice of this maxim, which is a very true one, consists all the benefit I reap from books. As a matter of fact, I make no more use of them, as it were, than those who know them not. I enjoy them as misers do their money, in knowing that I may enjoy them when I please: my mind is satisfied with this right of possession. I never travel without books, either in peace or war; and yet sometimes I pass over several days, and sometimes months, without looking on

them. I will read by-and-by, say I to myself, or to-morrow, or when I please; and in the interim, time steals away without any inconvenience. For it is not to be imagined to what degree I please myself and rest content in this consideration, that I have them by me to divert myself with them when I am so disposed, and to call to mind what a refreshment they are to my life. 'Tis the best viaticum I have yet found out for this human journey, and I very much pity those men of understanding who are unprovided of it. I the rather accept of any other sort of diversion, how light soever, because this can never fail me.

When at home, I a little more frequent my library, whence I overlook at once all the concerns of my family. 'Tis situated at the entrance into my house, and I thence see under me my garden, court, and base-court, and almost all parts of the building. There I turn over now one book, and then another, on various subjects, without method or design. One while I meditate, another I record and dictate, as I walk to and fro, such whimsies as these I present to you here. 'Tis in the third storey of a tower, of which the ground-room is my chapel, the second storey a chamber with a withdrawing-room and closet, where I often lie, to be more retired; and above is a great wardrobe. This formerly was the most useless part of the house. I there pass away both most of the days of my life and most of the hours of those days. In the night I am never there. There is by the side of it a cabinet handsome enough, with a fire-place very commodiously contrived, and plenty of light; and were I not more afraid of the trouble than the expense—the trouble that frights me from all business—I could very easily adjoin on either side, and on the same floor, a gallery of an hundred paces long and twelve broad, having found walls already raised for some other design to the requisite height. Every place of retirement requires a walk: my thoughts sleep if I sit still: my fancy does not go by itself, as when my legs move it: and all those who study without a book are in the same condition. The figure of my study is round, and there is no more open wall than what is taken up by my table and my chair, so that the remaining parts of the circle present me a view of all my books at once, ranged upon five rows of shelves round about me. It has three noble and free prospects, and is sixteen paces in diameter. I am not so continually there in winter; for my house is built upon an eminence, as its name imports, and no part of it is so much exposed to the wind and weather as this, which pleases me the better, as being of more difficult access and a little remote, as well upon the account of exercise, as also being there more retired from the crowd. 'Tis there that I am in my kingdom, and there I

endeavour to make myself an absolute monarch, and to sequester this one corner from all society, conjugal, filial, and civil; elsewhere I have but verbal authority only, and of a confused essence. That man, in my opinion, is very miserable, who has not at home where to be by himself, where to entertain himself alone, or to conceal himself from others. Ambition sufficiently plagues her proselytes, by keeping them always in show, like the statue of a public, square:

*“Magna servitus est magna fortuna.”*³⁹

They cannot so much as be private in the watercloset. I have thought nothing so severe in the austerity of life that our monks affect, as what I have observed in some of their communities; namely, by rule, to have a perpetual society of place, and numerous persons present in every action whatever; and think it much more supportable to be always alone than never to be so.

If any one shall tell me that it is to undervalue the Muses to make use of them only for sport and to pass away the time, I shall tell him, that he does not know so well as I the value of the sport, the pleasure, and the pastime; I can hardly forbear to add that all other end is ridiculous. I live from day to day, and, with reverence be it spoken, I only live for myself; there all my designs terminate. I studied, when young, for ostentation; since, to make myself a little wiser; and now for my diversion, but never for any profit. A vain and prodigal humour I had after this sort of furniture, not only for the supplying my own need, but, moreover, for ornament and outward show, I have since quite cured myself of.

Books have many charming qualities to such as know how to choose them; but every good has its ill; 'tis a pleasure that is not pure and clean, no more than others: it has its inconveniences, and great ones too. The soul indeed is exercised therein; but the body, the care of which I must withal never neglect, remains in the meantime without action, and grows heavy and sombre. I know no excess more prejudicial to me, nor more to be avoided in this my declining age.

These have been my three favourite and particular occupations; I speak not of those I owe to the world by civil obligation.

³⁹“A great fortune is a great slavery.” —Seneca, De Consol. ad. Polyb., c. 26.

CHAPTER IV

OF DIVERSION

I was once employed in consoling a lady truly afflicted. Most of their mournings are artificial and ceremonious:

*“Uberibus semper lacrymis, semperque paratis,
In statione subatque expectantibus illam,
Quo jubeat manare modo.”⁴⁰*

A man goes the wrong way to work when he opposes this passion; for opposition does but irritate and make them more obstinate in sorrow; the evil is exasperated by discussion. We see, in common discourse, that what I have indifferently let fall from me, if any one takes it up to controvert it, I justify it with the best arguments I have; and much more a thing wherein I had a real interest. And besides, in so doing you enter roughly upon your operation; whereas the first addresses of a physician to his patient should be gracious, gay, and pleasing; never did any ill-looking, morose physician do anything to purpose. On the contrary, then, a man should, at the first approaches, favour their grief and express some approbation of their sorrow. By this intelligence you obtain credit to proceed further, and by a facile and insensible gradation fall into discourses more solid and proper for their cure. I, whose aim it was principally to gull the company who had their eyes fixed upon me, took it into my head only to palliate the disease. And indeed I have found by experience that I have an unlucky hand in persuading. My arguments are either too sharp and dry, or pressed too roughly, or

⁴⁰“A woman has ever a fountain of tears ready to gush up whenever she requires to make use of them.” —Juvenal, vi. 272.

not home enough. After I had some time applied myself to her grief, I did not attempt to cure her by strong and lively reasons, either because I had them not at hand, or because I thought to do my business better another way; neither did I make choice of any of those methods of consolation which philosophy prescribes: that what we complain of is no evil, according to Cleanthes; that it is a light evil, according to the Peripatetics; that to bemoan one's self is an action neither commendable nor just, according to Chrysippus; nor this of Epicurus, more suitable to my way, of shifting the thoughts from afflicting things to those that are pleasing; nor making a bundle of all these together, to make use of upon occasion, according to Cicero; but, gently bending my discourse, and by little and little digressing, sometimes to subjects nearer, and sometimes more remote from the purpose, according as she was more intent on what I said, I imperceptibly led her from that sorrowful thought, and kept her calm and in good-humour whilst I continued there. I herein made use of diversion. They who succeeded me in the same service did not, for all that, find any amendment in her, for I had not gone to the root.

I, peradventure, may elsewhere have glanced upon some sort of public diversions; and the practice of military ones, which Pericles made use of in the Peloponnesian war, and a thousand others in other places, to withdraw the adverse forces from their own countries, is too frequent in history. It was an ingenious evasion whereby Monseigneur d'Hempricourt saved both himself and others in the city of Liege, into which the Duke of Burgundy, who kept it besieged, had made him enter to execute the articles of their promised surrender; the people, being assembled by night to consider of it, began to mutiny against the agreement, and several of them resolved to fall upon the commissioners, whom they had in their power; he, feeling the gusts of this first popular storm, who were coming to rush into his lodgings, suddenly sent out to them two of the inhabitants of the city (of whom he had some with him) with new and milder terms to be proposed in their council, which he had then and there contrived for his need: These two diverted the first tempest, carrying back the enraged rabble to the town-hall to hear and consider of what they had to say. The deliberation was short; a second storm arose as violent as the other, whereupon he despatched four new mediators of the same quality to meet them, protesting that he had now better conditions to present them with, and such as would give them absolute satisfaction, by which means the tumult was once more appeased, and the people again turned back to

the conclave. In fine, by this dispensation of amusements, one after another, diverting their fury and dissipating it in frivolous consultations, he laid it at last asleep till the day appeared, which was his principal end.

This other story that follows is also of the same category. Atalanta, a virgin of excelling beauty and of wonderful disposition of body, to disengage herself from the crowd of a thousand suitors who sought her in marriage, made this proposition, that she would accept of him for her husband who should equal her in running, upon condition that they who failed should lose their lives. There were enough who thought the prize very well worth the hazard, and who suffered the cruel penalty of the contract. Hippomenes, about to make trial after the rest, made his address to the goddess of love, imploring her assistance; and she, granting his request, gave him three golden apples, and instructed him how to use them. The race beginning, as Hippomenes perceived his mistress to press hard up to him; he, as it were by chance, let fall one of these apples; the maid, taken with the beauty of it, failed not to step out of her way to pick it up:

*“Obstupuit Virgo, nitidique cupidine pomi
Declinat cursus, aurumque volubile tollit.”⁴¹*

He did the same, when he saw his time, by the second and the third, till by so diverting her, and making her lose so much ground, he won the race. When physicians cannot stop a catarrh, they divert and turn it into some other less dangerous part. And I find also that this is the most ordinary practice for the diseases of the mind:

*“Abducendus etiam nonnunquam animus est ad alia studia,
sollicitudines, curas, negotia: loci denique mutatione, tan-
quam aegroti non convalescentes, saepe curandus est.”⁴²*

’Tis to little effect directly to jostle a man’s infirmities; we neither make him sustain nor repel the attack; we only make him decline and evade it.

⁴¹“The virgin, astonished and attracted by the glittering apple, stops her career, and seizes the rolling gold.” —Ovid, *Metam.*, x. 666.

⁴²“The mind is sometimes to be diverted to other studies, thoughts, cares, business: in fine, by change of place, as where sick persons do not become convalescent.” —Cicero, *Tusc. Quaes.*, iv. 35.

This other lesson is too high and too difficult: 'tis for men of the first form of knowledge purely to insist upon the thing, to consider and judge it; it appertains to one sole Socrates to meet death with an ordinary countenance, to grow acquainted with it, and to sport with it; he seeks no consolation out of the thing itself; dying appears to him a natural and indifferent accident; 'tis there that he fixes his sight and resolution, without looking elsewhere. The disciples of Hegesias, who starved themselves to death, animated thereunto by his fine lectures, and in such numbers that King Ptolemy ordered he should be forbidden to entertain his followers with such homicidal doctrines, did not consider death in itself, neither did they judge of it; it was not there they fixed their thoughts; they ran towards and aimed at a new being.

The poor wretches whom we see brought upon the scaffold, full of ardent devotion, and therein, as much as in them lies, employing all their senses, their ears in hearing the instructions given them, their eyes and hands lifted up towards heaven, their voices in loud prayers, with a vehement and continual emotion, do doubtless things very commendable and proper for such a necessity: we ought to commend them for their devotion, but not properly for their constancy; they shun the encounter, they divert their thoughts from the consideration of death, as children are amused with some toy or other when the surgeon is going to give them a prick with his lancet. I have seen some, who, casting their eyes upon the dreadful instruments of death round about, have fainted, and furiously turned their thoughts another way; such as are to pass a formidable precipice are advised either to shut their eyes or to look another way.

Subrius Flavius, being by Nero's command to be put to death, and by the hand of Niger, both of them great captains, when they lead him to the place appointed for his execution, seeing the grave that Niger had caused to be hollowed to put him into ill-made: "Neither is this," said he, turning to the soldiers who guarded him, "according to military discipline." And to Niger, who exhorted him to keep his head firm: "Do but thou strike as firmly," said he. And he very well foresaw what would follow when he said so; for Niger's arm so trembled that he had several blows at his head before he could cut it off. This man seems to have had his thoughts rightly fixed upon the subject.

He who dies in a battle, with his sword in his hand, does not then think of death; he feels or considers it not; the ardour of the fight diverts his thought another way. A worthy man of my acquaintance, falling as he was fighting a duel, and feeling himself nailed to the earth by

nine or ten thrusts of his enemy, every one present called to him to think of his conscience; but he has since told me, that though he very well heard what they said, it nothing moved him, and that he never thought of anything but how to disengage and revenge himself. He afterwards killed his man in that very duel. He who brought to L. Silanus the sentence of death, did him a very great kindness, in that, having received his answer, that he was well prepared to die, but not by base hands, he ran upon him with his soldiers to force him, and as he, unarmed as he was, obstinately defended himself with his fists and feet, he made him lose his life in the contest, by that means dissipating and diverting in a sudden and furious rage the painful apprehension of the lingering death to which he was designed.

We always think of something else; either the hope of a better life comforts and supports us, or the hope of our children's worth, or the future glory of our name, or the leaving behind the evils of this life, or the vengeance that threatens those who are the causes of our death, administers consolation to us:

*"Spero equidem mediis, si quid pia numina possunt,
Supplicia hausurum scopulis, et nomine Dido
Saepe vocaturum..."*

Audiam; et haec Manes veniet mihi fama sub imos."⁴³

Xenophon was sacrificing with a crown upon his head when one came to bring him news of the death of his son Gryllus, slain in the battle of Mantinea: at the first surprise of the news, he threw his crown to the ground; but understanding by the sequel of the narrative the manner of a most brave and valiant death, he took it up and replaced it upon his head. Epicurus himself, at his death, consoles himself upon the utility and eternity of his writings:

*"Omnes clari et nobilitati labores fiunt tolerabiles;"*⁴⁴

and the same wound, the same fatigue, is not, says Xenophon, so intolerable to a general of an army as to a common soldier. Epaminondas

⁴³"I hope, however, if the pious gods have any power, thou wilt feel thy punishment amid the rocks, and will call on the name of Dido; I shall hear, and this report will come to me below." —Aeneid, iv. 382, 387.

⁴⁴"All labours that are illustrious and famous become supportable." —Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., ii. 26.

took his death much more cheerfully, having been informed that the victory remained to him:

*"Haec sunt solatia, haec fomenta summorum dolorum;"*⁴⁵

and such like circumstances amuse, divert, and turn our thoughts from the consideration of the thing in itself. Even the arguments of philosophy are always edging and glancing on the matter, so as scarce to rub its crust; the greatest man of the first philosophical school, and superintendent over all the rest, the great Zeno, forms this syllogism against death: "No evil is honourable; but death is honourable; therefore death is no evil"; against drunkenness this: "No one commits his secrets to a drunkard; but every one commits his secrets to a wise man: therefore a wise man is no drunkard." Is this to hit the white? I love to see that these great and leading souls cannot rid themselves of our company: perfect men as they are, they are yet simply men.

Revenge is a sweet passion, of great and natural impression; I discern it well enough, though I have no manner of experience of it. From this not long ago to divert a young prince, I did not tell him that he must, to him that had struck him upon the one cheek, turn the other, upon account of charity; nor go about to represent to him the tragical events that poetry attributes to this passion. I left that behind; and I busied myself to make him relish the beauty of a contrary image: and, by representing to him what honour, esteem, and goodwill he would acquire by clemency and good nature, diverted him to ambition. Thus a man is to deal in such cases.

If your passion of love be too violent, disperse it, say they, and they say true; for I have often tried it with advantage: break it into several desires, of which let one be regent, if you will, over the rest; but, lest it should tyrannise and domineer over you, weaken and protract, by dividing and diverting it:

*"Cum morosa vago singultiet inguine vena,"*⁴⁶

*"Conjicito humorem collectum in corpora quaeque,"*⁴⁷

⁴⁵"These are sedatives and alleviations to the greatest pains." –Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., ii. 23.

⁴⁶"When you are tormented with fierce desire, satisfy it with the first person that presents herself." –Persius, Sat., vi. 73.

⁴⁷Lucretius, vi. 1062, to the like effect.

*and provide for it in time, lest it prove troublesome to deal with, when it has once seized you:
 "Si non prima novis conturbes vulnera plagis,
 Volgivagaque vagus venere ante recentia cures."*⁴⁸

I was once wounded with a vehement displeasure, and withal, more just than vehement; I might peradventure have lost myself in it, if I had merely trusted to my own strength. Having need of a powerful diversion to disengage me, by art and study I became amorous, wherein I was assisted by my youth: love relieved and rescued me from the evil wherein friendship had engaged me. 'Tis in everything else the same; a violent imagination hath seized me: I find it a nearer way to change than to subdue it: I depute, if not one contrary, yet another at least, in its place. Variation ever relieves, dissolves, and dissipates.

If I am not able to contend with it, I escape from it; and in avoiding it, slip out of the way, and make, my doubles; shifting place, business, and company, I secure myself in the crowd of other thoughts and fancies, where it loses my trace, and I escape.

After the same manner does nature proceed, by the benefit of inconstancy; for time, which she has given us for the sovereign physician of our passions, chiefly works by this, that supplying our imaginations with other and new affairs, it loosens and dissolves the first apprehension, how strong soever. A wise man little less sees his friend dying at the end of five-and-twenty years than on the first year; and according to Epicurus, no less at all; for he did not attribute any alleviation of afflictions, either to their foresight or their antiquity; but so many other thoughts traverse this, that it languishes and tires at last.

Alcibiades, to divert the inclination of common rumours, cut off the ears and tail of his beautiful dog, and turned him out into the public place, to the end that, giving the people this occasion to prate, they might let his other actions alone. I have also seen, for this same end of diverting the opinions and conjectures of the people and to stop their mouths, some women conceal their real affections by those that were only counterfeit; but I have also seen some of them, who in counterfeiting have suffered themselves to be caught indeed, and who have quitted the true and original affection for the feigned: and so have learned that they who find their affections well placed are fools to consent to this disguise: the public and favourable reception being only reserved

⁴⁸"Unless you cure old wounds by new." —Lucretius, iv. 1064.

for this pretended lover, one may conclude him a fellow of very little address and less wit, if he does not in the end put himself into your place, and you into his; this is precisely to cut out and make up a shoe for another to draw on.

A little thing will turn and divert us, because a little thing holds us. We do not much consider subjects in gross and singly; they are little and superficial circumstances, or images that touch us, and the outward useless rinds that peel off from the subjects themselves:

*"Folliculos ut nunc teretes aestate cicadae Linqunt."*⁴⁹

Even Plutarch himself laments his daughter for the little apish tricks of her infancy.⁵⁰ The remembrance of a farewell, of the particular grace of an action, of a last recommendation, afflict us. The sight of Caesar's robe troubled all Rome, which was more than his death had done. Even the sound of names ringing in our ears, as "my poor master,"—"my faithful friend,"—"alas, my dear father," or, "my sweet daughter," afflict us. When these repetitions annoy me, and that I examine it a little nearer, I find 'tis no other but a grammatical and word complaint; I am only wounded with the word and tone, as the exclamations of preachers very often work more upon their auditory than their reasons, and as the pitiful eyes of a beast killed for our service; without my weighing or penetrating meanwhile into the true and solid essence of my subject:

*'His se stimulis dolor ipse lacessit.'*⁵¹

These are the foundations of our mourning.

The obstinacy of my stone to all remedies especially those in my bladder, has sometimes thrown me into so long suppressions of urine for three or four days together, and so near death, that it had been folly to have hoped to evade it, and it was much rather to have been desired, considering the miseries I endure in those cruel fits. Oh, that good emperor, who caused criminals to be tied that they might die for want of urination, was a great master in the hangman's science! Finding myself in this condition, I considered by how many light causes and objects imagination nourished in me the regret of life; of what atoms

⁴⁹"As husks we find grasshoppers leave behind them in summer." —Lucretius, v. 801.

⁵⁰Consolation to his Wife on the Death of their Daughter, c. I.

⁵¹"With these incitements grief provokes itself." —Lucretius, ii. 42.

the weight and difficulty of this dislodging was composed in my soul; to how many idle and frivolous thoughts we give way in so great an affair; a dog, a horse, a book, a glass, and what not, were considered in my loss; to others their ambitious hopes, their money, their knowledge, not less foolish considerations in my opinion than mine. I look upon death carelessly when I look upon it universally as the end of life. I insult over it in gross, but in detail it domineers over me: the tears of a footman, the disposing of my clothes, the touch of a friendly hand, a common consolation, discourages and softens me. So do the complaints in tragedies agitate our souls with grief; and the regrets of Dido and Ariadne, impassionate even those who believe them not in Virgil and Catullus. 'Tis a symptom of an obstinate and obdurate nature to be sensible of no emotion, as 'tis reported for a miracle of Polemon; but then he did not so much as alter his countenance at the biting of a mad dog that tore away the calf of his leg; and no wisdom proceeds so far as to conceive so vivid and entire a cause of sorrow, by judgment that it does not suffer increase by its presence, when the eyes and ears have their share; parts that are not to be moved but by vain accidents.

Is it reason that even the arts themselves should make an advantage of our natural stupidity and weakness? An orator, says rhetoric in the farce of his pleading, shall be moved with the sound of his own voice and feigned emotions, and suffer himself to be imposed upon by the passion he represents; he will imprint in himself a true and real grief, by means of the part he plays, to transmit it to the judges, who are yet less concerned than he: as they do who are hired at funerals to assist in the ceremony of sorrow, who sell their tears and mourning by weight and measure; for although they act in a borrowed form, nevertheless, by habituating and settling their countenances to the occasion, 'tis most certain they often are really affected with an actual sorrow. I was one, amongst several others of his friends, who conveyed the body of Monsieur de Grammont to Spissons from the siege of La Fere, where he was slain; I observed that in all places we passed through we filled the people we met with lamentations and tears by the mere solemn pomp of our convoy, for the name of the defunct was not there so much as known. Quintilian reports as to have seen comedians so deeply engaged in a mourning part, that they still wept in the retiring room, and who, having taken upon them to stir up passion in another, have themselves espoused it to that degree as to find themselves infected with it, not only to tears, but, moreover, with pallor and the comportment of men really overwhelmed with grief.

In a country near our mountains the women play Priest Martin, for as they augment the regret of the deceased husband by the remembrance of the good and agreeable qualities he possessed, they also at the same time make a register of and publish his imperfections; as if of themselves to enter into some composition, and divert themselves from compassion to disdain. Yet with much better grace than we, who, when we lose an acquaintance, strive to give him new and false praises, and to make him quite another thing when we have lost sight of him than he appeared to us when we did see him; as if regret were an instructive thing, or as if tears, by washing our understandings, cleared them. For my part, I henceforth renounce all favourable testimonies men would give of me, not because I shall be worthy of them, but because I shall be dead.

Whoever shall ask a man, "What interest have you in this siege?"—"The interest of example," he will say, "and of the common obedience to my prince: I pretend to no profit by it; and for glory, I know how small a part can affect a private man such as I: I have here neither passion nor quarrel." And yet you shall see him the next day quite another man, chafing and red with fury, ranged in battle for the assault; 'tis the glittering of so much steel, the fire and noise of our cannon and drums, that have infused this new rigidity and fury into his veins. A frivolous cause, you will say. How a cause? There needs none to agitate the mind; a mere whimsey without body and without subject will rule and agitate it. Let me think of building castles in Spain, my imagination suggests to me conveniences and pleasures with which my soul is really tickled and pleased. How often do we torment our mind with anger or sorrow by such shadows, and engage ourselves in fantastic passions that impair both soul and body? What astonished, fleeting, confused grimaces does this raving put our faces into! what sallies and agitations both of members and voices does it inspire us with! Does it not seem that this individual man has false visions amid the crowd of others with whom he has to do, or that he is possessed with some internal demon that persecutes him? Inquire of yourself where is the object of this mutation? is there anything but us in nature which inanity sustains, over which it has power? Cambyses, from having dreamt that his brother should be one day king of Persia, put him to death: a beloved brother, and one in whom he had always confided. Aristodemus, king of the Messenians, killed himself out of a fancy of ill omen, from I know not what howling of his dogs; and King Midas did as much upon the account of some foolish dream he had dreamed. 'Tis to prize life at its

just value, to abandon it for a dream. And yet hear the soul triumph over the miseries and weakness of the body, and that it is exposed to all attacks and alterations; truly, it has reason so to speak!

*“O prima infelix finger ti terra Prometheo!
Ille parum cauti pectoris egit opus
Corpora disponens, mentem non vidit in arte;
Recta animi primum debuit esse via.”⁵²*

⁵²“O wretched clay, first formed by Prometheus. In his attempt, what little wisdom did he shew! In framing bodies, he did not apply his art to form the mind, which should have been his first care.” —Propertius, iii. 5, 7.

CHAPTER V

UPON SOME VERSES OF VIRGIL

BY how much profitable thoughts are more full and solid, by so much are they also more cumbersome and heavy: vice, death, poverty, diseases, are grave and grievous subjects. A man should have his soul instructed in the means to sustain and to contend with evils, and in the rules of living and believing well: and often rouse it up, and exercise it in this noble study; but in an ordinary soul it must be by intervals and with moderation; it will otherwise grow besotted if continually intent upon it. I found it necessary, when I was young, to put myself in mind and solicit myself to keep me to my duty; gaiety and health do not, they say, so well agree with those grave and serious meditations: I am at present in another state: the conditions of age but too much put me in mind, urge me to wisdom, and preach to me. From the excess of sprightliness I am fallen into that of severity, which is much more troublesome; and for that reason I now and then suffer myself purposely a little to run into disorder, and occupy my mind in wanton and youthful thoughts, wherewith it diverts itself. I am of late but too reserved, too heavy, and too ripe; years every day read to me lectures of coldness and temperance. This body of mine avoids disorder and dreads it; 'tis now my body's turn to guide my mind towards reformation; it governs, in turn, and more rudely and imperiously than the other; it lets me not an hour alone, sleeping or waking, but is always preaching to me death, patience, and repentance. I now defend myself from temperance, as I have formerly done from pleasure; it draws me too much back, and even to stupidity. Now I will be master of myself, to all intents and purposes; wisdom has its excesses, and has no less need of moderation than folly. Therefore, lest I should wither, dry up, and overcharge myself with prudence, in the intervals and truces my

infirmities allow me:

*"Mens intenta suis ne seit usque malis."*⁵³

I gently turn aside, and avert my eyes from the stormy and cloudy sky I have before me, which, thanks be to God, I regard without fear, but not without meditation and study, and amuse myself in the remembrance of my better years:

*"Animus quo perdidit, optat,
Atque in praeterita se totus imagine versat."*⁵⁴

Let childhood look forward and age backward; was not this the signification of Janus' double face? Let years draw me along if they will, but it shall be backward; as long as my eyes can discern the pleasant season expired, I shall now and then turn them that way; though it escape from my blood and veins, I shall not, however, root the image of it out of my memory:

*"Hoc est
Vivere bis, vita posse priore frui."*⁵⁵

Plato ordains that old men should be present at the exercises, dances, and sports of young people, that they may rejoice in others for the activity and beauty of body which is no more in themselves, and call to mind the grace and comeliness of that flourishing age; and wills that in these recreations the honour of the prize should be given to that young man who has most diverted the company. I was formerly wont to mark cloudy and gloomy days as extraordinary; these are now my ordinary days; the extraordinary are the clear and bright; I am ready to leap for joy, as for an unwonted favour, when nothing happens me. Let me tickle myself, I cannot force a poor smile from this wretched body of mine; I am only merry in conceit and in dreaming, by artifice to divert the melancholy of age; but, in faith, it requires another remedy than a dream. A weak contest of art against nature. 'Tis great folly to lengthen and anticipate human incommodities, as every one does; I had rather

⁵³"That my mind may not eternally be intent upon my ills." –Ovid., *Trist.*, iv. i, 4.

⁵⁴"The mind wishes to have what it has lost, and throws itself wholly into memories of the past." –Petronius, c. 128.

⁵⁵"'Tis to live twice to be able to enjoy one's former life again." –Martial, x. 23, 7.

be a less while old than be old before I am really so.' I seize on even the least occasions of pleasure I can meet. I know very well, by hearsay, several sorts of prudent pleasures, effectually so, and glorious to boot; but opinion has not power enough over me to give me an appetite to them. I covet not so much to have them magnanimous, magnificent, and pompous, as I do to have them sweet, facile, and ready:

*"A natura discedimus; populo nos damus, nullius rei bono auctori."*⁵⁶

My philosophy is in action, in natural and present practice, very little in fancy: what if I should take pleasure in playing at cob-nut or to whip a top!

*"Non ponebat enim rumores ante salutem."*⁵⁷

Pleasure is a quality of very little ambition; it thinks itself rich enough of itself without any addition of repute; and is best pleased where most retired. A young man should be whipped who pretends to a taste in wine and sauces; there was nothing which, at that age, I less valued or knew: now I begin to learn; I am very much ashamed on't; but what should I do? I am more ashamed and vexed at the occasions that put me upon't. 'Tis for us to dote and trifle away the time, and for young men to stand upon their reputation and nice punctilios; they are going towards the world and the world's opinion; we are retiring from it:

*"Sibi arma, sibi equos, sibi hastas, sibi clavam, sibi pilam, sibi natationes, et cursus habeant: nobis senibus, ex lusionibus multis, talos relinquunt et tesseras;"*⁵⁸

the laws themselves send us home. I can do no less in favour of this wretched condition into which my age has thrown me than furnish it with toys to play withal, as they do children; and, in truth, we become such. Both wisdom and folly will have enough to do to support and relieve me by alternate services in this calamity of age:

⁵⁶"We depart from nature and give ourselves to the people, who understand nothing." –Seneca, Ep., 99.

⁵⁷"He did not sacrifice his health even to rumours." Ennius, apud Cicero, De Offic., i. 24

⁵⁸"Let them reserve to themselves arms, horses, spears, clubs, tennis, swimming, and races; and of all the sports leave to us old men cards and dice." –Cicero, De Senec., c. 16.

*"Misce stultitiam consiliis brevem."*⁵⁹

I accordingly avoid the lightest punctures; and those that formerly would not have rippled the skin, now pierce me through and through: my habit of body is now so naturally declining to ill:

*"In fragili corpore odiosa omnis offensio est;"*⁶⁰

*"Mensque pati durum sustinet aegra nihil."*⁶¹

I have ever been very susceptibly tender as to offences: I am much more tender now, and open throughout.

*"Et minimae vires frangere quassa valent."*⁶²

My judgment restrains me from kicking against and murmuring at the inconveniences that nature orders me to endure, but it does not take away my feeling them: I, who have no other thing in my aim but to live and be merry, would run from one end of the world to the other to seek out one good year of pleasant and jocund tranquillity. A melancholic and dull tranquillity may be enough for me, but it benumbs and stupefies me; I am not contented with it. If there be any person, any knot of good company in country or city, in France or elsewhere, resident or in motion, who can like my humour, and whose humours I can like, let them but whistle and I will run and furnish them with essays in flesh and bone:

Seeing it is the privilege of the mind to rescue itself from old age, I advise mine to it with all the power I have; let it meanwhile continue green, and flourish if it can, like mistletoe upon a dead tree. But I fear 'tis a traitor; it has contracted so strict a fraternity with the body that it leaves me at every turn, to follow that in its need. I wheedle and deal with it apart in vain; I try in vain to wean it from this correspondence, to no effect; quote to it Seneca and Catullus, and ladies and royal masques; if its companion have the stone, it seems to have it too; even the faculties that are most peculiarly and properly its own cannot then perform their functions, but manifestly appear stupefied and asleep;

⁵⁹"Mingle with counsels a brief interval of folly." —Horace, *Od.*, iv. 12, 27.

⁶⁰"In a fragile body every shock is obnoxious." —Cicero, *De Senec.*, c. 18.

⁶¹"And the infirm mind can bear no difficult exertion." —Ovid, *De Ponto.*, i. 5, 18.

⁶²"And little force suffices to break what was cracked before." —Ovid, *De Tris.*, iii. 11, 22.

there is no sprightliness in its productions, if there be not at the same time an equal proportion in the body too.

Our masters are to blame, that in searching out the causes of the extraordinary emotions of the soul, besides attributing it to a divine ecstasy, love, martial fierceness, poesy, wine, they have not also attributed a part to health: a boiling, vigorous, full, and lazy health, such as formerly the verdure of youth and security, by fits, supplied me withal; that fire of sprightliness and gaiety darts into the mind flashes that are lively and bright beyond our natural light, and of all enthusiasms the most jovial, if not the most extravagant.

It is, then, no wonder if a contrary state stupefy and clog my spirit, and produce a contrary effect:

*“Ad nullum consurgit opus, cum corpore languet;”*⁶³

and yet would have me obliged to it for giving, as it wants to make out, much less consent to this stupidity than is the ordinary case with men of my age. Let us, at least, whilst we have truce, drive away incommodities and difficulties from our commerce:

*“Dum licet, obducta solvatur fronte senectus:”*⁶⁴

*“Tetrica sunt amcenanda jocularibus.”*⁶⁵

I love a gay and civil wisdom, and fly from all sourness and austerity of manners, all repellent, mien being suspected by me:

*“Tristemque vultus tetrici arrogantiam:”*⁶⁶

*“Et habet tristis quoque turba cinaedos.”*⁶⁷

I am very much of Plato’s opinion, who says that facile or harsh humours are great indications of the good or ill disposition of the mind.

⁶³“When the mind is languishing, the body is good for nothing.” (Or:) “It rises to no effort; it languishes with the body.” –Pseudo Gallus, i. 125.

⁶⁴“Whilst we can, let us banish old age from the brow.” –Herod., Ep., xiii. 7.

⁶⁵“Sour things are to be sweetened with those that are pleasant.” –Sidonius Apollin., Ep., i. 9.

⁶⁶“The arrogant sadness of a crabbed face.” –Auctor Incert.

⁶⁷“And the dull crowd also has its voluptuaries.” (Or:) “An austere countenance sometimes covers a debauched mind.” –Idem.

Socrates had a constant countenance, but serene and smiling, not sourly austere, like the elder Crassus, whom no one ever saw laugh. Virtue is a pleasant and gay quality.

I know very well that few will quarrel with the licence of my writings, who have not more to quarrel with in the licence of their own thoughts: I conform myself well enough to their inclinations, but I offend their eyes. 'Tis a fine humour to strain the writings of Plato, to wrest his pretended intercourses with Phaedo, Dion, Stella, and Archeanassa:

*"Non pudeat dicere, quod non pudet sentire."*⁶⁸

I hate a froward and dismal spirit, that slips over all the pleasures of life and seizes and feeds upon misfortunes; like flies, that cannot stick to a smooth and polished body, but fix and repose themselves upon craggy and rough places, and like cupping-glasses, that only suck and attract bad blood.

As to the rest, I have enjoined myself to dare to say all that I dare to do; even thoughts that are not to be published, displease me; the worst of my actions and qualities do not appear to me so evil as I find it evil and base not to dare to own them. Every one is wary and discreet in confession, but men ought to be so in action; the boldness of doing ill is in some sort compensated and restrained by the boldness of confessing it. Whoever will oblige himself to tell all, should oblige himself to do nothing that he must be forced to conceal. I wish that this excessive licence of mine may draw men to freedom, above these timorous and mincing virtues sprung from our imperfections, and that at the expense of my immoderation I may reduce them to reason. A man must see and study his vice to correct it; they who conceal it from others, commonly conceal it from themselves; and do not think it close enough, if they themselves see it: they withdraw and disguise it from their own consciences:

*"Quare vitia sua nemo confitetur?
Quia etiam nunc in illia est; somnium narrare vigilantis
est."*⁶⁹

⁶⁸"Let us not be ashamed to speak what we are not ashamed to think."

⁶⁹"Why does no man confess his vices? because he is yet in them; 'tis for a waking man to tell his dream." —Seneca, Ep., 53.

The diseases of the body explain themselves by their increase; we find that to be the gout which we called a rheum or a strain; the diseases of the soul, the greater they are, keep, themselves the most obscure; the most sick are the least sensible; therefore it is that with an unrelenting hand they most often, in full day, be taken to task, opened, and torn from the hollow of the heart. As in doing well, so in doing ill, the mere confession is sometimes satisfaction. Is there any deformity in doing amiss, that can excuse us from confessing ourselves? It is so great a pain to me to dissemble, that I evade the trust of another's secrets, wanting the courage to disavow my knowledge. I can keep silent, but deny I cannot without the greatest trouble and violence to myself imaginable to be very secret, a man must be so by nature, not by obligation. 'Tis little worth, in the service of a prince, to be secret, if a man be not a liar to boot. If he who asked Thales the Milesian whether he ought solemnly to deny that he had committed adultery, had applied himself to me, I should have told him that he ought not to do it; for I look upon lying as a worse fault than the other. Thales advised him quite contrary, bidding him swear to shield the greater fault by the less,⁷⁰

nevertheless, this counsel was not so much an election as a multiplication of vice. Upon which let us say this in passing, that we deal liberally with a man of conscience when we propose to him some difficulty in counterpoise of vice; but when we shut him up betwixt two vices, he is put to a hard choice as Origen was either to idolatrise or to suffer himself to be carnally abused by a great Ethiopian slave they brought to him. He submitted to the first condition, and wrongly, people say. Yet those women of our times are not much out, according to their error, who protest they had rather burden their consciences with ten men than one mass.

If it be indiscretion so to publish one's errors, yet there is no great danger that it pass into example and custom; for Ariston said, that the winds men most fear are those that lay them open. We must tuck up this ridiculous rag that hides our manners: they send their consciences to the stews, and keep a starched countenance: even traitors and assassins espouse the laws of ceremony, and there fix their duty. So that neither can injustice complain of incivility, nor malice of indiscretion. 'Tis pity but a bad man should be a fool to boot, and that outward decency should palliate his vice: this rough-cast only appertains to a good and sound wall, that deserves to be preserved and whited.

⁷⁰Montaigne's memory here serves him ill, for the question being put to Thales, his answer was: "But is not perjury worse than adultery?" —Diogenes Laertius, in vita, i. 36.

In favour of the Huguenots, who condemn our auricular and private confession, I confess myself in public, religiously and purely: St. Augustin, Origeti, and Hippocrates have published the errors of their opinions; I, moreover, of my manners. I am greedy of making myself known, and I care not to how many, provided it be truly; or to say better, I hunger for nothing; but I mortally hate to be mistaken by those who happen to learn my name. He who does all things for honour and glory, what can he think to gain by shewing himself to the world in a vizor, and by concealing his true being from the people? Praise a humpback for his stature, he has reason to take it for an affront: if you are a coward, and men commend you for your valour, is it of you they speak? They take you for another. I should like him as well who glorifies himself in the compliments and congees that are made him as if he were master of the company, when he is one of the least of the train. Archelaus, king of Macedon, walking along the street, somebody threw water on his head, which they who were with him said he ought to punish: "Aye, but," said he, "whoever it was, he did not throw the water upon me, but upon him whom he took me to be." Socrates being told that people spoke ill of him, "Not at all," said he, "there is nothing, in me of what they say."

For my part, if any one should recommend me as a good pilot, as being very modest or very chaste, I should owe him no thanks; and so, whoever should call me traitor, robber, or drunkard, I should be as little concerned. They who do not rightly know themselves, may feed themselves with false approbations; not I, who see myself, and who examine myself even to my very bowels, and who very well know what is my due. I am content to be less commended, provided I am better known. I may be reputed a wise man in such a sort of wisdom as I take to be folly. I am vexed that my Essays only serve the ladies for a common piece of furniture, and a piece for the hall; this chapter will make me part of the water-closet. I love to traffic with them a little in private; public conversation is without favour and without savour. In farewells, we oftener than not heat our affections towards the things we take leave of; I take my last leave of the pleasures of this world: these are our last embraces.

But let us come to my subject: what has the act of generation, so natural, so necessary, and so just, done to men, to be a thing not to be spoken of without blushing, and to be excluded from all serious and moderate discourse? We boldly pronounce kill, rob, betray, and that we dare only to do betwixt the teeth. Is it to say, the less we expend in

words, we may pay so much the more in thinking? For it is certain that the words least in use, most seldom written, and best kept in, are the best and most generally known: no age, no manners, are ignorant of them, no more than the word bread they imprint themselves in every one without being, expressed, without voice, and without figure; and the sex that most practises it is bound to say least of it. 'Tis an act that we have placed in the franchise of silence, from which to take it is a crime even to accuse and judge it; neither dare we reprehend it but by periphrasis and picture. A great favour to a criminal to be so execrable that justice thinks it unjust to touch and see him; free, and safe by the benefit of the severity of his condemnation. Is it not here as in matter of books, that sell better and become more public for being suppressed? For my part, I will take Aristotle at his word, who says, that "bashfulness is an ornament to youth, but a reproach to old age." These verses are preached in the ancient school, a school that I much more adhere to than the modern: its virtues appear to me to be greater, and the vices less:

*"Ceux qui par trop fuyant Venus estrivent,
Faillent autant que ceulx qui trop la suyvent."*⁷¹

*"Tu, dea, rerum naturam sola gubernas,
Nec sine to quicquam dias in luminis oras
Exoritur, neque fit laetum, nec amabile quidquam."*⁷²

I know not who could set Pallas and the Muses at variance with Venus, and make them cold towards Love; but I see no deities so well met, or that are more indebted to one another. Who will deprive the Muses of amorous imaginations, will rob them of the best entertainment they have, and of the noblest matter of their work: and who will make Love lose the communication and service of poesy, will disarm him of his best weapons: by this means they charge the god of familiarity and good will, and the protecting goddesses of humanity and justice, with the vice of ingratitude and unthankfulness. I have not been so long cashiered from the state and service of this god, that my memory is not still perfect in his force and value:

⁷¹"They err as much who too much forbear Venus, as they who are too frequent in her rites." —A translation by Amyot from Plutarch, A philosopher should converse with princes.

⁷²"Goddess, still thou alone governess nature, nor without thee anything comes into light; nothing is pleasant, nothing joyful." —Lucretius, i. 22.

*"Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae;"*⁷³

There are yet some remains of heat and emotion after the fever:

*"Nec mihi deficiat calor hic, hiemantibus annis!"*⁷⁴

Withered and drooping as I am, I feel yet some remains of the past ardour:

*"Qual l'alto Egeo, per the Aquilone o Noto
Cessi, the tutto prima il volse et scosse,
Non 's acceta ei pero; ma'l suono e'l moto
Ritien del l'onde anco agitate e grosse:"*⁷⁵

but from what I understand of it, the force and power of this god are more lively and animated in the picture of poesy than in their own essence:

*"Et versus digitos habet:"*⁷⁶

it has I know not what kind of air, more amorous than love itself. Venus is not so beautiful, naked, alive, and panting, as she is here in Virgil:

*'Dixerat; et niveis hinc atque hinc Diva lacertis
Cunctantem amplexu molli fovet.
Ille repente
Accepit solitam flammam; notusque medullas
Intravit calor, et labefacta per ossa cucurrit
Non secus atque olim tonitru, cum rupta corusco
Ignea rima micans percurrit lumine nimbos.*

.....
*Ea verba loquutus,
Optatos dedit amplexus; placidumque petivit*

⁷³"I recognise vestiges of my old flame." –Aeneid., iv. 23.

⁷⁴"Nor let this heat of youth fail me in my winter years."

⁷⁵"As Aegean seas, when storms be calmed again,
That rolled their tumbling waves with troublous blasts,
Do yet of tempests passed some show retain,
And here and there their swelling billows cast." –Fairfax.

⁷⁶"Verse has fingers."—Altered from Juvenal, iv. 196.

*Conjugis infusus gremio per membra soporem.*⁷⁷

All that I find fault with in considering it is, that he has represented her a little too passionate for a married Venus; in this discreet kind of coupling, the appetite is not usually so wanton, but more grave and dull. Love hates that people should hold of any but itself, and goes but faintly to work in familiarities derived from any other title, as marriage is: alliance, dowry, therein sway by reason, as much or more than grace and beauty. Men do not marry for themselves, let them say what they will; they marry as much or more for their posterity and family; the custom and interest of marriage concern our race much more than us; and therefore it is, that I like to have a match carried on by a third hand rather than a man's own, and by another man's liking than that of the party himself; and how much is all this opposite to the conventions of love? And also it is a kind of incest to employ in this venerable and sacred alliance the heat and extravagance of amorous licence, as I think I have said elsewhere. A man, says Aristotle, must approach his wife with prudence and temperance, lest in dealing too lasciviously with her, the extreme pleasure make her exceed the bounds of reason. What he says upon the account of conscience, the physicians say upon the account of health: "that a pleasure excessively lascivious, voluptuous, and frequent, makes the seed too hot, and hinders conception": 'tis said, elsewhere, that to a languishing intercourse, as this naturally is, to supply it with a due and fruitful heat, a man must do it but seldom and at appreciable intervals:

*"Quo rapiat sitiens Venerem, interiusque recondat."*⁷⁸

I see no marriages where the conjugal compatibility sooner fails than those that we contract upon the account of beauty and amorous desires; there should be more solid and constant foundation, and they should proceed with greater circumspection; this furious ardour is worth nothing.

⁷⁷"The goddess spoke, and throwing round him her snowy arms in soft embraces, caresses him hesitating. Suddenly he caught the wonted flame, and the well-known warmth pierced his marrow, and ran thrilling through his shaken bones: just as when at times, with thunder, a stream of fire in lightning flashes shoots across the skies. Having spoken these words, he gave her the wished embrace, and in the bosom of his spouse sought placid sleep." —Aeneid, viii. 387 and 392.

⁷⁸"But let him thirstily snatch the joys of love and enclose them in his bosom." —Virg., Georg., iii. 137.

They who think they honour marriage by joining love to it, do, methinks, like those who, to favour virtue, hold that nobility is nothing else but virtue. They are indeed things that have some relation to one another, but there is a great deal of difference; we should not so mix their names and titles; 'tis a wrong to them both so to confound them. Nobility is a brave quality, and with good reason introduced; but forasmuch as 'tis a quality depending upon others, and may happen in a vicious person, in himself nothing, 'tis in estimate infinitely below virtue';⁷⁹

'tis a virtue, if it be one, that is artificial and apparent, depending upon time and fortune: various in form, according to the country; living and mortal; without birth, as the river Nile; genealogical and common; of succession and similitude; drawn by consequence, and a very weak one. Knowledge, strength, goodness, beauty, riches, and all other qualities, fall into communication and commerce, but this is consummated in itself, and of no use to the service of others. There was proposed to one of our kings the choice of two candidates for the same command, of whom one was a gentleman, the other not; he ordered that, without respect to quality, they should choose him who had the most merit; but where the worth of the competitors should appear to be entirely equal, they should have respect to birth: this was justly to give it its rank. A young man unknown, coming to Antigonus to make suit for his father's command, a valiant man lately dead: "Friend," said he, "in such preferments as these, I have not so much regard to the nobility of my soldiers as to their prowess." And, indeed, it ought not to go as it did with the officers of the kings of Sparta, trumpeters, fiddlers, cooks, the children of whom always succeeded to their places, how ignorant soever, and were preferred before the most experienced in the trade. They of Calicut make of nobles a sort of superhuman persons: they are interdicted marriage and all but warlike employments: they may have of concubines their fill, and the women as many lovers, without being jealous of one another; but 'tis a capital and irremissible crime to couple with a person of meaner conditions than themselves; and they think themselves polluted, if they have but touched one in walking along; and supposing their nobility to be marvellously interested and injured in it, kill such as only approach a little too near them: in-somuch that the ignoble are obliged to cry out as they walk, like the gondoliers of Venice, at the turnings of streets for fear of jostling; and

⁷⁹"If nobility be virtue, it loses its quality in all things wherein it be not virtue, 'tis a small matter." —La Byuyere. not virtuous: and if

the nobles command them to step aside to what part they please: by that means these avoid what they repute a perpetual ignominy, those certain death. No time, no favour of the prince, no office, or virtue, or riches, can ever prevail to make a plebeian become noble: to which this custom contributes, that marriages are interdicted betwixt different trades; the daughter of one of the cordwainers' gild is not permitted to marry a carpenter; and parents are obliged to train up their children precisely in their own callings, and not put them to any other trade; by which means the distinction and continuance of their fortunes are maintained.

A good marriage, if there be any such, rejects the company and conditions of love, and tries to represent those of friendship. 'Tis a sweet society of life, full of constancy, trust, and an infinite number of useful and solid services and mutual obligations; which any woman who has a right taste:

*"Optato quam junxit lumine taeda"*⁸⁰

would be loth to serve her husband in quality of a mistress. If she be lodged in his affection as a wife, she is more honourably and securely placed. When he purports to be in love with another, and works all he can to obtain his desire, let any one but ask him, on which he had rather a disgrace should fall, his wife or his mistress, which of their misfortunes would most afflict him, and to which of them he wishes the most grandeur, the answer to these questions is out of dispute in a sound marriage.

And that so few are observed to be happy, is a token of its price and value. If well formed and rightly taken, 'tis the best of all human societies; we cannot live without it, and yet we do nothing but decry it. It happens, as with cages, the birds without despair to get in, and those within despair of getting out. Socrates being asked, whether it was more commodious to take a wife or not, "Let a man take which course he will," said he; "he will repent." 'Tis a contract to which the common saying:

*"Homo homini aut deus aut lupus,"*⁸¹

⁸⁰"Whom the marriage torch has joined with the desired light."

—Catullus, lxiv. 79.

⁸¹"Man to man is either a god or a wolf." —Erasmus, Adag.

may very fitly be applied; there must be a concurrence of many qualities in the construction. It is found nowadays more convenient for simple and plebeian souls, where delights, curiosity, and idleness do not so much disturb it; but extravagant humours, such as mine, that hate all sorts of obligation and restraint, are not so proper for it:

*“Et mihi dulce magis resoluto vivere collo.”*⁸²

Might I have had my own will, I would not have married Wisdom herself, if she would have had me. But 'tis to much purpose to evade it; the common custom and usance of life will have it so. The most of my actions are guided by example, not by choice, and yet I did not go to it of my own voluntary motion; I was led and drawn to it by extrinsic occasions; for not only things that are incommodious in themselves, but also things however ugly, vicious, and to be avoided, may be rendered acceptable by some condition or accident; so unsteady and vain is all human resolution! and I was persuaded to it, when worse prepared and less tractable than I am at present, that I have tried what it is: and as great a libertine as I am taken to be, I have in truth more strictly observed the laws of marriage, than I either promised or expected. 'Tis in vain to kick, when a man has once put on his fetters: a man must prudently manage his liberty; but having once submitted to obligation, he must confine himself within the laws of common duty, at least, do what he can towards it. They who engage in this contract, with a design to carry themselves in it with hatred and contempt, do an unjust and inconvenient thing; and the fine rule that I hear pass from hand to hand amongst the women, as a sacred oracle:⁸³

which is to say, comport thyself towards him with a dissembled, inimical, and distrustful reverence (a cry of war and defiance), is equally injurious and hard. I am too mild for such rugged designs: to say the truth, I am not arrived to that perfection of ability and refinement of wit, to confound reason with injustice, and to laugh at all rule and order that does not please my palate; because I hate superstition, I do not presently run into the contrary extreme of irreligion.⁸⁴

If a man does not always perform his duty, he ought at least to love and acknowledge it; 'tis treachery to marry without espousing.

⁸²“And it is sweet to me to live with a loosened neck.” —Pseudo Gallus, i. 61.

⁸³“Serve thy husband as thy master, but guard thyself against him as from a traitor.”

⁸⁴If a man hate superstition he cannot love religion. D.W.

Let us proceed.

Our poet represents a marriage happy in a good accord wherein nevertheless there is not much loyalty. Does he mean, that it is not impossible but a woman may give the reins to her own passion, and yield to the importunities of love, and yet reserve some duty toward marriage, and that it may be hurt, without being totally broken? A serving man may cheat his master, whom nevertheless he does not hate. Beauty, opportunity, and destiny (for destiny has also a hand in't),

*"Fatum est in partibus illis
Quas sinus abscondit; nam, si tibi sidera cessent,
Nil faciet longi mensura incognita nervi;"*⁸⁵

have attached her to a stranger; though not so wholly, peradventure, but that she may have some remains of kindness for her husband. They are two designs, that have several paths leading to them, without being confounded with one another; a woman may yield to a man she would by no means have married, not only for the condition of his fortune, but for those also of his person. Few men have made a wife of a mistress, who have not repented it. And even in the other world, what an unhappy life does Jupiter lead with his, whom he had first enjoyed as a mistress! 'Tis, as the proverb runs, to befool a basket and then put it upon one's head. I have in my time, in a good family, seen love shamefully and dishonestly cured by marriage: the considerations are widely different. We love at once, without any tie, two things contrary in themselves.

Socrates was wont to say, that the city of Athens pleased, as ladies do whom men court for love; every one loved to come thither to take a turn, and pass away his time; but no one liked it so well as to espouse it, that is, to inhabit there, and to make it his constant residence. I have been vexed to see husbands hate their wives only because they themselves do them wrong; we should not, at all events, methinks, love them the less for our own faults; they should at least, upon the account of repentance and compassion, be dearer to us.

They are different ends, he says, and yet in some sort compatible; marriage has utility, justice, honour, and constancy for its share; a flat, but more universal pleasure: love finds itself wholly upon pleasure,

⁸⁵"There is a fatality about the hidden parts: let nature have endowed you however liberally, 'tis of no use, if your good star fails you in the nick of time." —Juvenal, ix. 32.

and, indeed, has it more full, lively, and sharp; a pleasure inflamed by difficulty; there must be in it sting and smart: 'tis no longer love, if without darts and fire. The bounty of ladies is too profuse in marriage, and dulls the point of affection and desire: to evade which inconvenience, do but observe what pains Lycurgus and Plato take in their laws.

Women are not to blame at all, when they refuse the rules of life that are introduced into the world, forasmuch as the men make them without their help. There is naturally contention and brawling betwixt them and us; and the strictest friendship we have with them is yet mixed with tumult and tempest. In the opinion of our author, we deal inconsiderately with them in this: after we have discovered that they are, without comparison, more able and ardent in the practice of love than we, and that the old priest testified as much, who had been one while a man, and then a woman:

*"Venus huic erat utraque nota:"*⁸⁶

and moreover, that we have learned from their own mouths the proof that, in several ages, was made by an Emperor and Empress of Rome,⁸⁷ –both famous for ability in that affair! for he in one night deflowered ten Sarmatian virgins who were his captives: but she had five-and-twenty bouts in one night, changing her man according to her need and liking;

*"Adhuc ardens rigidae tentigine vulvae
Et lassata viris, nondum satiata, recessit:"*⁸⁸

and that upon the dispute which happened in Cataluna, wherein a wife complaining of her husband's too frequent addresses to her, not so much, as I conceive, that she was incommodated by it (for I believe no miracles out of religion) as under this pretence, to curtail and curb in this, which is the fundamental act of marriage, the authority of husbands over their wives, and to shew that their frowardness and malignity go beyond the nuptial bed, and spurn under foot even the graces and sweets of Venus; the husband, a man truly brutish and unnatural,

⁸⁶"Both aspects of love were known to him," –Tiresias. Ovid. Metam., iii. 323.

⁸⁷Proclus.

⁸⁸"Ardent still, she retired, fatigued, but not satisfied." –Juvenal, vi. 128.

replied, that even on fasting days he could not subsist with less than ten courses: whereupon came out that notable sentence of the Queen of Arragon, by which, after mature deliberation of her council, this good queen, to give a rule and example to all succeeding ages of the moderation required in a just marriage, set down six times a day as a legitimate and necessary stint; surrendering and quitting a great deal of the needs and desires of her sex, that she might, she said, establish an easy, and consequently, a permanent and immutable rule. Hereupon the doctors cry out: what must the female appetite and concupiscence be, when their reason, their reformation and virtue, are taxed at such a rate, considering the divers judgments of our appetites? for Solon, master of the law school, taxes us but at three a month,—that men may not fail in point of conjugal frequentation: after having, I say, believed and preached all this, we go and enjoin them continency for their particular share, and upon the last and extreme penalties.

There is no passion so hard to contend with as this, which we would have them only resist, not simply as an ordinary vice, but as an execrable abomination, worse than irreligion and parricide; whilst we, at the same time, go to't without offence or reproach. Even those amongst us who have tried the experiment have sufficiently confessed what difficulty, or rather impossibility, they have found by material remedies to subdue, weaken, and cool the body. We, on the contrary, would have them at once sound, vigorous plump, high-fed, and chaste; that is to say, both hot and cold; for the marriage, which we tell them is to keep them from burning, is but small refreshment to them, as we order the matter. If they take one whose vigorous age is yet boiling, he will be proud to make it known elsewhere;

*“Sit tandem pudor; aut eamus in jus;
Multis mentula millibus redempta,
Non est haec tua, Basse; vendidisti;”*⁸⁹

Polemon the philosopher was justly by his wife brought before the judge for sowing in a barren field the seed that was due to one that was fruitful: if, on the other hand, they take a decayed fellow, they are in a worse condition in marriage than either maids or widows. We think them well provided for, because they have a man to lie with, as the Romans concluded Clodia Laeta, a vestal nun, violated, because

⁸⁹“Let there be some shame, or we shall go to law: your vigour, bought by your wife with many thousands, is no longer yours: thou hast sold it. —“Martial, xii. 90.

Caligula had approached her, though it was declared he did no more but approach her: but, on the contrary, we by that increase their necessity, forasmuch as the touch and company of any man whatever rouses their desires, that in solitude would be more quiet. And to the end, 'tis likely, that they might render their chastity more meritorious by this circumstance and consideration, Boleslas and Kinge his wife, kings of Poland, vowed it by mutual consent, being in bed together, on their very wedding day, and kept their vow in spite of all matrimonial conveniences.

We train them up from their infancy to the traffic of love; their grace, dressing, knowledge, language, and whole instruction tend that way: their governesses imprint nothing in them but the idea of love, if for nothing else but by continually representing it to them, to give them a distaste for it. My daughter, the only child I have, is now of an age that forward young women are allowed to be married at; she is of a slow, thin, and tender complexion, and has accordingly been brought up by her mother after a retired and particular manner, so that she but now begins to be weaned from her childish simplicity. She was reading before me in a French book where the word 'fouteau', the name of a tree very well known, occurred;⁹⁰ the woman, to whose conduct she is committed, stopped her short a little roughly, and made her skip over that dangerous step. I let her alone, not to trouble their rules, for I never concern myself in that sort of government; feminine polity has a mysterious procedure; we must leave it to them; but if I am not mistaken the commerce of twenty lacquies could not, in six months' time, have so imprinted in her memory the meaning, usage, and all the consequence of the sound of these wicked syllables, as this good old woman did by reprimand and interdiction.

*"Motus doceri gaudet Ionicos
Matura virgo, et frangitur artibus;
Jam nunc et incestos amores
De tenero, meditatur ungui."⁹¹*

Let them but give themselves the rein a little, let them but enter into liberty of discourse, we are but children to them in this science. Hear them

⁹⁰The beech-tree; the name resembles in sound an obscene French word.

⁹¹"The maid ripe for marriage delights to learn Ionic dances, and to imitate those lascivious movements. Nay, already from her infancy she meditates criminal amours." – Horace, Od., iii. 6, 21., the text has 'fingitur'.

but describe our pursuits and conversation, they will very well make you understand that we bring them nothing they have not known before, and digested without our help.⁹²

Is it, perhaps, as Plato says, that they have formerly been debauched young fellows? I happened one day to be in a place where I could hear some of their talk without suspicion; I am sorry I cannot repeat it. By'r lady, said I, we had need go study the phrases of Amadis, and the tales of Boccaccio and Aretin, to be able to discourse with them: we employ our time to much purpose indeed. There is neither word, example, nor step they are not more perfect in than our books; 'tis a discipline that springs with their blood,

*"Et mentem ipsa Venus dedit,"*⁹³

which these good instructors, nature, youth, and health, are continually inspiring them with; they need not learn, they breed it:

*"Nec tantum niveo gavisus est ulla columbo,
Compar, vel si quid dicitur improbius,
Oscula mordenti semper decerpere rostro,
Quantum praecipue multivola est mulier."*⁹⁴

So that if the natural violence of their desire were not a little restrained by fear and honour, which were wisely contrived for them, we should be all shamed. All the motions in the world resolve into and tend to this conjunction; 'tis a matter infused throughout: 'tis a centre to which all things are directed. We yet see the edicts of the old and wise Rome made for the service of love, and the precepts of Socrates for the instruction of courtezans:

*"Noncon libelli Stoici inter sericos
acere pulvillos amant:"*⁹⁵

⁹²This sentence refers to a conversation between some young women in his immediate neighbourhood, which the Essayist just below informs us that he overheard, and which was too shocking for him to repeat. It must have been tolerably bad. —Remark by the editor of a later edition.

⁹³"Venus herself made them what they are," —Virg., Georg., iii. 267.

⁹⁴"No milk-white dove, or if there be a thing more lascivious, takes so much delight in kissing as woman, wishful for every man she sees." —Catullus, lxvi. 125.

⁹⁵"There are writings of the Stoics which we find lying upon silken cushions." —Horace, Epod., viii. 15.

Zeno, amongst his laws, also regulated the motions to be observed in getting a maidenhead. What was the philosopher Strato's book *Of Carnal Conjunction*?⁹⁶ And what did Theophrastus treat of in those he intitled, the one 'The Lover', and the other 'Of Love'? Of what Aristippus in his 'Of Former Delights'? What do the so long and lively descriptions in Plato of the loves of his time pretend to? and the book called 'The Lover', of Demetrius Phalereus? and 'Clinias', or the 'Ravished Lover', of Heraclides; and that of Antisthenes, 'Of Getting Children', or, 'Of Weddings', and the other, 'Of the Master or the Lover'? And that of Aristo: 'Of Amorous Exercises' What those of Cleanthes: one, 'Of Love', the other, 'Of the Art of Loving'? The amorous dialogues of Sphaereus? and the fable of Jupiter and Juno, of Chrysippus, impudent beyond all toleration? And his fifty so lascivious epistles? I will let alone the writings of the philosophers of the Epicurean sect, protectress of voluptuousness. Fifty deities were, in time past, assigned to this office; and there have been nations where, to assuage the lust of those who came to their devotion, they kept men and women in their temples for the worshippers to lie with; and it was an act of ceremony to do this before they went to prayers:

*"Nimirum propter continentiam incontinentia necessaria est; incendium ignibus extinguitur."*⁹⁷

In the greatest part of the world, that member of our body was deified; in the same province, some flayed off the skin to offer and consecrate a piece; others offered and consecrated their seed. In another, the young men publicly cut through betwixt the skin and the flesh of that part in several places, and thrust pieces of wood into the openings as long and thick as they would receive, and of these pieces of wood afterwards made a fire as an offering to their gods; and were reputed neither vigorous nor chaste, if by the force of that cruel pain they seemed to be at all dismayed. Elsewhere the most sacred magistrate was revered and acknowledged by that member and in several ceremonies the effigy of it was carried in pomp to the honour of various divinities. The Egyptian ladies, in their Bacchanalia, each carried one finely-carved of wood about their necks, as large and heavy as she could so carry it;

⁹⁶Diogenes Laertius, v. 59.

⁹⁷"Forsooth incontinency is necessary for continency's sake; a conflagration is extinguished by fire."

besides which, the statue of their god presented one, which in greatness surpassed all the rest of his body.⁹⁸ The married women, near the place where I live, make of their kerchiefs the figure of one upon their foreheads, to glorify themselves in the enjoyment they have of it; and coming to be widows, they throw it behind, and cover it with their headcloths. The most modest matrons of Rome thought it an honour to offer flowers and garlands to the god Priapus; and they made the virgins, at the time of their espousals, sit upon his shameful parts. And I know not whether I have not in my time seen some air of like devotion. What was the meaning of that ridiculous piece of the chausseye of our forefathers, and that is still worn by our Swiss?⁹⁹ To what end do we make a show of our implements in figure under our breeches, and often, which is worse, above their natural size, by falsehood and imposture? I have half a mind to believe that this sort of vestment was invented in the better and more conscientious ages, that the world might not be deceived, and that every one should give a public account of his proportions: the simple nations wear them yet, and near about the real size. In those days, the tailor took measure of it, as the shoemaker does now of a man's foot. That good man, who, when I was young, gelded so many noble and ancient statues in his great city, that they might not corrupt the sight of the ladies, according to the advice of this other ancient worthy:

*"Flagitii principium est, nudare inter gives corpora,"*¹⁰⁰

should have called to mind, that, as in the mysteries of the Bona Dea, all masculine appearance was excluded, he did nothing, if he did not geld horses and asses, in short, all nature:

*"Omne adeo genus in terris, hominumque, ferarumque,
Et genus aequoreum, pecudes, pictaeque volucres,
In furias ignemque ruunt."*¹⁰¹

The gods, says Plato, have given us one disobedient and unruly member that, like a furious animal, attempts, by the violence of its appetite,

⁹⁸Herodotus, ii. 48, says "nearly as large as the body itself."

⁹⁹"Cod-pieces worn"—Cotton

¹⁰⁰"'Tis the beginning of wickedness to expose their persons among the citizens" — Ennius, ap. Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., iv. 33.

¹⁰¹"So that all living things, men and animals, wild or tame, and fish and gaudy fowl, rush to this flame of love." —Virgil, Georg., iii. 244.

to subject all things to it; and so they have given to women one like a greedy and ravenous animal, which, if it be refused food in season, grows wild, impatient of delay, and infusing its rage into their bodies, stops the passages, and hinders respiration, causing a thousand ills, till, having imbibed the fruit of the common thirst, it has plentifully bedewed the bottom of their matrix. Now my legislator¹⁰² should also have considered that, peradventure, it were a chaster and more fruitful usage to let them know the fact as it is betimes, than permit them to guess according to the liberty and heat of their own fancy; instead of the real parts they substitute, through hope and desire, others that are three times more extravagant; and a certain friend of mine lost himself by producing his in place and time when the opportunity was not present to put them to their more serious use. What mischief do not those pictures of prodigious dimension do that the boys make upon the staircases and galleries of the royal houses? they give the ladies a cruel contempt of our natural furniture. And what do we know but that Plato, after other well-instituted republics, ordered that the men and women, old and young, should expose themselves naked to the view of one another, in his gymnastic exercises, upon that very account? The Indian women who see the men in their natural state, have at least cooled the sense of seeing. And let the women of the kingdom of Pegu say what they will, who below the waist have nothing to cover them but a cloth slit before, and so strait, that what decency and modesty soever they pretend by it, at every step all is to be seen, that it is an invention to allure the men to them, and to divert them from boys, to whom that nation is generally inclined; yet, peradventure they lose more by it than they get, and one may venture to say, that an entire appetite is more sharp than one already half-glutted by the eyes. Livia was wont to say, that to a virtuous woman a naked man was but a statue. The Lacedaemonian women, more virgins when wives than our daughters are, saw every day the young men of their city stripped naked in their exercises, themselves little heeding to cover their thighs in walking, believing themselves, says Plato, sufficiently covered by their virtue without any other robe. But those, of whom St. Augustin speaks, have given nudity a wonderful power of temptation, who have made it a doubt, whether women at the day of judgment shall rise again in their own sex, and not rather in ours, for fear of tempting us again in that holy state. In brief, we allure and flesh them by all sorts of ways: we incessantly heat and stir up their imagination, and then we find fault.

¹⁰²The Pope who, as Montaigne has told us, took it into his head to geld the statues.

Let us confess the truth; there is scarce one of us who does not more apprehend the shame that accrues to him by the vices of his wife than by his own, and that is not more solicitous (a wonderful charity) of the conscience of his virtuous wife than of his own; who had not rather commit theft and sacrilege, and that his wife was a murderess and a heretic, than that she should not be more chaste than her husband: an unjust estimate of vices. Both we and they are capable of a thousand corruptions more prejudicial and unnatural than lust: but we weigh vices, not according to nature, but according to our interest; by which means they take so many unequal forms.

The austerity of our decrees renders the application of women to this vice more violent and vicious than its own condition needs, and engages it in consequences worse than their cause: they will readily offer to go to the law courts to seek for gain, and to the wars to get reputation, rather than in the midst of ease and delights, to have to keep so difficult a guard. Do not they very well see that there is neither merchant nor soldier who will not leave his business to run after this sport, or the porter or cobbler, toiled and tired out as they are with labour and hunger?

*“Num tu, quæ tenuit dives Achaemenes,
Aut pinguis Phrygiae Mygdonias opes,
Permutare velis crine Licymnim?
Plenas aut Arabum domos,
Dum fragrantia detorquet ad oscula
Cervicem, aut facili sævitia negat,
Quæ poscente magis gaudeat eripi,
Interdum rapere occupet?”*¹⁰³

I do not know whether the exploits of Alexander and Caesar really surpass the resolution of a beautiful young woman, bred up after our fashion, in the light and commerce of the world, assailed by so many contrary examples, and yet keeping herself entire in the midst of a thousand continual and powerful solicitations. There is no doing more difficult than that not doing, nor more active:

¹⁰³“Wouldst thou not exchange all that the wealthy Archaemenes had, or the Mygdonian riches of fertile Phrygia, for one ringlet of Licymnia’s hair? or the treasures of the Arabians, when she turns her head to you for fragrant kisses, or with easily assuaged anger denies them, which she would rather by far you took by force, and sometimes herself snatches one!” —Horace, Od., ii. 12, 21.

I hold it more easy to carry a suit of armour all the days of one's life than a maidenhead; and the vow of virginity of all others is the most noble, as being the hardest to keep:

"Diaboli virtus in lumbis est,"

says St. Jerome. We have, doubtless, resigned to the ladies the most difficult and most vigorous of all human endeavours, and let us resign to them the glory too. This ought to encourage them to be obstinate in it; 'tis a brave thing for them to defy us, and to spurn under foot that vain pre-eminence of valour and virtue that we pretend to have over them; they will find if they do but observe it, that they will not only be much more esteemed for it, but also much more beloved. A gallant man does not give over his pursuit for being refused, provided it be a refusal of chastity, and not of choice; we may swear, threaten, and complain to much purpose; we therein do but lie, for we love them all the better: there is no allurement like modesty, if it be not rude and crabbed. 'Tis stupidity and meanness to be obstinate against hatred and disdain; but against a virtuous and constant resolution, mixed with goodwill, 'tis the exercise of a noble and generous soul. They may acknowledge our service to a certain degree, and give us civilly to understand that they disdain us not; for the law that enjoins them to abominate us because we adore them, and to hate us because we love them, is certainly very cruel, if but for the difficulty of it. Why should they not give ear to our offers and requests, so long as they are kept within the bounds of modesty? wherefore should we fancy them to have other thoughts within, and to be worse than they seem? A queen of our time said with spirit, "that to refuse these courtesies is a testimony of weakness in women and a self-accusation of facility, and that a lady could not boast of her chastity who was never tempted."

The limits of honour are not cut so short; they may give themselves a little rein, and relax a little without being faulty: there lies on the frontier some space free, indifferent, and neuter. He that has beaten and pursued her into her fort is a strange fellow if he be not satisfied with his fortune: the price of the conquest is considered by the difficulty. Would you know what impression your service and merit have made in her heart? Judge of it by her behaviour. Such an one may grant more, who does not grant so much. The obligation of a benefit wholly relates to the good will of those who confer it: the other coincident circumstances are dumb, dead, and casual; it costs her dearer to grant you

that little, than it would do her companion to grant all. If in anything rarity give estimation, it ought especially in this: do not consider how little it is that is given, but how few have it to give; the value of money alters according to the coinage and stamp of the place. Whatever the spite and indiscretion of some may make them say in the excess of their discontent, virtue and truth will in time recover all the advantage. I have known some whose reputation has for a great while suffered under slander, who have afterwards been restored to the world's universal approbation by their mere constancy without care or artifice; every one repents, and gives himself the lie for what he has believed and said; and from girls a little suspected they have been afterward advanced to the first rank amongst the ladies of honour. Somebody told Plato that all the world spoke ill of him. "Let them talk," said he; "I will live so as to make them change their note." Besides the fear of God, and the value of so rare a glory, which ought to make them look to themselves, the corruption of the age we live in compels them to it; and if I were they, there is nothing I would not rather do than intrust my reputation in so dangerous hands. In my time the pleasure of telling (a pleasure little inferior to that of doing) was not permitted but to those who had some faithful and only friend; but now the ordinary discourse and common table-talk is nothing but boasts of favours received and the secret liberality of ladies. In earnest, 'tis too abject, too much meanness of spirit, in men to suffer such ungrateful, indiscreet, and giddy-headed people so to persecute, forage, and rifle those tender and charming favours.

This our immoderate and illegitimate exasperation against this vice springs from the most vain and turbulent disease that afflicts human minds, which is jealousy:

*"Quis vetat apposito lumen de lumine sumi?
Dent licet assidue, nil tamen inde perit;"*¹⁰⁴

she, and envy, her sister, seem to me to be the most foolish of the whole troop. As to the last, I can say little about it; 'tis a passion that, though said to be so mighty and powerful, had never to do with me. As to the other, I know it by sight, and that's all. Beasts feel it; the shepherd Cratis, having fallen in love with a she-goat, the he-goat, out of

¹⁰⁴"Who says that one light should not be lighted from another light? Let them give ever so much, as much ever remains to lose." —Ovid, *De Arte Amandi*, iii. 93. The measure of the last line is not good; but the words are taken from the epigram in the *Catalecta* entitled *Priapus*.

jealousy, came, as he lay asleep, to butt the head of the female, and crushed it. We have raised this fever to a greater excess by the examples of some barbarous nations; the best disciplined have been touched with it, and 'tis reason, but not transported:

*"Ense maritali nemo confossus adulter
Purpureo Stygias sanguine tinxit aquas."*¹⁰⁵

Lucullus, Caesar, Pompey, Antony, Cato, and other brave men were cuckolds, and knew it, without making any bustle about it; there was in those days but one coxcomb, Lepidus, that died for grief that his wife had used him so.

*"Ah! tum te miserum malique fati,
Quem attractis pedibus, patente porta,
Percurrent raphanique mugilesque:"*¹⁰⁶

and the god of our poet, when he surprised one of his companions with his wife, satisfied himself by putting them to shame only,

*"Atque aliquis de dis non tristibus optat
Sic fieri turpis:"*¹⁰⁷

and nevertheless took anger at the lukewarm embraces she gave him; complaining that upon that account she was grown jealous of his affection:

*"Quid causas petis ex alto? fiducia cessit
Quo tibi, diva, mei?"*¹⁰⁸

nay, she entreats arms for a bastard of hers,

*"Arena rogo genitrix nato."*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵"Never did adulterer slain by a husband stain with purple blood the Stygian waters."

¹⁰⁶"Wretched man! when, taken in the fact, thou wilt be dragged out of doors by the heels, and suffer the punishment of thy adultery." –Catullus, xv. 17.

¹⁰⁷"And one of the merry gods wishes that he should himself like to be so disgraced." –Ovid, *Metam.*, iv. 187.

¹⁰⁸"Dost thou seek causes from above? Why, goddess, has your confidence in me ceased?" –Virgil, *Aeneid*, viii. 395.

¹⁰⁹"I, a mother, ask armour for a son." –Idem, *ibid.*, 383.

which are freely granted; and Vulcan speaks honourably of AEneas,

*“Arma acri facienda viro,”*¹¹⁰

with, in truth, a more than human humanity. And I am willing to leave this excess of kindness to the gods:

*“Nec divis homines componier aequum est.”*¹¹¹

As to the confusion of children, besides that the gravest legislators ordain and affect it in their republics, it touches not the women, where this passion is, I know not how, much better seated:

*“Saepe etiam Juno, maxima coelicolam,
Conjugis in culpa flagravat quotidiana.”*¹¹²

When jealousy seizes these poor souls, weak and incapable of resistance, 'tis pity to see how miserably it torments and tyrannises over them; it insinuates itself into them under the title of friendship, but after it has once possessed them, the same causes that served for a foundation of good-will serve them for a foundation of mortal hatred. 'Tis, of all the diseases of the mind, that which the most things serve for aliment and the fewest for remedy: the virtue, health, merit, reputation of the husband are incendiaries of their fury and ill-will:

*“Nullae sunt inimicitiae, nisi amoris, acerbae.”*¹¹³

This fever defaces and corrupts all they have of beautiful and good besides; and there is no action of a jealous woman, let her be how chaste and how good a housewife soever, that does not relish of anger and wrangling; 'tis a furious agitation, that rebounds them to an extremity quite contrary to its cause. This held good with one Octavius at Rome. Having lain with Pontia Posthumia, he augmented love with fruition,

¹¹⁰“Arms are to be made for a valiant hero.”—Aeneid, viii. 441.

¹¹¹“Nor is it fit to compare men with gods.” —Catullus, lxxviii. 141.

¹¹²“Often was Juno, greatest of the heaven-dwellers, enraged by her husband’s daily infidelities.” —Idem, *ibid.*

¹¹³“No enmities are bitter, save that of love.” (Or:) “No hate is implacable except the hatred of love” —Propertius, ii. 8, 3.

and solicited with all importunity to marry her: unable to persuade her, this excessive affection precipitated him to the effects of the most cruel and mortal hatred: he killed her. In like manner, the ordinary symptoms of this other amorous disease are intestine hatreds, private conspiracies, and cabals:

*"Notumque furens quid faemina possit,"*¹¹⁴

and a rage which so much the more frets itself, as it is compelled to excuse itself by a pretence of good-will.

Now, the duty of chastity is of a vast extent; is it the will that we would have them restrain? This is a very supple and active thing; a thing very nimble, to be stayed. How? if dreams sometimes engage them so far that they cannot deny them: it is not in them, nor, peradventure, in chastity itself, seeing that is a female, to defend itself from lust and desire. If we are only to trust to their will, what a case are we in, then? Do but imagine what crowding there would be amongst men in pursuance of the privilege to run full speed, without tongue or eyes, into every woman's arms who would accept them. The Scythian women put out the eyes of all their slaves and prisoners of war, that they might have their pleasure of them, and they never the wiser. O, the furious advantage of opportunity! Should any one ask me, what was the first thing to be considered in love matters, I should answer that it was how to take a fitting time; and so the second; and so the third—'tis a point that can do everything. I have sometimes wanted fortune, but I have also sometimes been wanting to myself in matters of attempt. God help him, who yet makes light of this! There is greater temerity required in this age of ours, which our young men excuse under the name of heat; but should women examine it more strictly, they would find that it rather proceeds from contempt. I was always superstitiously afraid of giving offence, and have ever had a great respect for her I loved: besides, he who in this traffic takes away the reverence, defaces at the same time the lustre. I would in this affair have a man a little play the child, the timorous, and the servant. If not this, I have in other bashfulness whereof altogether in things some air of the foolish Plutarch makes mention; and the course of my life has been divers ways hurt and blemished with it; a quality very ill suiting my universal form: and, indeed, what are we but sedition and discrepancy? I am as

¹¹⁴"And it is known what an angry woman is capable of doing." —Aeneid, V. 21.

much out of countenance to be denied as I am to deny; and it so much troubles me to be troublesome to others that on occasion when duty compels me to try the good-will of any one in a thing that is doubtful and that will be chargeable to him, I do it very faintly, and very much against my will: but if it be for my own particular (whatever Homer truly says, that modesty is a foolish virtue in an indigent person), I commonly commit it to a third person to blush for me, and deny those who employ me with the same difficulty: so that it has sometimes befallen me to have had a mind to deny, when I had not the power to do it.

'Tis folly, then, to attempt to bridle in women a desire that is so powerful in them, and so natural to them. And when I hear them brag of having so maidenly and so temperate a will, I laugh at them: they retire too far back. If it be an old toothless trot, or a young dry consumptive thing, though it be not altogether to be believed, at least they say it with more similitude of truth. But they who still move and breathe, talk at that ridiculous rate to their own prejudice, by reason that inconsiderate excuses are a kind of self-accusation; like a gentleman, a neighbour of mine, suspected to be insufficient:

*"Languidior tenera cui pendens sicula beta,
Numquam se mediam sustulit ad tunicam,"*¹¹⁵

who three or four days after he was married, to justify himself, went about boldly swearing that he had ridden twenty stages the night before: an oath that was afterwards made use of to convict him of his ignorance in that affair, and to divorce him from his wife. Besides, it signifies nothing, for there is neither continency nor virtue where there are no opposing desires. It is true, they may say, but we will not yield; saints themselves speak after that manner. I mean those who boast in good gravity of their coldness and insensibility, and who expect to be believed with a serious countenance; for when 'tis spoken with an affected look, when their eyes give the lie to their tongue, and when they talk in the cant of their profession, which always goes against the hair, 'tis good sport. I am a great servant of liberty and plainness; but there is no remedy; if it be not wholly simple or childish, 'tis silly, and unbecoming ladies in this commerce, and presently runs into impudence. Their disguises and figures only serve to cosen fools; lying is there in

¹¹⁵Catullus, lxxvii. 2, i. –The sense is in the context.

its seat of honour; 'tis a by-way, that by a back-door leads us to truth. If we cannot curb their imagination, what would we have from them. Effects? There are enough of them that evade all foreign communication, by which chastity may be corrupted:

*"Illud saepe facit, quod sine teste facit;"*¹¹⁶

and those which we fear the least are, peradventure, most to be feared; their sins that make the least noise are the worst:

*"Offendor maecha simpliciore minus."*¹¹⁷

There are ways by which they may lose their virginity without prostitution, and, which is more, without their knowledge:

*"Obsterix, virginis cujusdam integritatem manu velut explorans, sive malevolentia, sive inscitia, sive casu, dum inspicit, perdidit."*¹¹⁸

Such a one, by seeking her maidenhead, has lost it; another by playing with it has destroyed it. We cannot precisely circumscribe the actions, we interdict them; they must guess at our meaning under general and doubtful terms; the very idea we invent for their chastity is ridiculous: for, amongst the greatest patterns that I have is Fatua, the wife of Faunus: who never, after her marriage, suffered herself to be seen by any man whatever; and the wife of Hiero, who never perceived her husband's stinking breath, imagining that it was common to all men. They must become insensible and invisible to satisfy us.

Now let us confess that the knot of this judgment of duty principally lies in the will; there have been husbands who have suffered cuckoldom, not only without reproach or taking offence at their wives, but with singular obligation to them and great commendation of their virtue. Such a woman has been, who prized her honour above her life, and yet has prostituted it to the furious lust of a mortal enemy, to save

¹¹⁶"He often does that which he does without a witness." –Martial, vii. 62, 6.

¹¹⁷"I am less offended with a more professed strumpet." –Idem, vi. 7, 6.

¹¹⁸"By malevolence, or unskilfulness, or accident, the midwife, seeking with the hand to test some maiden's virginity, has sometimes destroyed it." –St. Augustine, De Civit. Dei, i. 18.

her husband's life, and who, in so doing, did that for him she would not have done for herself! This is not the place wherein we are to multiply these examples; they are too high and rich to be set off with so poor a foil as I can give them here; let us reserve them for a nobler place; but for examples of ordinary lustre, do we not every day see women amongst us who surrender themselves for their husbands sole benefit, and by their express order and mediation? and, of old, Phaulius the Argian, who offered his to King Philip out of ambition; as Galba did it out of civility, who, having entertained Maecenas at supper, and observing that his wife and he began to cast glances at one another and to make eyes and signs, let himself sink down upon his cushion, like one in a profound sleep, to give opportunity to their desires: which he handsomely confessed, for thereupon a servant having made bold to lay hands on the plate upon the table, he frankly cried, "What, you rogue? do you not see that I only sleep for Maecenas?" Such there may be, whose manners may be lewd enough, whose will may be more reformed than another, who outwardly carries herself after a more regular manner. As we see some who complain of having vowed chastity before they knew what they did; and I have also known others really, complain of having been given up to debauchery before they were of the years of discretion. The vice of the parents or the impulse of nature, which is a rough counsellor, may be the cause.

In the East Indies, though chastity is of singular reputation, yet custom permitted a married woman to prostitute herself to any one who presented her with an elephant, and that with glory, to have been valued at so high a rate. Phaedo the philosopher, a man of birth, after the taking of his country Elis, made it his trade to prostitute the beauty of his youth, so long as it lasted, to any one that would, for money thereby to gain his living: and Solon was the first in Greece, 'tis said, who by his laws gave liberty to women, at the expense of their chastity, to provide for the necessities of life; a custom that Herodotus says had been received in many governments before his time. And besides, what fruit is there of this painful solicitude? For what justice soever there is in this passion, we are yet to consider whether it turns to account or no: does any one think to curb them, with all his industry?

*"Pone seram; cohibe: sed quis custodiet ipsos Custodes?
cauta est, et ab illis incipit uxor."*¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹"Put on a lock; shut them up under a guard; but who shall guard the guard? she knows what she is about, and begins with them." —Juvenal, vi. 346.

What commodity will not serve their turn, in so knowing an age?

Curiosity is vicious throughout; but 'tis pernicious here. 'Tis folly to examine into a disease for which there is no physic that does not inflame and make it worse; of which the shame grows still greater and more public by jealousy, and of which the revenge more wounds our children than it heals us. You wither and die in the search of so obscure a proof. How miserably have they of my time arrived at that knowledge who have been so unhappy as to have found it out? If the informer does not at the same time apply a remedy and bring relief, 'tis an injurious information, and that better deserves a stab than the lie. We no less laugh at him who takes pains to prevent it, than at him who is a cuckold and knows it not. The character of cuckold is indelible: who once has it carries it to his grave; the punishment proclaims it more than the fault. It is to much purpose to drag out of obscurity and doubt our private misfortunes, thence to expose them on tragic scaffolds; and misfortunes that only hurt us by being known; for we say a good wife or a happy marriage, not that they are really so, but because no one says to the contrary. Men should be so discreet as to evade this tormenting and unprofitable knowledge: and the Romans had a custom, when returning from any expedition, to send home before to acquaint their wives with their coming, that they might not surprise them; and to this purpose it is that a certain nation has introduced a custom, that the priest shall on the wedding-day open the way to the bride, to free the husband from the doubt and curiosity of examining in the first assault, whether she comes a virgin to his bed, or has been at the trade before.

But the world will be talking. I know, a hundred honest men cuckolds, honestly and not unbecomingly; a worthy man is pitied, not disesteemed for it. Order it so that your virtue may conquer your misfortune; that good men may curse the occasion, and that he who wrongs you may tremble but to think on't. And, moreover, who escapes being talked of at the same rate, from the least even to the greatest?

"Tot qui legionibus imperitavit

*Et melior quam to multis fuit, improbe, rebus."*¹²⁰

Seest thou how many honest men are reproached with this in thy presence; believe that thou art no more spared elsewhere. But, the very

¹²⁰"Many who have commanded legions, many a man much better far than you, you rascal." -Lucretius, iii. 1039, 1041.

ladies will be laughing too; and what are they so apt to laugh at in this virtuous age of ours as at a peaceable and well-composed marriage? Each amongst you has made somebody cuckold; and nature runs much in parallel, in compensation, and turn for turn. The frequency of this accident ought long since to have made it more easy; 'tis now passed into custom.

Miserable passion! which has this also, that it is incommunicable,

*“Fors etiam nostris invidit questibus aures;”*¹²¹

for to what friend dare you intrust your griefs, who, if he does not laugh at them, will not make use of the occasion to get a share of the quarry? The sharps, as well as the sweets of marriage, are kept secret by the wise; and amongst its other troublesome conditions this to a prating fellow, as I am, is one of the chief, that custom has rendered it indecent and prejudicial to communicate to any one all that a man knows and all that a man feels. To give women the same counsel against jealousy would be so much time lost; their very being is so made up of suspicion, vanity, and curiosity, that to cure them by any legitimate way is not to be hoped. They often recover of this infirmity by a form of health much more to be feared than the disease itself; for as there are enchantments that cannot take away the evil but by throwing it upon another, they also willingly transfer this ever to their husbands, when they shake it off themselves. And yet I know not, to speak truth, whether a man can suffer worse from them than their jealousy; 'tis the most dangerous of all their conditions, as the head is of all their members. Pittacus used to say,¹²² that every one had his trouble, and that his was the jealous head of his wife; but for which he should think himself perfectly happy. A mighty inconvenience, sure, which could poison the whole life of so just, so wise, and so valiant a man; what must we other little fellows do? The senate of Marseilles had reason to grant him his request who begged leave to kill himself that he might be delivered from the clamour of his wife; for 'tis a mischief that is never removed but by removing the whole piece; and that has no remedy but flight or patience, though both of them very hard. He was, methinks, an understanding fellow who said, 'twas a happy marriage betwixt a blind wife and a deaf husband.

¹²¹“Fortune also refuses ear to our complaints.” –Catullus, lxvii.

¹²²Plutarch, On Contentment, c. II.

Let us also consider whether the great and violent severity of obligation we enjoin them does not produce two effects contrary to our design namely, whether it does not render the pursuants more eager to attack, and the women more easy to yield. For as to the first, by raising the value of the place, we raise the value and the desire of the conquest. Might it not be Venus herself, who so cunningly enhanced the price of her merchandise, by making the laws her bawds; knowing how insipid a delight it would be that was not heightened by fancy and hardness to achieve? In short, 'tis all swine's flesh, varied by sauces, as Flaminius' host said. Cupid is a roguish god, who makes it his sport to contend with devotion and justice: 'tis his glory that his power mates all powers, and that all other rules give place to his:

*"Materiam culpae prosequiturque suae."*¹²³

As to the second point; should we not be less cuckolds, if we less feared to be so? according to the humour of women whom interdiction incites, and who are more eager, being forbidden:

*"Ubi velis, nolunt; ubi nolis, volunt ultro;
Concessa pudet ire via."*¹²⁴

What better interpretation can we make of Messalina's behaviour? She, at first, made her husband a cuckold in private, as is the common use; but, bringing her business about with too much ease, by reason of her husband's stupidity, she soon scorned that way, and presently fell to making open love, to own her lovers, and to favour and entertain them in the sight of all: she would make him know and see how she used him. This animal, not to be roused with all this, and rendering her pleasures dull and flat by his too stupid facility, by which he seemed to authorise and make them lawful; what does she? Being the wife of a living and healthful emperor, and at Rome, the theatre of the world, in the face of the sun, and with solemn ceremony, and to Silius, who had long before enjoyed her, she publicly marries herself one day that her husband was gone out of the city. Does it not seem as if she was going to become chaste by her husband's negligence? or that she sought another husband who might sharpen her appetite by his jealousy, and

¹²³"And seeks out a matter (motive) for his crimes." —Ovid, *Trist.*, iv. I. 34.

¹²⁴"Where thou wilt, they won't; where thou wilt not, they spontaneously agree; they are ashamed to go in the permitted path." —Terence, *Eunuchus*, act iv., sc. 8, v 43

who by watching should incite her? But the first difficulty she met with was also the last: this beast suddenly roused these sleepy, sluggish sort of men are often the most dangerous: I have found by experience that this extreme toleration, when it comes to dissolve, produces the most severe revenge; for taking fire on a sudden, anger and fury being combined in one, discharge their utmost force at the first onset,

*"Irarumque omnes effundit habenas:"*¹²⁵

he put her to death, and with her a great number of those with whom she had intelligence, and even one of them who could not help it, and whom she had caused to be forced to her bed with scourges.

What Virgil says of Venus and Vulcan, Lucretius had better expressed of a stolen enjoyment betwixt her and Mars:

*"Belli fera moenera Mavors
Armipotens regit, ingremium qui saepe tuum se
Rejicit, aeterno devinctus vulnere amoris*

.....

*Pascit amore avidos inhians in te, Dea, visus,
Eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore
Hunc tu, Diva, tuo recubantem corpore sancto
Circumfusa super, suaveis ex ore loquelas Funde."*¹²⁶

When I consider this *rejicit*, *fiascit*, *inhians*, *ynolli*, *fovet*, *medullas*, *labefacta*, *pendet*, *percurrit*, and that noble *circumfusa*, mother of the pretty *infuses*; I disdain those little quibbles and verbal allusions that have since sprung up. Those worthy people stood in need of no subtlety to disguise their meaning; their language is downright, and full of natural and continued vigour; they are all epigram; not only the tail, but the head, body, and feet. There is nothing forced, nothing languishing, but everything keeps the same pace:

*"Contextus totes virilis est; non sunt circa flosculos occupati."*¹²⁷

¹²⁵"He let loose his whole fury." –Aeneid, xii. 499.

¹²⁶"Mars, the god of wars, who controls the cruel tasks of war, often reclines on thy bosom, and greedily drinks love at both his eyes, vanquished by the eternal wound of love: and his breath, as he reclines, hangs on thy lips; bending thy head over him as he lies upon thy sacred person, pour forth sweet and persuasive words." –Lucretius, i. 23.

¹²⁷"The whole contexture is manly; they don't occupy themselves with little flowers of rhetoric." –Seneca, Ep., 33.

'Tis not a soft eloquence, and without offence only; 'tis nervous and solid, that does not so much please, as it fills and ravishes the greatest minds. When I see these brave forms of expression, so lively, so profound, I do not say that 'tis well said, but well thought. 'Tis the sprightliness of the imagination that swells and elevates the words:

*"Pectus est quod disertum Tacit."*¹²⁸

Our people call language, judgment, and fine words, full conceptions. This painting is not so much carried on by dexterity of hand as by having the object more vividly imprinted in the soul. Gallus speaks simply because he conceives simply: Horace does not content himself with a superficial expression; that would betray him; he sees farther and more clearly into things; his mind breaks into and rummages all the magazine of words and figures wherewith to express himself, and he must have them more than ordinary, because his conception is so. Plutarch says' that he sees the Latin tongue by the things: 'tis here the same: the sense illuminates and produces the words, no more words of air, but of flesh and bone; they signify more than they say. Moreover, those who are not well skilled in a language present some image of this; for in Italy I said whatever I had a mind to in common discourse, but in more serious talk, I durst not have trusted myself with an idiom that I could not wind and turn out of its ordinary pace; I would have a power of introducing something of my own.

The handling and utterance of fine wits is that which sets off language; not so much by innovating it, as by putting it to more vigorous and various services, and by straining, bending, and adapting it to them. They do not create words, but they enrich their own, and give them weight and signification by the uses they put them to, and teach them unwonted motions, but withal ingeniously and discreetly. And how little this talent is given to all is manifest by the many French scribblers of this age: they are bold and proud enough not to follow the common road, but want of invention and discretion ruins them; there is nothing seen in their writings but a wretched affectation of a strange new style, with cold and absurd disguises, which, instead of elevating, depress the matter: provided they can but trick themselves out with new words, they care not what they signify; and to bring in a new word by the head and shoulders, they leave the old one, very often more sinewy and significant than the other.

¹²⁸"The heart makes the man eloquent." —Quintilian, x. 7.

There is stuff enough in our language, but there is a defect in cutting out: for there is nothing that might not be made out of our terms of hunting and war, which is a fruitful soil to borrow from; and forms of speaking, like herbs, improve and grow stronger by being transplanted. I find it sufficiently abundant, but not sufficiently pliable and vigorous; it commonly quails under a powerful conception; if you would maintain the dignity of your style, you will often perceive it to flag and languish under you, and there Latin steps in to its relief, as Greek does to others. Of some of these words I have just picked out we do not so easily discern the energy, by reason that the frequent use of them has in some sort abased their beauty, and rendered it common; as in our ordinary language there are many excellent phrases and metaphors to be met with, of which the beauty is withered by age, and the colour is sullied by too common handling; but that nothing lessens the relish to an understanding man, nor does it derogate from the glory of those ancient authors who, 'tis likely, first brought those words into that lustre.

The sciences treat of things too refinedly, after an artificial, very different from the common and natural, way. My page makes love, and understands it; but read to him Leo Hebraeus¹²⁹ and Ficinus, where they speak of love, its thoughts and actions, he understands it not. I do not find in Aristotle most of my ordinary motions; they are there covered and disguised in another robe for the use of the schools. Good speed them! were I of the trade, I would as much naturalise art as they artificialise nature. Let us let Bembo and Equicola alone.

When I write, I can very well spare both the company and the remembrance of books, lest they should interrupt my progress; and also, in truth, the best authors too much humble and discourage me: I am very much of the painter's mind, who, having represented cocks most wretchedly ill, charged all his boys not to suffer any natural cock to come into his shop; and had rather need to give myself a little lustre, of the invention of Antigenides the musician, who, when he was asked to sing or play, took care beforehand that the auditory should, either before or after, be satiated with some other ill musicians. But I can hardly be without Plutarch; he is so universal and so full, that upon all occasions, and what extravagant subject soever you take in hand, he will still be at your elbow, and hold out to you a liberal and not to be exhausted hand of riches and embellishments. It vexes me that he is

¹²⁹Leo the Jew, Ficinus, Cardinal Bembo, and Mario Equicola all wrote Treatises on Love.

so exposed to be the spoil of those who are conversant with him: I can scarce cast an eye upon him but I purloin either a leg or a wing.

And also for this design of mine 'tis convenient for me for me to write at home, in a wild country, where I have nobody to assist or relieve me; where I hardly see a man who understands the Latin of his Paternoster, and of French a little less. I might have made it better elsewhere, but then the work would have been less my own; and its principal end and perfection is to be exactly mine. I readily correct an accidental error, of which I am full, as I run carelessly on; but for my ordinary and constant imperfections, it were a kind of treason to put them out. When another tells me, or that I say to myself, "Thou art too thick of figures: this is a word of rough Gascon: that is a dangerous phrase (I do not reject any of those that are used in the common streets of France; they who would fight custom with grammar are triflers): this is an ignorant discourse: this is a paradoxical discourse: that is going too far: thou makest thyself too merry at times: men will think thou sayest a thing in good earnest which thou only speakest in jest."—"Yes, I know, but I correct the faults of inadvertence, not those of custom. Do I not talk at the same rate throughout? Do I not represent myself to the life? 'Tis enough that I have done what I designed; all the world knows me in my book, and my book in me."

Now I have an apish, imitative quality: when I used to write verses (and I never made any but Latin), they evidently discovered the poet I had last read, and some of my first essays have a little exotic taste: I speak something another kind of language at Paris than I do at Montaigne. Whoever I steadfastly look upon easily leaves some impression of his upon me; whatever I consider I usurp, whether a foolish countenance, a disagreeable look, or a ridiculous way of speaking; and vices most of all, because they seize and stick to me, and will not leave hold without shaking. I swear more by imitation than by complexion: a murderous imitation, like that of the apes so terrible both in stature and strength, that Alexander met with in a certain country of the Indies, and which he would have had much ado any other way to have subdued; but they afforded him the means by that inclination of theirs to imitate whatever they saw done; for by that the hunters were taught to put on shoes in their sight, and to tie them fast with many knots, and to muffle up their heads in caps all composed of running nooses, and to seem to anoint their eyes with glue; so did those poor beasts employ their imitation to their own ruin they glued up their own eyes, haltered and bound themselves. The other faculty of playing the mimic, and in-

geniously acting the words and gestures of another, purposely to make people merry and to raise their admiration, is no more in me than in a stock. When I swear my own oath, 'tis only, by God! of all oaths the most direct. They say that Socrates swore by the dog; Zeno had for his oath the same interjection at this time in use amongst the Italians, Cap-pari! Pythagoras swore By water and air. I am so apt, without thinking of it, to receive these superficial impressions, that if I have Majesty or Highness in my mouth three days together, they come out instead of Excellency and Lordship eight days after; and what I say to-day in sport and fooling I shall say the same to-morrow seriously. Wherefore, in writing, I more unwillingly undertake beaten arguments, lest I should handle them at another's expense. Every subject is equally fertile to me: a fly will serve the purpose, and 'tis well if this I have in hand has not been undertaken at the recommendation of as flighty a will. I may begin, with that which pleases me best, for the subjects are all linked to one another.

But my soul displeases me, in that it ordinarily produces its deepest and most airy conceits and which please me best, when I least expect or study for them, and which suddenly vanish, having at the instant, nothing to apply them to; on horseback, at table, and in bed: but most on horseback, where I am most given to think. My speaking is a little nicely jealous of silence and attention: if I am talking my best, whoever interrupts me, stops me. In travelling, the necessity of the way will often put a stop to discourse; besides which I, for the most part, travel without company fit for regular discourses, by which means I have all the leisure I would to entertain myself. It falls out as it does in my dreams; whilst dreaming I recommend them to my memory (for I am apt to dream that I dream), but, the next morning, I may represent to myself of what complexion they were, whether gay, or sad, or strange, but what they were, as to the rest, the more I endeavour to retrieve them, the deeper I plunge them in oblivion. So of thoughts that come accidentally into my head, I have no more but a vain image remaining in my memory; only enough to make me torment myself in their quest to no purpose.

Well, then, laying books aside, and more simply and materially speaking, I find, after all, that Love is nothing else but the thirst of enjoying the object desired, or Venus any other thing than the pleasure of discharging one's vessels, just as the pleasure nature gives in discharging other parts, that either by immoderation or indiscretion become vicious. According to Socrates, love is the appetite of generation by

the mediation of beauty. And when I consider the ridiculous titillation of this pleasure, the absurd, crack-brained, wild motions with which it inspires Zeno and Cratippus, the indiscreet rage, the countenance inflamed with fury and cruelty in the sweetest effects of love, and then that austere air, so grave, severe, ecstatic, in so wanton an action; that our delights and our excrements are promiscuously shuffled together; and that the supreme pleasure brings along with it, as in pain, fainting and complaining; I believe it to be true, as Plato says, that the gods made man for their sport:

*“Quaenam ista jocandi Saevitia!”*¹³⁰

and that it was in mockery that nature has ordered the most agitative of actions and the most common, to make us equal, and to put fools and wise men, beasts and us, on a level. Even the most contemplative and prudent man, when I imagine him in this posture, I hold him an impudent fellow to pretend to be prudent and contemplative; they are the peacocks’ feet that abate his pride:

*“Ridentem dicere verum
Quid vetat?”*¹³¹

They who banish serious imaginations from their sports, do, says one, like him who dares not adore the statue of a saint, if not covered with a veil. We eat and drink, indeed, as beasts do; but these are not actions that obstruct the functions of the soul, in these we maintain our advantage over them; this other action subjects all other thought, and by its imperious authority makes an ass of all Plato’s divinity and philosophy; and yet there is no complaint of it. In everything else a man may keep some decorum, all other operations submit to the rules of decency; this cannot so much as in imagination appear other than vicious or ridiculous: find out, if you can, therein any serious and discreet procedure. Alexander said, that he chiefly knew himself to be mortal by this act and sleeping; sleep suffocates and suppresses the faculties of the soul; the familiarity with women likewise dissipates and exhausts them: doubtless ’tis a mark, not only of our original corruption, but also of our vanity and deformity.

¹³⁰“With a sportive cruelty” (Or:) “What an unkindness there is in jesting!” ←Claudian in Eutrop. i. 24.

¹³¹“What prevents us from speaking truth with a smile?” —Horace, Sat., i. I, 24.

On the one side, nature pushes us on to it, having fixed the most noble, useful, and pleasant of all her functions to this desire: and, on the other side, leaves us to accuse and avoid it, as insolent and indecent, to blush at it, and to recommend abstinence. Are we not brutes to call that work brutish which begets us? People of so many differing religions have concurred in several proprieties, as sacrifices, lamps, burning incense, fasts, and offerings; and amongst others, in the condemning this act: all opinions tend that way, besides the widespread custom of circumcision, which may be regarded as a punishment. We have, peradventure, reason to blame ourselves for being guilty of so foolish a production as man, and to call the act, and the parts that are employed in the act, shameful (mine, truly, are now shameful and pitiful). The Essenians, of whom Pliny speaks, kept up their country for several ages without either nurse or baby-clouts, by the arrival of strangers who, following this pretty humour, came continually to them: a whole nation being resolute, rather to hazard a total extermination, than to engage themselves in female embraces, and rather to lose the succession of men, than to beget one. 'Tis said, that Zeno never had to do with a woman but once in his life, and then out of civility, that he might not seem too obstinately to disdain the sex¹³²

Every one avoids seeing a man born, every one runs to see him die; to destroy him a spacious field is sought out in the face of the sun, but, to make him, we creep into as dark and private a corner as we can: 'tis a man's duty to withdraw himself bashfully from the light to create; but 'tis glory and the fountain of many virtues to know how to destroy what we have made: the one is injury, the other favour: for Aristotle says that to do any one a kindness, in a certain phrase of his country, is to kill him. The Athenians, to couple the disgrace of these two actions, having to purge the Isle of Delos, and to justify themselves to Apollo, interdicted at once all births and burials in the precincts thereof:

*"Nostrī nosmet paenitet."*¹³³

There are some nations that will not be seen to eat. I know a lady, and of the best quality, who has the same opinion, that chewing disfigures the face, and takes away much from the ladies' grace and beauty; and therefore unwillingly appears at a public table with an appetite; and I

¹³²Diogenes Laertius, vii. 13.—What is there said, however, is that Zeno seldom had commerce with boys, lest he should be deemed a very misogynist.

¹³³"We are ashamed of ourselves." —Terence, Phomyio, i. 3, 20.

know a man also, who cannot endure to see another eat, nor himself to be seen eating, and who is more shy of company when putting in than when putting out. In the Turkish empire, there are a great number of men who, to excel others, never suffer themselves to be seen when they make their repast: who never have any more than one a week; who cut and mangle their faces and limbs; who never speak to any one: fanatic people who think to honour their nature by disnaturating themselves; who value themselves upon their contempt of themselves, and purport to grow better by being worse. What monstrous animal is this, that is a horror to himself, to whom his delights are grievous, and who weds himself to misfortune? There are people who conceal their life:

*“Exilioque domos et dulcia limina mutant,”*¹³⁴

and withdraw them from the sight of other men; who avoid health and cheerfulness, as dangerous and prejudicial qualities. Not only many sects, but many peoples, curse their birth, and bless their death; and there is a place where the sun is abominated and darkness adored. We are only ingenious in using ourselves ill: ‘tis the real quarry our intellects fly at; and intellect, when misapplied, is a dangerous tool!

*“O miseri! quorum gaudia crimen habent!”*¹³⁵

Alas, poor man! thou hast enough inconveniences that are inevitable, without increasing them by throe own invention; and art miserable enough by nature, without being so by art; thou hast real and essential deformities enough, without forging those that are imaginary. Dost thou think thou art too much at ease unless half thy ease is uneasy? dost thou find that thou hast not performed all the necessary offices that nature has enjoined thee, and that she is idle in thee, if thou dost not oblige thyself to other and new offices? Thou dost not stick to infringe her universal and undoubted laws; but stickest to thy own special and fantastic rules, and by how much more particular, uncertain, and contradictory they are, by so much thou employest thy whole endeavour in them: the laws of thy parish occupy and bind thee: those of God and the world concern thee not. Run but a little over the examples of this kind; thy life is full of them.

¹³⁴“And change for exile their homes and pleasant abodes.” –Virgil, *Georg.*, ii. 511.

¹³⁵“O wretched men, whose pleasures are a crime!” –Pseudo Gallus, i. 180.

Whilst the verses of these two poets, treat so reservedly and discreetly of wantonness as they do, methinks they discover it much more openly. Ladies cover their necks with network, priests cover several sacred things, and painters shadow their pictures to give them greater lustre: and 'tis said that the sun and wind strike more violently by reflection than in a direct line. The Egyptian wisely answered him who asked him what he had under his cloak, "It is hid under my cloak," said he, "that thou mayest not know what it is:" but there are certain other things that people hide only to show them. Hear that one, who speaks plainer,

*"Et nudum pressi corpus ad usque meum:"*¹³⁶

methinks that he emasculates me. Let Martial turn up Venus as high as he may, he cannot shew her so naked: he who says all that is to be said gluts and disgusts us. He who is afraid to express himself, draws us on to guess at more than is meant; there is treachery in this sort of modesty, and specially when they half open, as these do, so fair a path to imagination. Both the action and description should relish of theft.

The more respectful, more timorous, more coy, and secret love of the Spaniards and Italians pleases me. I know not who of old wished his throat as long as that of a crane, that he might the longer taste what he swallowed; it had been better wished as to this quick and precipitous pleasure, especially in such natures as mine that have the fault of being too prompt. To stay its flight and delay it with preambles: all things – a glance, a bow, a word, a sign, stand for favour and recompense betwixt them. Were it not an excellent piece of thrift in him who could dine on the steam of the roast? 'Tis a passion that mixes with very little solid essence, far more vanity and feverish raving; and we should serve and pay it accordingly. Let us teach the ladies to set a better value and esteem upon themselves, to amuse and fool us: we give the last charge at the first onset; the French impetuosity will still show itself; by spinning out their favours, and exposing them in small parcels, even miserable old age itself will find some little share of reward, according to its worth and merit. He who has no fruition but in fruition, who wins nothing unless he sweeps the stakes, who takes no pleasure in the chase but in the quarry, ought not to introduce himself in our school: the more steps and degrees there are, so much higher and more honourable

¹³⁶"And pressed her naked body to mine" (Or:) "My body I applied even to her naked side" –Ovid, Amor, i. 5, 24.

is the uppermost seat: we should take a pleasure in being conducted to it, as in magnificent palaces, by various porticoes and passages, long and pleasant galleries, and many windings. This disposition of things would turn to our advantage; we should there longer stay and longer love; without hope and without desire we proceed not worth a pin. Our conquest and entire possession is what they ought infinitely to dread: when they wholly surrender themselves up to the mercy of our fidelity and constancy they run a mighty hazard; they are virtues very rare and hard to be found; the ladies are no sooner ours, than we are no more theirs:

*“Postquam cupidae mentis satiata libido est,
Verba nihil metuere, nihil perjuria curant;”*¹³⁷

And Thrasonides, a young man of Greece, was so in love with his passion that, having, gained a mistress’s consent, he refused to enjoy her, that he might not by fruition quench and stupefy the unquiet ardour of which he was so proud, and with which he so fed himself. Dearness is a good sauce to meat: do but observe how much the manner of salutation, particular to our nation, has, by its facilities, made kisses, which Socrates says are so powerful and dangerous for the stealing of hearts, of no esteem. It is a displeasing custom and injurious for the ladies, that they must be obliged to lend their lips to every fellow who has three footmen at his heels, however ill-favoured he may be in himself:

*“Cujus livida naribus caninis
Dependet glacies, rigetque barba...
Centum occurrere malo culilingis:”*¹³⁸

and we ourselves barely gain by it; for as the world is divided, for three beautiful women we must kiss fifty ugly ones; and to a tender stomach, like those of my age, an ill kiss overpays a good one.

In Italy they passionately court even their common women who sell themselves for money, and justify the doing so by saying, “that there are degrees of fruition, and that by such service they would procure for themselves that which is most entire; the women sell nothing but

¹³⁷“When our desires are once satisfied, we care little for oaths and promises.” – Catullus, lxiv. 147.

¹³⁸Martial, vii. 94.

their bodies; the will is too free and too much of its own to be exposed to sale." So that these say, 'tis the will they undertake and they have reason. 'Tis indeed the will that we are to serve and gain by wooing. I abhor to imagine mine, a body without affection: and this madness is, methinks, cousin-german to that of the boy who would needs pollute the beautiful statue of Venus made by Praxiteles; or that of the furious Egyptian, who violated the dead carcase of a woman he was embalming: which was the occasion of the law then made in Egypt, that the corpses of beautiful young women, of those of good quality, should be kept three days before they should be delivered to those whose office it was to take care for the interment. Periander did more wonderfully, who extended his conjugal affection (more regular and legitimate) to the enjoyment of his wife Melissa after she was dead. Does it not seem a lunatic humour in the Moon, seeing she could no otherwise enjoy her darling Endymion, to lay-him for several months asleep, and to please herself with the fruition of a boy who stirred not but in his sleep? I likewise say that we love a body without a soul or sentiment when we love a body without its consent and desire. All enjoyments are not alike: there are some that are hectic and languishing: a thousand other causes besides good-will may procure us this favour from the ladies; this is not a sufficient testimony of affection: treachery may lurk there, as well as elsewhere: they sometimes go to't by halves:

*"Tanquam thura merumque parent
Absentem marmoreamve putes:"*¹³⁹

I know some who had rather lend that than their coach, and who only impart themselves that way. You are to examine whether your company pleases them upon any other account, or, as some strong-chined groom, for that only; in what degree of favour and esteem you are with them:

*"Tibi si datur uni,
Quem lapide illa diem candidiore notat."*¹⁴⁰

What if they eat your bread with the sauce of a more pleasing imagination.

¹³⁹"As if they are preparing frankincense and wine... you might think her absent or marble." –Martial, xi. 103, 12, and 59, 8.

¹⁴⁰"Wherefore that is enough, if that day alone is given us which she marks with a whiter stone." –Catullus, lxxviii. 147.

“Te tenet, absentes alios suspirat amores.”¹⁴¹

What? have we not seen one in these days of ours who made use of this act for the purpose of a most horrid revenge, by that means to kill and poison, as he did, a worthy lady?

Such as know Italy will not think it strange if, for this subject, I seek not elsewhere for examples; for that nation may be called the regent of the world in this. They have more generally handsome and fewer ugly women than we; but for rare and excellent beauties we have as many as they. I think the same of their intellects: of those of the common sort, they have evidently far more brutishness is immeasurably rarer there; but in individual characters of the highest form, we are nothing indebted to them. If I should carry on the comparison, I might say, as touching valour, that, on the contrary, it is, to what it is with them, common and natural with us; but sometimes we see them possessed of it to such a degree as surpasses the greatest examples we can produce: The marriages of that country are defective in this; their custom commonly imposes so rude and so slavish a law upon the women, that the most distant acquaintance with a stranger is as capital an offence as the most intimate; so that all approaches being rendered necessarily substantial, and seeing that all comes to one account, they have no hard choice to make; and when they have broken down the fence, we may safely presume they get on fire:

“Luxuria ipsis vinculis, sicut fera bestia, irritata, deinde emissa.”¹⁴²

They must give them a little more rein:

*“Vidi ego nuper equum, contra sua frena tenacem,
Ore reluctanti fulminis ire modo”:¹⁴³*

the desire of company is allayed by giving it a little liberty. We are pretty much in the same case they are extreme in constraint, we in licence. 'Tis a good custom we have in France that our sons are received

¹⁴¹“She has you in her arms; her thoughts are with other absent lovers.” –Tibullus, i. 6, 35.

¹⁴²“Lust, like a wild beast, being more excited by being bound, breaks from his chains with greater wildness.” –Livy, xxxiv. 4.

¹⁴³“I saw, the other day, a horse struggling against his bit, rush like a thunderbolt.” – Ovid, Amor., iii. 4, 13.

into the best families, there to be entertained and bred up pages, as in a school of nobility; and 'tis looked upon as a discourtesy and an affront to refuse this to a gentleman. I have taken notice (for, so many families, so many differing forms) that the ladies who have been strictest with their maids have had no better luck than those who allowed them a greater liberty. There should be moderation in these things; one must leave a great deal of their conduct to their own discretion; for, when all comes to all, no discipline can curb them throughout. But it is true withal that she who comes off with flying colours from a school of liberty, brings with her whereon to repose more confidence than she who comes away sound from a severe and strict school.

Our fathers dressed up their daughters' looks in bashfulness and fear (their courage and desires being the same); we ours in confidence and assurance; we understand nothing of the matter; we must leave it to the Sarmatian women, who may not lie with a man till with their own hands they have first killed another in battle. For me, who have no other title left me to these things but by the ears, 'tis sufficient if, according to the privilege of my age, they retain me for one of their counsel. I advise them then, and us men too, to abstinence; but if the age we live in will not endure it, at least modesty and discretion. For, as in the story of Aristippus, who, speaking to some young men who blushed to see him go into a scandalous house, said "the vice is in not coming out, not in going in," let her who has no care of her conscience have yet some regard to her reputation; and though she be rotten within, let her carry a fair outside at least.

I commend a gradation and delay in bestowing their favours: Plato 'declares that, in all sorts of love, facility and promptness are forbidden to the defendant. 'Tis a sign of eagerness which they ought to disguise with all the art they have, so rashly, wholly, and hand-over-hand to surrender themselves. In carrying themselves orderly and measuredly in the granting their last favours, they much more allure our desires and hide their own. Let them still fly before us, even those who have most mind to be overtaken: they better conquer us by flying, as the Scythians did. To say the truth, according to the law that nature has imposed upon them, it is not properly for them either to will or desire; their part is to suffer, obey, and consent and for this it is that nature has given them a perpetual capacity, which in us is but at times and uncertain; they are always fit for the encounter, that they may be always ready when we are so "Pati natee."¹⁴⁴ And whereas she has ordered that our

¹⁴⁴"Born to suffer."-Seneca, Ep., 95.

appetites shall be manifest by a prominent demonstration, she would have theirs to be hidden and concealed within, and has furnished them with parts improper for ostentation, and simply defensive. Such proceedings as this that follows must be left to the Amazonian licence: Alexander marching his army through Hyrcania, Thalestris, Queen of the Amazons, came with three hundred light horse of her own-sex, well mounted, and armed, having left the remainder of a very great, army that followed her behind the neighbouring mountains to give him a visit; where she publicly and in plain terms told him that the fame of his valour and victories had brought her thither to see him, and to make him an offer of her forces to assist him in the pursuit of his enterprises; and that, finding him so handsome, young, and vigorous, she, who was also perfect in all those qualities, advised that they might lie together, to the end that from the most valiant woman of the world and the bravest man then living, there might spring some great and wonderful issue for the time to come. Alexander returned her thanks for all the rest; but, to give leisure for the accomplishment of her last demand, he detained her thirteen days in that place, which were spent in royal feasting and jollity, for the welcome of so courageous a princess.

We are, almost throughout, unjust judges of their actions, as they are of ours. I confess the truth when it makes against me, as well as when 'tis on my side. 'Tis an abominable intemperance that pushes them on so often to change, and that will not let them limit their affection to any one person whatever; as is evident in that goddess to whom are attributed so many changes and so many lovers. But 'tis true withal that 'tis contrary to the nature of love if it be, not violent; and contrary to the nature of violence if it be constant. And they who wonder, exclaim, and keep such a clutter to find out the causes of this frailty of theirs, as unnatural and not to be believed, how comes it to pass they do not discern how often they are themselves guilty of the same, without any astonishment or miracle at all? It would, peradventure, be more strange to see the passion fixed; 'tis not a simply corporeal passion. If there be no end to avarice and ambition, there is doubtless no more in desire; it still lives after satiety; and 'tis impossible to prescribe either constant satisfaction or end; it ever goes beyond its possession. And by that means inconstancy, peradventure, is in some sort more pardonable in them than in us: they may plead, as well as we, the inclination to variety and novelty common to us both; and secondly, without us, that they buy a cat in a sack: Joanna, queen of Naples, caused her first husband, Andrews, to be hanged at the bars of her window in

a halter of gold and silk woven with her own hand, because in matrimonial performances she neither found his parts nor abilities answer the expectation she had conceived from his stature, beauty, youth, and activity, by which she had been caught and deceived. They may say there is more pains required in doing than in suffering; and so they are on their part always at least provided for necessity, whereas on our part it may fall out otherwise. For this reason it was, that Plato wisely made a law that before marriage, to determine of the fitness of persons, the judges should see the young men who pretended to it stripped stark naked, and the women but to the girdle only. When they come to try us they do not, perhaps, find us worthy of their choice:

*"Experta latus, madidoque simillima loro
Inguina, nec lassa stare coacta manu,
Deserit imbelles thalamos."*¹⁴⁵

'Tis not enough that a man's will be good; weakness and insufficiency lawfully break a marriage,

*"Et quaerendum aliunde foret nervosius illud,
Quod posset zonam solvere virgineam:"*¹⁴⁶

why not? and according to her own standard, an amorous intelligence, more licentious and active,

*"Si blando nequeat superesse labori."*¹⁴⁷

But is it not great impudence to offer our imperfections and imbecilities, where we desire to please and leave a good opinion and esteem of ourselves? For the little that I am able to do now:

*'Ad unum Mollis opus."*¹⁴⁸

I would not trouble a woman, that I am to reverence and fear:

¹⁴⁵"After using every endeavour to arouse him to action, she quits the barren couch." – Martial, vii. 58.

¹⁴⁶"And seeks a more vigorous lover to undo her virgin zone." – Catullus, lxxvii. 27.

¹⁴⁷"If his strength be unequal to the pleasant task." – Virgil, Georg., iii. 127.

¹⁴⁸"Fit but for once." – Horace, Epod., xii. 15.

*"Fuge suspicari,
Cujus undenum trepidavit aetas
Claudere lustrum."*¹⁴⁹

Nature should satisfy herself in having rendered this age miserable, without rendering it ridiculous too. I hate to see it, for one poor inch of pitiful vigour which comes upon it but thrice a week, to strut and set itself out with as much eagerness as if it could do mighty feats; a true flame of flax; and laugh to see it so boil and bubble and then in a moment so congealed and extinguished. This appetite ought to appertain only to the flower of beautiful youth: trust not to its seconding that indefatigable, full, constant, magnanimous ardour you think in you, for it will certainly leave you in a pretty corner; but rather transfer it to some tender, bashful, and ignorant boy, who yet trembles at the rod, and blushes:

*"Indum sanguineo veluti violaverit ostro
Si quis ebur, vel mista rubent ubi lilia multa
Alba rosa."*¹⁵⁰

Who can stay till the morning without dying for shame to behold the disdain of the fair eyes of her who knows so well his fumbling impertinence,

*"Et taciti fecere tamen convicia vultus,"*¹⁵¹

has never had the satisfaction and the glory of having cudgelled them till they were weary, with the vigorous performance of one heroic night. When I have observed any one to be vexed with me, I have not presently accused her levity, but have been in doubt, if I had not reason rather to complain of nature; she has doubtless used me very uncivilly and unkindly:

*"Si non longa satis, si non bene mentula crassa
Nimirum sapiunt, videntque parvam*

¹⁴⁹"Fear not him whose eleventh lustrum is closed." –Horace, Od., ii. 4, 12, limits it to the eighth.

¹⁵⁰"As Indian ivory streaked with crimson, or white lilies mixed with the damask rose." –Aeneid, xii. 67.

¹⁵¹"Though she nothing say, her looks betray her anger." –Ovid, Amor., i. 7, 21.

*Matronae quoque mentulam illibenter:*¹⁵²

and done me a most enormous injury. Every member I have, as much one as another, is equally my own, and no other more properly makes me a man than this.

I universally owe my entire picture to the public. The wisdom of my instruction consists in liberty, in truth, in essence: disdaining to introduce those little, feigned, common, and provincial rules into the catalogue of its real duties; all natural, general, and constant, of which civility and ceremony are daughters indeed, but illegitimate. We are sure to have the vices of appearance, when we shall have had those of essence: when we have done with these, we run full drive upon the others, if we find it must be so; for there is danger that we shall fancy new offices, to excuse our negligence towards the natural ones, and to confound them: and to manifest this, is it not seen that in places where faults are crimes, crimes are but faults; that in nations where the laws of decency are most rare and most remiss, the primitive laws of common reason are better observed: the innumerable multitude of so many duties stifling and dissipating our care. The application of ourselves to light and trivial things diverts us from those that are necessary and just. Oh, how these superficial men take an easy and plausible way in comparison of ours! These are shadows wherewith we palliate and pay one another; but we do not pay, but inflame the reckoning towards that great judge, who tucks up our rags and tatters above our shameful parts, and suckles not to view us all over, even to our inmost and most secret ordures: it were a useful decency of our maidenly modesty, could it keep him from this discovery. In fine, whoever could reclaim man from so scrupulous a verbal superstition, would do the world no great disservice. Our life is divided betwixt folly and prudence: whoever will write of it but what is reverend and canonical, will leave above the one-half behind. I do not excuse myself to myself; and if I did, it should rather be for my excuses that I would excuse myself than for any other fault; I excuse myself of certain humours, which I think more strong in number than those that are on my side. In consideration of which, I will further say this (for I desire to please every one, though it will be hard to do):

¹⁵²The first of these verses is the commencement of an epigram of the *Veterum Potayurra Catalecta*, and the two others are from an epigram in the same collection (*Ad Matrones*). They describe untranslatably Montaigne's charge against nature, indicated in the previous passage.

*“Esse unum hominem accommodatum ad tantam morum ac sermonum et voluntatum varietatem,”*¹⁵³

that they ought not to condemn me for what I make authorities, received and approved by so many ages, to utter: and that there is no reason that for want of rhyme they should refuse me the liberty they allow even to churchmen of our nation and time, and these amongst the most notable, of which here are two of their brisk verses:

“Rimula, dispeream, ni monogramma tua est.”

*“Un vit d’amy la contente et bien traicte:”*¹⁵⁴

besides how many others. I love modesty; and ‘tis not out of judgment that I have chosen this scandalous way of speaking; ‘tis nature that has chosen it for me. I commend it not, no more than other forms that are contrary to common use: but I excuse it, and by circumstances both general and particular, alleviate its accusation.

But to proceed. Whence, too, can proceed that usurpation of sovereign authority you take upon you over the women, who favour you at their own expense,

*“Si furtiva dedit mira munuscula nocte,”*¹⁵⁵

so that you presently assume the interest, coldness, and authority of a husband? ‘Tis a free contract why do you not then keep to it, as you would have them do? there is no prescription upon voluntary things. ‘Tis against the form, but it is true withal, that I in my time have conducted this bargain as much as the nature of it would permit, as conscientiously and with as much colour of justice, as any other contract; and that I never pretended other affection than what I really had, and have truly acquainted them with its birth, vigour, and declination, its fits and intermissions: a man does not always hold on at the same rate. I have been so sparing of my promises, that I think I have been better than my word. They have found me faithful even to service of their inconstancy, a confessed and sometimes multiplied inconstancy.

¹⁵³“For a man to conform to such a variety of manners, discourses, and will.” –Q. Cicero, De Pet. Consul, c. 14.

¹⁵⁴St. Gelais, (Euvres Poetiques), p. 99, ed. of Lyons, 1574.

¹⁵⁵“If, in the stealthy night, she has made strange gifts.” –Catullus, lxviii. 145.

I never broke with them, whilst I had any hold at all, and what occasion soever they have given me, never broke with them to hatred or contempt; for such privacies, though obtained upon never so scandalous terms, do yet oblige to some good will: I have sometimes, upon their tricks and evasions, discovered a little indiscreet anger and impatience; for I am naturally subject to rash emotions, which, though light and short, often spoil my market. At any time they have consulted my judgment, I never stuck to give them sharp and paternal counsels, and to pinch them to the quick. If I have left them any cause to complain of me, 'tis rather to have found in me, in comparison of the modern use, a love foolishly conscientious than anything else. I have kept my word in things wherein I might easily have been dispensed; they sometimes surrendered themselves with reputation, and upon articles that they were willing enough should be broken by the conqueror: I have, more than once, made pleasure in its greatest effort strike to the interest of their honour; and where reason importuned me, have armed them against myself; so that they ordered themselves more decorously and securely by my rules, when they frankly referred themselves to them, than they would have done by their own. I have ever, as much as I could, wholly taken upon myself alone the hazard of our assignments, to acquit them; and have always contrived our meetings after the hardest and most unusual manner, as less suspected, and, moreover, in my opinion, more accessible. They are chiefly more open, where they think they are most securely shut; things least feared are least interdicted and observed; one may more boldly dare what nobody thinks you dare, which by its difficulty becomes easy. Never had any man his approaches more impertinently generative; this way of loving is more according to discipline but how ridiculous it is to our people, and how ineffectual, who better knows than I? yet I shall not repent me of it; I have nothing there more to lose:

*"Me tabula sacer
 Votiva paries, indicat uvida
 Suspendisse potenti
 Vestimenta maris deo:"*¹⁵⁶

'tis now time to speak out. But as I might, per adventure, say to another, "Thou talkest idly, my friend; the love of thy time has little commerce with faith and integrity;"

¹⁵⁶"The holy wall, by my votive table, shows that I have hanged up my wet clothes in honour of the powerful god of the sea." —Horace, Od., i. 5, 13.

*“Haec si tu postules
Ratione certa facere, nihilo plus agas,
Quam si des operam, ut cum ratione insanias.”*¹⁵⁷

on the contrary, also, if it were for me to begin again, certainly it should be by the same method and the same progress, how fruitless soever it might be to me; folly and insufficiency are commendable in an incommensurable action: the farther I go from their humour in this, I approach so much nearer to my own. As to the rest, in this traffic, I did not suffer myself to be totally carried away; I pleased myself in it, but did not forget myself. I retained the little sense and discretion that nature has given me, entire for their service and my own: a little emotion, but no dotage. My conscience, also, was engaged in it, even to debauch and licentiousness; but, as to ingratitude, treachery, malice, and cruelty, never. I would not purchase the pleasure of this vice at any price, but content myself with its proper and simple cost:

*“Nullum intra se vitium est.”*¹⁵⁸

I almost equally hate a stupid and slothful laziness, as I do a toilsome and painful employment; this pinches, the other lays me asleep. I like wounds as well as bruises, and cuts as well as dry blows. I found in this commerce, when I was the most able for it, a just moderation betwixt these extremes. Love is a sprightly, lively, and gay agitation; I was neither troubled nor afflicted with it, but heated, and moreover, disordered; a man must stop there; it hurts nobody but fools. A young man asked the philosopher Panetius if it were becoming a wise man to be in love? “Let the wise man look to that,” answered he, “but let not thou and I, who are not so, engage ourselves in so stirring and violent an affair, that enslaves us to others, and renders us contemptible to ourselves.” He said true that we are not to intrust a thing so precipitous in itself to a soul that has not wherewithal to withstand its assaults and disprove practically the saying of Agesilaus, that prudence and love cannot live together. ‘Tis a vain employment, ‘tis true, unbecoming, shameful, and illegitimate; but carried on after this manner, I look upon it as wholesome, and proper to enliven a drowsy soul and to rouse up a heavy body; and, as an experienced physician, I would prescribe it to

¹⁵⁷“If you seek to make these things certain by reason, you will do no more than if you should seek to be mad in your senses.” –Terence, *Eun.*, act i., sc. i, v. 16.

¹⁵⁸“Nothing is a vice in itself.” –Seneca, *Ep.*, 95.

a man of my form and condition, as soon as any other recipe whatever, to rouse and keep him in vigour till well advanced in years, and to defer the approaches of age. Whilst we are but in the suburbs, and that the pulse yet beats:

*“Dum nova canities, dum prima et recta senectus,
Dum superest lachesi quod torqueat, et pedibus me
Porto meis, nullo dextram subeunte bacillo,”*¹⁵⁹

we have need to be solicited and tickled by some such nipping incitation as this. Do but observe what youth, vigour, and gaiety it inspired the good Anacreon withal: and Socrates, who was then older than I, speaking of an amorous object:

“Leaning,” said he, “my shoulder to her shoulder, and my head to hers, as we were reading together in a book, I felt, without dissembling, a sudden sting in my shoulder like the biting of an insect, which I still felt above five days after, and a continual itching crept into my heart.” So that merely the accidental touch, and of a shoulder, heated and altered a soul cooled and enerved by age, and the strictest liver of all mankind. And, pray, why not? Socrates was a man, and would neither be, nor seem, any other thing. Philosophy does not contend against natural pleasures, provided they be moderate, and only preaches moderation, not a total abstinence; the power of its resistance is employed against those that are adulterate and strange. Philosophy says that the appetites of the body ought not to be augmented by the mind, and ingeniously warns us not to stir up hunger by saturity; not to stuff, instead of merely filling, the belly; to avoid all enjoyments that may bring us to want; and all meats and drinks that bring thirst and hunger: as, in the service of love, she prescribes us to take such an object as may simply satisfy the body’s need, and does not stir the soul, which ought only barely to follow and assist the body, without mixing in the affair. But have I not reason to hold that these precepts, which, indeed, in my opinion, are somewhat over strict, only concern a body in its best plight; and that in a body broken with age, as in a weak stomach, ’tis excusable to warm and support it by art, and by the mediation of the fancy to restore the appetite and cheerfulness it has lost of itself.

¹⁵⁹“Whilst the white hair is new, whilst old age is still straight shouldered, whilst there still remains something for Lachesis to spin, whilst I walk on my own legs, and need no staff to lean upon.” –Juvenal, iii. 26.

May we not say that there is nothing in us, during this earthly prison, that is purely either corporeal or spiritual; and that we injuriously break up a man alive; and that it seems but reasonable that we should carry ourselves as favourably, at least, towards the use of pleasure as we do towards that of pain! Pain was (for example) vehement even to perfection in the souls of the saints by penitence: the body had there naturally a sham by the right of union, and yet might have but little part in the cause; and yet are they not contented that it should barely follow and assist the afflicted soul: they have afflicted itself with grievous and special torments, to the end that by emulation of one another the soul and body might plunge man into misery by so much more salutiferous as it is more severe. In like manner, is it not injustice, in bodily pleasures, to subdue and keep under the soul, and say that it must therein be dragged along as to some enforced and servile obligation and necessity? 'Tis rather her part to hatch and cherish them, there to present herself, and to invite them, the authority of ruling belonging to her; as it is also her part, in my opinion, in pleasures that are proper to her, to inspire and infuse into the body all the sentiment it is capable of, and to study how to make them sweet and useful to it. For it is good reason, as they say, that the body should not pursue its appetites to the prejudice of the mind; but why is it not also the reason that the mind should not pursue hers to the prejudice of the body?

I have no other passion to keep me in breath. What avarice, ambition, quarrels, lawsuits do for others who, like me, have no particular vocation, love would much more commodiously do; it would restore to me vigilance, sobriety, grace, and the care of my person; it would reassure my countenance, so that the grimaces of old age, those deformed and dismal looks, might not come to disgrace it; would again put me upon sound and wise studies, by which I might render myself more loved and esteemed, clearing my mind of the despair of itself and of its use, and reintegrating it to itself; would divert me from a thousand troublesome thoughts, a thousand melancholic humours that idleness and the ill posture of our health loads us withal at such an age; would warm again, in dreams at least, the blood that nature is abandoning; would hold up the chin, and a little stretch out the nerves, the vigour and gaiety of life of that poor man who is going full drive towards his ruin. But I very well understand that it is a commodity hard to recover: by weakness and long experience our taste is become more delicate and nice; we ask most when we bring least, and are harder to choose when we least deserve to be accepted: and knowing ourselves

for what we are, we are less confident and more distrustful; nothing can assure us of being beloved, considering our condition and theirs. I am out of countenance to see myself in company with those young wanton creatures:

*“Cujus in indomito constantior inguine nervus,
Quam nova collibus arbor inhaeret.”*¹⁶⁰

To what end should we go insinuate our misery amid their gay and sprightly humour?

*“Possint ut juvenes visere fervidi.
Multo non sine risu,
Dilapsam in cineres facem.”*¹⁶¹

They have strength and reason on their side; let us give way; we have nothing to do there: and these blossoms of springing beauty suffer not themselves to be handled by such benumbed hands nor dealt with by mere material means, for, as the old philosopher answered one who jeered him because he could not gain the favour of a young girl he made love to: “Friend, the hook will not stick in such soft cheese.” It is a commerce that requires relation and correspondence: the other pleasures we receive may be acknowledged by recompenses of another nature, but this is not to be paid but with the same kind of coin. In earnest, in this sport, the pleasure I give more tickles my imagination than that they give me; now, he has nothing of generosity in him who can receive pleasure where he confers none—it must needs be a mean soul that will owe all, and can be content to maintain relations with persons to whom he is a continual charge; there is no beauty, grace, nor privacy so exquisite that a gentleman ought to desire at this rate. If they can only be kind to us out of pity, I had much rather die than live upon charity. I would have right to ask, in the style wherein I heard them beg in Italy: “Fate ben per voi,”¹⁶² or after the manner that Cyrus exhorted his soldiers, “Who loves himself let him follow me.”—“Consort yourself,” some one will say to me, “with women of your own condition, whom like fortune will render more easy to your desire.” O ridiculous and insipid composition!

¹⁶⁰“In whose unbridled reins the vigour is more inherent than in the young tree on the hills.” —Horace, Epod., xii. 19.

¹⁶¹“As the fervid youths may behold, not without laughter, a burning torch worn to ashes.” —Horace, Od., iv. 13, 21.

¹⁶²“Do good for yourself.”

*"Nolo
Barbam vellere mortuo leoni."*¹⁶³

Xenophon lays it for an objection and an accusation against Menon, that he never made love to any but old women. For my part, I take more pleasure in but seeing the just and sweet mixture of two young beauties, or only in meditating on it in my fancy, than myself in acting second in a pitiful and imperfect conjunction;¹⁶⁴

I leave that fantastic appetite to the Emperor Galba, who was only for old curried flesh: and to this poor wretch:

*"O ego Di faciant talem to cernere possim,
Caraque mutatis oscula ferre comis,
Amplectique meis corpus non pingue lacertis!"*¹⁶⁵

Amongst chief deformities I reckon forced and artificial beauties: Hemon, a young boy of Chios, thinking by fine dressing to acquire the beauty that nature had denied him, came to the philosopher Arcesilaus and asked him if it was possible for a wise man to be in love—"Yes," replied he, "provided it be not with a farded and adulterated beauty like thine."¹⁶⁶

Ugliness of a confessed antiquity is to me less old and less ugly than another that is polished and plastered up. Shall I speak it, without the danger of having my throat cut? love, in my opinion, is not properly and naturally in its season, but in the age next to childhood,

*"Quem si puellarum insereres choro,
Mille sagaces falleret hospites,
Discrimen obscurum, solutis
Crinibus ambiguoque vultu:"*¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³"I would not pluck the beard from a dead lion." —Martial

¹⁶⁴Which Cotton renders, "Than to be myself an actor in the second with a deformed creature."

¹⁶⁵Ovid, who (Ex. Ponto, i. 4, 49) writes to his wife, "O would the gods arrange that such I might see thee, and bring dear kisses to thy changed locks, and embrace thy withered body with my arms"

¹⁶⁶Diogenes Laertius, iv. 36. The question was whether a wise man could love him. Cotton has "Emonez, a young courtezan of Chios."

¹⁶⁷"Whom if thou shouldst place in a company of girls, it would require a thousand experts to distinguish him, with his loose locks and ambiguous countenance." —Horace, Od., ii. 5, 21.

nor beauty neither; for whereas Homer extends it so far as to the budding of the beard, Plato himself has remarked this as rare: and the reason why the sophist Bion so pleasantly called the first appearing hairs of adolescence ‘Aristogitons’ and ‘Harmoniuses’¹⁶⁸ is sufficiently known. I find it in virility already in some sort a little out of date, though not so much as in old age;

*“Importunus enim transvolat aridas Quercus.”*¹⁶⁹

and Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, like a woman, very far extends the advantage of women, ordaining that it is time, at thirty years old, to convert the title of fair into that of good. The shorter authority we give to love over our lives, ‘tis so much the better for us. Do but observe his port; ‘tis a beardless boy. Who knows not how, in his school they proceed contrary to all order; study, exercise, and usage are their ways for insufficiency there novices rule:

*“Amor ordinem nescit.”*¹⁷⁰

Doubtless his conduct is much more graceful when mixed with inadvertency and trouble; miscarriages and ill successes give him point and grace; provided it be sharp and eager, ‘tis no great matter whether it be prudent or no: do but observe how he goes reeling, tripping, and playing: you put him in the stocks when you guide him by art and wisdom; and he is restrained of his divine liberty when put into those hairy and callous clutches.

As to the rest, I often hear the women set out this intelligence as entirely spiritual, and disdain to put the interest the senses there have into consideration; everything there serves; but I can say that I have often seen that we have excused the weakness of their understandings in favour of their outward beauty, but have never yet seen that in favour of mind, how mature and full soever, any of them would hold out a hand to a body that was never so little in decadence. Why does not some one of them take it into her head to make that noble Socratical bargain between body and soul, purchasing a philosophical and spiritual intelligence and generation at the price of her thighs, which is

¹⁶⁸Plutarch, On Love, c.34.

¹⁶⁹“For it uncivilly passes over withered oaks.” –Horace, Od., iv. 13, 9.

¹⁷⁰“Love ignores rules.” (Or:) “Love knows no rule.” –St. Jerome, Letter to Chyomatius.

the highest price she can get for them? Plato ordains in his Laws that he who has performed any signal and advantageous exploit in war may not be refused during the whole expedition, his age or ugliness notwithstanding, a kiss or any other amorous favour from any woman whatever. What he thinks to be so just in recommendation of military valour, why may it not be the same in recommendation of any other good quality? and why does not some woman take a fancy to possess over her companions the glory of this chaste love? I may well say chaste;

*“Nam si quando ad praelia ventum est,
Ut quondam in stipulis magnus sine viribus ignis,
Incassum furit.”¹⁷¹*

the vices that are stifled in the thought are not the worst.

To conclude this notable commentary, which has escaped from me in a torrent of babble, a torrent sometimes impetuous and hurtful,

*“Ut missum sponsi furtivo munere malum
Procurrit casto virginis a gremio,
Quod miserae oblitae molli sub veste locatuat,
Dum adventu matris prosilit, excutitur,
Atque illud prono praeceps agitur decursu
Huic manat tristi conscius ore rubor.”¹⁷²*

I say that males and females are cast in the same mould, and that, education and usage excepted, the difference is not great. Plato indifferently invites both the one and the other to the society of all studies, exercises, and vocations, both military and civil, in his Commonwealth; and the philosopher Antisthenes rejected all distinction betwixt their virtue and ours. It is much more easy to accuse one sex than to excuse the other; 'tis according to the saying,

“Le fourgon se moque de la paele.”¹⁷³

¹⁷¹“For when they sometimes engage in love’s battle, his sterile ardour lights up but as the flame of a straw.” –Virgil, Georg., iii. 98.

¹⁷²“As when an apple, sent by a lover secretly to his mistress, falls from the chaste virgin’s bosom, where she had quite forgotten it; when, starting at her mother’s coming in, it is shaken out and rolls over the floor before her eyes, a conscious blush covers her face.” –Catullus, lxxv. 19.

¹⁷³“The Pot and the Kettle.”

CHAPTER VI

OF COACHES

IT is very easy to verify, that great authors, when they write of causes, not only make use of those they think to be the true causes, but also of those they believe not to be so, provided they have in them some beauty and invention: they speak true and usefully enough, if it be ingeniously. We cannot make ourselves sure of the supreme cause, and therefore crowd a great many together, to see if it may not accidentally be amongst them:

*“Namque unam dicere causam
Non satis est, verum plures, unde una tamen sit.”¹⁷⁴*

Do you ask me, whence comes the custom of blessing those who sneeze? We break wind three several ways; that which sallies from below is too filthy; that which breaks out from the mouth carries with it some reproach of gluttony; the third is sneezing, which, because it proceeds from the head and is without offence, we give it this civil reception: do not laugh at this distinction; they say ‘tis Aristotle’s.

I think I have seen in Plutarch’ (who of all the authors I know, is he who has best mixed art with nature, and judgment with knowledge), his giving as a reason for the, rising of the stomach in those who are at sea, that it is occasioned by fear; having first found out some reason by which he proves that fear may produce such an effect. I, who am very subject to it, know well that this cause concerns not me; and I know it, not by argument, but by necessary experience. Without instancing

¹⁷⁴Lucretius, vi. 704. —The sense is in the preceding passage.

what has been told me, that the same thing often happens in beasts, especially hogs, who are out of all apprehension of danger; and what an acquaintance of mine told me of himself, that though very subject to it, the disposition to vomit has three or four times gone off him, being very afraid in a violent storm, as it happened to that ancient:

*“Pejus vexabar, quam ut periculum mihi succurreret;”*¹⁷⁵

I was never afraid upon the water, nor indeed in any other peril (and I have had enough before my eyes that would have sufficed, if death be one), so as to be astounded to lose my judgment. Fear springs sometimes as much from want of judgment as from want of courage. All the dangers I have been in I have looked upon without winking, with an open, sound, and entire sight; and, indeed, a man must have courage to fear. It formerly served me better than other help, so to order and regulate my retreat, that it was, if not without fear, nevertheless without affright and astonishment; it was agitated, indeed, but not amazed or stupefied. Great souls go yet much farther, and present to us flights, not only steady and temperate, but moreover lofty. Let us make a relation of that which Alcibiades reports of Socrates, his fellow in arms: “I found him,” says he, “after the rout of our army, him and Lachez, last among those who fled, and considered him at my leisure and in security, for I was mounted on a good horse, and he on foot, as he had fought. I took notice, in the first place, how much judgment and resolution he showed, in comparison of Lachez, and then the bravery of his march, nothing different from his ordinary gait; his sight firm and regular, considering and judging what passed about him, looking one while upon those, and then upon others, friends and enemies, after such a manner as encouraged those, and signified to the others that he would sell his life dear to any one who should attempt to take it from him, and so they came off; for people are not willing to attack such kind of men, but pursue those they see are in a fright.” That is the testimony of this great captain, which teaches us, what we every day experience, that nothing so much throws us into dangers as an inconsiderate eagerness of getting ourselves clear of them:

*“Quo timoris minus est, eo minus ferme periculi est.”*¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵“I was too ill to think of danger.” (Or the reverse: “I was too frightened to be ill.” – Seneca, Ep., 53. 2

¹⁷⁶“When there is least fear, there is for the most part least danger.” –Livy, xxii. 5.

Our people are to blame who say that such an one is afraid of death, when they would express that he thinks of it and foresees it: foresight is equally convenient in what concerns us, whether good or ill. To consider and judge of danger is, in some sort, the reverse to being astounded. I do not find myself strong enough to sustain the force and impetuosity of this passion of fear, nor of any other vehement passion whatever: if I was once conquered and beaten down by it, I should never rise again very sound. Whoever should once make my soul lose her footing, would never set her upright again: she retastes and researches herself too profoundly, and too much to the quick, and therefore would never let the wound she had received heal and cicatrise. It has been well for me that no sickness has yet discomposed her: at every charge made upon me, I preserve my utmost opposition and defence; by which means the first that should rout me would keep me from ever rallying again. I have no after-game to play: on which side soever the inundation breaks my banks, I lie open, and am drowned without remedy. Epicurus says, that a wise man can never become a fool; I have an opinion reverse to this sentence, which is, that he who has once been a very fool, will never after be very wise. God grants me cold according to my cloth, and passions proportionable to the means I have to withstand them: nature having laid me open on the one side, has covered me on the other; having disarmed me of strength, she has armed me with insensibility and an apprehension that is regular, or, if you will, dull.

I cannot now long endure (and when I was young could much less) either coach, litter, or boat, and hate all other riding but on horseback, both in town and country. But I can bear a litter worse than a coach; and, by the same reason, a rough agitation upon the water, whence fear is produced, better than the motions of a calm. At the little jerks of oars, stealing the vessel from under us, I find, I know not how, both my head and my stomach disordered; neither can I endure to sit upon a tottering chair. When the sail or the current carries us equally, or that we are towed, the equal agitation does not disturb me at all; 'tis an interrupted motion that offends me, and most of all when most slow: I cannot otherwise express it. The physicians have ordered me to squeeze and gird myself about the bottom of the belly with a napkin to remedy this evil; which however I have not tried, being accustomed to wrestle with my own defects, and overcome them myself.

Would my memory serve me, I should not think my time ill spent in setting down here the infinite variety that history presents us of the

use of chariots in the service of war: various, according to the nations and according to the age; in my opinion, of great necessity and effect; so that it is a wonder that we have lost all knowledge of them. I will only say this, that very lately, in our fathers' time, the Hungarians made very advantageous use of them against the Turks; having in every one of them a targetter and a musketeer, and a number of harquebuses piled ready and loaded, and all covered with a pavesade like a galliot¹⁷⁷ They formed the front of their battle with three thousand such coaches, and after the cannon had played, made them all pour in their shot upon the enemy, who had to swallow that volley before they tasted of the rest, which was no little advance; and that done, these chariots charged into their squadrons to break them and open a way for the rest; besides the use they might make of them to flank the soldiers in a place of danger when marching to the field, or to cover a post, and fortify it in haste. In my time, a gentleman on one of our frontiers, unwieldy of body, and finding no horse able to carry his weight, having a quarrel, rode through the country in a chariot of this fashion, and found great convenience in it. But let us leave these chariots of war.

As if their effeminacy¹⁷⁸ had not been sufficiently known by better proofs, the last kings of our first race travelled in a chariot drawn by four oxen. Marc Antony was the first at Rome who caused himself to be drawn in a coach by lions, and a singing wench with him.¹⁷⁹

Heliogabalus did since as much, calling himself Cybele, the mother of the gods; and also drawn by tigers, taking upon him the person of the god Bacchus; he also sometimes harnessed two stags to his coach, another time four dogs, and another four naked wenches, causing himself to be drawn by them in pomp, stark naked too. The Emperor Firmus caused his chariot to be drawn by ostriches of a prodigious size, so that it seemed rather to fly than roll.

The strangeness of these inventions puts this other fancy in my head: that it is a kind of pusillanimity in monarchs, and a testimony that they do not sufficiently understand themselves what they are, when they study to make themselves honoured and to appear great by excessive expense: it were indeed excusable in a foreign country, but amongst

¹⁷⁷Canvas spread along the side of a ship of war, in action to screen the movements of those on board.

¹⁷⁸Which Cotton translates: "as if the insignificance of coaches."

¹⁷⁹Cytheris, the Roman courtesan.—Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, c. 3. This, was the same person who is introduced by Gallus under the name of Lycoris. Gallus doubtless knew her personally.

their own subjects, where they are in sovereign command, and may do what they please, it derogates from their dignity the most supreme degree of honour to which they can arrive: just as, methinks, it is superfluous in a private gentleman to go finely dressed at home; his house, his attendants, and his kitchen sufficiently answer for him. The advice that Isocrates gives his king seems to be grounded upon reason: that he should be splendid in plate and furniture; forasmuch as it is an expense of duration that devolves on his successors; and that he should avoid all magnificences that will in a short time be forgotten. I loved to go fine when I was a younger brother, for want of other ornament; and it became me well: there are some upon whom their rich clothes weep: We have strange stories of the frugality of our kings about their own persons and in their gifts: kings who were great in reputation, valour, and fortune. Demosthenes vehemently opposes the law of his city that assigned the public money for the pomp of their public plays and festivals: he would that their greatness should be seen in numbers of ships well equipped, and good armies well provided for; and there is good reason to condemn Theophrastus, who, in his Book on Riches, establishes a contrary opinion, and maintains that sort of expense to be the true fruit of abundance. They are delights, says Aristotle, that only please the baser sort of the people, and that vanish from the memory as soon as the people are sated with them, and for which no serious and judicious man can have any esteem. This money would, in my opinion, be much more royally, as more profitably, justly, and durably, laid out in ports, havens, walls, and fortifications; in sumptuous buildings, churches, hospitals, colleges, the reforming of streets and highways: wherein Pope Gregory XIII. will leave a laudable memory to future times: and wherein our Queen Catherine would to long posterity manifest her natural liberality and munificence, did her means supply her affection. Fortune has done me a great despite in interrupting the noble structure of the Pont-Neuf of our great city, and depriving me of the hope of seeing it finished before I die.

Moreover, it seems to subjects, who are spectators of these triumphs, that their own riches are exposed before them, and that they are entertained at their own expense: for the people are apt to presume of kings, as we do of our servants, that they are to take care to provide us all things necessary in abundance, but not touch it themselves; and therefore the Emperor Galba, being pleased with a musician who played to him at supper, called for his money-box, and gave him a handful of crowns that he took out of it, with these words: "This is not the public

money, but my own." Yet it so falls out that the people, for the most part, have reason on their side, and that the princes feed their eyes with what they have need of to fill their bellies.

Liberality itself is not in its true lustre in a sovereign hand: private men have therein the most right; for, to take it exactly, a king has nothing properly his own; he owes himself to others: authority is not given in favour of the magistrate, but of the people; a superior is never made so for his own profit, but for the profit of the inferior, and a physician for the sick person, and not for himself: all magistracy, as well as all art, has its end out of itself wherefore the tutors of young princes, who make it their business to imprint in them this virtue of liberality, and preach to them to deny nothing and to think nothing so well spent as what they give (a doctrine that I have known in great credit in my time), either have more particular regard to their own profit than to that of their master, or ill understand to whom they speak. It is too easy a thing to inculcate liberality on him who has as much as he will to practise it with at the expense of others; and, the estimate not being proportioned to the measure of the gift but to the measure of the means of him who gives it, it comes to nothing in so mighty hands; they find themselves prodigal before they can be reputed liberal. And it is but a little recommendation, in comparison with other royal virtues: and the only one, as the tyrant Dionysius said, that suits well with tyranny itself. I should rather teach him this verse of the ancient labourer:¹⁸⁰

he must scatter it abroad, and not lay it on a heap in one place: and that, seeing he is to give, or, to say better, to pay and restore to so many people according as they have deserved, he ought to be a loyal and discreet disposer. If the liberality of a prince be without measure or discretion, I had rather he were covetous.

Royal virtue seems most to consist in justice; and of all the parts of justice that best denotes a king which accompanies liberality, for this they have particularly reserved to be performed by themselves, whereas all other sorts of justice they remit to the administration of others. An immoderate bounty is a very weak means to acquire for them good will; it checks more people than it allures:

"Quo in plures usus sis, minus in multos uti possis..."

¹⁸⁰"That whoever will have a good crop must sow with his hand, and not pour out of the sack."—Plutarch, Apothegms, Whether the Ancients were more excellent in Arms than in Learning.

*Quid autem est stultius, quam, quod libenter facias,
curare ut id diutius facere non possis;*¹⁸¹

and if it be conferred without due respect of merit, it puts him out of countenance who receives it, and is received ungraciously. Tyrants have been sacrificed to the hatred of the people by the hands of those very men they have unjustly advanced; such kind of men as buffoons, panders, fiddlers, and such ragamuffins, thinking to assure to themselves the possession of benefits unduly received, if they manifest to have him in hatred and disdain of whom they hold them, and in this associate themselves to the common judgment and opinion.

The subjects of a prince excessive in gifts grow excessive in asking, and regulate their demands, not by reason, but by example. We have, seriously, very often reason to blush at our own impudence: we are over-paid, according to justice, when the recompense equals our service; for do we owe nothing of natural obligation to our princes? If he bear our charges, he does too much; 'tis enough that he contribute to them: the overplus is called benefit, which cannot be exacted: for the very name Liberality sounds of Liberty.

In our fashion it is never done; we never reckon what we have received; we are only for the future liberality; wherefore, the more a prince exhausts himself in giving, the poorer he grows in friends. How should he satisfy immoderate desires, that still increase as they are fulfilled? He who has his thoughts upon taking, never thinks of what he has taken; covetousness has nothing so properly and so much its own as ingratitude.

The example of Cyrus will not do amiss in this place, to serve the kings of these times for a touchstone to know whether their gifts are well or ill bestowed, and to see how much better that emperor conferred them than they do, by which means they are reduced to borrow of unknown subjects, and rather of them whom they have wronged than of them on whom they have conferred their benefits, and so receive aids wherein there is nothing of gratuitous but the name. Croesus reproached him with his bounty, and cast up to how much his treasure would amount if he had been a little closer-handed. He had a mind to justify his liberality, and therefore sent despatches into all parts to the

¹⁸¹“By how much more you use it to many, by so much less will you be in a capacity to use it to many more. And what greater folly can there be than to order it so that what you would willingly do, you cannot do longer.” –Cicero, *De Offic.*, ii. 15.

grantees of his dominions whom he had particularly advanced, entreating every one of them to supply him with as much money as they could, for a pressing occasion, and to send him particulars of what each could advance. When all these answers were brought to him, every one of his friends, not thinking it enough barely to offer him so much as he had received from his bounty, and adding to it a great deal of his own, it appeared that the sum amounted to a great deal more than Croesus' reckoning. Whereupon Cyrus: "I am not," said he, "less in love with riches than other princes, but rather a better husband; you see with how small a venture I have acquired the inestimable treasure of so many friends, and how much more faithful treasurers they are to me than mercenary men without obligation, without affection; and my money better laid up than in chests, bringing upon me the hatred, envy, and contempt of other princes."

The emperors excused the superfluity of their plays and public spectacles by reason that their authority in some sort (at least in outward appearance) depended upon the will of the people of Rome, who, time out of mind, had been accustomed to be entertained and caressed with such shows and excesses. But they were private citizens, who had nourished this custom to gratify their fellow-citizens and companions (and chiefly out of their own purses) by such profusion and magnificence it had quite another taste when the masters came to imitate it:

*"Pecuniarum translatio a justis dominis ad alienos non debet liberalis videri."*¹⁸²

Philip, seeing that his son went about by presents to gain the affection of the Macedonians, reprimanded him in a letter after this manner: "What! hast thou a mind that thy subjects shall look upon thee as their cash-keeper and not as their king? Wilt thou tamper with them to win their affections? Do it, then, by the benefits of thy virtue, and not by those of thy chest." And yet it was, doubtless, a fine thing to bring and plant within the amphitheatre a great number of vast trees, with all their branches in their full verdure, representing a great shady forest, disposed in excellent order; and, the first day, to throw into it a thousand ostriches and a thousand stags, a thousand boars, and a thousand fallow-deer, to be killed and disposed of by the people: the next day,

¹⁸²"The transferring of money from the right owners to strangers ought not to have the title of liberality." —Cicero, *De Offic.*, i. 14.

to cause a hundred great lions, a hundred leopards, and three hundred bears to be killed in his presence; and for the third day, to make three hundred pair of gladiators fight it out to the last, as the Emperor Probus did. It was also very fine to see those vast amphitheatres, all faced with marble without, curiously wrought with figures and statues, and within glittering with rare enrichments:

*“Baltheus en! gemmis, en illita porticus auro:”*¹⁸³

all the sides of this vast space filled and environed, from the bottom to the top, with three or four score rows of seats, all of marble also, and covered with cushions:

*“Exeat, inquit,
Si pudor est, et de pulvino surgat equestri,
Cujus res legi non sufficit;”*¹⁸⁴

where a hundred thousand men might sit at their ease: and, the place below, where the games were played, to make it, by art, first open and cleave in chasms, representing caves that vomited out the beasts designed for the spectacle; and then, secondly, to be overflowed by a deep sea, full of sea monsters, and laden with ships of war, to represent a naval battle; and, thirdly, to make it dry and even again for the combat of the gladiators; and, for the fourth scene, to have it strown with vermilion grain and storax,¹⁸⁵ instead of sand, there to make a solemn feast for all that infinite number of people: the last act of one only day:

*“Quoties nos descenditis arenae
Vidimus in partes, ruptaque voragine terrae
Emersisse feras, et eisdem saepe latebris
Aurea cum croceo creverunt arbuta libro!...
Nec solum nobis silvestria cernere monstra
Contigit; aequoreos ego cum certantibus ursis*

¹⁸³“A belt glittering with jewels, and a portico overlaid with gold.” –Calpurnius, Eclog., vii. 47. A baltheus was a shoulder-belt or baldric.

¹⁸⁴“Let him go out, he said, if he has any sense of shame, and rise from the equestrian cushion, whose estate does not satisfy the law.” –Juvenal, iii. 153. The Equites were required to possess a fortune of 400 sestertia, and they sat on the first fourteen rows behind the orchestra.

¹⁸⁵A resinous gum.

*Spectavi vitulos, et equorum nomine dignum,
Sen deforme pecus, quod in illo nascitur amni...*¹⁸⁶

Sometimes they made a high mountain advance itself, covered with fruit-trees and other leafy trees, sending down rivulets of water from the top, as from the mouth of a fountain: otherwhiles, a great ship was seen to come rolling in, which opened and divided of itself, and after having disgorged from the hold four or five hundred beasts for fight, closed again, and vanished without help. At other times, from the floor of this place, they made spouts of perfumed water dart their streams upward, and so high as to sprinkle all that infinite multitude. To defend themselves from the injuries of the weather, they had that vast place one while covered over with purple curtains of needlework, and by-and-by with silk of one or another colour, which they drew off or on in a moment, as they had a mind:

*"Quamvis non modico caleant spectacula sole,
Vela reducuntur, cum venit Hermogenes."*¹⁸⁷

The network also that was set before the people to defend them from the violence of these turned-out beasts was woven of gold:

*"Auro quoque torts refulgent Retia."*¹⁸⁸

If there be anything excusable in such excesses as these, it is where the novelty and invention create more wonder than the expense; even in these vanities we discover how fertile those ages were in other kind of wits than these of ours. It is with this sort of fertility, as with all other products of nature: not that she there and then employed her utmost

¹⁸⁶"How often have we seen the stage of the theatre descend and part asunder, and from a chasm in the earth wild beasts emerge, and then presently give birth to a grove of gilded trees, that put forth blossoms of enamelled flowers. Nor yet of sylvan marvels alone had we sight: I saw sea-calves fight with bears, and a deformed sort of cattle, we might call sea-horses." –Calpurnius, *Eclog.*, vii. 64.

¹⁸⁷"The curtains, though the sun should scorch the spectators, are drawn in, when Hermogenes appears." –Martial, xii. 29, 15. M. Tigellius Hermogenes, whom Horace and others have satirised. One editor calls him "a noted thief," another: "He was a literary amateur of no ability, who expressed his critical opinions with too great a freedom to please the poets of his day." D.W.

¹⁸⁸"The woven nets are refulgent with gold." –Calpurnius, *ubi supra*.

force: we do not go; we rather run up and down, and whirl this way and that; we turn back the way we came. I am afraid our knowledge is weak in all senses; we neither see far forward nor far backward; our understanding comprehends little, and lives but a little while; 'tis short both in extent of time and extent of matter:

*“Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona
Mufti, sed omnes illacrymabiles
Urgentur, ignotique longs Nocte.”*¹⁸⁹
*“Et supra bellum Thebanum et funera Trojae
Non alias alii quoque res cecinere poetae?”*¹⁹⁰

And the narrative of Solon, of what he had learned from the Egyptian priests, touching the long life of their state, and their manner of learning and preserving foreign histories, is not, methinks, a testimony to be refused in this consideration:

*“Si interminatam in omnes partes magnitudinem regionum
videremus et temporum, in quam se injiciens animus et in-
tendens, ita late longeque peregrinatur, ut nullam oram ul-
timi videat, in qua possit insistere: in haec immensitate... in-
finita vis innumerabilium appareret fomorum.”*¹⁹¹

Though all that has arrived, by report, of our knowledge of times past should be true, and known by some one person, it would be less than nothing in comparison of what is unknown. And of this same image of the world, which glides away whilst we live upon it, how

¹⁸⁹Many brave men lived before Agamemnon, but all are pressed by the long night unmourned and unknown.” –Horace, *Od.*, iv. 9, 25.

¹⁹⁰“Why before the Theban war and the destruction of Troy, have not other poets sung other events?” –Lucretius, v. 327.

Montaigne here diverts himself in giving Lucretius’ words a construction directly contrary to what they bear in the poem. Lucretius puts the question, Why if the earth had existed from all eternity, there had not been poets, before the Theban war, to sing men’s exploits. –Coste.

¹⁹¹“Could we see on all parts the unlimited magnitude of regions and of times, upon which the mind being intent, could wander so far and wide, that no limit is to be seen, in which it can bound its eye, we should, in that infinite immensity, discover an infinite force of innumerable atoms.” Here also Montaigne puts a sense quite different from what the words bear in the original; but the application he makes of them is so happy that one would declare they were actually put together only to express his own sentiments. “Et temporum” is an addition by Montaigne. –Coste.

wretched and limited is the knowledge of the most curious; not only of particular events, which fortune often renders exemplary and of great concern, but of the state of great governments and nations, a hundred more escape us than ever come to our knowledge. We make a mighty business of the invention of artillery and printing, which other men at the other end of the world, in China, had a thousand years ago. Did we but see as much of the world as we do not see, we should perceive, we may well believe, a perpetual multiplication and vicissitude of forms. There is nothing single and rare in respect of nature, but in respect of our knowledge, which is a wretched foundation whereon to ground our rules, and that represents to us a very false image of things. As we nowadays vainly conclude the declension and decrepitude of the world, by the arguments we extract from our own weakness and decay:

*“Jamque adeo est affecta aetas effoet aque tellus;”*¹⁹²

so did he vainly conclude as to its birth and youth, by the vigour he observed in the wits of his time, abounding in novelties and the invention of divers arts:

*“Verum, ut opinor, habet novitatem summa, recensque
Natura est mundi, neque pridem exordia coepit
Quare etiam quaedam nunc artes expoliuntur,
Nunc etiam aulescunt; nunc addita navigiis sunt
Multa.”*¹⁹³

Our world has lately discovered another (and who will assure us that it is the last of its brothers, since the Daemons, the Sybils, and we ourselves have been ignorant of this till now?), as large, well-peopled, and fruitful as this whereon we live and yet so raw and childish, that we are still teaching it it's a B C: 'tis not above fifty years since it knew neither letters, weights, measures, vestments, corn, nor vines: it was then quite naked in the mother's lap, and only lived upon what she gave it. If we rightly conclude of our end, and this poet of the youthfulness of that age of his, that other world will only enter into the light when

¹⁹²“Our age is feeble, and the earth less fertile.” –Lucretius, ii. 1151.

¹⁹³“But, as I am of opinion, the whole of the world is of recent origin, nor had its commencement in remote times; wherefore it is that some arts are still being refined, and some just on the increase; at present many additions are being made to shipping.” –Lucretius, v. 331.

this of ours shall make its exit; the universe will fall into paralysis; one member will be useless, the other in vigour. I am very much afraid that we have greatly precipitated its declension and ruin by our contagion; and that we have sold it opinions and our arts at a very dear rate. It was an infant world, and yet we have not whipped and subjected it to our discipline by the advantage of our natural worth and force, neither have we won it by our justice and goodness, nor subdued it by our magnanimity. Most of their answers, and the negotiations we have had with them, witness that they were nothing behind us in pertinency and clearness of natural understanding. The astonishing magnificence of the cities of Cusco and Mexico, and, amongst many other things, the garden of the king, where all the trees, fruits, and plants, according to the order and stature they have in a garden, were excellently formed in gold; as, in his cabinet, were all the animals bred upon his territory and in its seas; and the beauty of their manufactures, in jewels, feathers, cotton, and painting, gave ample proof that they were as little inferior to us in industry. But as to what concerns devotion, observance of the laws, goodness, liberality, loyalty, and plain dealing, it was of use to us that we had not so much as they; for they have lost, sold, and betrayed themselves by this advantage over us.

As to boldness and courage, stability, constancy against pain, hunger, and death, I should not fear to oppose the examples I find amongst them to the most famous examples of elder times that we find in our records on this side of the world. Far as to those who subdued them, take but away the tricks and artifices they practised to gull them, and the just astonishment it was to those nations to see so sudden and unexpected an arrival of men with beards, differing in language, religion, shape, and countenance, from so remote a part of the world, and where they had never heard there was any habitation, mounted upon great unknown monsters, against those who had not only never seen a horse, but had never seen any other beast trained up to carry a man or any other loading; shelled in a hard and shining skin, with a cutting and glittering weapon in his hand, against them, who, out of wonder at the brightness of a looking glass or a knife, would exchange great treasures of gold and pearl; and who had neither knowledge, nor matter with which, at leisure, they could penetrate our steel: to which may be added the lightning and thunder of our cannon and harquebuses, enough to frighten Caesar himself, if surprised, with so little experience, against people naked, except where the invention of a little quilted cotton was in use, without other arms, at the most, than bows,

stones, staves, and bucklers of wood; people surprised under colour of friendship and good faith, by the curiosity of seeing strange and unknown things; take but away, I say, this disparity from the conquerors, and you take away all the occasion of so many victories. When I look upon that in vincible ardour wherewith so many thousands of men, women, and children so often presented and threw themselves into inevitable dangers for the defence of their gods and liberties; that generous obstinacy to suffer all extremities and difficulties, and death itself, rather than submit to the dominion of those by whom they had been so shamefully abused; and some of them choosing to die of hunger and fasting, being prisoners, rather than to accept of nourishment from the hands of their so basely victorious enemies: I see, that whoever would have attacked them upon equal terms of arms, experience, and number, would have had a hard, and, peradventure, a harder game to play than in any other war we have seen.

Why did not so noble a conquest fall under Alexander, or the ancient Greeks and Romans; and so great a revolution and mutation of so many empires and nations, fall into hands that would have gently levelled, rooted up, and made plain and smooth whatever was rough and savage amongst them, and that would have cherished and propagated the good seeds that nature had there produced; mixing not only with the culture of land and the ornament of cities, the arts of this part of the world, in what was necessary, but also the Greek and Roman virtues, with those that were original of the country? What a reparation had it been to them, and what a general good to the whole world, had our first examples and deportments in those parts allured those people to the admiration and imitation of virtue, and had begotten betwixt them and us a fraternal society and intelligence? How easy had it been to have made advantage of souls so innocent, and so eager to learn, leaving, for the most part, naturally so good inclinations before? Whereas, on the contrary, we have taken advantage of their ignorance and inexperience, with greater ease to incline them to treachery, luxury, avarice, and towards all sorts of inhumanity and cruelty, by the pattern and example of our manners. Who ever enhanced the price of merchandise at such a rate? So many cities levelled with the ground, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people fallen by the edge of the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down, for the traffic of pearl and pepper? Mechanic victories! Never did ambition, never did public animosities, engage men against one another in such miserable hostilities, in such miserable calamities.

Certain Spaniards, coasting the sea in quest of their mines, landed in a fruitful and pleasant and very well peopled country, and there made to the inhabitants their accustomed professions: "that they were peaceable men, who were come from a very remote country, and sent on the behalf of the King of Castile, the greatest prince of the habitable world, to whom the Pope, God's vicegerent upon earth, had given the principality of all the Indies; that if they would become tributaries to him, they should be very gently and courteously used"; at the same time requiring of them victuals for their nourishment, and gold whereof to make some pretended medicine; setting forth, moreover, the belief in one only God, and the truth of our religion, which they advised them to embrace, whereunto they also added some threats. To which they received this answer: "That as to their being peaceable, they did not seem to be such, if they were so. As to their king, since he was fain to beg, he must be necessitous and poor; and he who had made him this gift, must be a man who loved dissension, to give that to another which was none of his own, to bring it into dispute against the ancient possessors. As to victuals, they would supply them; that of gold they had little; it being a thing they had in very small esteem, as of no use to the service of life, whereas their only care was to pass it over happily and pleasantly: but that what they could find excepting what was employed in the service of their gods, they might freely take. As to one only God, the proposition had pleased them well; but that they would not change their religion, both because they had so long and happily lived in it, and that they were not wont to take advice of any but their friends, and those they knew: as to their menaces, it was a sign of want of judgment to threaten those whose nature and power were to them unknown; that, therefore, they were to make haste to quit their coast, for they were not used to take the civilities and professions of armed men and strangers in good part; otherwise they should do by them as they had done by those others," showing them the heads of several executed men round the walls of their city. A fair example of the babble of these children. But so it is, that the Spaniards did not, either in this or in several other places, where they did not find the merchandise they sought, make any stay or attempt, whatever other conveniences were there to be had; witness my CANNIBALS.¹⁹⁴

Of the two most puissant monarchs of that world, and, peradventure, of this, kings of so many kings, and the last they turned out, he of Peru, having been taken in a battle, and put to so excessive a ransom

¹⁹⁴Chapter XXX. of Book I.

as exceeds all belief, and it being faithfully paid, and he having, by his conversation, given manifest signs of a frank, liberal, and constant spirit, and of a clear and settled understanding, the conquerors had a mind, after having exacted one million three hundred and twenty-five thousand and five hundred weight of gold, besides silver, and other things which amounted to no less (so that their horses were shod with massy gold), still to see, at the price of what disloyalty and injustice whatever, what the remainder of the treasures of this king might be, and to possess themselves of that also. To this end a false accusation was preferred against him, and false witnesses brought to prove that he went about to raise an insurrection in his provinces, to procure his own liberty; whereupon, by the virtuous sentence of those very men who had by this treachery conspired his ruin, he was condemned to be publicly hanged and strangled, after having made him buy off the torment of being burnt alive, by the baptism they gave him immediately before execution; a horrid and unheard of barbarity, which, nevertheless, he underwent without giving way either in word or look, with a truly grave and royal behaviour. After which, to calm and appease the people, aroused and astounded at so strange a thing, they counterfeited great sorrow for his death, and appointed most sumptuous funerals.

The other king of Mexico,¹⁹⁵ having for a long time defended his beleaguered city, and having in this siege manifested the utmost of what suffering and perseverance can do, if ever prince and people did, and his misfortune having delivered him alive into his enemies' hands, upon articles of being treated like a king, neither did he in his captivity discover anything unworthy of that title. His enemies, after their victory, not finding so much gold as they expected, when they had searched and rifled with their utmost diligence, they went about to procure discoveries by the most cruel torments they could invent upon the prisoners they had taken: but having profited nothing by these, their courage being greater than their torments, they arrived at last to such a degree of fury, as, contrary to their faith and the law of nations, to condemn the king himself, and one of the principal noblemen of his court, to the rack, in the presence of one another. This lord, finding himself overcome with pain, being environed with burning coals, pitifully turned his dying eyes towards his master, as it were to ask him pardon that he was able to endure no more; whereupon the king, darting at him a fierce and severe look, as reproaching his cowardice and

¹⁹⁵Guatimosin

pusillanimity, with a harsh and constant voice said to him thus only: "And what dost thou think I suffer? am I in a bath? am I more at ease than thou?" Whereupon the other immediately quailed under the torment and died upon the spot. The king, half roasted, was carried thence; not so much out of pity (for what compassion ever touched so barbarous souls, who, upon the doubtful information of some vessel of gold to be made a prey of, caused not only a man, but a king, so great in fortune and desert, to be broiled before their eyes), but because his constancy rendered their cruelty still more shameful. They afterwards hanged him for having nobly attempted to deliver himself by arms from so long a captivity and subjection, and he died with a courage becoming so magnanimous a prince.

Another time, they burnt in the same fire four hundred and sixty men alive at once, the four hundred of the common people, the sixty the principal lords of a province, simply prisoners of war. We have these narratives from themselves for they not only own it, but boast of it and publish it. Could it be for a testimony of their justice or their zeal to religion? Doubtless these are ways too differing and contrary to so holy an end. Had they proposed to themselves to extend our faith, they would have considered that it does not amplify in the possession of territories, but in the gaining of men; and would have more than satisfied themselves with the slaughters occasioned by the necessity of war, without indifferently mixing a massacre, as upon wild beasts, as universal as fire and sword could make it; having only, by intention, saved so many as they meant to make miserable slaves of, for the work and service of their mines; so that many of the captains were put to death upon the place of conquest, by order of the kings of Castile, justly offended with the horror of their deportment, and almost all of them hated and disesteemed. God meritoriously permitted that all this great plunder should be swallowed up by the sea in transportation, or in the civil wars wherewith they devoured one another; and most of the men themselves were buried in a foreign land without any fruit of their victory.

That the revenue from these countries, though in the hands of so parsimonious and so prudent a prince,¹⁹⁶ so little answers the expectation given of it to his predecessors, and to that original abundance of riches which was found at the first landing in those new discovered countries (for though a great deal be fetched thence, yet we see

¹⁹⁶Phillip II.

'tis nothing in comparison of that which might be expected), is that the use of coin was there utterly unknown, and that consequently their gold was found all hoarded together, being of no other use but for ornament and show, as a furniture reserved from father to son by many puissant kings, who were ever draining their mines to make this vast heap of vessels and statues for the decoration of their palaces and temples; whereas our gold is always in motion and traffic; we cut it into a thousand small pieces, and cast it into a thousand forms, and scatter and disperse it in a thousand ways. But suppose our kings should thus hoard up all the gold they could get in several ages and let it lie idle by them.

Those of the kingdom of Mexico were in some sort more civilised and more advanced in arts than the other nations about them. Therefore did they judge, as we do, that the world was near its period, and looked upon the desolation we brought amongst them as a certain sign of it. They believed that the existence of the world was divided into five ages, and in the life of five successive suns, of which four had already ended their time, and that this which gave them light was the fifth. The first perished, with all other creatures, by an universal inundation of water; the second by the heavens falling upon us and suffocating every living thing to which age they assigned the giants, and showed bones to the Spaniards, according to the proportion of which the stature of men amounted to twenty feet; the third by fire, which burned and consumed all; the fourth by an emotion of the air and wind, which came with such violence as to beat down even many mountains, wherein the men died not, but were turned into baboons. What impressions will not the weakness of human belief admit? After the death of this fourth sun, the world was twenty-five years in perpetual darkness: in the fifteenth of which a man and a woman were created, who restored the human race: ten years after, upon a certain day, the sun appeared newly created, and since the account of their year takes beginning from that day: the third day after its creation the ancient gods died, and the new ones were since born daily. After what manner they think this last sun shall perish, my author knows not; but their number of this fourth change agrees with the great conjunction of stars which eight hundred and odd years ago, as astrologers suppose, produced great alterations and novelties in the world.

As to pomp and magnificence, upon the account of which I engaged in this discourse, neither Greece, Rome, nor Egypt, whether for utility, difficulty, or state, can compare any of their works with the highway

to be seen in Peru, made by the kings of the country, from the city of Quito to that of Cusco (three hundred leagues), straight, even, five-and-twenty paces wide, paved, and provided on both sides with high and beautiful walls; and close by them, and all along on the inside, two perennial streams, bordered with beautiful plants, which they call moly. In this work, where they met with rocks and mountains, they cut them through, and made them even, and filled up pits and valleys with lime and stone to make them level. At the end of every day's journey are beautiful palaces, furnished with provisions, vestments, and arms, as well for travellers as for the armies that are to pass that way. In the estimate of this work I have reckoned the difficulty which is especially considerable in that place; they did not build with any stones less than ten feet square, and had no other conveniency of carriage but by drawing their load themselves by force of arm, and knew not so much as the art of scaffolding, nor any other way of standing to their work, but by throwing up earth against the building as it rose higher, taking it away again when they had done.

Let us here return to our coaches. Instead of these, and of all other sorts of carriages, they caused themselves to be carried upon men's shoulders. This last king of Peru, the day that he was taken, was thus carried betwixt two upon staves of gold, and set in a chair of gold in the middle of his army. As many of these sedan-men as were killed to make him fall (for they would take him alive), so many others (and they contended for it) took the place of those who were slain, so that they could never beat him down, what slaughter soever they made of these people, till a horseman, seizing upon him, brought him to the ground.

CHAPTER VII

OF THE INCONVENIENCE OF GREATNESS

SINCE we cannot attain unto it, let us revenge our selves by railing at it; and yet it is not absolutely railing against anything to proclaim its defects, because they are in all things to be found, how beautiful or how much to be coveted soever. Greatness has, in general, this manifest advantage, that it can lower itself when it pleases, and has, very near, the choice of both the one and the other condition; for a man does not fall from all heights; there are several from which one may descend without falling down. It does, indeed, appear to me that we value it at too high a rate, and also overvalue the resolution of those whom we have either seen or heard have contemned it, or displaced themselves of their own accord: its essence is not so evidently commodious that a man may not, with out a miracle, refuse it. I find it a very hard thing to undergo misfortunes, but to be content with a moderate measure of fortune, and to avoid greatness, I think a very easy matter. 'Tis, methinks, a virtue to which I, who am no conjuror, could without any great endeavour arrive. What, then, is to be expected from them that would yet put into consideration the glory attending this refusal, wherein there may lurk worse ambition than even in the desire itself, and fruition of greatness? Forasmuch as ambition never comports itself better, according to itself, than when it proceeds by obscure and unfrequented ways.

I incite my courage to patience, but I rein it as much as I can towards desire. I have as much to wish for as another, and allow my wishes as much liberty and indiscretion; but yet it never befell me to wish for either empire or royalty, or the eminency of those high and commanding fortunes: I do not aim that way; I love myself too well. When I think to grow greater, 'tis but very moderately, and by a compelled

and timorous advancement, such as is proper for me in resolution, in prudence, in health, in beauty, and even in riches too; but this supreme reputation, this mighty authority, oppress my imagination; and, quite contrary to that other,¹⁹⁷ I should, peradventure, rather choose to be the second or third in Perigord than the first at Paris at least, without lying, rather the third at Paris than the first. I would neither dispute with a porter, a miserable unknown, nor make crowds open in adoration as I pass. I am trained up to a moderate condition, as well by my choice as fortune; and have made it appear, in the whole conduct of my life and enterprises, that I have rather avoided than otherwise the climbing above the degree of fortune wherein God has placed me by my birth; all natural constitution is equally just and easy. My soul is such a poltroon, that I measure not good fortune by the height, but by the facility.

But if my heart be not great enough, 'tis open enough to make amends, at any one's request, freely to lay open its weakness. Should any one put me upon comparing the life of L. Thorius Balbus, a brave man, handsome, learned, healthful, understanding, and abounding in all sorts of conveniences and pleasures, leading a quiet life, and all his own, his mind well prepared against death, superstition, pain, and other incumbrances of human necessity, dying, at last, in battle, with his sword in his hand, for the defence of his country, on the one part; and on the other part, the life of M. Regulus, so great and high as is known to every one, and his end admirable; the one without name and without dignity, the other exemplary and glorious to a wonder. I should doubtless say, as Cicero did, could I speak as well as he.¹⁹⁸

But if I was to compare them with my own, I should then also say that the first is as much according to my capacity, and from desire, which I conform to my capacity, as the second is far beyond it; that I could not approach the last but with veneration, the other I could readily attain by use.

Let us return to our temporal greatness, from which we are digressed. I disrelish all dominion, whether active or passive. Otanes, one of the seven who had right to pretend to the kingdom of Persia, did as I should willingly have done, which was, that he gave up to his competitors his right of being promoted to it, either by election or

¹⁹⁷Julius Caesar.

¹⁹⁸Cicero, *De Finibus*, ii. 20, gives the preference to Regulus, and proclaims him the happier man.

by lot, provided that he and his might live in the empire out of all authority and subjection, those of the ancient laws excepted, and might enjoy all liberty that was not prejudicial to these, being as impatient of commanding as of being commanded.

The most painful and difficult employment in the world, in my opinion, is worthily to discharge the office of a king. I excuse more of their mistakes than men commonly do, in consideration of the intolerable weight of their function, which astounds me. 'Tis hard to keep measure in so immeasurable a power; yet so it is that it is, even to those who are not of the best nature, a singular incitement to virtue to be seated in a place where you cannot do the least good that shall not be put upon record, and where the least benefit redounds to so many men, and where your talent of administration, like that of preachers, principally addresses itself to the people, no very exact judge, easy to deceive, and easily content. There are few things wherein we can give a sincere judgment, by reason that there are few wherein we have not, in some sort, a private interest. Superiority and inferiority, dominion and subjection are bound to a natural envy and contest, and must of necessity perpetually intrench upon one another. I believe neither the one nor the other touching the rights of the other party; let reason therefore, which is inflexible and without passion, determine when we can avail ourselves of it. 'Tis not above a month ago that I read over, two Scottish authors contending upon this subject, of whom he who stands for the people makes the king to be in a worse condition than a carter; he who writes for monarchy places him some degrees above God in power and sovereignty.

Now, the incommodity of greatness that I have taken to remark in this place, upon some occasion that has lately put it into my head, is this: there is not, peradventure, anything more pleasant in the commerce of many than the trials that we make against one another, out of emulation of honour and worth, whether in the exercises of the body or in those of the mind, wherein sovereign greatness can have no true part. And, in earnest, I have often thought that by force of respect itself men use princes disdainfully and injuriously in that particular; for the thing I was infinitely offended at in my childhood, that they who exercised with me forbore to do their best because they found me unworthy of their utmost endeavour, is what we see happen to them daily, every one finding himself unworthy to contend with them. If we discover that they have the least desire to get the better of us, there is no one who will not make it his business to give it them, and who will not

rather betray his own glory than offend theirs; and will therein employ so much force only as is necessary to save their honour. What share have they, then, in the engagement, where every one is on their side? Methinks I see those paladins of ancient times presenting themselves to jousts and battle with enchanted arms and bodies. Brisson,¹⁹⁹

running against Alexander, purposely missed his blow, and made a fault in his career; Alexander chid him for it, but he ought to have had him whipped. Upon this consideration Carneades said, that "the sons of princes learned nothing right but to manage horses; by reason that, in all their other exercises, every one bends and yields to them; but a horse, that is neither a flatterer nor a courtier, throws the son of a king with no more ceremony than he would throw that of a porter."

Homer was fain to consent that Venus, so sweet and delicate a goddess as she was, should be wounded at the battle of Troy, thereby to ascribe courage and boldness to her qualities that cannot possibly be in those who are exempt from danger. The gods are made to be angry, to fear, to run away, to be jealous, to grieve, to be transported with passions, to honour them with the virtues that, amongst us, are built upon these imperfections. Who does not participate in the hazard and difficulty, can claim no interest in the honour and pleasure that are the consequents of hazardous actions. 'Tis pity a man should be so potent that all things must give way to him; fortune therein sets you too remote from society, and places you in too great a solitude. This easiness and mean facility of making all things bow under you, is an enemy to all sorts of pleasure: 'tis to slide, not to go; 'tis to sleep, and not to live. Conceive man accompanied with omnipotence: you overwhelm him; he must beg disturbance and opposition as an alms: his being and his good are in indigence. Evil to man is in its turn good, and good evil. Neither is pain always to be shunned, nor pleasure always to be pursued.

Their good qualities are dead and lost; for they can only be perceived by comparison, and we put them out of this: they have little knowledge of true praise, having their ears deafened with so continual and uniform an approbation. Have they to do with the stupidest of all their subjects? they have no means to take any advantage of him; if he but say: "'Tis because he is my king," he thinks he has said enough to express that he therefore suffered himself to be overcome. This quality

¹⁹⁹Plutarch, On Satisfaction or Tranquillity of the Mind. But in his essay, How a Man may Distinguish a Flatterer from a Friend, he calls him Chriso.

stifles and consumes the other true and essential qualities: they are sunk in the royalty, and leave them nothing to recommend themselves with but actions that directly concern and serve the function of their place; 'tis so much to be a king, that this alone remains to them. The outer glare that environs him conceals and shrouds him from us; our sight is there repelled and dissipated, being filled and stopped by this prevailing light. The senate awarded the prize of eloquence to Tiberius; he refused it, esteeming that though it had been just, he could derive no advantage from a judgment so partial, and that was so little free to judge.

As we give them all advantages of honour, so do we soothe and authorise all their vices and defects, not only by approbation, but by imitation also. Every one of Alexander's followers carried his head on one side, as he did; and the flatterers of Dionysius ran against one another in his presence, and stumbled at and overturned whatever was under foot, to shew they were as purblind as he. Hernia itself has also served to recommend a man to favour; I have seen deafness affected; and because the master hated his wife, Plutarch²⁰⁰ has seen his courtiers repudiate theirs, whom they loved; and, which is yet more, uncleanness and all manner of dissoluteness have so been in fashion; as also disloyalty, blasphemy, cruelty, heresy, superstition, irreligion, effeminacy, and worse, if worse there be; and by an example yet more dangerous than that of Mithridates' flatterers, who, as their master pretended to the honour of a good physician, came to him to have incisions and cauteries made in their limbs; for these others suffered the soul, a more delicate and noble part, to be cauterised.

But to end where I began: the Emperor Adrian, disputing with the philosopher Favorinus about the interpretation of some word, Favorinus soon yielded him the victory; for which his friends rebuking him, "You talk simply," said he; "would you not have him wiser than I, who commands thirty legions?" Augustus wrote verses against Asinius Pollio, and "I," said Pollio, "say nothing, for it is not prudence to write in contest with him who has power to proscribe." And they were right. For Dionysius, because he could not equal Philoxenus in poesy and Plato in discourse, condemned the one to the quarries, and sent the other to be sold for a slave into the island of AEGina.

²⁰⁰who, however, only gives one instance; and in this he tells us that the man visited his wife privately.

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE ART OF CONFERENCE

'TIS A CUSTOM of our justice to condemn some for a warning to others. To condemn them for having done amiss, were folly, as Plato says,²⁰¹ for what is done can never be undone; but 'tis to the end they may offend no more, and that others may avoid the example of their offence: we do not correct the man we hang; we correct others by him. I do the same; my errors are sometimes natural, incorrigible, and irremediable: but the good which virtuous men do to the public, in making themselves imitated, I, peradventure, may do in making my manners avoided:

*“Nonne vides, Albi ut male vivat filius? utque
Barrus inops? magnum documentum, ne patriam rein
Perdere guis velit;”*²⁰²

publishing and accusing my own imperfections, some one will learn to be afraid of them. The parts that I most esteem in myself, derive more honour from decrying, than for commending myself which is the reason why I so often fall into, and so much insist upon that strain. But, when all is summed up, a man never speaks of himself without loss; a man's accusations of himself are always believed; his praises never: There may, peradventure, be some of my own complexion who better instruct myself by contrariety than by similitude, and by avoiding

²⁰¹Diogenes Laertius, however, in his Life of Plato, iii. 181, says that Plato's offence was the speaking too freely to the tyrant.

²⁰²“Dost thou not see how ill the son of Albus lives? and how the indigent Barrus? a great warning lest any one should incline to dissipate his patrimony.” —Horace, Sat., i. 4, 109.

than by imitation. The elder Cato was regarding this sort of discipline, when he said, "that the wise may learn more of fools, than fools can of the wise"; and Pausanias tells us of an ancient player upon the harp, who was wont to make his scholars go to hear one who played very ill, who lived over against him, that they might learn to hate his discords and false measures. The horror of cruelty more inclines me to clemency, than any example of clemency could possibly do. A good rider does not so much mend my seat, as an awkward attorney or a Venetian, on horseback; and a clownish way of speaking more reforms mine than the most correct. The ridiculous and simple look of another always warns and advises me; that which pricks, rouses and incites much better than that which tickles. The time is now proper for us to reform backward; more by dissenting than by agreeing; by differing more than by consent. Profiting little by good examples, I make use of those that are ill, which are everywhere to be found: I endeavour to render myself as agreeable as I see others offensive; as constant as I see others fickle; as affable as I see others rough; as good as I see others evil: but I propose to myself impracticable measures.

The most fruitful and natural exercise of the mind, in my opinion, is conversation; I find the use of it more sweet than of any other action of life; and for that reason it is that, if I were now compelled to choose, I should sooner, I think, consent to lose my sight, than my hearing and speech. The Athenians, and also the Romans, kept this exercise in great honour in their academies; the Italians retain some traces of it to this day, to their great advantage, as is manifest by the comparison of our understandings with theirs. The study of books is a languishing and feeble motion that heats not, whereas conversation teaches and exercises at once. If I converse with a strong mind and a rough disputant, he presses upon my flanks, and pricks me right and left; his imaginations stir up mine; jealousy, glory, and contention, stimulate and raise me up to something above myself; and acquiescence is a quality altogether tedious in discourse. But, as our mind fortifies itself by the communication of vigorous and regular understandings, 'tis not to be expressed how much it loses and degenerates by the continual commerce and familiarity we have with mean and weak spirits; there is no contagion that spreads like that; I know sufficiently by experience what 'tis worth a yard. I love to discourse and dispute, but it is with but few men, and for myself; for to do it as a spectacle and entertainment to great persons, and to make of a man's wit and words competitive parade is, in my opinion, very unbecoming a man of honour.

Folly is a bad quality; but not to be able to endure it, to fret and vex at it, as I do, is another sort of disease little less troublesome than folly itself; and is the thing that I will now accuse in myself. I enter into conference, and dispute with great liberty and facility, forasmuch as opinion meets in me with a soil very unfit for penetration, and wherein to take any deep root; no propositions astonish me, no belief offends me, though never so contrary to my own; there is no so frivolous and extravagant fancy that does not seem to me suitable to the production of human wit. We, who deprive our judgment of the right of determining, look indifferently upon the diverse opinions, and if we incline not our judgment to them, yet we easily give them the hearing: Where one scale is totally empty, I let the other waver under an old wife's dreams; and I think myself excusable, if I prefer the odd number; Thursday rather than Friday; if I had rather be the twelfth or fourteenth than the thirteenth at table; if I had rather, on a journey, see a hare run by me than cross my way, and rather give my man my left foot than my right, when he comes to put on my stockings. All such reveries as are in credit around us, deserve at least a hearing: for my part, they only with me import inanity, but they import that. Moreover, vulgar and casual opinions are something more than nothing in nature; and he who will not suffer himself to proceed so far, falls, peradventure, into the vice of obstinacy, to avoid that of superstition.

The contradictions of judgments, then, neither offend nor alter, they only rouse and exercise, me. We evade correction, whereas we ought to offer and present ourselves to it, especially when it appears in the form of conference, and not of authority. At every opposition, we do not consider whether or no it be dust, but, right or wrong, how to disengage ourselves: instead of extending the arms, we thrust out our claws. I could suffer myself to be rudely handled by my friend, so much as to tell me that I am a fool, and talk I know not of what. I love stout expressions amongst gentle men, and to have them speak as they think; we must fortify and harden our hearing against this tenderness of the ceremonious sound of words. I love a strong and manly familiarity and conversation: a friendship that pleases itself in the sharpness and vigour of its communication, like love in biting and scratching: it is not vigorous and generous enough, if it be not quarrelsome, if it be civilised and artificial, if it treads nicely and fears the shock:

*“Neque enim disputari sine reprehensione potest.”*²⁰³

²⁰³“Neither can a man dispute, but he must contradict.” (Or:) “Nor can people dispute

When any one contradicts me, he raises my attention, not my anger: I advance towards him who controverts, who instructs me; the cause of truth ought to be the common cause both of the one and the other. What will the angry man answer? Passion has already confounded his judgment; agitation has usurped the place of reason. It were not amiss that the decision of our disputes should pass by wager: that there might be a material mark of our losses, to the end we might the better remember them; and that my man might tell me: "Your ignorance and obstinacy cost you last year, at several times, a hundred crowns." I hail and caress truth in what quarter soever I find it, and cheerfully surrender myself, and open my conquered arms as far off as I can discover it; and, provided it be not too imperiously, take a pleasure in being reprov'd, and accommodate myself to my accusers, very often more by reason of civility than amendment, loving to gratify and nourish the liberty of admonition by my facility of submitting to it, and this even at my own expense.

Nevertheless, it is hard to bring the men of my time to it: they have not the courage to correct, because they have not the courage to suffer themselves to be corrected; and speak always with dissimulation in the presence of one another: I take so great a pleasure in being judged and known, that it is almost indifferent to me in which of the two forms I am so: my imagination so often contradicts and condemns itself, that 'tis all one to me if another do it, especially considering that I give his reprehension no greater authority than I choose; but I break with him, who carries himself so high, as I know of one who repents his advice, if not believed, and takes it for an affront if it be not immediately followed. That Socrates always received smilingly the contradictions offered to his arguments, a man may say arose from his strength of reason; and that, the advantage being certain to fall on his side, he accepted them as a matter of new victory. But we see, on the contrary, that nothing in argument renders our sentiment so delicate, as the opinion of pre-eminence, and disdain of the adversary; and that, in reason, 'tis rather for the weaker to take in good part the oppositions that correct him and set him right. In earnest, I rather choose the company of those who ruffle me than of those who fear me; 'tis a dull and hurtful pleasure to have to do with people who admire us and approve of all we say. Antisthenes commanded his children never to take it kindly or for a favour, when any man commended them. I find I am much prouder of the victory I obtain over myself, when, in the

without reprehension." —Cicero, *De Finib.*, i. 8.

very ardour of dispute, I make myself submit to my adversary's force of reason, than I am pleased with the victory I obtain over him through his weakness. In fine, I receive and admit of all manner of attacks that are direct, how weak soever; but I am too impatient of those that are made out of form. I care not what the subject is, the opinions are to me all one, and I am almost indifferent whether I get the better or the worse. I can peaceably argue a whole day together, if the argument be carried on with method; I do not so much require force and subtlety as order; I mean the order which we every day observe in the wranglings of shepherds and shop-boys, but never amongst us: if they start from their subject, 'tis out of incivility, and so 'tis with us; but their tumult and impatience never put them out of their theme; their argument still continues its course; if they interrupt, and do not stay for one another, they at least understand one another. Any one answers too well for me, if he answers what I say: when the dispute is irregular and disordered, I leave the thing itself, and insist upon the form with anger and indiscretion; falling into wilful, malicious, and imperious way of disputation, of which I am afterwards ashamed. 'Tis impossible to deal fairly with a fool: my judgment is not only corrupted under the hand of so impetuous a master, but my conscience also.

Our disputes ought to be interdicted and punished as well as other verbal crimes: what vice do they not raise and heap up, being always governed and commanded by passion? We first quarrel with their reasons, and then with the men. We only learn to dispute that we may contradict; and so, every one contradicting and being contradicted, it falls out that the fruit of disputation is to lose and annihilate truth. Therefore it is that Plato in his Republic prohibits this exercise to fools and ill-bred people. To what end do you go about to inquire of him, who knows nothing to the purpose? A man does no injury to the subject, when he leaves it to seek how he may treat it; I do not mean by an artificial and scholastic way, but by a natural one, with a sound understanding. What will it be in the end? One flies to the east, the other to the west; they lose the principal, dispersing it in the crowd of incidents after an hour of tempest, they know not what they seek: one is low, the other high, and a third wide. One catches at a word and a simile; another is no longer sensible of what is said in opposition to him, and thinks only of going on at his own rate, not of answering you: another, finding himself too weak to make good his rest, fears all, refuses all, at the very beginning, confounds the subject; or, in the very height of the dispute, stops short and is silent, by a peevish ignorance affecting

a proud contempt or a foolishly modest avoidance of further debate: provided this man strikes, he cares not how much he lays himself open; the other counts his words, and weighs them for reasons; another only brawls, and uses the advantage of his lungs. Here's one who learnedly concludes against himself, and another who deafens you with prefaces and senseless digressions: an other falls into downright railing, and seeks a quarrel after the German fashion, to disengage himself from a wit that presses too hard upon him: and a last man sees nothing into the reason of the thing, but draws a line of circumvallation about you of dialectic clauses, and the formulas of his art.

Now, who would not enter into distrust of sciences, and doubt whether he can reap from them any solid fruit for the service of life, considering the use we put them to?

*"Nihil sanantibus litteris."*²⁰⁴

Who has got understanding by his logic? Where are all her fair promises?

*"Nec ad melius vivendum, nec ad commodius disserendum."*²⁰⁵

Is there more noise or confusion in the scolding of herring-wives than in the public disputes of men of this profession? I had rather my son should learn in a tap-house to speak, than in the schools to prate. Take a master of arts, and confer with him: why does he not make us sensible of this artificial excellence? and why does he not captivate women and ignoramuses, as we are, with admiration at the steadiness of his reasons and the beauty of his order? why does he not sway and persuade us to what he will? why does a man, who has so much advantage in matter and treatment, mix railing, indiscretion, and fury in his disputations? Strip him of his gown, his hood, and his Latin, let him not batter our ears with Aristotle, pure and simple, you will take him for one of us, or worse. Whilst they torment us with this complication and confusion of words, it fares with them, methinks, as with jugglers; their dexterity imposes upon our senses, but does not at all work upon our belief this legerdemain excepted, they perform nothing that is not

²⁰⁴"Letters which cure nothing." –Seneca, Ep., 59.

²⁰⁵"It neither makes a man live better nor talk better." –Cicero, De Fin., i. 19.

very ordinary and mean: for being the more learned, they are none the less fools.²⁰⁶

I love and honour knowledge as much as they that have it, and in its true use 'tis the most noble and the greatest acquisition of men; but in such as I speak of (and the number of them is infinite), who build their fundamental sufficiency and value upon it, who appeal from their understanding to their memory:

*"Sub aliena umbra latentes,"*²⁰⁷

and who can do nothing but by book, I hate it, if I dare to say so, worse than stupidity. In my country, and in my time, learning improves fortunes enough, but not minds; if it meet with those that are dull and heavy, it overcharges and suffocates them, leaving them a crude and undigested mass; if airy and fine, it purifies, clarifies, and subtilises them, even to exinanition. 'Tis a thing of almost indifferent quality; a very useful accession to a well-born soul, but hurtful and pernicious to others; or rather a thing of very precious use, that will not suffer itself to be purchased at an under rate; in the hand of some 'tis a sceptre, in that of others a fool's bauble.

But let us proceed. What greater victory do you expect than to make your enemy see and know that he is not able to encounter you? When you get the better of your argument; 'tis truth that wins; when you get the advantage of form and method, 'tis then you who win. I am of opinion that in, Plato and Xenophon Socrates disputes more in favour of the disputants than in favour of the dispute, and more to instruct Euthydemus and Protagoras in the, knowledge of their impertinence, than in the impertinence of their art. He takes hold of the first subject like one who has a more profitable end than to explain it—namely, to clear the understandings that he takes upon him to instruct and exercise. To hunt after truth is properly our business, and we are inexcusable if we carry on the chase impertinently and ill; to fail of seizing it is another thing, for we are born to inquire after truth: it belongs to a greater power to possess it. It is not, as Democritus said, hid in the bottom of the deeps, but rather elevated to an infinite height in the divine knowledge. The world is but a school of inquisition: it is not who shall

²⁰⁶So Hobbes said that if he had read as much as the academical pedants he should have known as little.

²⁰⁷"Sheltering under the shadow of others." —Seneca, Ep., 33.

enter the ring, but who shall run the best courses. He may as well play the fool who speaks true, as he who speaks false, for we are upon the manner, not the matter, of speaking. 'Tis my humour as much to regard the form as the substance, and the advocate as much as the cause, as Alcibiades ordered we should: and every day pass away my time in reading authors without any consideration of their learning; their manner is what I look after, not their subject: And just so do I hunt after the conversation of any eminent wit, not that he may teach me, but that I may know him, and that knowing him, if I think him worthy of imitation, I may imitate him. Every man may speak truly, but to speak methodically, prudently, and fully, is a talent that few men have. The falsity that proceeds from ignorance does not offend me, but the foppery of it. I have broken off several treaties that would have been of advantage to me, by reason of the impertinent contestations of those with whom I treated. I am not moved once in a year at the faults of those over whom I have authority, but upon the account of the ridiculous obstinacy of their allegations, denials, excuses, we are every day going together by the ears; they neither understand what is said, nor why, and answer accordingly; 'tis enough to drive a man mad. I never feel any hurt upon my head but when 'tis knocked against another, and more easily forgive the vices of my servants than their boldness, importunity, and folly; let them do less, provided they understand what they do: you live in hope to warm their affection to your service, but there is nothing to be had or to be expected from a stock.

But what, if I take things otherwise than they are? Perhaps I do; and therefore it is that I accuse my own impatience, and hold, in the first place, that it is equally vicious both in him that is in the right, and in him that is in the wrong; for 'tis always a tyrannic sourness not to endure a form contrary to one's own: and, besides, there cannot, in truth, be a greater, more constant, nor more irregular folly than to be moved and angry at the follies of the world, for it principally makes us quarrel with ourselves; and the old philosopher never wanted an occasion for his tears whilst he considered himself. Miso, one of the seven sages, of a Timonian and Democritic humour, being asked, "what he laughed at, being alone?"—"That I do laugh alone," answered he. How many ridiculous things, in my own opinion, do I say and answer every day that comes over my head? and then how many more, according to the opinion of others? If I bite my own lips, what ought others to do? In fine, we must live amongst the living, and let the river run under the bridge without our care, or, at least, without our interference. In truth,

why do we meet a man with a hunch-back, or any other deformity, without being moved, and cannot endure the encounter of a deformed mind without being angry? this vicious sourness sticks more to the judge than to the crime. Let us always have this saying of Plato in our mouths: "Do not I think things unsound, because I am not sound in myself? Am I not myself in fault? may not my observations reflect upon myself?"—a wise and divine saying, that lashes the most universal and common error of mankind. Not only the reproaches that we throw in the face of one another, but our reasons also, our arguments and controversies, are reboundable upon us, and we wound ourselves with our own weapons: of which antiquity has left me enough grave examples. It was ingeniously and home-said by him, who was the inventor of this sentence:

*"Stercus cuique suum bene olet."*²⁰⁸

We see nothing behind us; we mock ourselves an hundred times a day; when we deride our neighbours; and we detest in others the defects which are more manifest in us, and which we admire with marvellous inadvertency and impudence. It was but yesterday that I heard a man of understanding and of good rank, as pleasantly as justly scoffing at the folly of another, who did nothing but torment everybody with the catalogue of his genealogy and alliances, above half of them false (for they are most apt to fall into such ridiculous discourses, whose qualities are most dubious and least sure), and yet, would he have looked into himself, he would have discerned himself to be no less intemperate and wearisome in extolling his wife's pedigree. O importunate presumption, with which the wife sees herself armed by the hands of her own husband. Did he understand Latin, we should say to him:

*"Age, si hic non insanit satis sua sponte, instiga."*²⁰⁹

I do not say that no man should accuse another, who is not clean himself,—for then no one would ever accuse,—clean from the same sort of spot; but I mean that our judgment, falling upon another who is then in question, should not, at the same time, spare ourselves, but sentence us with an inward and severe authority. 'Tis an office of charity, that he

²⁰⁸"To every man his own excrements smell well." —Erasmus

²⁰⁹"Come! if of himself he is not mad enough, urge him on." —Terence, *And.*, iv. 2, 9.

who cannot reclaim himself from a vice, should, nevertheless, endeavour to remove it from another, in whom, peradventure, it may not have so deep and so malignant a root; neither do him who reproves me for my fault that he himself is guilty of the same. What of that? The reproof is, notwithstanding, true and of very good use. Had we a good nose, our own ordure would stink worse to us, forasmuch as it is our own: and Socrates is of opinion that whoever should find himself, his son, and a stranger guilty of any violence and wrong, ought to begin with himself, present himself first to the sentence of justice, and implore, to purge himself, the assistance of the hand of the executioner; in the next place, he should proceed to his son, and lastly, to the stranger. If this precept seem too severe, he ought at least to present himself the first, to the punishment of his own conscience.

The senses are our first and proper judges, which perceive not things but by external accidents; and 'tis no wonder, if in all the parts of the service of our society, there is so perpetual and universal a mixture of ceremonies and superficial appearances; insomuch that the best and most effectual part of our polities therein consist. 'Tis still man with whom we have to do, of whom the condition is wonderfully corporal. Let those who, of these late years, would erect for us such a contemplative and immaterial an exercise of religion, not wonder if there be some who think it had vanished and melted through their fingers had it not more upheld itself among us as a mark, title, and instrument of division and faction, than by itself. As in conference, the gravity, robe, and fortune of him who speaks, oftentimes gives reputation to vain arguments and idle words, it is not to be presumed but that a man, so attended and feared, has not in him more than ordinary sufficiency; and that he to whom the king has given so many offices and commissions and charges, he so supercilious and proud, has not a great deal more in him, than another who salutes him at so great a distance, and who has no employment at all. Not only the words, but the grimaces also of these people, are considered and put into the account; every one making it his business to give them some fine and solid interpretation. If they stoop to the common conference, and that you offer anything but approbation and reverence, they then knock you down with the authority of their experience: they have heard, they have seen, they have done so and so: you are crushed with examples. I should willingly tell them, that the fruit of a surgeon's experience, is not the history of his practice and his remembering that he has cured four people of the plague and three of the gout, unless he knows how thence to

extract something whereon to form his judgment, and to make us sensible that he has thence become more skillful in his art. As in a concert of instruments, we do not hear a lute, a harpsichord, or a flute alone, but one entire harmony, the result of all together. If travel and offices have improved them, 'tis a product of their understanding to make it appear. 'Tis not enough, to reckon experiences, they must weigh, sort and distil them, to extract the reasons and conclusions they carry along with them. There were never so many historians: it is, indeed, good and of use to read them, for they furnish us everywhere with excellent and laudable instructions from the magazine of their memory, which, doubtless, is of great concern to the help of life; but 'tis not that we seek for now: we examine whether these relaters and collectors of things are commendable themselves.

I hate all sorts of tyranny, both in word and deed. I am very ready to oppose myself against those vain circumstances that delude our judgments by the senses; and keeping my eye close upon those extraordinary greatnesses, I find that at best they are men, as others are:

*"Rarus enim ferme sensus communis in illa Fortuna."*²¹⁰

Peradventure, we esteem and look upon them for less than they are, by reason they undertake more, and more expose themselves; they do not answer to the charge they have undertaken. There must be more vigour and strength in the bearer than in the burden; he who has not lifted as much as he can, leaves you to guess that he has still a strength beyond that, and that he has not been tried to the utmost of what he is able to do; he who sinks under his load, makes a discovery of his best, and the weakness of his shoulders. This is the reason that we see so many silly souls amongst the learned, and more than those of the better sort: they would have made good husbandmen, good merchants, and good artisans: their natural vigour was cut out to that proportion. Knowledge is a thing of great weight, they faint under it: their understanding has neither vigour nor dexterity enough to set forth and distribute, to employ or make use of this rich and powerful matter; it has no prevailing virtue but in a strong nature; and such natures are very rare—and the weak ones, says Socrates, corrupt the dignity of philosophy in the handling, it appears useless and vicious, when lodged in an ill-contrived mind. They spoil and make fools of themselves:

²¹⁰"For in those high fortunes, common sense is generally rare." —Juvenal, viiii. 73.

*“Humani qualis simulator simius oris,
Quern puer arridens pretioso stamine serum
Velavit, nudasque nates ac terga reliquit,
Ludibrium mensis.”*²¹¹

Neither is it enough for those who govern and command us, and have all the world in their hands, to have a common understanding, and to be able to do the same that we can; they are very much below us, if they be not infinitely above us: as they promise more, so they are to perform more.

And yet silence is to them, not only a countenance of respect and gravity, but very often of good advantage too: for Megabyzus, going ‘to see Apelles in his painting-room, stood a great while without speaking a word, and at last began to talk of his paintings, for which he received this rude reproof: “Whilst thou wast silent, thou seemedst to be some great thing, by reason of thy chains and rich habit; but now that we have heard thee speak, there is not the meanest boy in my workshop that does not despise thee.” Those princely ornaments, that mighty state, did not permit him to be ignorant with a common ignorance, and to speak impertinently of painting; he ought to have kept this external and presumptive knowledge by silence. To how many foolish fellows of my time has a sullen and silent mien procured the credit of prudence and capacity!

Dignities and offices are of necessity conferred more by fortune than upon the account of merit; and we are often to blame, to condemn kings when these are misplaced: on the contrary, ‘tis a wonder they should have so good luck, where there is so little skill:

*“Principis est virtus maxima nosse suos;”*²¹²

for nature has not given them a sight that can extend to so many people, to discern which excels the rest, nor to penetrate into our bosoms, where the knowledge of our wills and best value lies they must choose us by conjecture and by groping; by the family, wealth, learning, and the voice of the people, which are all very feeble arguments. Whoever

²¹¹“Just like an ape, simulator of the human face, whom a wanton boy has dizened up in rich silks above, but left the lower parts bare, for a laughing-stock for the tables.” – Claudian, in *Eutrop.*, i 303.

²¹²“‘Tis the chief virtue of a prince to know his people.” –Martial, viii. 15.

could find out a way by which they might judge by justice, and choose men by reason, would, in this one thing, establish a perfect form of government.

“Ay, but he brought that great affair to a very good pass.” This is, indeed, to say something, but not to say enough: for this sentence is justly received, “That we are not to judge of counsels by events.” The Carthaginians punished the ill counsels of their captains, though they were rectified by a successful issue; and the Roman people often denied a triumph for great and very advantageous victories because the conduct of their general was not answerable to his good fortune. We ordinarily see, in the actions of the world, that Fortune, to shew us her power in all things, and who takes a pride in abating our presumption, seeing she could not make fools wise, has made them fortunate in emulation of virtue; and most favours those operations the web of which is most purely her own; whence it is that the simplest amongst us bring to pass great business, both public and private; and, as Seiramnes, the Persian, answered those who wondered that his affairs succeeded so ill, considering that his deliberations were so wise, “that he was sole master of his designs, but that success was wholly in the power of fortune”; these may answer the same, but with a contrary turn. Most worldly affairs are performed by themselves

*“Fata viam inveniunt;”*²¹³

the event often justifies a very foolish conduct; our interposition is little more than as it were a running on by rote, and more commonly a consideration of custom and example, than of reason. Being formerly astonished at the greatness of some affair, I have been made acquainted with their motives and address by those who had performed it, and have found nothing in it but very ordinary counsels; and the most common and usual are indeed, perhaps, the most sure and convenient for practice, if not for show. What if the plainest reasons are the best seated? the meanest, lowest, and most beaten more adapted to affairs? To maintain the authority of the counsels of kings, it needs not that profane persons should participate of them, or see further into them than the outmost barrier; he who will husband its reputation must be revered upon credit and taken altogether. My consultation somewhat rough-hews the matter, and considers it lightly by the first face it

²¹³“The destinies find the way.” —Aeneid, iii. 395

presents: the stress and main of the business I have been wont to refer to heaven;

*“Permitte divis caetera.”*²¹⁴

Good and ill fortune are, in my opinion, two sovereign powers; 'tis folly to think that human prudence can play the part of Fortune; and vain is his attempt who presumes to comprehend both causes and consequences, and by the hand to conduct the progress of his design; and most especially vain in the deliberations of war. There was never greater circumspection and military prudence than sometimes is seen amongst us: can it be that men are afraid to lose themselves by the way, that they reserve themselves to the end of the game? I moreover affirm that our wisdom itself and consultation, for the most part commit themselves to the conduct of chance; my will and my reason are sometimes moved by one breath, and sometimes by another; and many of these movements there are that govern themselves without me: my reason has uncertain and casual agitations and impulsions:

*“Vertuntur species animorum, et pectora motus
Nunc alios, alios, dum nubila ventus agebat,
Concipiunt.”*²¹⁵

Let a man but observe who are of greatest authority in cities, and who best do their own business; we shall find that they are commonly men of the least parts: women, children, and madmen have had the fortune to govern great kingdoms equally well with the wisest princes, and Thucydides says, that the stupid more ordinarily do it than those of better understandings; we attribute the effects of their good fortune to their prudence:

*“Ut quisque Fortuna utitur,
Ita praecllet; atque exinde sapere illum omnes dicimus;”*²¹⁶

²¹⁴“Leave the rest to the gods.” –Horace, Od., i. 9, 9.

²¹⁵“The aspects of their minds change; and they conceive now such ideas, now such, just so long as the wind agitated the clouds.” –Virgil, Georg., i. 42.

²¹⁶“He makes his way who knows how to use Fortune, and thereupon we all call him wise.” –Plautus, Pseudol., ii. 3, 13.

wherefore I say unreservedly, events are a very poor testimony of our worth and parts.

Now, I was upon this point, that there needs no more but to see a man promoted to dignity; though we knew him but three days before a man of little regard, yet an image of grandeur of sufficiency insensibly steals into our opinion, and we persuade ourselves that, being augmented in reputation and train, he is also increased in merit; we judge of him, not according to his worth, but as we do by counters, according to the prerogative of his place. If it happen so that he fall again, and be mixed with the common crowd, every one inquires with amazement into the cause of his having been raised so high. "Is this he," say they, "was he no wiser when he was there? Do princes satisfy themselves with so little? Truly, we were in good hands." This is a thing that I have often seen in my time. Nay, even the very disguise of grandeur represented in our comedies in some sort moves and gulls us. That which I myself adore in kings is the crowd of their adorers; all reverence and submission are due to them, except that of the understanding: my reason is not obliged to bow and bend; my knees are. Melanthius being asked what he thought of the tragedy of Dionysius, "I could not see it," said he, "it was so clouded with language"; so most of those who judge of the discourses of great men ought to say, "I did not understand his words, they were so clouded with gravity, grandeur, and majesty." Antisthenes one day tried to persuade the Athenians to give order that their asses might be employed in tilling the ground as well as the horses were; to which it was answered that that animal was not destined for such a service: "That's all one," replied he, "you have only to order it: for the most ignorant and incapable men you employ in the commands of your wars incontinently become worthy enough, because you employ them"; to which the custom of so many people, who canonise the king they have chosen out of their own body, and are not content only to honour, but must adore them, comes very near. Those of Mexico, after the ceremonies of their king's coronation are over, dare no more look him in the face; but, as if they had defied him by his royalty. Amongst the oaths they make him take to maintain their religion, their laws, and liberties, to be valiant, just, and mild, he moreover swears to make the sun run his course in his wonted light, to drain the clouds at fit seasons, to make rivers run their course, and to cause the earth to bear all things necessary for his people.

I differ from this common fashion, and am more apt to suspect the capacity when I see it accompanied with that grandeur of fortune and

public applause; we are to consider of what advantage it is to speak when a man pleases, to choose his subject, to interrupt or change it, with a magisterial authority; to protect himself from the oppositions of others by a nod, a smile, or silence, in the presence of an assembly that trembles with reverence and respect. A man of a prodigious fortune coming to give his judgment upon some slight dispute that was foolishly set on foot at his table, began in these words: "It can be no other but a liar or a fool that will say otherwise than so and so." Pursue this philosophical point with a dagger in your hand.

There is another observation I have made, from which I draw great advantage; which is, that in conferences and disputes, every word that seems to be good, is not immediately to be accepted. Most men are rich in borrowed sufficiency: a man may say a good thing, give a good answer, cite a good sentence, without at all seeing the force of either the one or the other. That a man may not understand all he borrows, may perhaps be verified in myself. A man must not always presently yield, what truth or beauty soever may seem to be in the opposite argument; either he must stoutly meet it, or retire, under colour of not understanding it, to try, on all parts, how it is lodged in the author. It may happen that we entangle ourselves, and help to strengthen the point itself. I have sometimes, in the necessity and heat of the combat, made answers that have gone through and through, beyond my expectation or hope; I only gave them in number, they were received in weight. As, when I contend with a vigorous man, I please myself with anticipating his conclusions, I ease him of the trouble of explaining himself, I strive to forestall his imagination whilst it is yet springing and imperfect; the order and pertinency of his understanding warn and threaten me afar off: I deal quite contrary with the others; I must understand, and presuppose nothing but by them. If they determine in general words, "this is good, that is naught," and that they happen to be in the right, see if it be not fortune that hits it off for them: let them a little circumscribe and limit their judgment; why, or how, it is so. These universal judgments that I see so common, signify nothing; these are men who salute a whole people in a crowd together; they, who have a real acquaintance, take notice of and salute them individually and by name. But 'tis a hazardous attempt; and from which I have, more than every day, seen it fall out, that weak understandings, having a mind to appear ingenious, in taking notice, as they read a book, of what is best and most to be admired, fix their admiration upon some thing so very ill chosen, that instead of making us discern the excellence of the

author; they make us very well see their own ignorance. This exclamation is safe, "That is fine," after having heard a whole page of Virgil; by that the cunning sort save themselves; but to undertake to follow him line by line, and, with an expert and tried judgment, to observe where a good author excels himself, weighing the words, phrases, inventions, and his various excellences, one after another; keep aloof from that:

*"Videndum est, non modo quid quisque loquatur, sed etiam quid quisque sentiat, atque etiam qua de causa quisque sentiat."*²¹⁷

I every day hear fools say things that are not foolish: they say a good thing; let us examine how far they understand it, whence they have it, and what they mean by it. We help them to make use of this fine expression, of this fine sentence, which is none of theirs; they only have it in keeping; they have bolted it out at a venture; we place it for them in credit and esteem. You lend them your hand. To what purpose? they do not think themselves obliged to you for it, and become more inept still. Don't help them; let them alone; they will handle the matter like people who are afraid of burning their fingers; they dare change neither its seat nor light, nor break into it; shake it never so little, it slips through their fingers; they give it up, be it never so strong or fair they are fine weapons, but ill hafted: How many times have I seen the experience of this? Now, if you come to explain anything to them, and to confirm them, they catch at it, and presently rob you of the advantage of your interpretation; "It was what I was about to say; it was just my idea; if I did not express it so, it was for want of language." Mere wind! Malice itself must be employed to correct this arrogant ignorance. The dogma of Hegesias, "that we are neither to hate nor accuse, but instruct," is correct elsewhere; but here 'tis injustice and inhumanity to relieve and set him right who stands in no need on't, and is the worse for't. I love to let them step deeper into the mire; and so deep, that, if it be possible, they may at last discern their error.

Folly and absurdity are not to be cured by bare admonition; and what Cyrus answered to him, who importuned him to harangue his army, upon the point of battle, "that men do not become valiant and warlike upon a sudden, by a fine oration, no more than a man becomes a good musician by hearing a fine song," may properly be said of such

²¹⁷"A man is not only to examine what every one says, but also what every one thinks, and from what reason every one thinks." —Cicero, *De Offic.*, i. 41.

an admonition as this. These are apprenticeships that are to be served beforehand, by a long and continued education. We owe this care and this assiduity of correction and instruction to our own people; but to go preach to the first passer-by, and to become tutor to the ignorance and folly of the first we meet, is a thing that I abhor. I rarely do it, even in private conversation, and rather give up the whole thing than proceed to these initiatory and school instructions; my humour is unfit either to speak or write for beginners; but for things that are said in common discourse, or amongst other things, I never oppose them either by word or sign, how false or absurd soever.

As to the rest, nothing vexes me so much in folly as that it is more satisfied with itself than any reason can reasonably be. 'Tis unfortunate that prudence forbids us to satisfy and trust ourselves, and always dismisses us timorous and discontented; whereas obstinacy and temerity fill those who are possessed with them with joy and assurance. 'Tis for the most ignorant to look at other men over the shoulder, always returning from the combat full of joy and triumph. And moreover, for the most part, this arrogance of speech and gaiety of countenance gives them the better of it in the opinion of the audience, which is commonly weak and incapable of well judging and discerning the real advantage. Obstinacy of opinion and heat in argument are the surest proofs of folly; is there anything so assured, resolute, disdainful, contemplative, serious and grave as the ass?

May we not include under the title of conference and communication the quick and sharp repartees which mirth and familiarity introduce amongst friends, pleasantly and wittily jesting and rallying with one another? 'Tis an exercise for which my natural gaiety renders me fit enough, and which, if it be not so tense and serious as the other I spoke of but now, is, as Lycurgus thought, no less smart and ingenious, nor of less utility. For my part, I contribute to it more liberty than wit, and have therein more of luck than invention; but I am perfect in suffering, for I endure a retaliation that is not only tart, but indiscreet to boot, without being moved at all; and whoever attacks me, if I have not a brisk answer immediately ready, I do not study to pursue the point with a tedious and impertinent contest, bordering upon obstinacy, but let it pass, and hanging down cheerfully my ears, defer my revenge to another and better time: there is no merchant that always gains: Most men change their countenance and their voice where their wits fail, and by an unseasonable anger, instead of revenging themselves, accuse at once their own folly and impatience. In this jollity, we sometimes pinch

the secret strings of our imperfections which, at another and graver time, we cannot touch without offence, and so profitably give one another a hint of our defects. There are other jeux de main,²¹⁸ rude and indiscreet, after the French manner, that I mortally hate; my skin is very tender and sensible: I have in my time seen two princes of the blood buried upon that very account. 'Tis unhandsome to fight in play. As to the rest, when I have a mind to judge of any one, I ask him how far he is contented with himself; to what degree his speaking or his work pleases him. I will none of these fine excuses, "I did it only in sport,

*'Ablatum mediis opus est incudibus istud.'*²¹⁹

I was not an hour about it: I have never looked at it since." Well, then, say I, lay these aside, and give me a perfect one, such as you would be measured by. And then, what do you think is the best thing in your work? is it this part or that? is it grace or the matter, the invention, the judgment, or the learning? For I find that men are, commonly, as wide of the mark in judging of their own works, as of those of others; not only by reason of the kindness they have for them, but for want of capacity to know and distinguish them: the work, by its own force and fortune, may second the workman, and sometimes outstrip him, beyond his invention and knowledge. For my part, I judge of the value of other men's works more obscurely than of my own; and place the Essays, now high, or low, with great doubt and inconstancy. There are several books that are useful upon the account of their subjects, from which the author derives no praise; and good books, as well as good works, that shame the workman. I may write the manner of our feasts, and the fashion of our clothes, and may write them ill; I may publish the edicts of my time, and the letters of princes that pass from hand to hand; I may make an abridgment of a good book (and every abridgment of a good book is a foolish abridgment), which book shall come to be lost; and so on: posterity will derive a singular utility from such compositions: but what honour shall I have unless by great good fortune? Most part of the famous books are of this condition.

When I read Philip de Commines, doubtless a very good author, several years ago, I there took notice of this for no vulgar saying, "That a man must have a care not to do his master so great service, that at

²¹⁸practical jokes

²¹⁹"That work was taken from the anvil half finished." —Ovid, *Trist.*, i. 6, 29.

last he will not know how to give him his just reward"; but I ought to commend the invention, not him, because I met with it in Tacitus, not long since:

*"Beneficia ea usque lxta sunt, dum videntur exsolvi posse; ubi multum antevenere, pro gratis odium redditur;"*²²⁰

and Seneca vigorously says:

*"Nam qui putat esse turpe non reddere, non vult esse cui reddat:"*²²¹

Cicero says with less directness.:

*"Qui se non putat satisfacere, amicus esse nullo modo potest."*²²²

The subject, according to what it is, may make a man looked upon as learned and of good memory; but to judge in him the parts that are most his own and the most worthy, the vigour and beauty of his soul, one must first know what is his own and what is not; and in that which is not his own, how much we are obliged to him for the choice, disposition, ornament, and language he has there presented us with. What if he has borrowed the matter and spoiled the form, as it often falls out? We, who are little read in books, are in this strait, that when we meet with a high fancy in some new poet, or some strong argument in a preacher, we dare not, nevertheless, commend it till we have first informed ourselves, through some learned man, if it be the writer's wit or borrowed from some other; until that I always stand upon my guard.

I have lately been reading the history of Tacitus quite through, without interrupting it with anything else (which but seldom happens with me, it being twenty years since I have kept to any one book an hour

²²⁰"Benefits are so far acceptable as they appear to be capable of recompense; where they much exceed that point, hatred is returned instead of thanks." —Tacitus, *Annal.*, iv. 18.

²²¹"For he who thinks it a shame not to requite, does not wish to have the man live to whom he owes return." —Seneca, *Ep.*, 81.

²²²"Who thinks himself behind in obligation, can by no means be a friend." —Q. Cicero, *De Petitione Consul.*, c. 9.

together), and I did it at the instance of a gentleman for whom France has a great esteem, as well for his own particular worth, as upon the account of a constant form of capacity and virtue which runs through a great many brothers of them. I do not know any author in a public narrative who mixes so much consideration of manners and particular inclinations: and I am of a quite contrary opinion to him, holding that, having especially to follow the lives of the emperors of his time, so various and extreme in all sorts of forms, so many notable actions as their cruelty especially produced in their subjects, he had a stronger and more attractive matter to treat of than if he had had to describe battles and universal commotions; so that I often find him sterile, running over those brave deaths as if he feared to trouble us with their multitude and length. This form of history is by much the most useful; public movements depend most upon the conduct of fortune, private ones upon our own. 'Tis rather a judgment than a narration of history; there are in it more precepts than stories: it is not a book to read, 'tis a book to study and learn; 'tis full of sententious opinions, right or wrong; 'tis a nursery of ethic and politic discourses, for the use and ornament of those who have any place in the government of the world. He always argues by strong and solid reasons, after a pointed and subtle manner, according to the affected style of that age, which was so in love with an inflated manner, that where point and subtlety were wanting in things it supplied these with lofty and swelling words. 'Tis not much unlike the style of Seneca: I look upon Tacitus as more sinewy, and Seneca as more sharp. His pen seems most proper for a troubled and sick state, as ours at present is; you would often say that he paints and pinches us.

They who doubt his good faith sufficiently accuse themselves of being his enemy upon some other account. His opinions are sound, and lean to the right side in the Roman affairs. And yet I am angry at him for judging more severely of Pompey than consists with the opinion of those worthy men who lived in the same time, and had dealings with him; and to have reputed him on a par with Marius and Sylla, excepting that he was more close. Other writers have not acquitted his intention in the government of affairs from ambition and revenge; and even his friends were afraid that victory would have transported him beyond the bounds of reason, but not to so immeasurable a degree as theirs; nothing in his life threatened such express cruelty and tyranny. Neither ought we to set suspicion against evidence; and therefore I do not believe Plutarch in this matter. That his narrations were genuine

and straightforward may, perhaps, be argued from this very thing, that they do not always apply to the conclusions of his judgments, which he follows according to the bias he has taken, very often beyond the matter he presents us withal, which he has not deigned to alter in the least degree. He needs no excuse for having approved the religion of his time, according as the laws enjoined, and to have been ignorant of the true; this was his misfortune, not his fault.

I have principally considered his judgment, and am not very well satisfied therewith throughout; as these words in the letter that Tiberius, old and sick, sent to the senate. "What shall I write to you, sirs, or how should I write to you, or what should I not write to you at this time? May the gods and goddesses lay a worse punishment upon me than I am every day tormented with, if I know!" I do not see why he should so positively apply them to a sharp remorse that tormented the conscience of Tiberius; at least, when I was in the same condition, I perceived no such thing.

And this also seemed to me a little mean in him that, having to say that he had borne an honourable office in Rome, he excuses himself that he does not say it out of ostentation; this seems, I say, mean for such a soul as his; for not to speak roundly of a man's self implies some want of courage; a man of solid and lofty judgment, who judges soundly and surely, makes use of his own example upon all occasions, as well as those of others; and gives evidence as freely of himself as of a third person. We are to pass by these common rules of civility, in favour of truth and liberty. I dare not only speak of myself, but to speak only of myself: when I write of anything else, I miss my way and wander from my subject. I am not so indiscreetly enamoured of myself, so wholly mixed up with, and bound to myself, that I cannot distinguish and consider myself apart, as I do a neighbour or a tree: 'tis equally a fault not to discern how far a man's worth extends, and to say more than a man discovers in himself. We owe more love to God than to ourselves, and know Him less; and yet speak of Him as much as we will.

If the writings of Tacitus indicate anything true of his qualities, he was a great personage, upright and bold, not of a superstitious but of a philosophical and generous virtue. One may think him bold in his relations; as where he tells us, that a soldier carrying a burden of wood, his hands were so frozen and so stuck to the load that they there remained closed and dead, being severed from his arms. I always in such things bow to the authority of so great witnesses.

What also he says, that Vespasian, “by the favour of the god Serapis, cured a blind woman at Alexandria by anointing her eyes with his spittle, and I know not what other miracle,” he says by the example and duty of all his good historians. They record all events of importance; and amongst public incidents are the popular rumours and opinions. ‘Tis their part to relate common beliefs, not to regulate them: that part concerns divines and philosophers, directors of consciences; and therefore it was that this companion of his, and a great man like himself, very wisely said:

*“Equidem plura transcribo, quam credo: nam nec affirmare sustineo, de quibus dubito, nec subducere quae accipi;”*²²³

and this other:

*“Haec neque affirmare neque refellere operae pretium est; famae rerum standum est.”*²²⁴

And writing in an age wherein the belief of prodigies began to decline, he says he would not, nevertheless, forbear to insert in his Annals, and to give a relation of things received by so many worthy men, and with so great reverence of antiquity; ‘tis very well said. Let them deliver to us history, more as they receive it than as they believe it. I, who am monarch of the matter whereof I treat, and who am accountable to none, do not, nevertheless, always believe myself; I often hazard sallies of my own wit, wherein I very much suspect myself, and certain verbal quibbles, at which I shake my ears; but I let them go at a venture. I see that others get reputation by such things: ‘tis not for me alone to judge. I present myself standing and lying, before and behind, my right side and my left, and, in all my natural postures. Wits, though equal in force, are not always equal in taste and application.

This is what my memory presents to me in gross, and with uncertainty enough; all judgments in gross are weak and imperfect.

²²³“Truly, I set down more things than I believe, for I can neither affirm things whereof I doubt, nor suppress what I have heard.” –Quintus Curtius, ix.

²²⁴“‘Tis neither worth the while to affirm or to refute these things; we must stand to report” –Livy, i., Praef., and viii. 6.

CHAPTER IX

OF VANITY

THERE is, peradventure, no more manifest vanity than to write of it so vainly. That which divinity has so divinely expressed to us²²⁵ ought to be carefully and continually meditated by men of understanding. Who does not see that I have taken a road, in which, incessantly and without labour, I shall proceed so long as there shall be ink and paper in the world? I can give no account of my life by my actions; fortune has placed them too low: I must do it by my fancies. And yet I have seen a gentleman who only communicated his life by the workings of his belly: you might see on his premises a show of a row of basins of seven or eight days' standing; it was his study, his discourse; all other talk stank in his nostrils. Here, but not so nauseous, are the excrements of an old mind, sometimes thick, sometimes thin, and always indigested. And when shall I have done representing the continual agitation and mutation of my thoughts, as they come into my head, seeing that Diomedes wrote six thousand books upon the sole subject of grammar?²²⁶

What, then, ought prating to produce, since prattling and the first beginning to speak, stuffed the world with such a horrible load of volumes? So many words for words only. O Pythagoras, why didst not thou allay this tempest? They accused one Galba of old for living idly; he made answer, "That every one ought to give account of his actions,

²²⁵"Vanity of vanities: all is vanity." –Eccles., i. 2.

²²⁶It was not Diomedes, but Didymus the grammarian, who, as Seneca (Ep., 88) tells us, wrote four not six thousand books on questions of vain literature, which was the principal study of the ancient grammarian. –Coste. But the number is probably exaggerated, and for books we should doubtless read pamphlets or essays.

but not of his home." He was mistaken, for justice also takes cognisance of those who glean after the reaper.

But there should be some restraint of law against foolish and impertinent scribblers, as well as against vagabonds and idle persons; which if there were, both I and a hundred others would be banished from the reach of our people. I do not speak this in jest: scribbling seems to be a symptom of a disordered and licentious age. When did we write so much as since our troubles? when the Romans so much, as upon the point of ruin? Besides that, the refining of wits does not make people wiser in a government: this idle employment springs from this, that every one applies himself negligently to the duty of his vocation, and is easily debauched from it. The corruption of the age is made up by the particular contribution of every individual man; some contribute treachery, others injustice, irreligion, tyranny, avarice, cruelty, according to their power; the weaker sort contribute folly, vanity, and idleness; of these I am one. It seems as if it were the season for vain things, when the hurtful oppress us; in a time when doing ill is common, to do but what signifies nothing is a kind of commendation. 'Tis my comfort, that I shall be one of the last who shall be called in question; and whilst the greater offenders are being brought to account, I shall have leisure to amend: for it would, methinks, be against reason to punish little inconveniences, whilst we are infested with the greater. As the physician Philotimus said to one who presented him his finger to dress, and who he perceived, both by his complexion and his breath, had an ulcer in his lungs: "Friend, it is not now time to play with your nails."²²⁷

And yet I saw, some years ago, a person, whose name and memory I have in very great esteem, in the very height of our great disorders, when there was neither law nor justice, nor magistrate who performed his office, no more than there is now, publish I know not what pitiful reformations about cloths, cookery, and law chicanery. Those are amusements wherewith to feed a people that are ill-used, to show that they are not totally forgotten. Those others do the same, who insist upon prohibiting particular ways of speaking, dances, and games, to a people totally abandoned to all sorts of execrable vices. 'Tis no time to bathe and cleanse one's self, when one is seized by a violent fever; it was for the Spartans alone to fall to combing and curling themselves, when they were just upon the point of running headlong into some extreme danger of their life.

²²⁷Plutarch, How we may distinguish a Flatterer from a Friend.

For my part, I have that worse custom, that if my slipper go awry, I let my shirt and my cloak do so too; I scorn to mend myself by halves.

When I am in a bad plight, I fasten upon the mischief; I abandon myself through despair; I let myself go towards the precipice, and, as they say, "throw the helve after the hatchet"; I am obstinate in growing worse, and think myself no longer worth my own care; I am either well or ill throughout. 'Tis a favour to me, that the desolation of this kingdom falls out in the desolation of my age: I better suffer that my ill be multiplied, than if my well had been disturbed.²²⁸ The words I utter in mishap are words of anger: my courage sets up its bristles, instead of letting them down; and, contrary to others, I am more devout in good than in evil fortune, according to the precept of Xenophon, if not according to his reason; and am more ready to turn up my eyes to heaven to return thanks, than to crave. I am more solicitous to improve my health, when I am well, than to restore it when I am sick; prosperities are the same discipline and instruction to me that adversities and rods are to others. As if good fortune were a thing inconsistent with good conscience, men never grow good but in evil fortune. Good fortune is to me a singular spur to modesty and moderation: an entreaty wins, a threat checks me; favour makes me bend, fear stiffens me.

Amongst human conditions this is common enough: to be better pleased with foreign things than with our own, and to love innovation and change:

*"Ipsa dies ideo nos grato perluit haustu,
Quod permutatis hora recurrit equis:"*²²⁹

I have my share. Those who follow the other extreme, of being quite satisfied and pleased with and in themselves, of valuing what they have above all the rest, and of concluding no beauty can be greater than what they see, if they are not wiser than we, are really more happy; I do not envy their wisdom, but their good fortune.

This greedy humour of new and unknown things helps to nourish in me the desire of travel; but a great many more circumstances contribute to it; I am very willing to quit the government of my house. There is, I confess, a kind of convenience in commanding, though it were but in a

²²⁸That, being ill, I should grow worse, than that, being well, I should grow ill.

²²⁹"The light of day itself shines more pleasantly upon us because it changes its horses every hour." Spoke of a water hour-glass, adds Cotton.

barn, and in being obeyed by one's people; but 'tis too uniform and languid a pleasure, and is, moreover, of necessity mixed with a thousand vexatious thoughts: one while the poverty and the oppression of your tenants: another, quarrels amongst neighbours: another, the trespasses they make upon you afflict you;

*"Aut verberatae grandine vineae,
Fundusque mendax, arbore nunc aquas
Culpante, nunc torrentia agros
Sidera, nunc hyemes iniquas."*²³⁰

and that God scarce in six months sends a season wherein your bailiff can do his business as he should; but that if it serves the vines, it spoils the meadows:

*"Aut nimis torret fervoribus aetherius sol,
Aut subiti perimunt imbres, gelidoeque pruinae,
Flabraque ventorum violento turbine vexant;"*²³¹

to which may be added the new and neat-made shoe of the man of old, that hurts your foot,²³² and that a stranger does not understand how much it costs you, and what you contribute to maintain that show of order that is seen in your family, and that peradventure you buy too dear.

I came late to the government of a house: they whom nature sent into the world before me long eased me of that trouble; so that I had already taken another bent more suitable to my humour. Yet, for so much as I have seen, 'tis an employment more troublesome than hard; whoever is capable of anything else, will easily do this. Had I a mind to be rich, that way would seem too long; I had served my kings, a more profitable traffic than any other. Since I pretend to nothing but the

²³⁰"Or hail-smitten vines and the deceptive farm; now trees damaged by the rains, or years of dearth, now summer's heat burning up the petals, now destructive winters." – Horatius, *Od.*, iii. I, 29.

²³¹"Either the scorching sun burns up your fields, or sudden rains or frosts destroy your harvests, or a violent wind carries away all before it."—Lucretius, V. 216.

²³²Leclerc maliciously suggests that this is a sly hit at Montaigne's wife, the man of old being the person mentioned in Plutarch's *Life of Paulus Emilius*, c. 3, who, when his friends reproached him for repudiating his wife, whose various merits they extolled, pointed to his shoe, and said, "That looks a nice well-made shoe to you; but I alone know where it pinches."

reputation of having got nothing or dissipated nothing, conformably to the rest of my life, improper either to do good or ill of any moment, and that I only desire to pass on, I can do it, thanks be to God, without any great endeavour. At the worst, evermore prevent poverty by lessening your expense; 'tis that which I make my great concern, and doubt not but to do it before I shall be compelled. As to the rest, I have sufficiently settled my thoughts to live upon less than I have, and live contentedly:

“Non aestimatione census, verum victu atque cultu, terminantur pecuniae modus.”²³³

My real need does not so wholly take up all I have, that Fortune has not whereon to fasten her teeth without biting to the quick. My presence, heedless and ignorant as it is, does me great service in my domestic affairs; I employ myself in them, but it goes against the hair, finding that I have this in my house, that though I burn my candle at one end by myself, the other is not spared.

Journeys do me no harm but only by their expense, which is great, and more than I am well able to bear, being always wont to travel with not only a necessary, but a handsome equipage; I must make them so much shorter and fewer; I spend therein but the froth, and what I have reserved for such uses, delaying and deferring my motion till that be ready. I will not that the pleasure of going abroad spoil the pleasure of being retired at home; on the contrary, I intend they shall nourish and favour one another. Fortune has assisted me in this, that since my principal profession in this life was to live at ease, and rather idly than busily, she has deprived me of the necessity of growing rich to provide for the multitude of my heirs. If there be not enough for one, of that whereof I had so plentifully enough, at his peril be it: his imprudence will not deserve that I should wish him any more. And every one, according to the example of Phocion, provides sufficiently for his children who so provides for them as to leave them as much as was left him. I should by no means like Crates' way. He left his money in the hands of a banker with this condition—that if his children were fools, he should then give it to them; if wise, he should then distribute it to the most foolish of the people; as if fools, for being less capable of living without riches, were more capable of using them.

²³³“’Tis not by the value of possessions, but by our daily subsistence and tillage, that our riches are truly estimated.” —Cicero, Paradox, vi. 3.

At all events, the damage occasioned by my absence seems not to deserve, so long as I am able to support it, that I should waive the occasions of diverting myself by that troublesome assistance.

There is always something that goes amiss. The affairs, one while of one house, and then of another, tear you to pieces; you pry into everything too near; your perspicacity hurts you here, as well as in other things. I steal away from occasions of vexing myself, and turn from the knowledge of things that go amiss; and yet I cannot so order it, but that every hour I jostle against something or other that displeases me; and the tricks that they most conceal from me, are those that I the soonest come to know; some there are that, not to make matters worse, a man must himself help to conceal. Vain vexations; vain sometimes, but always vexations. The smallest and slightest impediments are the most piercing: and as little letters most tire the eyes, so do little affairs most disturb us. The rout of little ills more offend than one, how great soever. By how much domestic thorns are numerous and slight, by so much they prick deeper and without warning, easily surprising us when least we suspect them.²³⁴

I am no philosopher; evils oppress me according to their weight, and they weigh as much according to the form as the matter, and very often more. If I have therein more perspicacity than the vulgar, I have also more patience; in short, they weigh with me, if they do not hurt me. Life is a tender thing, and easily molested. Since my age has made me grow more pensive and morose,

*"Nemo enim resistit sibi, cum caeperit impelli,"*²³⁵

for the most trivial cause imaginable, I irritate that humour, which afterwards nourishes and exasperates itself of its own motion; attracting and heaping up matter upon matter whereon to feed:

*"Stillicidi casus lapidem cavat:"*²³⁶

²³⁴Now Homer shews us clearly enough how surprise gives the advantage; who represents Ulysses weeping at the death of his dog; and not weeping at the tears of his mother; the first accident, trivial as it was, got the better of him, coming upon him quite unexpectedly; he sustained the second, though more potent, because he was prepared for it. 'Tis light occasions that humble our lives.

²³⁵"For no man resists himself when he has begun to be driven forward." —Seneca, Ep., 13.

²³⁶"The ever falling drop hollows out a stone." —Lucretius, i. 314.

these continual tricklings consume and ulcerate me. Ordinary inconveniences are never light; they are continual and inseparable, especially when they spring from the members of a family, continual and inseparable. When I consider my affairs at distance and in gross, I find, because perhaps my memory is none of the best, that they have gone on hitherto improving beyond my reason or expectation; my revenue seems greater than it is; its prosperity betrays me: but when I pry more narrowly into the business, and see how all things go:

*“Tum vero in curas animum diducimus omnes;”*²³⁷

I have a thousand things to desire and to fear. To give them quite over, is very easy for me to do: but to look after them without trouble, is very hard. 'Tis a miserable thing to be in a place where everything you see employs and concerns you; and I fancy that I more cheerfully enjoy the pleasures of another man's house, and with greater and a purer relish, than those of my own. Diogenes answered according to my humour him who asked him what sort of wine he liked the best: “That of another,” said he.²³⁸

My father took a delight in building at Montaigne, where he was born; and in all the government of domestic affairs I love to follow his example and rules, and I shall engage those who are to succeed me, as much as in me lies, to do the same. Could I do better for him, I would; and am proud that his will is still performing and acting by me. God forbid that in my hands I should ever suffer any image of life, that I am able to render to so good a father, to fail. And wherever I have taken in hand to strengthen some old foundations of walls, and to repair some ruinous buildings, in earnest I have done it more out of respect to his design, than my own satisfaction; and am angry at myself that I have not proceeded further to finish the beginnings he left in his house, and so much the more because I am very likely to be the last possessor of my race, and to give the last hand to it. For, as to my own particular application, neither the pleasure of building, which they say is so bewitching, nor hunting, nor gardens, nor the other pleasures of a retired life, can much amuse me. And 'tis what I am angry at myself for, as I am for all other opinions that are incommodious to me; which I would not so much care to have vigorous and learned, as I would have

²³⁷“Indeed we lead the mind into all sorts of cares.” —Aeneid, v. 720.

²³⁸Diogenes Laertius, vi. 54.

them easy and convenient for life, they are true and sound enough, if they are useful and pleasing. Such as hear me declare my ignorance in husbandry, whisper in my ear that it is disdain, and that I neglect to know its instruments, its seasons, its order, how they dress my vines, how they graft, and to know the names and forms of herbs and fruits, and the preparing the meat on which I live, the names and prices of the stuffs I wear, because, say they; I have set my heart upon some higher knowledge; they kill me in saying so. It is not disdain; it is folly, and rather stupidity than glory; I had rather be a good horseman than a good logician:

*"Quin to aliquid saltem potius, quorum indiget usus,
Viminibus mollique paras detexere junco."*²³⁹

We occupy our thoughts about the general, and about universal causes and conducts, which will very well carry on themselves without our care; and leave our own business at random, and Michael much more our concern than man. Now I am, indeed, for the most part at home; but I would be there better pleased than anywhere else:

*"Sit meae sedes utinam senectae,
Sit modus lasso maris, et viarum,
Militiaeque."*²⁴⁰

I know not whether or no I shall bring it about. I could wish that, instead of some other member of his succession, my father had resigned to me the passionate affection he had in his old age to his household affairs; he was happy in that he could accommodate his desires to his fortune, and satisfy himself with what he had; political philosophy may to much purpose condemn the meanness and sterility of my employment, if I can once come to relish it, as he did. I am of opinion that the most honourable calling is to serve the public, and to be useful to many,

*'Fructus enim ingenii et virtutis, omnisque praestantiae,
tum maximus capitur, quum in proximum quemque confer-
tur:'*²⁴¹

²³⁹"Dost thou not rather do something which is required, and make osier and reed basket." —Virgil, Eclog., ii. 71.

²⁴⁰"Let my old age have a fixed seat; let there be a limit to fatigues from the sea, journeys, warfare." —Horace, Od., ii. 6, 6.

²⁴¹"For the greatest enjoyment of evil and virtue, and of all excellence, is experienced when they are conferred on some one nearest." —Cicero, De Amicil., c.

for myself, I disclaim it; partly out of conscience (for where I see the weight that lies upon such employments, I perceive also the little means I have to supply it; and Plato, a master in all political government himself, nevertheless took care to abstain from it), and partly out of cowardice. I content myself with enjoying the world without bustle; only-to live an excusable life, and such as may neither be a burden to myself nor to any other.

Never did any man more fully and feebly suffer himself to be governed by a third person than I should do, had I any one to whom to entrust myself. One of my wishes at this time should be, to have a son-in-law that knew handsomely how to cherish my old age, and to rock it asleep; into whose hands I might deposit, in full sovereignty, the management and use of all my goods, that he might dispose of them as I do, and get by them what I get, provided that he on his part were truly acknowledging, and a friend. But we live in a world where loyalty of one's own children is unknown.

He who has the charge of my purse in his travels, has it purely and without control; he could cheat me thoroughly, if he came to reckoning; and, if he is not a devil, I oblige him to deal faithfully with me by so entire a trust:

“Multi fallere do cuerunt, dum timent falli; et aliis jus peccandi suspicando fecerunt.”²⁴²

The most common security I take of my people is ignorance; I never presume any to be vicious till I have first found them so; and repose the most confidence in the younger sort, that I think are least spoiled by ill example. I had rather be told at two months' end that I have spent four hundred crowns, than to have my ears battered every night with three, five, seven: and I have been, in this way, as little robbed as another. It is true, I am willing enough not to see it; I, in some sort, purposely, harbour a kind of perplexed, uncertain knowledge of my money: up to a certain point, I am content to doubt. One must leave a little room for the infidelity or indiscretion of a servant; if you have left enough, in gross, to do your business, let the overplus of Fortune's liberality run a little more freely at her mercy; 'tis the gleaner's portion. After all, I do not so much value the fidelity of my people as I contemn their injury.

²⁴²“Many have taught others to deceive, while they fear to be deceived, and, by suspecting them, have given them a title to do ill.” —Seneca, Epist., 3.

What a mean and ridiculous thing it is for a man to study his money, to delight in handling and telling it over and over again! 'Tis by this avarice makes its approaches.

In eighteen years that I have had my estate in my, own hands, I could never prevail with myself either to read over my deeds or examine my principal affairs, which ought, of necessity, to pass under my knowledge and inspection. 'Tis not a philosophical disdain of worldly and transitory things; my taste is not purified to that degree, and I value them at as great a rate, at least, as they are worth; but 'tis, in truth, an inexcusable and childish laziness and negligence. What would I not rather do than read a contract? or than, as a slave to my own business, tumble over those dusty writings? or, which is worse, those of another man, as so many do nowadays, to get money? I grudge nothing but care and trouble, and endeavour nothing so much, as to be careless and at ease. I had been much fitter, I believe, could it have been without obligation and servitude, to have lived upon another man's fortune than my own: and, indeed, I do not know, when I examine it nearer, whether, according to my humour, what I have to suffer from my affairs and servants, has not in it something more abject, troublesome, and tormenting than there would be in serving a man better born than myself, who would govern me with a gentle rein, and a little at my own case:

*"Servitus obedientia est fracti animi et abjecti, arbitrio carentis suo."*²⁴³

Crates did worse, who threw himself into the liberty of poverty, only to rid himself of the inconveniences and cares of his house. This is what I would not do; I hate poverty equally with pain; but I could be content to change the kind of life I live for another that was humbler and less chargeable.

When absent from home, I divest myself of all these thoughts, and should be less concerned for the ruin of a tower, than I am, when present, at the fall of a tile. My mind is easily composed at distance, but suffers as much as that of the meanest peasant when I am at home; the reins of my bridle being wrongly put on, or a strap flapping against my leg, will keep me out of humour a day together. I raise my courage, well enough against inconveniences: lift up my eyes I cannot:

²⁴³"Servitude is the obedience of a subdued and abject mind, wanting its own free will." –Cicero, Paradox, V. I.

*"Sensus, o superi, sensus."*²⁴⁴

I am at home responsible for whatever goes amiss. Few masters (I speak of those of medium condition such as mine), and if there be any such, they are more happy, can rely so much upon another, but that the greatest part of the burden will lie upon their own shoulders. This takes much from my grace in entertaining visitors, so that I have, peradventure, detained some rather out of expectation of a good dinner, than by my own behaviour; and lose much of the pleasure I ought to reap at my own house from the visitation and assembling of my friends. The most ridiculous carriage of a gentleman in his own house, is to see him bustling about the business of the place, whispering one servant, and looking an angry look at another: it ought insensibly to slide along, and to represent an ordinary current; and I think it unhandsome to talk much to our guests of their entertainment, whether by way of bragging or excuse. I love order and cleanliness—

*"Et cantharus et lanx
Ostendunt mihi me"*²⁴⁵

more than abundance; and at home have an exact regard to necessity, little to outward show. If a footman falls to cuffs at another man's house, or stumble and throw a dish before him as he is carrying it up, you only laugh and make a jest on't; you sleep whilst the master of the house is arranging a bill of fare with his steward for your morrow's entertainment. I speak according as I do myself; quite appreciating, nevertheless, good husbandry in general, and how pleasant quiet and prosperous household management, carried regularly on, is to some natures; and not wishing to fasten my own errors and inconveniences to the thing; nor to give Plato the lie, who looks upon it as the most pleasant employment to every one to do his particular affairs without wrong to another.

When I travel I have nothing to care for but myself, and the laying out my money; which is disposed of by one single precept; too many things are required to the raking it together; in that I understand nothing; in spending, I understand a little, and how to give some show to my expense, which is indeed its principal use; but I rely too ambitiously upon it, which renders it unequal and difform, and, moreover,

²⁴⁴"The senses, O ye gods, the senses."

²⁴⁵"The dishes and the glasses shew me my own reflection." —Horace, Ep., i. 5, 23

immoderate in both the one and the other aspect; if it makes a show, if it serve the turn, I indiscreetly let it run; and as indiscreetly tie up my purse-strings, if it does not shine, and does not please me. Whatever it be, whether art or nature, that imprints in us the condition of living by reference to others, it does us much more harm than good; we deprive ourselves of our own utilities, to accommodate appearances to the common opinion: we care not so much what our being is, as to us and in reality, as what it is to the public observation. Even the properties of the mind, and wisdom itself, seem fruitless to us, if only enjoyed by ourselves, and if it produce not itself to the view and approbation of others. There is a sort of men whose gold runs in streams underground imperceptibly; others expose it all in plates and branches; so that to the one a liard is worth a crown, and to the others the inverse: the world esteeming its use and value, according to the show. All over-nice solicitude about riches smells of avarice: even the very disposing of it, with a too systematic and artificial liberality, is not worth a painful superintendence and solicitude: he, that will order his expense to just so much, makes it too pinched and narrow. The keeping or spending are, of themselves, indifferent things, and receive no colour of good or ill, but according to the application of the will.

The other cause that tempts me out to these journeys is, inaptitude for the present manners in our state. I could easily console myself for this corruption in regard to the public interest:

*“Pejoraque saecula ferri
Temporibus, quorum sceleri non invenit ipsa
Nomen, et a nullo posuit natura metallo;”*²⁴⁶

<but not to my own. I am, in particular, too much oppressed by them: for, in my neighbourhood, we are, of late, by the long licence of our civil wars, grown old in so riotous a form of state,

*“Quippe ubi fas versum atque nefas,”*²⁴⁷

that in earnest, ‘tis a wonder how it can subsist:

²⁴⁶“And, worse than the iron ages, for whose crimes there is no similitude in any of Nature’s metals.” –Juvenal, xiii. 28.

²⁴⁷“Where wrong and right have changed places.” –Virgil, Georg., i. 504.

*“Armati terram exercent, semperque recentes
Convectare juvat praedas; et vivere rapto.”²⁴⁸*

In fine, I see by our example, that the society of men is maintained and held together, at what price soever; in what condition soever they are placed, they still close and stick together, both moving and in heaps; as ill united bodies, that, shuffled together without order, find of themselves a means to unite and settle, often better than they could have been disposed by art. King Philip mustered up a rabble of the most wicked and incorrigible rascals he could pick out, and put them all together into a city he had caused to be built for that purpose, which bore their name: I believe that they, even from vices themselves, erected a government amongst them, and a commodious and just society. I see, not one action, or three, or a hundred, but manners, in common and received use, so ferocious, especially in inhumanity and treachery, which are to me the worst of all vices, that I have not the heart to think of them without horror; and almost as much admire as I detest them: the exercise of these signal villainies carries with it as great signs of vigour and force of soul, as of error and disorder. Necessity reconciles and brings men together; and this accidental connection afterwards forms itself into laws: for there have been such, as savage as any human opinion could conceive, who, nevertheless, have maintained their body with as much health and length of life as any Plato or Aristotle could invent. And certainly, all these descriptions of polities, feigned by art, are found to be ridiculous and unfit to be put in practice.

These great and tedious debates about the best form of society, and the most commodious rules to bind us, are debates only proper for the exercise of our wits; as in the arts there are several subjects which have their being in agitation and controversy, and have no life but there. Such an idea of government might be of some value in a new world; but we take a world already made, and formed to certain customs; we do not beget it, as Pyrrha or Cadmus did. By what means soever we may have the privilege to redress and reform it anew, we can hardly writhe it from its wonted bent, but we shall break all. Solon being asked whether he had established the best laws he could for the Athenians; “Yes,” said he, “of those they would have received.” Varro excuses himself after the same manner: “that if he were to begin to write

²⁴⁸“Men plough, girt with arms; ever delighting in fresh robberies, and living by rapine.” —Aeneid, vii. 748.

of religion, he would say what he believed; but seeing it was already received, he would write rather according to use than nature."

Not according to opinion, but in truth and reality, the best and most excellent government for every nation is that under which it is maintained: its form and essential convenience depend upon custom. We are apt to be displeas'd at the present condition; but I, nevertheless, maintain that to desire command in a few²⁴⁹ in a republic, or another sort of government in monarchy than that already established, is both vice and folly:

*"Ayme l'estat, tel que to le veois estre
S'il est royal ayme la royaute;
S'il est de peu, ou biers communaute,
Ayme l'aussi; car Dieu t'y a faict naistre."*²⁵⁰

So wrote the good Monsieur de Pibrac, whom we have lately lost, a man of so excellent a wit, such sound opinions, and such gentle manners. This loss, and that at the same time we have had of Monsieur de Foix, are of so great importance to the crown, that I do not know whether there is another couple in France worthy to supply the places of these two Gascons in sincerity and wisdom in the council of our kings. They were both variously great men, and certainly, according to the age, rare and great, each of them in his kind: but what destiny was it that placed them in these times, men so remote from and so disproportioned to our corruption and intestine tumults?

Nothing presses so hard upon a state as innovation: change only gives form to injustice and tyranny. When any piece is loosened, it may be proper to stay it; one may take care that the alteration and corruption natural to all things do not carry us too far from our beginnings and principles: but to undertake to found so great a mass anew, and to change the foundations of so vast a building, is for them to do, who to make clean, efface; who reform particular defects by an universal confusion, and cure diseases by death:

*"Non tam commutandarum quam evertendarum rerum cupididi."*²⁵¹

²⁴⁹an oligarchy.

²⁵⁰"Love the government, such as you see it to be. If it be royal, love royalty; if it is a republic of any sort, still love it; for God himself created thee therein."

²⁵¹"Not so desirous of changing as of overthrowing things." —Cicero, De Offic., ii. i.

The world is unapt to be cured; and so impatient of anything that presses it, that it thinks of nothing but disengaging itself at what price soever. We see by a thousand examples, that it ordinarily cures itself to its cost. The discharge of a present evil is no cure, if there be not a general amendment of condition. The surgeon's end is not only to cut away the dead flesh; that is but the progress of his cure; he has a care, over and above, to fill up the wound with better and more natural flesh, and to restore the member to its due state. Whoever only proposes to himself to remove that which offends him, falls short: for good does not necessarily succeed evil; another evil may succeed, and a worse, as it happened to Caesar's murderers, who brought the republic to such a pass, that they had reason to repent the meddling with the matter. The same has since happened to several others, even down to our own times: the French, my contemporaries, know it well enough. All great mutations shake and disorder a state.

Whoever would look direct at a cure, and well consider of it before he began, would be very willing to withdraw his hands from meddling in it. Pacuvius Calavius corrected the vice of this proceeding by a notable example. His fellow-citizens were in mutiny against their magistrates; he being a man of great authority in the city of Capua, found means one day to shut up the Senators in the palace; and calling the people together in the market-place, there told them that the day was now come wherein at full liberty they might revenge themselves on the tyrants by whom they had been so long oppressed, and whom he had now, all alone and unarmed, at his mercy. He then advised that they should call these out, one by one, by lot, and should individually determine as to each, causing whatever should be decreed to be immediately executed; with this proviso, that they should, at the same time, depute some honest man in the place of him who was condemned, to the end there might be no vacancy in the Senate. They had no sooner heard the name of one senator but a great cry of universal dislike was raised up against him. "I see," says Pacuvius, "that we must put him out; he is a wicked fellow; let us look out a good one in his room." Immediately there was a profound silence, every one being at a stand whom to choose. But one, more impudent than the rest, having named his man, there arose yet a greater consent of voices against him, an hundred imperfections being laid to his charge, and as many just reasons why he should not stand. These contradictory humours growing hot, it fared worse with the second senator and the third, there being as much disagreement in the election of the new, as consent in the putting out of

the old. In the end, growing weary of this bustle to no purpose, they began, some one way and some another, to steal out of the assembly: every one carrying back this resolution in his mind, that the oldest and best known evil was ever more supportable than one that was, new and untried.

Seeing how miserably we are agitated (for what have we not done!)

*“Eheu! cicatricum, et sceleris pudet,
Fratrumque: quid nos dura refugimus
Aetas? quid intactum nefasti Liquimus?
Unde manus inventus
Metu Deorum continuit? quibus
Pepercit aris.”*²⁵²

I do not presently conclude,

*“Ipsa si velit Salus,
Servare prorsus non potest hanc familiam;”*²⁵³

we are not, peradventure, at our last gasp. The conservation of states is a thing that, in all likelihood, surpasses our understanding;—a civil government is, as Plato says, a mighty and puissant thing, and hard to be dissolved; it often continues against mortal and intestine diseases, against the injury of unjust laws, against tyranny, the corruption and ignorance of magistrates, the licence and sedition of the people. In all our fortunes, we compare ourselves to what is above us, and still look towards those who are better: but let us measure ourselves with what is below us: there is no condition so miserable wherein a man may not find a thousand examples that will administer consolation. ‘Tis our vice that we more unwillingly look upon what is above, than willingly upon what is below; and Solon was used to say, that “whoever would make a heap of all the ills together, there is no one who would not rather choose to bear away the ills he has than to come to an equal division with all other men from that heap, and take his share.” Our government is, indeed, very sick, but there have been others more sick without dying. The gods play at ball with us and bandy us every way:

²⁵²“Alas! our crimes and our fratricides are a shame to us! What crime does this bad age shrink from? What wickedness have we left undone? What youth is restrained from evil by the fear of the gods? What altar is spared?” —Horace, *Od.*, i. 33, 35

²⁵³“If the goddess Salus herself wish to save this family, she absolutely cannot” — Terence, *Adelph.*, iv. 7, 43.

“Enimvero Dii nos homines quasi pilas habent.”

The stars fatally destined the state of Rome for an example of what they could do in this kind: in it are comprised all the forms and adventures that concern a state: all that order or disorder, good or evil fortune, can do. Who, then, can despair of his condition, seeing the shocks and commotions wherewith Rome was tumbled and tossed, and yet withstood them all? If the extent of dominion be the health of a state (which I by no means think it is, and Isocrates pleases me when he instructs Nicocles not to envy princes who have large dominions, but those who know how to preserve those which have fallen into their hands), that of Rome was never so sound, as when it was most sick. The worst of her forms was the most fortunate; one can hardly discern any image of government under the first emperors; it is the most horrible and tumultuous confusion that can be imagined; it endured it, notwithstanding, and therein continued, preserving not a monarchy limited within its own bounds, but so many nations so differing, so remote, so disaffected, so confusedly commanded, and so unjustly conquered:

*‘Nec gentibus ullis
Commodat in populum, terra pelagique potentem,
Invidiam fortuna suam.’²⁵⁴*

Everything that totters does not fall. The contexture of so great a body holds by more nails than one; it holds even by its antiquity, like old buildings, from which the foundations are worn away by time, without rough-cast or mortar, which yet live and support themselves by their own weight:

*“Nec jam validis radicibus haerens,
Pondere tuta suo est.”*

Moreover, it is not rightly to go to work, to examine only the flank and the foss, to judge of the security of a place; we must observe which way approaches can be made to it, and in what condition the assailant is: few vessels sink with their own weight, and without some exterior

²⁵⁴“Fortune never gave it to any nation to satisfy its hatred against the people, masters of the seas and of the earth.” –Lucan, i. 32.

violence. Now, let us everyway cast our eyes; everything about us totters; in all the great states, both of Christendom and elsewhere, that are known to us, if you will but look, you will there see evident menace of alteration and ruin:

*"Et sua sunt illis incommoda; parque per omnes Tempestas."*²⁵⁵

Astrologers may very well, as they do, warn us of great revolutions and imminent mutations: their prophecies are present and palpable, they need not go to heaven to foretell this. There is not only consolation to be extracted from this universal combination of ills and menaces, but, moreover, some hopes of the continuation of our state, forasmuch as, naturally, nothing falls where all falls: universal sickness is particular health: conformity is antagonistic to dissolution. For my part, I despair not, and fancy that I discover ways to save us:

*"Deus haec fortasse benigna
Reducet in sedem vice."*²⁵⁶

Who knows but that God will have it happen, as in human bodies that purge and restore themselves to a better state by long and grievous maladies, which render them more entire and perfect health than that they took from them? That which weighs the most with me is, that in reckoning the symptoms of our ill, I see as many natural ones, and that Heaven sends us, and properly its own, as of those that our disorder and human imprudence contribute to it. The very stars seem to declare that we have already continued long enough, and beyond the ordinary term. This also afflicts me, that the mischief which nearest threatens us, is not an alteration in the entire and solid mass, but its dissipation and divulsion, which is the most extreme of our fears.

I, moreover, fear, in these fantasies of mine, the treachery of my memory, lest, by inadvertence, it should make me write the same thing twice. I hate to examine myself, and never review, but very unwillingly, what has once escaped my pen. I here set down nothing new. These are common thoughts, and having, peradventure, conceived

²⁵⁵"They all share in the mischief; the tempest rages everywhere." —Aeneid, ii.

²⁵⁶"The deity will perchance by a favourable turn restore us to our former position." —Horace, Epod., xiii. 7.

them an hundred times, I am afraid I have set them down somewhere else already. Repetition is everywhere troublesome, though it were in Homer; but 'tis ruinous in things that have only a superficial and transitory show. I do not love over-insisting, even in the most profitable things, as in Seneca; and the usage of his stoical school displeases me, to repeat, upon every subject, at full length and width the principles and presuppositions that serve in general, and always to realledge anew common and universal reasons.

My memory grows cruelly worse every day:

*"Pocula Lethaeos ut si ducentia somnos,
Arente fauce traxerim;"*²⁵⁷

I must be fain for the time to come (for hitherto, thanks be to God, nothing has happened much amiss), whereas others seek time and opportunity to think of what they have to say, to avoid all preparation, for fear of tying myself to some obligation upon which I must insist. To be tied and bound to a thing puts me quite out, and to depend upon so weak an instrument as my memory. I never read this following story that I am not offended at it with a personal and natural resentment: Lyncestes, accused of conspiracy against Alexander, the day that he was brought out before the army, according to the custom, to be heard as to what he could say for himself, had learned a studied speech, of which, hesitating and stammering, he pronounced some words. Whilst growing more and more perplexed, whilst struggling with his memory, and trying to recollect what he had to say, the soldiers nearest to him charged their pikes against him and killed him, looking upon him as convict; his confusion and silence served them for a confession; for having had so much leisure to prepare himself in prison, they concluded that it was not his memory that failed him, but that his conscience tied up his tongue and stopped his mouth. And, truly, well said; the place, the assembly, the expectation, astound a man, even when he has but the ambition to speak well; what can a man do when 'tis an harangue upon which his life depends?

For my part, the very being tied to what I am to say is enough to loose me from it. When I wholly commit and refer myself to my memory, I lay so much stress upon it that it sinks under me: it grows dismayed

²⁵⁷"As if my dry throat had drunk seducing cups of Lethaeon oblivion." —Horace, Epod., xiv. 3.

with the burden. So much as I trust to it, so much do I put myself out of my own power, even to the finding it difficult to keep my own countenance; and have been sometimes very much put to it to conceal the slavery wherein I was engaged; whereas my design is to manifest, in speaking, a perfect calmness both of face and accent, and casual and unpremeditated motions, as rising from present occasions, choosing rather to say nothing to purpose than to show that I came prepared to speak well, a thing especially unbecoming a man of my profession, and of too great obligation on him who cannot retain much. The preparation begets a great deal more expectation than it will satisfy. A man often strips himself to his doublet to leap no farther than he would have done in his gown:

*“Nihil est his, qui placere volunt, turn adversarium, quam expectatio.”*²⁵⁸

It is recorded of the orator Curio, that when he proposed the division of his oration into three or four parts, or three or four arguments or reasons, it often happened either that he forgot some one, or added one or two more. I have always avoided falling into this inconvenience, having ever hated these promises and prescriptions, not only out of distrust of my memory, but also because this method relishes too much of the artist:

*“Simpliciora militares decent.”*²⁵⁹

‘Tis enough that I have promised to myself never again to take upon me to speak in a place of respect, for as to speaking, when a man reads his speech, besides that it is very absurd, it is a mighty disadvantage to those who naturally could give it a grace by action; and to rely upon the mercy of my present invention, I would much less do it; ‘tis heavy and perplexed, and such as would never furnish me in sudden and important necessities.

Permit, reader, this essay its course also, and this third sitting to finish the rest of my picture: I add, but I correct not. First, because I conceive that a man having once parted with his labours to the world,

²⁵⁸“Nothing is so adverse to those who make it their business to please as expectation” – Cicero, Acad., ii. 4

²⁵⁹“Simplicity becomes warriors.” –Quintilian, Instit. Orat., xi. I.

he has no further right to them; let him do better if he can, in some new undertaking, but not adulterate what he has already sold. Of such dealers nothing should be bought till after they are dead. Let them well consider what they do before they, produce it to the light who hastens them? My book is always the same, saving that upon every new edition (that the buyer may not go away quite empty) I take the liberty to add (as 'tis but an ill jointed marquerie) some supernumerary emblem; it is but overweight, that does not disfigure the primitive form of the essays, but, by a little artful subtlety, gives a kind of particular value to every one of those that follow. Thence, however, will easily happen some transposition of chronology, my stories taking place according to their opportuneness, not always according to their age.

Secondly, because as to what concerns myself, I fear to lose by change: my understanding does not always go forward, it goes backward too. I do not much less suspect my fancies for being the second or the third, than for being the first, or present, or past; we often correct ourselves as foolishly as we do others. I am grown older by a great many years since my first publications, which were in the year 1580; but I very much doubt whether I am grown an inch the wiser. I now, and I anon, are two several persons; but whether better, I cannot determine. It were a fine thing to be old, if we only travelled towards improvement; but 'tis a drunken, stumbling, reeling, infirm motion: like that of reeds, which the air casually waves to and fro at pleasure. Antiochus had in his youth strongly written in favour of the Academy; in his old age he wrote as much against it; would not, which of these two soever I should follow, be still Antiochus? After having established the uncertainty, to go about to establish the certainty of human opinions, was it not to establish doubt, and not certainty, and to promise, that had he had yet another age to live, he would be always upon terms of altering his judgment, not so much for the better, as for something else?

The public favour has given me a little more confidence than I expected; but what I 'most fear is, lest I should glut the world with my writings; I had rather, of the two, pique my reader than tire him, as a learned man of my time has done. Praise is always pleasing, let it come from whom, or upon what account it will; yet ought a man to understand why he is commended, that he may know how to keep up the same reputation still: imperfections themselves may get commendation. The vulgar and common estimation is seldom happy in hitting; and I am much mistaken if, amongst the writings of my time,

the worst are not those which have most gained the popular applause. For my part, I return my thanks to those good-natured men who are pleased to take my weak endeavours in good part; the faults of the workmanship are nowhere so apparent as in a matter which of itself has no recommendation. Blame not me, reader, for those that slip in here by the fancy or inadvertency of others; every hand, every artisan, contribute their own materials; I neither concern myself with orthography (and only care to have it after the old way) nor pointing, being very inexpert both in the one and the other. Where they wholly break the sense, I am very little concerned, for they at least discharge me; but where they substitute a false one, as they so often do, and wrest me to their conception, they ruin me. When the sentence, nevertheless, is not strong enough for my proportion, a civil person ought to reject it as spurious, and none of mine. Whoever shall know how lazy I am, and how indulgent to my own humour, will easily believe that I had rather write as many more essays, than be tied to revise these over again for so childish a correction.

I said elsewhere, that being planted in the very centre of this new religion, I am not only deprived of any great familiarity with men of other kind of manners than my own, and of other opinions, by which they hold together, as by a tie that supersedes all other obligations; but moreover I do not live without danger, amongst men to whom all things are equally lawful, and of whom the most part cannot offend the laws more than they have already done; from which the extremist degree of licence proceeds. All the particular being summed up together, I do not find one man of my country, who pays so dear for the defence of our laws both in loss and damages (as the lawyers say) as myself; and some there are who vapour and brag of their zeal and constancy, that if things were justly weighed, do much less than I. My house, as one that has ever been open and free to all comers, and civil to all (for I could never persuade myself to make it a garrison of war, war being a thing that I prefer to see as remote as may be), has sufficiently merited popular kindness, and so that it would be a hard matter justly to insult over me upon my own dunghill; and I look upon it as a wonderful and exemplary thing that it yet continues a virgin from blood and plunder during so long a storm, and so many neighbouring revolutions and tumults. For to confess the truth, it had been possible enough for a man of my complexion to have shaken hands with any one constant and continued form whatever; but the contrary invasions and incursions, alternations and vicissitudes of fortune round about me, have hitherto

more exasperated than calmed and mollified the temper of the country, and involved me, over and over again, with invincible difficulties and dangers.

I escape, 'tis true, but am troubled that it is more by chance, and something of my own prudence, than by justice; and am not satisfied to be out of the protection of the laws, and under any other safeguard than theirs. As matters stand, I live, above one half, by the favour of others, which is an untoward obligation. I do not like to owe my safety either to the generosity or affection of great persons, who allow me my legality and my liberty, or to the obliging manners of my predecessors, or my own: for what if I were another kind of man? If my deportment, and the frankness of my conversation or relationship, oblige my neighbours, 'tis that that they should acquit themselves of obligation in only permitting me to live, and they may say, "We allow him the free liberty of having divine service read in his own private chapel, when it is interdicted in all churches round about, and allow him the use of his goods and his life, as one who protects our wives and cattle in time of need." For my house has for many descents shared in the reputation of Lycurgus the Athenian, who was the general depository and guardian of the purses of his fellow-citizens. Now I am clearly of opinion that a man should live by right and by authority, and not either by recompense or favour. How many gallant men have rather chosen to lose their lives than to be debtors for them? I hate to subject myself to any sort of obligation, but above all, to that which binds me by the duty of honour. I think nothing so dear as what has been given me, and this because my will lies at pawn under the title of gratitude, and more willingly accept of services that are to be sold; I feel that for the last I give nothing but money, but for the other I give myself.

The knot that binds me by the laws of courtesy binds me more than that of civil constraint; I am much more at ease when bound by a scrivener, than by myself. Is it not reason that my conscience should be much more engaged when men simply rely upon it? In a bond, my faith owes nothing, because it has nothing lent it; let them trust to the security they have taken without me. I had much rather break the wall of a prison and the laws themselves than my own word. I am nice, even to superstition, in keeping my promises, and, therefore, upon all occasions have a care to make them uncertain and conditional. To those of no great moment, I add the jealousy of my own rule, to make them weight; it wracks and oppresses me with its own interest. Even in actions wholly my own and free, if I once say a thing, I conceive that I

have bound myself, and that delivering it to the knowledge of another, I have positively enjoined it my own performance. Methinks I promise it, if I but say it: and therefore am not apt to say much of that kind. The sentence that I pass upon myself is more severe than that of a judge, who only considers the common obligation; but my conscience looks upon it with a more severe and penetrating eye. I lag in those duties to which I should be compelled if I did not go:

*"Hoc ipsum ita justum est, quod recte fit, si est voluntarium."*²⁶⁰

If the action has not some splendour of liberty, it has neither grace nor honour:

*"Quod vos jus cogit, vix voluntate impetrent."*²⁶¹

where necessity draws me, I love to let my will take its own course:

*"Quia quicquid imperio cogitur, exigenti magis, quam praestanti, acceptum refertur."*²⁶²

I know some who follow this rule, even to injustice; who will sooner give than restore, sooner lend than pay, and will do them the least good to whom they are most obliged. I don't go so far as that, but I'm not far off.

I so much love to disengage and disoblige myself, that I have sometimes looked upon ingratitude, affronts, and indignities which I have received from those to whom either by nature or accident I was bound in some way of friendship, as an advantage to me; taking this occasion of their ill-usage, for an acquaintance and discharge of so much of my debt. And though I still continue to pay them all the external offices of public reason, I, notwithstanding, find a great saving in doing that upon the account of justice which I did upon the score of affection, and am a little eased of the attention and solicitude of my inward will:

²⁶⁰"This itself is so far just, that it is rightly done, if it is voluntary." —Cicero, De Offic., i. 9.

²⁶¹"That which the laws compel us to do, we scarcely do with a will." —Terence, Adelph., iii. 3, 44.

²⁶²"For whatever is compelled by power, is more imputed to him that exacts than to him that performs."—Valerius Maximus, ii. 2, 6.

*"Est prudentis sustinere, ut currum, sic impetum benevolentia;"*²⁶³

'tis in me, too urging and pressing where I take; at least, for a man who loves not to be strained at all. And this husbanding my friendship serves me for a sort of consolation in the imperfections of those in whom I am concerned. I am very sorry they are not such as I could wish they were, but then I also am spared somewhat of my application and engagement towards them. I approve of a man who is the less fond of his child for having a scald head, or for being crooked; and not only when he is ill-conditioned, but also when he is of unhappy disposition, and imperfect in his limbs (God himself has abated so much from his value and natural estimation), provided he carry himself in this coldness of affection with moderation and exact justice: proximity, with me, lessens not defects, but rather aggravates them.

After all, according to what I understand in the science of benefit and acknowledgment, which is a subtle science, and of great use, I know no person whatever more free and less indebted than I am at this hour. What I do owe is simply to foreign obligations and benefits; as to anything else, no man is more absolutely clear:

*"Nec sunt mihi nota potentum Munera."*²⁶⁴

Princes give me a great deal if they take nothing from me; and do me good enough if they do me no harm; that's all I ask from them. O how am I obliged to God, that he has been pleased I should immediately receive from his bounty all I have, and specially reserved all my obligation to himself. How earnestly do I beg of his holy compassion that I may never owe essential thanks to any one. O happy liberty wherein I have thus far lived. May it continue with me to the last. I endeavour to have no express need of any one:

*"In me omnis spec est mihi."*²⁶⁵

'Tis what every one may do in himself, but more easily they whom God has placed in a condition exempt from natural and urgent necessities. It is a wretched and dangerous thing to depend upon others; we

²⁶³"'Tis the part of a wise man to keep a curbing hand upon the impetus of friendship, as upon that of his horse." —Cicero, *De Amicit.*, c. 17.

²⁶⁴"The gifts of great men are unknown to me." —Aeneid, xii. 529.

²⁶⁵"All my hope is in myself."—Terence, *Adelph.*, iii. 5, 9.

ourselves, in whom is ever the most just and safest dependence, are not sufficiently sure.

I have nothing mine but myself, and yet the possession is, in part, defective and borrowed. I fortify myself both in courage, which is the strongest assistant, and also in fortune, therein wherewith to satisfy myself, though everything else should forsake me. Hippias of Elis not only furnished himself with knowledge, that he might, at need, cheerfully retire from all other company to enjoy the Muses: nor only with the knowledge of philosophy, to teach his soul to be contented with itself, and bravely to subsist without outward conveniences, when fate would have it so; he was, moreover, so careful as to learn to cook, to shave himself, to make his own clothes, his own shoes and drawers, to provide for all his necessities in himself, and to wean himself from the assistance of others. A man more freely and cheerfully enjoys borrowed conveniences, when it is not an enjoyment forced and constrained by need; and when he has, in his own will and fortune, the means to live without them. I know myself very well; but 'tis hard for me to imagine any so pure liberality of any one towards me, any so frank and free hospitality, that would not appear to me discreditable, tyrannical, and tainted with reproach, if necessity had reduced me to it. As giving is an ambitious and authoritative quality, so is accepting a quality of submission; witness the insulting and quarrelsome refusal that Bajazet made of the presents that Tamerlane sent him; and those that were offered on the part of the Emperor Solymán to the Emperor of Calicut, so angered him, that he not only rudely rejected them, saying that neither he nor any of his predecessors had ever been wont to take, and that it was their office to give; but, moreover, caused the ambassadors sent with the gifts to be put into a dungeon. When Thetis, says Aristotle, flatters Jupiter, when the Lacedaemonians flatter the Athenians, they do not put them in mind of the good they have done them, which is always odious, but of the benefits they have received from them. Such as I see so frequently employ every one in their affairs, and thrust themselves into so much obligation, would never do it, did they but relish as I do the sweetness of a pure liberty, and did they but weigh, as wise men should, the burden of obligation: 'tis sometimes, peradventure, fully paid, but 'tis never dissolved. 'Tis a miserable slavery to a man who loves to be at full liberty in all respects. Such as know me, both above and below me in station, are able to say whether they have ever known a man less importuning, soliciting, entreating, and pressing upon others than I. If I am so, and a degree beyond all

modern example, 'tis no great wonder, so many parts of my manners contributing to it: a little natural pride, an impatience at being refused, the moderation of my desires and designs, my incapacity for business, and my most beloved qualities, idleness and freedom; by all these together I have conceived a mortal hatred to being obliged to any other, or by any other than myself. I leave no stone unturned, to do without it, rather than employ the bounty of another in any light or important occasion or necessity whatever. My friends strangely trouble me when they ask me to ask a third person; and I think it costs me little less to disengage him who is indebted to me, by making use of him, than to engage myself to him who owes me nothing. These conditions being removed, and provided they require of me nothing if any great trouble or care (for I have declared mortal war against all care), I am very ready to do every one the best service I can. I have been very willing to seek occasion to do people a good turn, and to attach them to me; and methinks there is no more agreeable employment for our means. But I have yet more avoided receiving than sought occasions of giving, and moreover, according to Aristotle, it is more easy, My fortune has allowed me but little to do others good withal, and the little it can afford, is put into a pretty close hand. Had I been born a great person, I should have been ambitious to have made myself beloved, not to make myself feared or admired: shall I more plainly express it? I should more have endeavoured to please than to profit others. Cyrus very wisely, and by the mouth of a great captain, and still greater philosopher, prefers his bounty and benefits much before his valour and warlike conquests; and the elder Scipio, wherever he would raise himself in esteem, sets a higher value upon his affability and humanity, than on his prowess and victories, and has always this glorious saying in his mouth: "That he has given his enemies as much occasion to love him as his friends." I will then say, that if a man must, of necessity, owe something, it ought to be by a more legitimate title than that whereof I am speaking, to which the necessity of this miserable war compels me; and not in so great a debt as that of my total preservation both of life and fortune: it overwhelms me.

I have a thousand times gone to bed in my own house with an apprehension that I should be betrayed and murdered that very night; compounding with fortune, that it might be without terror and with quick despatch; and, after my Paternoster, I have cried out,

"Impius haec tam culta novalia miles habebit!"²⁶⁶

What remedy? 'tis the place of my birth, and that of most of my ancestors; they have here fixed their affection and name. We inure ourselves to whatever we are accustomed to; and in so miserable a condition as ours is, custom is a great bounty of nature, which benumbs out senses to the sufferance of many evils. A civil war has this with it worse than other wars have, to make us stand sentinels in our own houses.

*"Quam miserum, porta vitam muroque tueri,
Vixque suae tutum viribus esse domus!"²⁶⁷*

'Tis a grievous extremity for a man to be jostled even in his own house and domestic repose. The country where I live is always the first in arms and the last that lays them down, and where there is never an absolute peace:

*"Tunc quoque, cum pax est, trepidant formidine belli...
Quoties Romam fortuna lacescit;
Hac iter est bellis...
Melius, Fortuna, dedisses
Orbe sub Eco sedem, gelidaque sub Arcto,
Errantesque domos."²⁶⁸*

I sometimes extract the means to fortify myself against these considerations from indifference and indolence, which, in some sort, bring us on to resolution. It often befalls me to imagine and expect mortal dangers with a kind of delight: I stupidly plunge myself headlong into death, without considering or taking a view of it, as into a deep and obscure abyss which swallows me up at one leap, and involves me in an instant in a profound sleep, without any sense of pain. And in these short and violent deaths, the consequence that I foresee administers

²⁶⁶"Shall impious soldiers have these new-ploughed grounds?" –Virgil, Ecl., i. 71.

²⁶⁷"'Tis miserable to protect one's life by doors and walls, and to be scarcely safe in one's own house." –Ovid, Trist., iv. I, 69.

²⁶⁸"Even when there's peace, there is here still the dear of war when Fortune troubles peace, this is ever the way by which war passes." –Ovid, Trist., iii. 10, 67.

"We might have lived happier in the remote East or in the icy North, or among the wandering tribes." –Lucan, i. 255.

more consolation to me than the effect does fear. They say, that as life is not better for being long, so death is better for being not long. I do not so much evade being dead, as I enter into confidence with dying. I wrap and shroud myself into the storm that is to blind and carry me away with the fury of a sudden and insensible attack. Moreover, if it should fall out that, as some gardeners say, roses and violets spring more odoriferous near garlic and onions, by reason that the last suck and imbibe all the ill odour of the earth; so, if these depraved natures should also attract all the malignity of my air and climate, and render it so much better and purer by their vicinity, I should not lose all. That cannot be: but there may be something in this, that goodness is more beautiful and attractive when it is rare; and that contrariety and diversity fortify and consolidate well-doing within itself, and inflame it by the jealousy of opposition and by glory. Thieves and robbers, of their special favour, have no particular spite at me; no more have I to them: I should have my hands too full. Like consciences are lodged under several sorts of robes; like cruelty, disloyalty, rapine; and so much the worse, and more falsely, when the more secure and concealed under colour of the laws. I less hate an open professed injury than one that is treacherous; an enemy in arms, than an enemy in a gown. Our fever has seized upon a body that is not much the worse for it; there was fire before, and now 'tis broken out into a flame; the noise is greater, not the evil. I ordinarily answer such as ask me the reason of my travels, "That I know very well what I fly from, but not what I seek." If they tell me that there may be as little soundness amongst foreigners, and that their manners are no better than ours: I first reply, that it is hard to be believed;

*"Tam multa: scelerum facies!"*²⁶⁹

secondly, that it is always gain to change an ill condition for one that is uncertain; and that the ills of others ought not to afflict us so much as our own.

I will not here omit, that I never mutiny so much against France, that I am not perfectly friends with Paris; that city has ever had my heart from my infancy, and it has fallen out, as of excellent things, that the more beautiful cities I have seen since, the more the beauty of this still wins upon my affection. I love her for herself, and more in her own

²⁶⁹"There are so many forms of crime." –Virgil, *Georg.*, i. 506.

native being, than in all the pomp of foreign and acquired embellishments. I love her tenderly, even to her warts and blemishes. I am a Frenchman only through this great city, great in people, great in the felicity of her situation; but, above all, great and incomparable in variety and diversity of commodities: the glory of France, and one of the most noble ornaments of the world. May God drive our divisions far from her. Entire and united, I think her sufficiently defended from all other violences. I give her caution that, of all sorts of people, those will be the worst that shall set her in discord; I have no fear for her, but of herself, and, certainly, I have as much fear for her as for any other part of the kingdom. Whilst she shall continue, I shall never want a retreat, where I may stand at bay, sufficient to make me amends for parting with any other retreat.

Not because Socrates has said so, but because it is in truth my own humour, and peradventure not without some excess, I look upon all men as my compatriots, and embrace a Polander as a Frenchman, preferring the universal and common tie to all national ties whatever. I am not much taken with the sweetness of a native air: acquaintance wholly new and wholly my own appear to me full as good as the other common and fortuitous ones with Four neighbours: friendships that are purely of our own acquiring ordinarily carry it above those to which the communication of climate or of blood oblige us. Nature has placed us in the world free and unbound; we imprison ourselves in certain straits, like the kings of Persia, who obliged themselves to drink no other water but that of the river Choaspes, foolishly quitted claim to their right in all other streams, and, so far as concerned themselves, dried up all the other rivers of the world. What Socrates did towards his end, to look upon a sentence of banishment as worse than a sentence of death against him, I shall, I think, never be either so decrepid or so strictly habituated to my own country to be of that opinion. These celestial lives have images enough that I embrace more by esteem than affection; and they have some also so elevated and extraordinary that I cannot embrace them so much as by esteem, forasmuch as I cannot conceive them. That fancy was singular in a man who thought the whole world his city; it is true that he disdained travel, and had hardly ever set his foot out of the Attic territories. What say you to his complaint of the money his friends offered to save his life, and that he refused to come out of prison by the mediation of others, in order not to disobey the laws in a time when they were otherwise so corrupt? These examples are of the first kind for me; of the second, there are others that I

could find out in the same person: many of these rare examples surpass the force of my action, but some of them, moreover, surpass the force of my judgment.

Besides these reasons, travel is in my opinion a very profitable exercise; the soul is there continually employed in observing new and unknown things, and I do not know, as I have often said a better school wherein to model life than by incessantly exposing to it the diversity of so many other lives, fancies, and usances, and by making it relish a perpetual variety of forms of human nature. The body is, therein, neither idle nor overwrought; and that moderate agitation puts it in breath. I can keep on horseback, tormented with the stone as I am, without alighting or being weary, eight or ten hours together:

*"Vires ultra sorternque senectae."*²⁷⁰

No season is enemy to me but the parching heat of a scorching sun; for the umbrellas made use of in Italy, ever since the time of the ancient Romans, more burden a man's arm than they relieve his head. I would fain know how it was that the Persians, so long ago and in the infancy of luxury, made ventilators where they wanted them, and planted shades, as Xenophon reports they did. I love rain, and to dabble in the dirt, as well as ducks do. The change of air and climate never touches me; every sky is alike; I am only troubled with inward alterations which I breed within myself, and those are not so frequent in travel. I am hard to be got out, but being once upon the road, I hold out as well as the best. I take as much pains in little as in great attempts, and am as solicitous to equip myself for a short journey, if but to visit a neighbour, as for the longest voyage. I have learned to travel after the Spanish fashion, and to make but one stage of a great many miles; and in excessive heats I always travel by night, from sun set to sunrise. The other method of baiting by the way, in haste and hurry to gobble up a dinner, is, especially in short days, very inconvenient. My horses perform the better; never any horse tired under me that was able to hold out the first day's journey. I water them at every brook I meet, and have only a care they have so much way to go before I come to my inn, as will digest the water in their bellies. My unwillingness to rise in a morning gives my servants leisure to dine at their ease before they set out; for my own part, I never eat too late; my appetite comes to me in eating, and not else; I am never hungry but at table.

²⁷⁰"Beyond the strength and lot of age." —Aeneid, vi. 114.

Some of my friends blame me for continuing this travelling humour, being married and old. But they are out in't; 'tis the best time to leave a man's house, when he has put it into a way of continuing without him, and settled such order as corresponds with its former government. 'Tis much greater imprudence to abandon it to a less faithful housekeeper, and who will be less solicitous to look after your affairs.

The most useful and honourable knowledge and employment for the mother of a family is the science of good housewifery. I see some that are covetous indeed, but very few that are good managers. 'Tis the supreme quality of a woman, which a man ought to seek before any other, as the only dowry that must ruin or preserve our houses. Let men say what they will, according to the experience I have learned, I require in married women the economical virtue above all other virtues; I put my wife to't, as a concern of her own, leaving her, by my absence, the whole government of my affairs. I see, and am vexed to see, in several families I know, Monsieur about noon come home all jaded and ruffled about his affairs, when Madame is still dressing her hair and tricking up herself, forsooth, in her closet: this is for queens to do, and that's a question, too: 'tis ridiculous and unjust that the laziness of our wives should be maintained with our sweat and labour. No man, so far as in me lie, shall have a clearer, a more quiet and free fruition of his estate than I. If the husband bring matter, nature herself will that the wife find the form.

As to the duties of conjugal friendship, that some think to be impaired by these absences, I am quite of another opinion. It is, on the contrary, an intelligence that easily cools by a too frequent and assiduous companionship. Every strange woman appears charming, and we all find by experience that being continually together is not so pleasing as to part for a time and meet again. These interruptions fill me with fresh affection towards my family, and render my house more pleasant to me. Change warms my appetite to the one and then to the other. I know that the arms of friendship are long enough to reach from the one end of the world to the other, and especially this, where there is a continual communication of offices that rouse the obligation and remembrance. The Stoics say that there is so great connection and relation amongst the sages, that he who dines in France nourishes his companion in Egypt; and that whoever does but hold out his finger, in what part of the world soever, all the sages upon the habitable earth feel themselves assisted by it. Fruition and possession principally appertain to the imagination; it more fervently and constantly embraces

what it is in quest of, than what we hold in our arms. Cast up your daily amusements; you will find that you are most absent from your friend when he is present with you; his presence relaxes your attention, and gives you liberty to absent yourself at every turn and upon every occasion. When I am away at Rome, I keep and govern my house, and the conveniences I there left; see my walls rise, my trees shoot, and my revenue increase or decrease, very

near as well as when I am there:

*“Ante oculos errat domus, errat forma locorum.”*²⁷¹

If we enjoy nothing but what we touch, we may say farewell to the money in our chests, and to our sons when they are gone a hunting. We will have them nearer to us: is the garden, or half a day’s journey from home, far? What is ten leagues: far or near? If near, what is eleven, twelve, or thirteen, and so by degrees. In earnest, if there be a woman who can tell her husband what step ends the near and what step begins the remote, I would advise her to stop between;

*“Excludat jurgia finis...
Utor permissio; caudaeque pilos ut equinae
Paulatim vello, et demo unum, demo etiam unum
Dum cadat elusus ratione ruentis acervi.”*²⁷²

and let them boldly call philosophy to their assistance; in whose teeth it may be cast that, seeing it neither discerns the one nor the other end of the joint, betwixt the too much and the little, the long and the short, the light and the heavy, the near and the remote; that seeing it discovers neither the beginning nor the end, it must needs judge very uncertainly of the middle:

*“Rerum natura nullam nobis dedit cognitionem finium.”*²⁷³

Are they not still wives and friends to the dead who are not at the end of this but in the other world? We embrace not only the absent, but

²⁷¹“My house and the forms of places float before my eyes” –Ovid, *Trist.* iii. 4, 57.

²⁷²“Let the end shut out all disputes... I use what is permitted; I pluck out the hairs of the horse’s tail one by one; while I thus outwit my opponent.” –Horace, *Ep.*, ii, I, 38, 45

²⁷³“Nature has given to us no knowledge of the end of things.” –Cicero, *Acad.*, ii. 29.

those who have been, and those who are not yet. We do not promise in marriage to be continually twisted and linked together, like some little animals that we see, or, like the bewitched folks of Karenty,²⁷⁴ tied together like dogs; and a wife ought not to be so greedily enamoured of her husband's foreparts, that she cannot endure to see him turn his back, if occasion be. But may not this saying of that excellent painter of woman's humours be here introduced, to show the reason of their complaints?

*"Uxor, si cesses, aut to amare cogitat,
Aut tete amari, aut potare, aut animo obsequi;
Et tibi bene esse soli, cum sibi sit male;"*²⁷⁵

or may it not be, that of itself opposition and contradiction entertain and nourish them, and that they sufficiently accommodate themselves, provided they incommode you?

In true friendship, wherein I am perfect, I more give myself to my friend, than I endeavour to attract him to me. I am not only better pleased in doing him service than if he conferred a benefit upon me, but, moreover, had rather he should do himself good than me, and he most obliges me when he does so; and if absence be either more pleasant or convenient for him, 'tis also more acceptable to me than his presence; neither is it properly absence, when we can write to one another: I have sometimes made good use of our separation from one another: we better filled and further extended the possession of life in being parted. He²⁷⁶ lived, enjoyed, and saw for me, and I for him, as fully as if he had himself been there; one part of us remained idle, and we were too much blended in one another when we were together; the distance of place rendered the conjunction of our wills more rich. This insatiable desire of personal presence a little implies weakness in the fruition of souls.

As to what concerns age, which is alleged against me, 'tis quite contrary; 'tis for youth to subject itself to common opinions, and to curb itself to please others; it has wherewithal to please both the people and

²⁷⁴Karantia, a town in the isle of Rugen. See Saxo-Grammaticus, Hist. of Denmark, book xiv.

²⁷⁵"Your wife, if you loiter, thinks that you love or are beloved; or that you are drinking or following your inclination; and that it is well for you when it is ill for her (all the pleasure is yours and hers all the care)." —Terence, Adelph., act i., sc. I, v. 7.

²⁷⁶La Boetie.

itself; we have but too much ado to please ourselves alone. As natural conveniences fail, let us supply them with those that are artificial. 'Tis injustice to excuse youth for pursuing its pleasures, and to forbid old men to seek them. When young, I concealed my wanton passions with prudence; now I am old, I chase away melancholy by debauch. And thus do the platonic laws forbid men to travel till forty or fifty years old, so that travel might be more useful and instructive in so mature an age. I should sooner subscribe to the second article of the same Laws, which forbids it after threescore.

"But, at such an age, you will never return from so long a journey." What care I for that? I neither undertake it to return, nor to finish it my business is only to keep myself in motion, whilst motion pleases me; I only walk for the walk's sake. They who run after a benefit or a hare, run not; they only run who run at base, and to exercise their running. My design is divisible throughout: it is not grounded upon any great hopes: every day concludes my expectation: and the journey of my life is carried on after the same manner. And yet I have seen places enough a great way off, where I could have wished to have stayed. And why not, if Chrysippus, Cleanthes, Diogenes, Zeno, Antipater, so many sages of the sourest sect, readily abandoned their country, without occasion of complaint, and only for the enjoyment of another air. In earnest, that which most displeases me in all my travels is, that I cannot resolve to settle my abode where I should best like, but that I must always propose to myself to return, to accommodate myself to the common humour.

If I feared to die in any other place than that of my birth; if I thought I should die more uneasily remote from my own family, I should hardly go out of France; I should not, without fear, step out of my parish; I feel death always pinching me by the throat or by the back. But I am otherwise constituted; 'tis in all places alike to me. Yet, might I have my choice, I think I should rather choose to die on horseback than in bed; out of my own house, and far from my own people. There is more heartbreaking than consolation in taking leave of one's friends; I am willing to omit that civility, for that, of all the offices of friendship, is the only one that is unpleasant; and I could, with all my heart, dispense with that great and eternal farewell. If there be any convenience in so many standers-by, it brings an hundred inconveniences along with it. I have seen many dying miserably surrounded with all this train: 'tis a crowd that chokes them. 'Tis against duty, and is a testimony of little kindness and little care, to permit you to die in repose; one torments

your eyes, another your ears, another your tongue; you have neither sense nor member that is not worried by them. Your heart is wounded with compassion to hear the mourning of friends, and, perhaps with anger, to hear the counterfeit condolences of pretenders. Who ever has been delicate and sensitive, when well, is much more so when ill. In such a necessity, a gentle hand is required, accommodated to his sentiment, to scratch him just in the place where he itches, otherwise scratch him not at all. If we stand in need of a wise woman²⁷⁷ to bring us into the world, we have much more need of a still wiser man to help us out of it. Such a one, and a friend to boot, a man ought to purchase at any cost for such an occasion. I am not yet arrived to that pitch of disdainful vigour that is fortified in itself, that nothing can assist or disturb; I am of a lower form; I endeavour to hide myself, and to escape from this passage, not by fear, but by art. I do not intend in this act of dying to make proof and show of my constancy. For whom should I do it? all the right and interest I have in reputation will then cease. I content myself with a death involved within itself, quiet, solitary, and all my own, suitable to my retired and private life; quite contrary to the Roman superstition, where a man was looked upon as unhappy who died without speaking, and who had not his nearest relations to close his eyes. I have enough to do to comfort myself, without having to console others; thoughts enough in my head, not to need that circumstances should possess me with new; and matter enough to occupy me without borrowing. This affair is out of the part of society; 'tis the act of one single person. Let us live and be merry amongst our friends; let us go repine and die amongst strangers; a man may find those, for his money, who will shift his pillow and rub his feet, and will trouble him no more than he would have them; who will present to him an indifferent countenance, and suffer him to govern himself, and to complain according to his own method.

I wean myself daily by my reason from this childish and inhuman humour, of desiring by our sufferings to move the compassion and mourning of our friends: we stretch our own incommodities beyond their just extent when we extract tears from others; and the constancy which we commend in every one in supporting his adverse fortune, we accuse and reproach in our friends when the evil is our own; we are not satisfied that they should be sensible of our condition only, unless they be, moreover, afflicted. A man should diffuse joy, but, as much as he can, smother grief. He who makes himself lamented without reason is

²⁷⁷midwife, Fr. 'sage femme'.

a man not to be lamented when there shall be real cause: to be always complaining is the way never to be lamented; by making himself always in so pitiful a taking, he is never commiserated by any. He who makes himself out dead when he is alive, is subject to be thought living when he is dying. I have seen some who have taken it ill when they have been told that they looked well, and that their pulse was good; restrain their smiles, because they betrayed a recovery, and be angry, at their health because it was not to be lamented: and, which is a great deal more, these were not women. I describe my infirmities, such as they really are, at most, and avoid all expressions of evil prognostic and composed exclamations. If not mirth, at least a temperate countenance in the standers-by, is proper in the presence of a wise sick man: he does not quarrel with health, for, seeing himself in a contrary condition, he is pleased to contemplate it sound and entire in others, and at least to enjoy it for company: he does not, for feeling himself melt away, abandon all living thoughts, nor avoid ordinary discourse. I would study sickness whilst I am well; when it has seized me, it will make its impression real enough, without the help of my imagination. We prepare ourselves beforehand for the journeys we undertake, and resolve upon them; we leave the appointment of the hour when to take horse to the company, and in their favour defer it.

I find this unexpected advantage in the publication of my manners, that it in some sort serves me for a rule. I have, at times, some consideration of not betraying the history of my life: this public declaration obliges me to keep my way, and not to give the lie to the image I have drawn of my qualities, commonly less deformed and contradictory than consists with the malignity and infirmity of the judgments of this age. The uniformity and simplicity of my manners produce a face of easy interpretation; but because the fashion is a little new and not in use, it gives too great opportunity to slander. Yet so it is, that whoever would fairly assail me, I think I so sufficiently assist his purpose in my known and avowed imperfections, that he may that way satisfy his ill-nature without fighting with the wind. If I myself, to anticipate accusation and discovery, confess enough to frustrate his malice, as he conceives, 'tis but reason that he make use of his right of amplification, and to wire-draw my vices as far as he can; attack has its rights beyond justice; and let him make the roots of those errors I have laid open to him shoot up into trees: let him make his use, not only of those I am really affected with, but also of those that only threaten me; injurious vices, both in quality and number; let him cudgel me that way. I should

willingly follow the example of the philosopher Bion: Antigonus being about to reproach him with the meanness of his birth, he presently cut him short with this declaration: "I am," said he, "the son of a slave, a butcher, and branded, and of a strumpet my father married in the lowest of his fortune; both of them were whipped for offences they had committed. An orator bought me, when a child, and finding me a pretty and hopeful boy, bred me up, and when he died left me all his estate, which I have transported into this city of Athens, and here settled myself to the study of philosophy. Let the historians never trouble themselves with inquiring about me: I will tell them about it." A free and generous confession enervates reproach and disarms slander. So it is that, one thing with another, I fancy men as often commend as undervalue me beyond reason; as, methinks also, from my childhood, in rank and degree of honour, they have given me a place rather above than below my right. I should find myself more at ease in a country where these degrees were either regulated or not regarded. Amongst men, when an altercation about the precedence either of walking or sitting exceeds three replies, 'tis reputed uncivil. I never stick at giving or taking place out of rule, to avoid the trouble of such ceremony; and never any man had a mind to go before me, but I permitted him to do it.

Besides this profit I make of writing of myself, I have also hoped for this other advantage, that if it should fall out that my humour should please or jump with those of some honest man before I die, he would then desire and seek to be acquainted with me. I have given him a great deal of made-way; for all that he could have, in many years, acquired by close familiarity, he has seen in three days in this memorial, and more surely and exactly. A pleasant fancy: many things that I would not confess to any one in particular, I deliver to the public, and send my best friends to a bookseller's shop, there to inform themselves concerning my most secret thoughts;

*"Excutienda damus praecordia."*²⁷⁸

Did I, by good direction, know where to seek any one proper for my conversation, I should certainly go a great way to find him out: for the sweetness of suitable and agreeable company cannot; in my opinion, be bought too dear. O what a thing is a true friend! how true is that old

²⁷⁸"We give our hearts to be examined." —Persius, V. 22.

saying, that the use of a friend is more pleasing and necessary than the elements of water and fire!

To return to my subject: there is, then, no great harm in dying privately and far from home; we conceive ourselves obliged to retire for natural actions less unseemly and less terrible than this. But, moreover, such as are reduced to spin out a long languishing life, ought not, perhaps, to wish to trouble a great family with their continual miseries; therefore the Indians, in a certain province, thought it just to knock a man on the head when reduced to such a necessity; and in another of their provinces, they all forsook him to shift for himself as well as he could. To whom do they not, at last, become tedious and insupportable? the ordinary offices of life do not go that length. You teach your best friends to be cruel perforce; hardening wife and children by long use neither to regard nor to lament your sufferings. The groans of the stone are grown so familiar to my people, that nobody takes any notice of them. And though we should extract some pleasure from their conversation (which does not always happen, by reason of the disparity of conditions, which easily begets contempt or envy toward any one whatever), is it not too much to make abuse of this half a lifetime? The more I should see them constrain themselves out of affection to be serviceable to me, the more I should be sorry for their pains. We have liberty to lean, but not to lay our whole weight upon others, so as to prop ourselves by their ruin; like him who caused little children's throats to be cut to make use of their blood for the cure of a disease he had, or that other, who was continually supplied with tender young girls to keep his old limbs warm in the night, and to mix the sweetness of their breath with his, sour and stinking. I should readily advise Venice as a retreat in this decline of life. Decrepitude is a solitary quality. I am sociable even to excess, yet I think it reasonable that I should now withdraw my troubles from the sight of the world and keep them to myself. Let me shrink and draw up myself in my own shell, like a tortoise, and learn to see men without hanging upon them. I should endanger them in so slippery a passage: 'tis time to turn my back to company.

"But, in these travels, you will be taken ill in some wretched place, where nothing can be had to relieve you." I always carry most things necessary about me; and besides, we cannot evade Fortune if she once resolves to attack us. I need nothing extraordinary when I am sick. I will not be beholden to my bolus to do that for me which nature cannot. At the very beginning of my fevers and sicknesses that cast me

down, whilst still entire, and but little, disordered in health, I reconcile myself to Almighty God by the last Christian, offices, and find myself by so doing less oppressed and more easy, and have got, methinks, so much the better of my disease. And I have yet less need of a notary or counsellor than of a physician. What I have not settled of my affairs when I was in health, let no one expect I should do it when I am sick. What I will do for the service of death is always done; I durst not so much as one day defer it; and if nothing be done, 'tis as much as to say either that doubt hindered my choice (and sometimes 'tis well chosen not to choose), or that I was positively resolved not to do anything at all.

I write my book for few men and for few years. Had it been matter of duration, I should have put it into firmer language. According to the continual variation that ours has been subject to, up to this day, who can expect that its present form should be in use fifty years hence? It slips every day through our fingers, and since I was born, it is altered above one-half. We say that it is now perfect; and every age says the same of its own. I shall hardly trust to that, so long as it varies and changes as it does. 'Tis for good and useful writings to rivet it to them, and its reputation will go according to the fortune of our state. For which reason I am not afraid to insert in it several private articles, which will spend their use amongst the men that are now living, and that concern the particular knowledge of some who will see further into them than every common reader. I will not, after all, as I often hear dead men spoken of, that men should say of me: "He judged, he lived so and so; he would have done this or that; could he have spoken when he was dying, he would have said so or so, and have given this thing or t'other; I knew him better than any." Now, as much as decency permits, I here discover my inclinations and affections; but I do more willingly and freely by word of mouth to any one who desires to be informed. So it is that in these memoirs, if any one observe, he will find that I have either told or designed to tell all; what I cannot express, I point out with my finger:

*"Verum animo satis haec vestigia parva sagaci
Sunt, per quae possis cognoscere caetera tute"*²⁷⁹

I leave nothing to be desired or to be guessed at concerning me. If people must be talking of me, I would have it to be justly and truly; I

²⁷⁹"By these footsteps a sagacious mind many easily find all other matters (are sufficient to enable one to learn the rest well)." —Lucretius, i. 403.

would come again, with all my heart, from the other world to give any one the lie who should report me other than I was, though he did it to honour me. I perceive that people represent, even living men, quite another thing than what they really are; and had I not stoutly defended a friend whom I have lost,²⁸⁰ they would have torn him into a thousand contrary pieces.

To conclude the account of my poor humours, I confess that in my travels I seldom reach my inn but that it comes into my mind to consider whether I could there be sick and dying at my ease. I desire to be lodged in some private part of the house, remote from all noise, ill scents, and smoke. I endeavour to flatter death by these frivolous circumstances; or, to say better, to discharge myself from all other incumbrances, that I may have nothing to do, nor be troubled with anything but that which will lie heavy enough upon me without any other load. I would have my death share in the ease and conveniences of my life; 'tis a great part of it, and of great importance, and I hope it will not in the future contradict the past. Death has some forms that are more easy than others, and receives divers qualities, according to every one's fancy. Amongst the natural deaths, that which proceeds from weakness and stupor I think the most favourable; amongst those that are violent, I can worse endure to think of a precipice than of the fall of a house that will crush me in a moment, and of a wound with a sword than of a harquebus shot; I should rather have chosen to poison myself with Socrates, than stab myself with Cato. And, though it, be all one, yet my imagination makes as great a difference as betwixt death and life, betwixt throwing myself into a burning furnace and plunging into the channel of a river: so idly does our fear more concern itself in the means than the effect. It is but an instant, 'tis true, but withal an instant of such weight, that I would willingly give a great many days of my life to pass it over after my own fashion. Since every one's imagination renders it more or less terrible, and since every one has some choice amongst the several forms of dying, let us try a little further to find some one that is wholly clear from all offence. Might not one render it even voluptuous, like the Commoyientes of Antony and Cleopatra? I set aside the brave and exemplary efforts produced by philosophy and religion; but, amongst men of little mark there have been found some, such as Petronius and Tigellinus at Rome, condemned to despatch themselves, who have, as it were, rocked death asleep with the delicacy of their preparations; they have made it slip

²⁸⁰De la Boetie.

and steal away in the height of their accustomed diversions amongst girls and good fellows; not a word of consolation, no mention of making a will, no ambitious affectation of constancy, no talk of their future condition; amongst sports, feastings, wit, and mirth, common and in-different discourses, music, and amorous verses. Were it not possible for us to imitate this resolution after a more decent manner? Since there are deaths that are good for fools, deaths good for the wise, let us find out such as are fit for those who are betwixt both. My imagination suggests to me one that is easy, and, since we must die, to be desired. The Roman tyrants thought they did, in a manner, give a criminal life when they gave him the choice of his death. But was not Theophrastus, that so delicate, so modest, and so wise a philosopher, compelled by reason, when he durst say this verse, translated by Cicero:

*"Vitam regit fortuna, non sapientia?"*²⁸¹

Fortune assists the facility of the bargain of my life, having placed it in such a condition that for the future it can be neither advantage nor hindrance to those who are concerned in me; 'tis a condition that I would have accepted at any time of my life; but in this occasion of trussing up my baggage, I am particularly pleased that in dying I shall neither do them good nor harm. She has so ordered it, by a cunning compensation, that they who may pretend to any considerable advantage by my death will, at the same time, sustain a material inconvenience. Death sometimes is more grievous to us, in that it is grievous to others, and interests us in their interest as much as in our own, and sometimes more.

In this conveniency of lodging that I desire, I mix nothing of pomp and amplitude—I hate it rather; but a certain plain neatness, which is oftenest found in places where there is less of art, and that Nature has adorned with some grace that is all her own:

*"Non ampliter, sea munditer convivium."*²⁸²

*"Plus salis quam sumptus."*²⁸³

And besides, 'tis for those whose affairs compel them to travel in the depth of winter through the Grisons country to be surprised upon the

²⁸¹"Fortune, not wisdom, sways human life." —Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., V. 31.

²⁸²"To eat not largely, but cleanly." —Nepos, Life of Atticus, c. 13

²⁸³"Rather enough than costly (More wit than cost)" —Nonius, xi. 19.

way with great inconveniences. I, who, for the most part, travel for my pleasure, do not order my affairs so ill. If the way be foul on my right hand, I turn on my left; if I find myself unfit to ride, I stay where I am; and, so doing, in earnest I see nothing that is not as pleasant and commodious as my own house. 'Tis true that I always find superfluity superfluous, and observe a kind of trouble even in abundance itself. Have I left anything behind me unseen, I go back to see it; 'tis still on my way; I trace no certain line, either straight or crooked.²⁸⁴ Do I not find in the place to which I go what was reported to me—as it often falls out that the judgments of others do not jump with mine, and that I have found their reports for the most part false—I never complain of losing my labour: I have, at least, informed myself that what was told me was not true.

I have a constitution of body as free, and a palate as indifferent, as any man living: the diversity of manners of several nations only affects me in the pleasure of variety: every usage has its reason. Let the plate and dishes be pewter, wood, or earth; my meat be boiled or roasted; let them give me butter or oil, of nuts or olives, hot or cold, 'tis all one to me; and so indifferent, that growing old, I accuse this generous faculty, and would wish that delicacy and choice should correct the indiscretion of my appetite, and sometimes soothe my stomach. When I have been abroad out of France and that people, out of courtesy, have asked me if I would be served after the French manner, I laughed at the question, and always frequented tables the most filled with foreigners. I am ashamed to see our countrymen besotted with this foolish humour of quarrelling with forms contrary to their own; they seem to be out of their element when out of their own village: wherever they go, they keep to their own fashions and abominate those of strangers. Do they meet with a compatriot in Hungary? O the happy chance! They are henceforward inseparable; they cling together, and their whole discourse is to condemn the barbarous manners they see about them. Why barbarous, because they are not French? And those have made the best use of their travels who have observed most to speak against. Most of them go for no other end but to come back again; they proceed in their travel with vast gravity and circumspection, with a silent and incommunicable prudence, preserving themselves from the contagion of an unknown air. What I am saying of them puts me in mind of something like it I have at times observed in some of our young courtiers; they will not mix with any but men of their own sort, and look upon

²⁸⁴Rousseau has translated this passage in his *Emile*, book v.

us as men of another world, with disdain or pity. Put them upon any discourse but the intrigues of the court, and they are utterly at a loss; as very owls and novices to us as we are to them. 'Tis truly said that a well-bred man is a compound man. I, on the contrary, travel very much sated with our own fashions; I do not look for Gascons in Sicily; I have left enough of them at home; I rather seek for Greeks and Persians; they are the men I endeavour to be acquainted with and the men I study; 'tis there that I bestow and employ myself. And which is more, I fancy that I have met but with few customs that are not as good as our own; I have not, I confess, travelled very far; scarce out of the sight of the vanes of my own house.

As to the rest, most of the accidental company a man falls into upon the road beget him more trouble than pleasure; I waive them as much as I civilly can, especially now that age seems in some sort to privilege and sequester me from the common forms. You suffer for others or others suffer for you; both of them inconveniences of importance enough, but the latter appears to me the greater. 'Tis a rare fortune, but of inestimable solace; to have a worthy man, one of a sound judgment and of manners conformable to your own, who takes a delight to bear you company. I have been at an infinite loss for such upon my travels. But such a companion should be chosen and acquired from your first setting out. There can be no pleasure to me without communication: there is not so much as a sprightly thought comes into my mind, that it does not grieve me to have produced alone, and that I have no one to communicate it to:

*"Si cum hac exceptione detur sapientia, ut illam inclusam teneam, nec enuntiem, rejiciam."*²⁸⁵

This other has strained it one note higher:

*"Si contigerit ea vita sapienti, ut ommum rerum affliuentibus copiis, quamvis omnia, quae cognitione digna sunt, summo otio secum ipse consideret et contempletur, tamen, si solitudo tanta sit, ut hominem videre non possit, excedat a vita."*²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵"If wisdom be conferred with this reservation, that I must keep it to myself, and not communicate it to others, I would none of it." —Seneca, Ep., 6.

²⁸⁶"If such a condition of life should happen to a wise man, that in the greatest plenty of all conveniences he might, at the most undisturbed leisure, consider and contemplate all things worth the knowing, yet if his solitude be such that he must not see a man, let him depart from life." —Cicero, De Offic., i. 43.

Architas pleases me when he says, "that it would be unpleasant, even in heaven itself, to wander in those great and divine celestial bodies without a companion. But yet 'tis much better to be alone than in foolish and troublesome company. Aristippus loved to live as a stranger in all places:

*"Me si fata meis paterentur ducere vitam Auspiciis,"*²⁸⁷

I should choose to pass away the greatest part of my life on horse-back:

*"Visere gestiens,
Qua pane debacchentur ignes,
Qua nebula, pluviique rores."*²⁸⁸

"Have you not more easy diversions at home? What do you there want? Is not your house situated in a sweet and healthful air, sufficiently furnished, and more than sufficiently large? Has not the royal majesty been more than once there entertained with all its train? Are there not more below your family in good ease than there are above it in eminence? Is there any local, extraordinary, indigestible thought that afflicts you?"

*"Qua to nunc coquat, et vexet sub pectore fixa."*²⁸⁹

"Where do you think to live without disturbance?"

*"Nunquam simpliciter Fortuna indulget."*²⁹⁰

You see, then, it is only you that trouble yourself; you will everywhere follow yourself, and everywhere complain; for there is no satisfaction here below, but either for brutish or for divine souls. He who, on so just an occasion, has no contentment, where will he think to find it? How many thousands of men terminate their wishes in such a condition as yours? Do but reform yourself; for that is wholly in your own power! whereas you have no other right but patience towards fortune:

²⁸⁷"If the fates would let me live in my own way." –Aeneid, iv. 340.

²⁸⁸"Visit the regions where the sun burns, where are the thick rain-clouds and the frosts." –Horace, Od., iii. 3, 54.

²⁸⁹"That may now worry you, and vex, fixed in your breast." –Cicero, De Senect, c. 1, Ex Ennio.

²⁹⁰"Fortune is never simply complaisant unmixed)." –Quintus Curtius, iv. 14

*"Nulla placida quies est, nisi quam ratio composuit."*²⁹¹

I see the reason of this advice, and see it perfectly well; but he might sooner have done, and more pertinently, in bidding me in one word be wise; that resolution is beyond wisdom; 'tis her precise work and product. Thus the physician keeps preaching to a poor languishing patient to "be cheerful"; but he would advise him a little more discreetly in bidding him "be well." For my part, I am but a man of the common sort. 'Tis a wholesome precept, certain and easy to be understood, "Be content with what you have," that is to say, with reason: and yet to follow this advice is no more in the power of the wise men of the world than in me. 'Tis a common saying, but of a terrible extent: what does it not comprehend? All things fall under discretion and qualification. I know very well that, to take it by the letter, this pleasure of travelling is a testimony of uneasiness and irresolution, and, in sooth, these two are our governing and predominating qualities. Yes, I confess, I see nothing, not so much as in a dream, in a wish, whereon I could set up my rest: variety only, and the possession of diversity, can satisfy me; that is, if anything can. In travelling, it pleases me that I may stay where I like, without inconvenience, and that I have a place wherein commodiously to divert myself. I love a private life, because 'tis my own choice that I love it, not by any dissenting from or dislike of public life, which, peradventure, is as much according to my complexion. I serve my prince more cheerfully because it is by the free election of my own judgment and reason, without any particular obligation; and that I am not reduced and constrained so to do for being rejected or disliked by the other party; and so of all the rest. I hate the morsels that necessity carves me; any commodity upon which I had only to depend would have me by the throat;

*"Alter remus aquas, alter mihi radat arenas;"*²⁹²

one cord will never hold me fast enough. You will say, there is vanity in this way of living. But where is there not? All these fine precepts are vanity, and all wisdom is vanity:

²⁹¹"There is no tranquillity but that which reason has conferred." —Seneca, Ep., 56.

²⁹²"Let me have one oar in the water, and with the other rake the shore." —Propertius, iii. 3, 23.

*“Dominus novit cogitationes sapientum, quoniam vanae sunt.”*²⁹³

These exquisite subtleties are only fit for sermons; they are discourses that will send us all saddled into the other world. Life is a material and corporal motion, an action imperfect and irregular of its own proper essence; I make it my business to serve it according to itself:

*“Quisque suos patimur manes.”*²⁹⁴

*“Sic est faciendum, ut contra naturam universam nihil contendamus; ea tamen conservata propriam sequamur.”*²⁹⁵

To what end are these elevated points of philosophy, upon which no human being can rely? and those rules that exceed both our use and force?

I see often that we have theories of life set before us which neither the proposer nor those who hear him have any hope, nor, which is more, any inclination to follow. Of the same sheet of paper whereon the judge has but just written a sentence against an adulterer, he steals a piece whereon to write a love-letter to his companion’s wife. She whom you have but just now illicitly embraced will presently, even in your hearing, more loudly inveigh against the same fault in her companion than a Portia would do;²⁹⁶ and men there are who will condemn others to death for crimes that they themselves do not repute so much as faults. I have, in my youth, seen a man of good rank with one hand present to the people verses that excelled both in wit and debauchery, and with the other, at the same time, the most ripe and pugnacious theological reformation that the world has been treated withal these many years. And so men proceed; we let the laws and precepts follow their way; ourselves keep another course, not only from debauchery of manners, but ofttimes by judgment and contrary opinion. Do but hear a philosophical lecture; the invention, eloquence, pertinency immediately strike upon your mind and move you; there is nothing that

²⁹³“The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.” –Ps. xciii. II; or I Cor. iii. 20.

²⁹⁴“We each of us suffer our own particular demon.” –Aeneid, vi. 743.

²⁹⁵“We must so order it as by no means to contend against universal nature; but yet, that rule being observed, to follow our own.” –Cicero, De Offc., i. 31.

²⁹⁶The chaste daughter of Cato of Utica.

touches or stings your conscience; 'tis not to this they address themselves. Is not this true? It made Aristo say, that neither a bath nor a lecture did aught unless it scoured and made men clean. One may stop at the skin; but it is after the marrow is picked out as, after we have swallowed good wine out of a fine cup, we examine the designs and workmanship. In all the courts of ancient philosophy, this is to be found, that the same teacher publishes rules of temperance and at the same time lessons in love and wantonness; Xenophon, in the very bosom of Clinias, wrote against the Aristippic virtue. 'Tis not that there is any miraculous conversion in it that makes them thus wavering; 'tis that Solon represents himself, sometimes in his own person, and sometimes in that of a legislator; one while he speaks for the crowd, and another for himself; taking the free and natural rules for his own share, feeling assured of a firm and entire health:

*"Curentur dubii medicis majoribus aegri."*²⁹⁷

Antisthenes allows a sage to love, and to do whatever he thinks convenient, without regard to the laws, forasmuch as he is better advised than they, and has a greater knowledge of virtue. His disciple Diogenes said, that "men to perturbations were to oppose reason: to fortune, courage: to the laws, nature." For tender stomachs, constrained and artificial recipes must be prescribed: good and strong stomachs serve themselves simply with the prescriptions of their own natural appetite; after this manner do our physicians proceed, who eat melons and drink iced wines, whilst they confine their patients to syrups and sops. "I know not," said the courtezan Lais, "what they may talk of books, wisdom, and philosophy; but these men knock as often at my door as any others." At the same rate that our licence carries us beyond what is lawful and allowed, men have, often beyond universal reason, stretched the precepts and rules of our life:

*"Nemo satis credit tantum delinquere, quantum Permittas."*²⁹⁸

It were to be wished that there was more proportion betwixt the command and the obedience; and the mark seems to be unjust to which one cannot attain. There is no so good man, who so squares all his thoughts

²⁹⁷"Desperate maladies require the best doctors." —Juvenal, xiii. 124.

²⁹⁸"No one thinks he has done ill to the full extent of what he may." —Juvenal, xiv. 233.

and actions to the laws, that he is not faulty enough to deserve hanging ten times in his life; and he may well be such a one, as it were great injustice and great harm to punish and ruin:

*“Ole, quid ad te
De cute quid faciat ille vel ille sua?”²⁹⁹*

and such an one there may be, who has no way offended the laws, who, nevertheless, would not deserve the character of a virtuous man, and whom philosophy would justly condemn to be whipped; so unequal and perplexed is this relation. We are so far from being good men, according to the laws of God, that we cannot be so according to our own human wisdom never yet arrived at the duties it had itself prescribed; and could it arrive there, it would still prescribe to itself others beyond, to which it would ever aspire and pretend; so great an enemy to consistency is our human condition. Man enjoins himself to be necessarily in fault: he is not very discreet to cut out his own duty by the measure of another being than his own. To whom does he prescribe that which he does not expect any one should perform? is he unjust in not doing what it is impossible for him to do? The laws which condemn us not to be able, condemn us for not being able.

At the worst, this difform liberty of presenting ourselves two several ways, the actions after one manner and the reasoning after another, may be allowed to those who only speak of things; but it cannot be allowed to those who speak of themselves, as I do: I must march my pen as I do my feet. Common life ought to have relation to the other lives: the virtue of Cato was vigorous beyond the reason of the age he lived in; and for a man who made it his business to govern others, a man dedicated to the public service, it might be called a justice, if not unjust, at least vain and out of season. Even my own manners, which differ not above an inch from those current amongst us, render me, nevertheless, a little rough and unsociable at my age. I know not whether it be without reason that I am disgusted with the world I frequent; but I know very well that it would be without reason, should I complain of its being disgusted with me, seeing I am so with it. The virtue that is assigned to the affairs of the world is a virtue of many wavings, corners, and elbows, to join and adapt itself to human frailty, mixed and artificial, not straight, clear, constant, nor purely innocent.

²⁹⁹“Olus, what is it to thee what he or she does with their skin?” –Martial, vii. 9, I.

Our annals to this very day reproach one of our kings for suffering himself too simply to be carried away by the conscientious persuasions of his confessor: affairs of state have bolder precepts;

*“Exeat aula,
Qui vult esse pius.”*³⁰⁰

I formerly tried to employ in the service of public affairs opinions and rules of living, as rough, new, unpolished or unpolished, as they were either born with me, or brought away from my education, and where-with I serve my own turn, if not so commodiously, at least securely, in my own particular concerns: a scholastic and novice virtue; but I have found them unapt and dangerous. He who goes into a crowd must now go one way and then another, keep his elbows close, retire or advance, and quit the straight way, according to what he encounters; and must live not so much according to his own method as to that of others; not according to what he proposes to himself, but according to what is proposed to him, according to the time, according to the men, according to the occasions. Plato says, that whoever escapes from the world’s handling with clean breeches, escapes by miracle: and says withal, that when he appoints his philosopher the head of a government, he does not mean a corrupt one like that of Athens, and much less such a one as this of ours, wherein wisdom itself would be to seek. A good herb, transplanted into a soil contrary to its own nature, much sooner conforms itself to the soil than it reforms the soil to it. I found that if I had wholly to apply myself to such employments, it would require a great deal of change and new modelling in me before I could be any way fit for it: And though I could so far prevail upon myself (and why might I not with time and diligence work such a feat), I would not do it. The little trial I have had of public employment has been so much disgust to me; I feel at times temptations toward ambition rising in my soul, but I obstinately oppose them:

*“At tu, Catulle, obstinatus obdura.”*³⁰¹

I am seldom called to it, and as seldom offer myself uncalled; liberty and laziness, the qualities most predominant in me, are qualities diametrically contrary to that trade. We cannot well distinguish the faculties of men; they have divisions and limits hard and delicate to choose;

³⁰⁰“Let him who will be pious retire from the court.” —Lucan, viii. 493

³⁰¹“But thou, Catullus, be obstinately firm.” —Catullus, viii. 19.

to conclude from the discreet conduct of a private life a capacity for the management of public affairs is to conclude ill; a man may govern himself well who cannot govern others so, and compose Essays who could not work effects: men there may be who can order a siege well, who would ill marshal a battle; who can speak well in private, who would ill harangue a people or a prince; nay, 'tis peradventure rather a testimony in him who can do the one that he cannot do the other, than otherwise. I find that elevated souls are not much more proper for mean things than mean souls are for high ones. Could it be imagined that Socrates should have administered occasion of laughter, at the expense of his own reputation, to the Athenians for: having never been able to sum up the votes of his tribe, to deliver it to the council? Truly, the veneration I have for the perfections of this great man deserves that his fortune should furnish, for the excuse of my principal imperfections, so magnificent an example. Our sufficiency is cut out into small parcels; mine has no latitude, and is also very contemptible in number. Saturninus, to those who had conferred upon him the command in chief: "Companions," said he, "you have lost a good captain, to make of him a bad general."

Whoever boasts, in so sick a time as this, to employ a true and sincere virtue in the world's service, either knows not what it is, opinions growing corrupt with manners (and, in truth, to hear them describe it, to hear the most of them glorify themselves in their departments, and lay down their rules; instead of painting virtue, they paint pure vice and injustice, and so represent it false in the education of princes); or if he does know it, boasts unjustly and let him say what he will, does a thousand things of which his own conscience must necessarily accuse him. I should willingly take Seneca's word on the experience he made upon the like occasion, provided he would deal sincerely with me. The most honourable mark of goodness in such a necessity is freely to confess both one's own faults and those of others; with the power of its virtue to stay one's inclination towards evil; unwillingly to follow this propensity; to hope better, to desire better. I perceive that in these divisions wherein we are involved in France, every one labours to defend his cause; but even the very best of them with dissimulation and disguise: he who would write roundly of the true state of the quarrel, would write rashly and wrongly. The most just party is at best but a member of a decayed and worm-eaten body; but of such a body, the member that is least affected calls itself sound, and with good reason, forasmuch as our qualities have no title but in comparison; civil in-

nocence is measured according to times and places. Imagine this in Xenophon, related as a fine commendation of Agesilaus: that, being entreated by a neighbouring prince with whom he had formerly had war, to permit him to pass through his country, he granted his request, giving him free passage through Peloponnesus; and not only did not imprison or poison him, being at his mercy, but courteously received him according to the obligation of his promise, without doing him the least injury or offence. To such ideas as theirs this were an act of no especial note; elsewhere and in another age, the frankness and unanimity of such an action would be thought wonderful; our monkeyish capets³⁰²

would have laughed at it, so little does the Spartan innocence resemble that of France. We are not without virtuous men, but 'tis according to our notions of virtue. Whoever has his manners established in regularity above the standard of the age he lives in, let him either wrest or blunt his rules, or, which I would rather advise him to, let him retire, and not meddle with us at all. What will he get by it?

*"Egregium sanctumque virum si cerno, bimembri
Hoc monstrum puero, et miranti jam sub aratro
Piscibus inventis, et foetae comparo mulae."*³⁰³

One may regret better times, but cannot fly from the present; we may wish for other magistrates, but we must, notwithstanding, obey those we have; and, peradventure, 'tis more laudable to obey the bad than the good. So long as the image of the ancient and received laws of this monarchy shall shine in any corner of the kingdom, there will I be. If they unfortunately happen to thwart and contradict one another, so as to produce two parts, of doubtful and difficult choice, I will willingly choose to withdraw and escape the tempest; in the meantime nature or the hazards of war may lend me a helping hand. Betwixt Caesar and Pompey, I should frankly have declared myself; but, as amongst the three robbers who came after,³⁰⁴ a man must have been necessitated either to hide himself, or have gone along with the current of the time, which I think one may fairly do when reason no longer guides:

³⁰²Capets, so called from their short capes, were the students of Montaigne College at Paris, and were held in great contempt.

³⁰³"If I see an exemplary and good man, I liken it to a two-headed boy, or a fish turned up by the plough, or a teeming mule." —Juvenal, xiii. 64.

³⁰⁴Octavius, Mark Antony, and Lepidus.

*"Quo diversus abis?"*³⁰⁵

This medley is a little from my theme; I go out of my way; but 'tis rather by licence than oversight; my fancies follow one another, but sometimes at a great distance, and look towards one another, but 'tis with an oblique glance. I have read a dialogue of Plato,³⁰⁶ of the like motley and fantastic composition, the beginning about love, and all the rest to the end about rhetoric; they fear not these variations, and have a marvellous grace in letting themselves be carried away at the pleasure of the wind, or at least to seem as if they were. The titles of my chapters do not always comprehend the whole matter; they often denote it by some mark only, as these others, Andria, Eunuchus; or these, Sylla, Cicero, Toyquatus. I love a poetic progress, by leaps and skips; 'tis an art, as Plato says, light, nimble, demoniac. There are pieces in Plutarch where he forgets his theme; where the proposition of his argument is only found by incidence, stuffed and half stifled in foreign matter. Observe his footsteps in the Daemon of Socrates. O God! how beautiful are these frolicsome sallies, those variations and digressions, and all the more when they seem most fortuitous and careless. 'Tis the indiligent reader who loses my subject, and not I; there will always be found some word or other in a corner that is to the purpose, though it lie very close. I ramble indiscreetly and tumultuously; my style and my wit wander at the same rate. He must fool it a little who would not be deemed wholly a fool, say both the precepts, and, still more, the examples of our masters. A thousand poets flag and languish after a prosaic manner; but the best old prose (and I strew it here up and down indifferently for verse) shines throughout with the lustre, vigour, and boldness of poetry, and not without some air of its fury. And certainly prose ought to have the pre-eminence in speaking. The poet, says Plato, seated upon the muses tripod, pours out with fury whatever comes into his mouth, like the pipe of a fountain, without considering and weighing it; and things escape him of various colours, of contrary substance, and with an irregular torrent. Plato himself is throughout poetical; and the old theology, as the learned tell us, is all poetry; and the first philosophy is the original language of the gods. I would have my matter distinguish itself; it sufficiently shows where it changes, where it concludes, where it begins, and where it rejoins, without interlacing it with words of connection introduced for the re-

³⁰⁵"Whither dost thou run wandering?" —Aeneid, v. 166.

³⁰⁶The Phaedrus.

lief of weak or negligent ears, and without explaining myself. Who is he that had not rather not be read at all than after a drowsy or cursory manner?

*"Nihil est tam utile, quod intransitu prosit."*³⁰⁷

If to take books in hand were to learn them: to look upon them were to consider them: and to run these slightly over were to grasp them, I were then to blame to make myself out so ignorant as I say I am. Seeing I cannot fix the attention of my reader by the weight of what I write, 'manco male', if I should chance to do it by my intricacies. "Nay, but he will afterwards repent that he ever perplexed himself about it." 'Tis very true, but he will yet be there perplexed. And, besides, there are some humours in which comprehension produces disdain; who will think better of me for not understanding what I say, and will conclude the depth of my sense by its obscurity; which, to speak in good sooth, I mortally hate, and would avoid it if I could. Aristotle boasts somewhere in his writings that he affected it: a vicious affectation. The frequent breaks into chapters that I made my method in the beginning of my book, having since seemed to me to dissolve the attention before it was raised, as making it disdain to settle itself to so little, I, upon that account, have made them longer, such as require proposition and assigned leisure. In such an employment, to whom you will not give an hour you give nothing; and you do nothing for him for whom you only do it whilst you are doing something else. To which may be added that I have, peradventure, some particular obligation to speak only by halves, to speak confusedly and discordantly. I am therefore angry at this trouble-feast reason, and its extravagant projects that worry one's life, and its opinions, so fine and subtle, though they be all true, I think too dear bought and too inconvenient. On the contrary, I make it my business to bring vanity itself in repute, and folly too, if it produce me any pleasure; and let myself follow my own natural inclinations, without carrying too strict a hand upon them.

I have seen elsewhere houses in ruins, and statues both of gods and men: these are men still. 'Tis all true; and yet, for all that, I cannot so often revisit the tomb of that so great and so puissant city,³⁰⁸ that I do not admire and reverence it. The care of the dead is recommended to us; now, I have been bred up from my infancy with these dead; I

³⁰⁷"Nothing is so useful as that which is cursorily so." —Seneca, Ep., 2.

³⁰⁸Rome

had knowledge of the affairs of Rome long before I had any of those of my own house; I knew the Capitol and its plan before I knew the Louvre, and the Tiber before I knew the Seine. The qualities and fortunes of Lucullus, Metellus, and Scipio have ever run more in my head than those of any of my own country; they are all dead; so is my father as absolutely dead as they, and is removed as far from me and life in eighteen years as they are in sixteen hundred: whose memory, nevertheless, friendship and society, I do not cease to embrace and utilise with a perfect and lively union. Nay, of my own inclination, I pay more service to the dead; they can no longer help themselves, and therefore, methinks, the more require my assistance: 'tis there that gratitude appears in its full lustre. The benefit is not so generously bestowed, where there is retrogradation and reflection. Arcesilaus, going to visit Ctesibius, who was sick, and finding him in a very poor condition, very finely conveyed some money under his pillow, and, by concealing it from him, acquitted him, moreover, from the acknowledgment due to such a benefit. Such as have merited from me friendship and gratitude have never lost these by being no more; I have better and more carefully paid them when gone and ignorant of what I did; I speak most affectionately of my friends when they can no longer know it. I have had a hundred quarrels in defending Pompey and for the cause of Brutus; this acquaintance yet continues betwixt us; we have no other hold even on present things but by fancy. Finding myself of no use to this age, I throw myself back upon that other, and am so enamoured of it, that the free, just, and flourishing state of that ancient Rome (for I neither love it in its birth nor its old age) interests and impassionates me; and therefore I cannot so often revisit the sites of their streets and houses, and those ruins profound even to the Antipodes, that I am not interested in them. Is it by nature, or through error of fancy, that the sight of places which we know to have been frequented and inhabited by persons whose memories are recommended in story, moves us in some sort more than to hear a recital of their acts or to read their writings?

*“Tanta vis admonitionis inest in locis...
Et id quidem in hac urbe infinitum; quacumque enim ingredimur, in aliquam historiam vestigium ponimus.”*³⁰⁹

It pleases me to consider their face, bearing, and vestments: I pro-

³⁰⁹“So great a power of reminiscence resides in places; and that truly in this city infinite, for which way soever we go, we find the traces of some story.” —Cicero, *De Fin.*, v. I, 2.

nounce those great names betwixt my teeth, and make them ring in my ears:

*"Ego illos veneror, et tantis nominibus semper assurgo."*³¹⁰

Of things that are in some part great and admirable, I admire even the common parts: I could wish to see them in familiar relations, walk, and sup. It were ingratitude to contemn the relics and images of so many worthy and valiant men as I have seen live and die, and who, by their example, give us so many good instructions, knew we how to follow them.

And, moreover, this very Rome that we now see, deserves to be beloved, so long and by so many titles allied to our crown; the only common and universal city; the sovereign magistrate that commands there is equally acknowledged elsewhere 'tis the metropolitan city of all the Christian nations the Spaniard and Frenchman is there at home: to be a prince of that state, there needs no more but to be of Christendom wheresoever. There is no place upon earth that heaven has embraced with such an influence and constancy of favour; her very ruins are grand and glorious,

*"Laudandis pretiosior ruinis."*³¹¹

she yet in her very tomb retains the marks and images of empire:

*"Ut palam sit, uno in loco gaudentis opus esse naturæ."*³¹²

Some would blame and be angry at themselves to perceive themselves tickled with so vain a pleasure our humours are never too vain that are pleasant let them be what they may, if they constantly content a man of common understanding, I could not have the heart to blame him.

I am very much obliged to Fortune, in that, to this very hour, she has offered me no outrage beyond what I was well able to bear. Is it not her custom to let those live in quiet by whom she is not importuned?

³¹⁰"I reverence them, and always rise to so great names." –Seneca, Ep., 64.

³¹¹"More precious from her glorious ruins." –Sidonius Apollinaris, Carm., xxiii.; Narba, v. 62.

³¹²"That it may be manifest that there is in one place the work of rejoicing nature." –Pliny, Nat. Hist., iii. 5.

*“Quanto quisque sibi plum negaverit,
A diis plum feret: nil cupientium
Nudus castra peto...
Multa petentibus
Desunt multa.”*³¹³

If she continue her favour, she will dismiss me very well satisfied:

*“Nihil supra
Deos lacesso.”*³¹⁴

But beware a shock: there are a thousand who perish in the port. I easily comfort myself for what shall here happen when I shall be gone, present things trouble me enough:

*“Fortunae caetera mando.”*³¹⁵

Besides, I have not that strong obligation that they say ties men to the future, by the issue that succeeds to their name and honour; and per-adventure, ought less to covet them, if they are to be so much desired. I am but too much tied to the world, and to this life, of myself: I am content to be in Fortune’s power by circumstances properly necessary to my being, without otherwise enlarging her jurisdiction over me; and have never thought that to be without children was a defect that ought to render life less complete or less contented: a sterile vocation has its conveniences too. Children are of the number of things that are not so much to be desired, especially now that it would be so hard to make them good:

*“Bona jam nec nasci licet, ita corrupta Bunt semina;”*³¹⁶

and yet they are justly to be lamented by such as lose them when they have them.

³¹³“The more each man denies himself, the more the gods give him. Poor as I am, I seek the company of those who ask nothing; they who desire much will be deficient in much.” –Horace, Od., iii. 16,21,42.

³¹⁴“I trouble the gods no farther.” –Horace, Od., ii. 18, 11.

³¹⁵“I leave the rest to fortune.” –Ovid, Metam., ii. 140.

³¹⁶“Nothing good can be born now, the seed is so corrupt.” –Tertullian, De Pudicitia.

He who left me my house in charge, foretold that I was like to ruin it, considering my humour so little inclined to look after household affairs. But he was mistaken; for I am in the same condition now as when I first entered into it, or rather somewhat better; and yet without office or any place of profit.

As to the rest, if Fortune has never done me any violent or extraordinary injury, neither has she done me any particular favour; whatever we derive from her bounty, was there above a hundred years before my time: I have, as to my own particular, no essential and solid good, that I stand indebted for to her liberality. She has, indeed, done me some airy favours, honorary and titular favours, without substance, and those in truth she has not granted, but offered me, who, God knows, am all material, and who take nothing but what is real, and indeed massive too, for current pay: and who, if I durst confess so much, should not think avarice much less excusable than ambition: nor pain less to be avoided than shame; nor health less to be coveted than learning, or riches than nobility.

Amongst those empty favours of hers, there is none that so much pleases vain humour natural to my country, as an authentic bull of a Roman burgeship, that was granted me when I was last there, glorious in seals and gilded letters, and granted with all gracious liberality. And because 'tis couched in a mixt style, more or less favourable, and that I could have been glad to have seen a copy of it before it had passed the seal.

Being before burges of no city at all, I am glad to be created one of the most noble that ever was or ever shall be. If other men would consider themselves at the rate I do, they would, as I do, discover themselves to be full of inanity and foppery; to rid myself of it, I cannot, without making myself away. We are all steeped in it, as well one as another; but they who are not aware on't, have somewhat the better bargain; and yet I know not whether they have or no.

This opinion and common usage to observe others more than ourselves has very much relieved us that way: 'tis a very displeasing object: we can there see nothing but misery and vanity: nature, that we may not be dejected with the sight of our own deformities, has wisely thrust the action of seeing outward. We go forward with the current, but to turn back towards ourselves is a painful motion; so is the sea moved and troubled when the waves rush against one another. Observe, says every one, the motions of the heavens, of public affairs; observe the quarrel of such a person, take notice of such a one's pulse, of

such another's last will and testament; in sum, be always looking high or low, on one side, before or behind you. It was a paradoxical command anciently given us by that god of Delphos: "Look into yourself; discover yourself; keep close to yourself; call back your mind and will, that elsewhere consume themselves into yourself; you run out, you spill yourself; carry a more steady hand: men betray you, men spill you, men steal you from yourself. Dost thou not see that this world we live in keeps all its sight confined within, and its eyes open to contemplate itself? 'Tis always vanity for thee, both within and without; but 'tis less vanity when less extended. Excepting thee, O man, said that god, everything studies itself first, and has bounds to its labours and desires, according to its need. There is nothing so empty and necessitous as thou, who embracest the universe; thou art the investigator without knowledge, the magistrate without jurisdiction, and, after all, the fool of the farce."

CHAPTER X

OF MANAGING THE WILL

F^EW things, in comparison of what commonly affect other men, move, or, to say better, possess me: for 'tis but reason they should concern a man, provided they do not possess him. I am very solicitous, both by study and argument, to enlarge this privilege of insensibility, which is in me naturally raised to a pretty degree, so that consequently I espouse and am very much moved with very few things. I have a clear sight enough, but I fix it upon very few objects; I have a sense delicate and tender enough; but an apprehension and application hard and negligent. I am very unwilling to engage myself; as much as in me lies, I employ myself wholly on myself, and even in that subject should rather choose to curb and restrain my affection from plunging itself over head and ears into it, it being a subject that I possess at the mercy of others, and over which fortune has more right than I; so that even as to health, which I so much value, 'tis all the more necessary for me not so passionately to covet and heed it, than to find diseases so insupportable. A man ought to moderate himself betwixt the hatred of pain and the love of pleasure: and Plato sets down a middle path of life betwixt the two. But against such affections as wholly carry me away from myself and fix me elsewhere, against those, I say, I oppose myself with my utmost power. 'Tis my opinion that a man should lend himself to others, and only give himself to himself. Were my will easy to lend itself out and to be swayed, I should not stick there; I am too tender both by nature and use:

*"Fugax rerum, securaque in otia natus."*³¹⁷

³¹⁷"Avoiding affairs and born to secure ease." —Ovid, *De Trist.*, iii. 2, 9.

Hot and obstinate disputes, wherein my adversary would at last have the better, the issue that would render my heat and obstinacy disgraceful would peradventure vex me to the last degree. Should I set myself to it at the rate that others do, my soul would never have the force to bear the emotion and alarms of those who grasp at so much; it would immediately be disordered by this inward agitation. If, sometimes, I have been put upon the management of other men's affairs, I have promised to take them in hand, but not into my lungs and liver; to take them upon me, not to incorporate them; to take pains, yes: to be impassioned about it, by no means; I have a care of them, but I will not sit upon them. I have enough to do to order and govern the domestic throng of those that I have in my own veins and bowels, without introducing a crowd of other men's affairs; and am sufficiently concerned about my own proper and natural business, without meddling with the concerns of others. Such as know how much they owe to themselves, and how many offices they are bound to of their own, find that nature has cut them out work enough of their own to keep them from being idle. "Thou hast business enough at home: look to that."

Men let themselves out to hire; their faculties are not for themselves, but for those to whom they have enslaved themselves; 'tis their tenants occupy them, not themselves. This common humour pleases not me. We must be thrifty of the liberty of our souls, and never let it out but upon just occasions, which are very few, if we judge aright. Do but observe such as have accustomed themselves to be at every one's call: they do it indifferently upon all, as well little as great, occasions; in that which nothing concerns them; as much as in what imports them most. They thrust themselves in indifferently wherever there is work to do and obligation, and are without life when not in tumultuous bustle:

*"In negotiis sunt, negotii cause,"*³¹⁸

It is not so much that they will go, as it is that they cannot stand still: like a rolling stone that cannot stop till it can go no further. Occupation, with a certain sort of men, is a mark of understanding and dignity: their souls seek repose in agitation, as children do by being rocked in a cradle; they may pronounce themselves as serviceable to their friends, as they are troublesome to themselves. No one distributes his money to others, but every one distributes his time and his life: there is nothing

³¹⁸"They are in business for business' sake." —Seneca, Ep., 22.

of which we are so prodigal as of these two things, of which to be thrifty would be both commendable and useful. I am of a quite contrary humour; I look to myself, and commonly covet with no great ardour what I do desire, and desire little; and I employ and busy myself at the same rate, rarely and temperately. Whatever they take in hand, they do it with their utmost will and vehemence. There are so many dangerous steps, that, for the more safety, we must a little lightly and superficially glide over the world, and not rush through it. Pleasure itself is painful in profundity:

*“Incedis per ignes,
Suppositos cineri doloso.”*³¹⁹

The Parliament of Bordeaux chose me mayor of their city at a time when I was at a distance from France,³²⁰ and still more remote from any such thought. I entreated to be excused, but I was told by my friends that I had committed an error in so doing, and the greater because the king had, moreover, interposed his command in that affair. ‘Tis an office that ought to be looked upon so much more honourable, as it has no other salary nor advantage than the bare honour of its execution. It continues two years, but may be extended by a second election, which very rarely happens; it was to me, and had never been so but twice before: some years ago to Monsieur de Lansac, and lately to Monsieur de Biron, Marshal of France, in whose place I succeeded; and, I left mine to Monsieur de Matignon, Marshal of France also: proud of so noble a fraternity—

*“Uterque bonus pacis bellique minister.”*³²¹

Fortune would have a hand in my promotion, by this particular circumstance which she put in of her own, not altogether vain; for Alexander disdained the ambassadors of Corinth, who came to offer him a burgess-ship of their city; but when they proceeded to lay before him that Bacchus and Hercules were also in the register, he graciously thanked them.

At my arrival, I faithfully and conscientiously represented myself to them for such as I find myself to be—a man without memory, without

³¹⁹“You tread on fire, hidden under deceitful ashes.” —Horace, Od., ii. i, 7.

³²⁰At Bagno Della Villa, near Lucca, September 1581

³²¹“Either one a good minister in peace and war.” —Aeneid, xi. 658.

vigilance, without experience, and without vigour; but withal, without hatred, without ambition, without avarice, and without violence; that they might be informed of my qualities, and know what they were to expect from my service. And whereas the knowledge they had had of my late father, and the honour they had for his memory, had alone incited them to confer this favour upon me, I plainly told them that I should be very sorry anything should make so great an impression upon me as their affairs and the concerns of their city had made upon him, whilst he held the government to which they had preferred me. I remembered, when a boy, to have seen him in his old age cruelly tormented with these public affairs, neglecting the soft repose of his own house, to which the declension of his age had reduced him for several years before, the management of his own affairs, and his health; and certainly despising his own life, which was in great danger of being lost, by being engaged in long and painful journeys on their behalf. Such was he; and this humour of his proceeded from a marvellous good nature; never was there a more charitable and popular soul. Yet this proceeding which I commend in others, I do not love to follow myself, and am not without excuse.

He had learned that a man must forget himself for his neighbour, and that the particular was of no manner of consideration in comparison with the general. Most of the rules and precepts of the world run this way; to drive us out of ourselves into the street for the benefit of public society; they thought to do a great feat to divert and remove us from ourselves, assuming we were but too much fixed there, and by a too natural inclination; and have said all they could to that purpose: for 'tis no new thing for the sages to preach things as they serve, not as they are. Truth has its obstructions, inconveniences, and incompatibilities with us; we must often deceive that we may not deceive ourselves; and shut our eyes and our understandings to redress and amend them:

*"Imperiti enim judicant, et qui frequenter in hoc ipsum fallendi sunt, ne errent."*³²²

When they order us to love three, four, or fifty degrees of things above ourselves, they do like archers, who, to hit the white, take their aim a great deal higher than the butt; to make a crooked stick straight, we bend it the contrary way.

³²²"For the ignorant judge, and therefore are oft to be deceived, less they should err." — Quintil., Inst. Orat., xi. 17.

I believe that in the Temple of Pallas, as we see in all other religions, there were apparent mysteries to be exposed to the people; and others, more secret and high, that were only to be shown to such as were professed; 'tis likely that in these the true point of friendship that every one owes to himself is to be found; not a false friendship, that makes us embrace glory, knowledge, riches, and the like, with a principal and immoderate affection, as members of our being; nor an indiscreet and effeminate friendship, wherein it happens, as with ivy, that it decays and ruins the walls it embraces; but a sound and regular friendship, equally useful and pleasant. He who knows the duties of this friendship and practises them is truly of the cabinet of the Muses, and has attained to the height of human wisdom and of our happiness, such an one, exactly knowing what he owes to himself, will on his part find that he ought to apply to himself the use of the world and of other men; and to do this, to contribute to public society the duties and offices appertaining to him. He who does not in some sort live for others, does not live much for himself:

*"Qui sibi amicus est, scito hunc amicum omnibus esse."*³²³

The principal charge we have is, to every one his own conduct; and 'tis for this only that we here are. As he who should forget to live a virtuous and holy life, and should think he acquitted himself of his duty in instructing and training others up to it, would be a fool; even so he who abandons his own particular healthful and pleasant living to serve others therewith, takes, in my opinion, a wrong and unnatural course.

I would not that men should refuse, in the employments they take upon them, their attention, pains, eloquence, sweat, and blood if need be:

*"Non ipse pro caris amicis
Aut patria, timidus perire:"*³²⁴

but 'tis only borrowed, and accidentally; his mind being always in repose and in health; not without action, but without vexation, without

³²³"He who is his own friend, is a friend to everybody else." —Seneca, Ep., 6.

³²⁴"Himself not afraid to die for beloved friends, or for his country." —Horace, Od., iv. 9, 51.

passion. To be simply acting costs him so little, that he acts even sleeping; but it must be set on going with discretion; for the body receives the offices imposed upon it just according to what they are; the mind often extends and makes them heavier at its own expense, giving them what measure it pleases. Men perform like things with several sorts of endeavour, and different contention of will; the one does well enough without the other; for how many people hazard themselves every day in war without any concern which way it goes; and thrust themselves into the dangers of battles, the loss of which will not break their next night's sleep? and such a man may be at home, out of the danger which he durst not have looked upon, who is more passionately concerned for the issue of this war, and whose soul is more anxious about events than the soldier who therein stakes his blood and his life. I could have engaged myself in public employments without quitting my own matters a nail's breadth, and have given myself to others without abandoning myself. This sharpness and violence of desires more hinder than they advance the execution of what we undertake; fill us with impatience against slow or contrary events, and with heat and suspicion against those with whom we have to do. We never carry on that thing well by which we are prepossessed and led:

*"Male cuncta ministrat Impetus."*³²⁵

He who therein employs only his judgment and address proceeds more cheerfully: he counterfeits, he gives way, he defers quite at his ease, according to the necessities of occasions; he fails in his attempt without trouble and affliction, ready and entire for a new enterprise; he always marches with the bridle in his hand. In him who is intoxicated with this violent and tyrannical intention, we discover, of necessity, much imprudence and injustice; the impetuosity of his desire carries him away; these are rash motions, and, if fortune do not very much assist, of very little fruit. Philosophy directs that, in the revenge of injuries received, we should strip ourselves of choler; not that the chastisement should be less, but, on the contrary, that the revenge may be the better and more heavily laid on, which, it conceives, will be by this impetuosity hindered. For anger not only disturbs, but, of itself, also wearies the arms of those who chastise; this fire benumbs and wastes their force; as in precipitation, "*festinatio tarda est,*"—haste trips up its own heels, fetters, and stops itself:

³²⁵"Impulse manages all things ill." —Status, *Thebaid*, x. 704.

*"Ipsa se velocitas implicat."*³²⁶

For example, according to what I commonly see, avarice has no greater impediment than itself; the more bent and vigorous it is, the less it rakes together, and commonly sooner grows rich when disguised in a visor of liberality.

A very excellent gentleman, and a friend of mine, ran a risk of impairing his faculties by a too passionate attention and affection to the affairs of a certain prince his master;³²⁷ which master has thus portrayed himself to me; "that he foresees the weight of accidents as well as another, but that in those for which there is no remedy, he presently resolves upon suffering; in others, having taken all the necessary precautions which by the vivacity of his understanding he can presently do, he quietly awaits what may follow." And, in truth, I have accordingly seen him maintain a great indifferency and liberty of actions and serenity of countenance in very great and difficult affairs: I find him much greater, and of greater capacity in adverse than in prosperous fortune; his defeats are to him more glorious than his victories, and his mourning than his triumph.

Consider, that even in vain and frivolous actions, as at chess, tennis, and the like, this eager and ardent engaging with an impetuous desire, immediately throws the mind and members into indiscretion and disorder: a man astounds and hinders himself; he who carries himself more moderately, both towards gain and loss, has always his wits about him; the less peevish and passionate he is at play, he plays much more advantageously and surely.

As to the rest, we hinder the mind's grasp and hold, in giving it so many things to seize upon; some things we should only offer to it; tie it to others, and with others incorporate it. It can feel and discern all things, but ought to feed upon nothing but itself; and should be instructed in what properly concerns itself, and that is properly of its own having and substance. The laws of nature teach us what justly we need. After the sages have told us that no one is indigent according to nature, and that every one is so according to opinion, they very subtly distinguish betwixt the desires that proceed from her, and those that proceed from the disorder of our own fancy: those of which we can see the end are hers; those that fly before us, and of which we can see no

³²⁶—Seneca, Ep. 44

³²⁷Probably the King of Navarre, afterward Henry IV.

end, are our own: the poverty of goods is easily cured; the poverty of the soul is irreparable:

*“Nam si, quod satis est homini, id satis esse potesset
Hoc sat erat: nunc, quum hoc non est, qui credimus porro
Divitias ullas animum mi explere potesse?”*³²⁸

Socrates, seeing a great quantity of riches, jewels, and furniture carried in pomp through his city: “How many things,” said he, “I do not desire!”³²⁹ Metrodorus lived on twelve ounces a day, Epicurus upon less; Metrocles slept in winter abroad amongst sheep, in summer in the cloisters of churches:

*“Sufficit ad id natura, quod poscit.”*³³⁰

Cleanthes lived by the labour of his own hands, and boasted that Cleanthes, if he would, could yet maintain another Cleanthes.

If that which nature exactly and originally requires of us for the conservation of our being be too little (as in truth what it is, and how good cheap life may be maintained, cannot be better expressed than by this consideration, that it is so little that by its littleness it escapes the gripe and shock of fortune), let us allow ourselves a little more; let us call every one of our habits and conditions nature; let us rate and treat ourselves by this measure; let us stretch our appurtenances and accounts so far; for so far, I fancy, we have some excuse. Custom is a second nature, and no less powerful. What is wanting to my custom, I reckon is wanting to me; and I should be almost as well content that they took away my life as cut me short in the way wherein I have so long lived. I am no longer in condition for any great change, nor to put myself into a new and unwonted course, not even to augmentation. ‘Tis past the time for me to become other than what I am; and as I should complain of any great good hap that should now befall me, that it came not in time to be enjoyed:

*“Quo mihi fortunas, si non conceditur uti?”*³³¹

³²⁸“For if what is for man enough, could be enough, it were enough; but since it is not so, how can I believe that any wealth can give my mind content.”—Lucilius apud Nonium Marcellinum, V. sec. 98.

³²⁹Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., V. 32.

³³⁰“Nature suffices for what he requires.” —Seneca, Ep., 90.

³³¹“What is the good fortune to me, if it is not granted to me to use it.” —Horace, Ep., i. 5, 12.

so should I complain of any inward acquisition. It were almost better never, than so late, to become an honest man, and well fit to live, when one has no longer to live. I, who am about to make my exit out of the world, would easily resign to any newcomer, who should desire it, all the prudence I am now acquiring in the world's commerce; after meat, mustard. I have no need of goods of which I can make no use; of what use is knowledge to him who has lost his head? 'Tis an injury and unkindness in fortune to tender us presents that will only inspire us with a just despite that we had them not in their due season. Guide me no more; I can no longer go. Of so many parts as make up a sufficiency, patience is the most sufficient. Give the capacity of an excellent treble to the chorister who has rotten lungs, and eloquence to a hermit exiled into the deserts of Arabia. There needs no art to help a fall; the end finds itself of itself at the conclusion of every affair. My world is at an end, my form expired; I am totally of the past, and am bound to authorise it, and to conform my outgoing to it. I will here declare, by way of example, that the Pope's late ten days' diminution³³² has taken me so aback that I cannot well reconcile myself to it; I belong to the years wherein we kept another kind of account. So ancient and so long a custom challenges my adherence to it, so that I am constrained to be somewhat heretical on that point incapable of any, though corrective, innovation. My imagination, in spite of my teeth, always pushes me ten days forward or backward, and is ever murmuring in my ears: "This rule concerns those who are to begin to be." If health itself, sweet as it is, returns to me by fits, 'tis rather to give me cause of regret than possession of it; I have no place left to keep it in. Time leaves me; without which nothing can be possessed. Oh, what little account should I make of those great elective dignities that I see in such esteem in the world, that are never conferred but upon men who are taking leave of it; wherein they do not so much regard how well the man will discharge his trust, as how short his administration will be: from the very entry they look at the exit. In short, I am about finishing this man, and not rebuilding another. By long use, this form is in me turned into substance, and fortune into nature.

I say, therefore, that every one of us feeble creatures is excusable in thinking that to be his own which is comprised under this measure; but withal, beyond these limits, 'tis nothing but confusion; 'tis the largest extent we can grant to our own claims. The more we amplify our need

³³²Gregory XIII., in 1582, reformed the Calendar, and, in consequence, in France they all at once passed from the 9th to the 20th December.

and our possession, so much the more do we expose ourselves to the blows of Fortune and adversities. The career of our desires ought to be circumscribed and restrained to a short limit of the nearest and most contiguous commodities; and their course ought, moreover, to be performed not in a right line, that ends elsewhere, but in a circle, of which the two points, by a short wheel, meet and terminate in ourselves. Actions that are carried on without this reflection—a near and essential reflection, I mean—such as those of ambitious and avaricious men, and so many more as run point-blank, and to whose career always carries them before themselves, such actions, I say; are erroneous and sickly.

Most of our business is farce:

*“Mundus universus exercet histrioniam.”*³³³

We must play our part properly, but withal as a part of a borrowed personage; we must not make real essence of a mask and outward appearance; nor of a strange person, our own; we cannot distinguish the skin from the shirt: ‘tis enough to meal the face, without mealing the breast. I see some who transform and transubstantiate themselves into as many new shapes and new beings as they undertake new employments; and who strut and fume even to the heart and liver, and carry their state along with them even to the close-stool: I cannot make them distinguish the salutations made to themselves from those made to their commission, their train, or their mule:

*“Tantum se fortunæ permittunt, etiam ut naturam dediscant.”*³³⁴

They swell and puff up their souls, and their natural way of speaking, according to the height of their magisterial place. The Mayor of Bordeaux and Montaigne have ever been two by very manifest separation. Because one is an advocate or a financier, he must not ignore the knavery there is in such callings; an honest man is not accountable for the vice or absurdity of his employment, and ought not on that account refuse to take the calling upon him: ‘tis the usage of his country, and there is money to be got by it; a man must live by the world; and make

³³³Petronius Arbiter, iii. 8.

³³⁴“They so much give themselves up to fortune, as even to unlearn nature.” —Quintus Curtius, iii. 2.

his best of it, such as it is. But the judgment of an emperor ought to be above his empire, and see and consider it as a foreign accident; and he ought to know how to enjoy himself apart from it, and to communicate himself as James and Peter, to himself, at all events.

I cannot engage myself so deep and so entire; when my will gives me to anything, 'tis not with so violent an obligation that my judgment is infected with it. In the present broils of this kingdom, my own interest has not made me blind to the laudable qualities of our adversaries, nor to those that are reproachable in those men of our party. Others adore all of their own side; for my part, I do not so much as excuse most things in those of mine: a good work has never the worst grace with me for being made against me. The knot of the controversy excepted, I have always kept myself in equanimity and pure indifference:

*“Neque extra necessitates belli praecipuum odium gero;”*³³⁵

for which I am pleased with myself; and the more because I see others commonly fail in the contrary direction. Such as extend their anger and hatred beyond the dispute in question, as most men do, show that they spring from some other occasion and private cause; like one who, being cured of an ulcer, has yet a fever remaining, by which it appears that the ulcer had another more concealed beginning. The reason is that they are not concerned in the common cause, because it is wounding to the state and general interest; but are only nettled by reason of their particular concern. This is why they are so especially animated, and to a degree so far beyond justice and public reason:

*“Non tam omnia universi, quam ea, quae ad quemque pertinent, singuli carcebant.”*³³⁶

I would have the advantage on our side; but if it be not, I shall not run mad. I am heartily for the right party; but I do not want to be taken notice of as an especial enemy to others, and beyond the general quarrel. I marvellously challenge this vicious form of opinion: “He is of the League because he admires the graciousness of Monsieur de Guise; he is astonished at the King of Navarre’s energy, therefore he

³³⁵“Nor bear particular hatred beyond the necessities of war.”

³³⁶“Every one was not so much angry against things in general, as against those that particularly concern himself.” –Livy, xxxiv. 36.

is a Huguenot; he finds this to say of the manners of the king, he is therefore seditious in his heart." And I did not grant to the magistrate himself that he did well in condemning a book because it had placed a heretic³³⁷ amongst the best poets of the time. Shall we not dare to say of a thief that he has a handsome leg? If a woman be a strumpet, must it needs follow that she has a foul smell? Did they in the wisest ages revoke the proud title of Capitolinus they had before conferred on Marcus Manlius as conservator of religion and the public liberty, and stifle the memory of his liberality, his feats of arms, and military recompenses granted to his valour, because he, afterwards aspired to the sovereignty, to the prejudice of the laws of his country? If we take a hatred against an advocate, he will not be allowed the next day to be eloquent. I have elsewhere spoken of the zeal that pushed on worthy men to the like faults. For my part, I can say, "Such an one does this thing ill, and another thing virtuously and well." So in the prognostication or sinister events of affairs they would have every one in his party blind or a blockhead, and that our persuasion and judgment should subserve not truth, but to the project of our desires. I should rather incline towards the other extreme; so much I fear being suborned by my desire; to which may be added that I am a little tenderly distrustful of things that I wish.

I have in my time seen wonders in the indiscreet and prodigious facility of people in suffering their hopes and belief to be led and governed, which way best pleased and served their leaders, despite a hundred mistakes one upon another, despite mere dreams and phantasms. I no more wonder at those who have been blinded and seduced by the fooleries of Apollonius and Mahomet. Their sense and understanding are absolutely taken away by their passion; their discretion has no more any other choice than that which smiles upon them and encourages their cause. I had principally observed this in the beginning of our intestine distempers; that other, which has sprung up since, in imitating, has surpassed it; by which I am satisfied that it is a quality inseparable from popular errors; after the first, that rolls, opinions drive on one another like waves with the wind: a man is not a member of the body, if it be in his power to forsake it, and if he do not roll the common way. But, doubtless, they wrong the just side when they go about to assist it with fraud; I have ever been against that practice: 'tis only fit to work upon weak heads; for the sound, there are surer and more honest ways to keep up their courage and to excuse adverse accidents.

³³⁷Theodore de Beza.

Heaven never saw a greater animosity than that betwixt Caesar and Pompey, nor ever shall; and yet I observe, methinks, in those brave souls, a great moderation towards one another: it was a jealousy of honour and command, which did not transport them to a furious and indiscreet hatred, and was without malignity and detraction: in their hottest exploits upon one another, I discover some remains of respect and good-will: and am therefore of opinion that, had, it been possible, each of them would rather have done his business without the ruin of the other than with it. Take notice how much otherwise matters went with Marius and Sylla.

We must not precipitate ourselves so headlong after our affections and interests. As, when I was young, I opposed myself to the progress of love which I perceived to advance too fast upon me, and had a care lest it should at last become so pleasing as to force, captivate, and wholly reduce me to its mercy: so I do the same upon all other occasions where my will is running on with too warm an appetite. I lean opposite to the side it inclines to; as I find it going to plunge and make itself drunk with its own wine; I evade nourishing its pleasure so far, that I cannot recover it without infinite loss. Souls that, through their own stupidity, only discern things by halves, have this happiness, that they smart less with hurtful things: 'tis a spiritual leprosy that has some show of health, and such a health as philosophy does not altogether condemn; but yet we have no reason to call it wisdom, as we often do. And after this manner some one anciently mocked Diogenes, who, in the depth of winter and quite naked, went embracing an image of snow for a trial of his endurance: the other seeing him in this position, "Art thou now very cold?" said he. "Not at all," replied Diogenes. "Why, then," pursued the other, "what difficult and exemplary thing dost thou think thou doest in embracing that snow?" To take a true measure of constancy, one must necessarily know what the suffering is.

But souls that are to meet with adverse events and the injuries of fortune, in their depth and sharpness, that are to weigh and taste them according to their natural weight and bitterness, let such show their skill in avoiding the causes and diverting the blow. What did King Cotys do? He paid liberally for the rich and beautiful vessel that had been presented to him, but, seeing it was exceedingly brittle, he immediately broke it betimes, to prevent so easy a matter of displeasure against his servants. In like manner, I have willingly avoided all confusion in my affairs, and never coveted to have my estate contiguous to those of my

relations, and such with whom I coveted a strict friendship; for thence matter of unkindness and falling out often proceeds. I formerly loved hazardous games of cards and dice; but have long since left them off, only for this reason that, with whatever good air I carried my losses, I could not help feeling vexed within. A man of honour, who ought to be touchily sensible of the lie or of an insult, and who is not to take a scurvy excuse for satisfaction, should avoid occasions of dispute. I shun melancholy, crabbed men, as I would the plague; and in matters I cannot talk of without emotion and concern I never meddle, if not compelled by my duty:

*“Melius non incipient, quam desinent.”*³³⁸

The surest way, therefore, is to prepare one’s self beforehand for occasions.

I know very well that some wise men have taken another way, and have not feared to grapple and engage to the utmost upon several subjects these are confident of their own strength, under which they protect themselves in all ill successes, making their patience wrestle and contend with disaster:

*“Velut rupes, vastum quae prodit in aequor,
Obvia ventorum furiis, expostaque ponto,
Vim cunctam atque minas perfert coelique marisque;
Ipsa immota manens.”*³³⁹

Let us not attempt these examples; we shall never come up to them. They set themselves resolutely, and without agitation, to behold the ruin of their country, which possessed and commanded all their will: this is too much, and too hard a task for our commoner souls. Cato gave up the noblest life that ever was upon this account; we meaner spirits must fly from the storm as far as we can; we must provide for sentiment, and not for patience, and evade the blows we cannot meet. Zeno, seeing Chremonides, a young man whom he loved, draw near to sit down by him, suddenly started up; and Cleanthes demanding of him the reason why he did so, “I hear,” said he, “that physicians

³³⁸“They had better never to begin than to have to desist.” –Seneca, Ep., 72.

³³⁹“As a rock, which projects into the vast ocean, exposed to the furious winds and the raging sea, defies the force and menaces of sky and sea, itself unshaken.” –Virgil, Aeneid, x. 693.

especially order repose, and forbid emotion in all tumours." Socrates does not say: "Do not surrender to the charms of beauty; stand your ground, and do your utmost to oppose it." "Fly it," says he; "shun the fight and encounter of it, as of a powerful poison that darts and wounds at a distance." And his good disciple, feigning or reciting, but, in my opinion, rather reciting than feigning, the rare perfections of the great Cyrus, makes him distrustful of his own strength to resist the charms of the divine beauty of that illustrious Panthea, his captive, and committing the visiting and keeping her to another, who could not have so much liberty as himself. And the Holy Ghost in like manner:

*"Ne nos inducas in tentationem."*³⁴⁰

We do not pray that our reason may not be combated and overcome by concupiscence, but that it should not be so much as tried by it; that we should not be brought into a state wherein we are so much as to suffer the approaches, solicitations, and temptations of sin: and we beg of Almighty God to keep our consciences quiet, fully and perfectly delivered from all commerce of evil.

Such as say that they have reason for their revenging passion, or any other sort of troublesome agitation of mind, often say true, as things now are, but not as they were: they speak to us when the causes of their error are by themselves nourished and advanced; but look backward—recall these causes to their beginning—and there you will put them to a nonplus. Will they have their faults less, for being of longer continuance; and that of an unjust beginning, the sequel can be just? Whoever shall desire the good of his country, as I do, without fretting or pining himself, will be troubled, but will not swoon to see it threatening either its own ruin, or a no less ruinous continuance; poor vessel, that the waves, the winds, and the pilot toss and steer to so contrary designs!

*"In tam diversa magister
Ventus et unda trahunt."*

He who does not gape after the favour of princes, as after a thing he cannot live without, does not much concern himself at the coldness of their reception and countenance, nor at the inconstancy of their wills. He who does not brood over his children or his honours with a slavish

³⁴⁰"Lead us not into temptation." —St. Matthew, vi. 13.

propension, ceases not to live commodiously enough after their loss. He who does good principally for his own satisfaction will not be much troubled to see men judge of his actions contrary to his merit. A quarter of an ounce of patience will provide sufficiently against such inconveniences. I find ease in this receipt, redeeming myself in the beginning as good cheap as I can; and find that by this means I have escaped much trouble and many difficulties. With very little ado I stop the first sally of my emotions, and leave the subject that begins to be troublesome before it transports me. He who stops not the start will never be able to stop the course; he who cannot keep them out will never, get them out when they are once got in; and he who cannot arrive at the beginning will never arrive at the end of all. Nor will he bear the fall who cannot sustain the shock:

“Etenim ipsae se impellunt, ubi semel a ratione discessum est; ipsaque sibi imbecillitas indulget, in altumque provehitur imprudens, nec reperit locum consistendi.”³⁴¹

I am betimes sensible of the little breezes that begin to sing and whistle within, forerunners of the storm:

*“Ceum flamina prima
Cum deprensa fremunt sylvis et caeca volutant
Murmura, venturos nautis prodentia ventos.”³⁴²*

How often have I done myself a manifest injustice to avoid the hazard of having yet a worse done me by the judges, after an age of vexations, dirty and vile practices, more enemies to my nature than fire or the rack?

“Convenit a litibus, quantum licet, et nescio an paulo plus etiam quam licet, abhorrentem esse: est enim non modo liberale, paululum nonnunquam de suo jure decedere, sed interdum etiam fructuosum.”³⁴³

³⁴¹“For they throw themselves headlong when once they lose their reason; and infirmity so far indulges itself, and from want of prudence is carried out into deep water, nor finds a place to shelter it.” –Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., iv. 18.

³⁴²“As the breezes, pent in the woods, first send out dull murmurs, announcing the approach of winds to mariners.” –AEneid, x. 97.

³⁴³“A man should abhor lawsuits as much as he may, and I know not whether not something more; for ‘tis not only liberal, but sometimes also advantageous, too, a little to recede from one’s right. –”Cicero, De Offic., ii. 18.

Were we wise, we ought to rejoice and boast, as I one day heard a young gentleman of a good family very innocently do, that his mother had lost her cause, as if it had been a cough, a fever, or something very troublesome to keep. Even the favours that fortune might have given me through relationship or acquaintance with those who have sovereign authority in those affairs, I have very conscientiously and very carefully avoided employing them to the prejudice of others, and of advancing my pretensions above their true right. In fine, I have so much prevailed by my endeavours (and happily I may say it) that I am to this day a virgin from all suits in law; though I have had very fair offers made me, and with very just title, would I have hearkened to them, and a virgin from quarrels too. I have almost passed over a long life without any offence of moment, either active or passive, or without ever hearing a worse word than my own name: a rare favour of Heaven.

Our greatest agitations have ridiculous springs and causes: what ruin did our last Duke of Burgundy run into about a cartload of sheepskins! And was not the graving of a seal the first and principal cause of the greatest commotion that this machine of the world ever underwent?³⁴⁴ for Pompey and Caesar were but the offsets and continuation of the two others: and I have in my time seen the wisest heads in this kingdom assembled with great ceremony, and at the public expense, about treaties and agreements, of which the true decision, in the meantime, absolutely depended upon the ladies' cabinet council, and the inclination of some bit of a woman.

The poets very well understood this when they put all Greece and Asia to fire and sword about an apple. Look why that man hazards his life and honour upon the fortune of his rapier and dagger; let him acquaint you with the occasion of the quarrel; he cannot do it without blushing: the occasion is so idle and frivolous.

A little thing will engage you in it; but being once embarked, all the cords draw; great provisions are then required, more hard and more important. How much easier is it not to enter in than it is to get out? Now we should proceed contrary to the reed, which, at its first springing, produces a long and straight shoot, but afterwards, as if tired and out of breath, it runs into thick and frequent joints and knots, as so many pauses which demonstrate that it has no more its first vigour and firmness; 'twere better to begin gently and coldly, and to keep one's

³⁴⁴The civil war between Marius and Sylla; see Plutarch's *Life of Marius*, c. 3.

breath and vigorous efforts for the height and stress of the business. We guide affairs in their beginnings, and have them in our own power; but afterwards, when they are once at work, 'tis they that guide and govern us, and we are to follow them.

Yet do I not mean to say that this counsel has discharged me of all difficulty, and that I have not often had enough to do to curb and restrain my passions; they are not always to be governed according to the measure of occasions, and often have their entries very sharp and violent. But still good fruit and profit may thence be reaped; except for those who in well-doing are not satisfied with any benefit, if reputation be wanting; for, in truth, such an effect is not valued but by every one to himself; you are better contented, but not more esteemed, seeing you reformed yourself before you got into the whirl of the dance, or that the provocative matter was in sight. Yet not in this only, but in all other duties of life also, the way of those who aim at honour is very different from that they proceed by, who propose to themselves order and reason. I find some who rashly and furiously rush into the lists and cool in the course. As Plutarch says, that those who, through false shame, are soft and facile to grant whatever is desired of them, are afterwards as facile to break their word and to recant; so he who enters lightly into a quarrel is apt to go as lightly out of it. The same difficulty that keeps me from entering into it, would, when once hot and engaged in quarrel, incite me to maintain it with great obstinacy and resolution. 'Tis the tyranny of custom; when a man is once engaged; he must go through with it, or die. "Undertake coolly," said Bias, "but pursue with ardour." For want of prudence, men fall into want of courage, which is still more intolerable.

Most accommodations of the quarrels of these days of ours are shameful and false; we only seek to save appearances, and in the meantime betray and disavow our true intentions; we salve over the fact. We know very well how we said the thing, and in what sense we spoke it, and the company know it, and our friends whom we have wished to make sensible of our advantage, understand it well enough too: 'tis at the expense of our frankness and of the honour of our courage, that we disown our thoughts, and seek refuge in falsities, to make matters up. We give ourselves the lie, to excuse the lie we have given to another. You are not to consider if your word or action may admit of another interpretation; 'tis your own true and sincere interpretation, your real meaning in what you said or did, that you are thenceforward to maintain, whatever it cost you. Men speak to your virtue and conscience,

which are not things to be put under a mask; let us leave these pitiful ways and expedients to the jugglers of the law. The excuses and reparations that I see every day made and given to repair indiscretion, seem to me more scandalous than the indiscretion itself. It were better to affront your adversary a second time than to offend yourself by giving him so unmanly a satisfaction. You have braved him in your heat and anger, and you would flatter and appease him in your cooler and better sense; and by that means lay yourself lower and at his feet, whom before you pretended to overtop. I do not find anything a gentleman can say so vicious in him as unsaying what he has said is infamous, when to unsay it is authoritatively extracted from him; forasmuch as obstinacy is more excusable in a man of honour than pusillanimity. Passions are as easy for me to evade, as they are hard for me to moderate:

*"Exscinduntur facilius ammo, quam temperantur."*³⁴⁵

He who cannot attain the noble Stoical impassibility, let him secure himself in the bosom of this popular stolidity of mine; what they performed by virtue, I inure myself to do by temperament. The middle region harbours storms and tempests; the two extremes, of philosophers and peasants, concur in tranquillity and happiness:

*"Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,
Atque metus omnes et inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari!
Fortunatus et ille, Deos qui novit agrestes,
Panaque, Sylvanumque senem, Nymphasque sorores!"*³⁴⁶

The births of all things are weak and tender; and therefore we should have our eyes intent on beginnings; for as when, in its infancy, the danger is not perceived, so when it is grown up, the remedy is as little to be found. I had every day encountered a million of crosses, harder to digest in the progress of ambition, than it has been hard for me to curb the natural propension that inclined me to it:

*"Jure perhorru
Lath conspicuum tollere verticem."*³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵"They are more easily to be eradicated than governed."

³⁴⁶"Happy is he who could discover the causes of things, and place under his feet all fears and inexorable fate, and the sound of rapacious Acheron: he is blest who knows the country gods, and Pan, and old Sylvanus, and the sister nymphs." –Virgil, Georg., ii. 490.

³⁴⁷"I ever justly feared to raise my head too high." –Horace, Od.,iii. 16, 18.

All public actions are subject to uncertain and various interpretations; for too many heads judge of them. Some say of this civic employment of mine (and I am willing to say a word or two about it, not that it is worth so much, but to give an account of my manners in such things), that I have behaved myself in it as a man who is too supine and of a languid temperament; and they have some colour for what they say. I endeavoured to keep my mind and my thoughts in repose;

*“Cum semper natura, tum etiam aetate jam quietus;”*³⁴⁸

and if they sometimes lash out upon some rude and sensible impression, 'tis in truth without my advice. Yet from this natural heaviness of mine, men ought not to conclude a total inability in me (for want of care and want of sense are two very different things), and much less any unkindness or ingratitude towards that corporation who employed the utmost means they had in their power to oblige me, both before they knew me and after; and they did much more for me in choosing me anew than in conferring that honour upon me at first. I wish them all imaginable good; and assuredly had occasion been, there is nothing I would have spared for their service; I did for them as I would have done for myself. 'Tis a good, warlike, and generous people, but capable of obedience and discipline, and of whom the best use may be made, if well guided. They say also that my administration passed over without leaving any mark or trace. Good! They moreover accuse my cessation in a time when everybody almost was convicted of doing too much. I am impatient to be doing where my will spurs me on; but this itself is an enemy to perseverance. Let him who will make use of me according to my own way, employ me in affairs where vigour and liberty are required, where a direct, short, and, moreover, a hazardous conduct are necessary; I may do something; but if it must be long, subtle, laborious, artificial and intricate, he had better call in somebody else. All important offices are not necessarily difficult: I came prepared to do somewhat rougher work, had there been great occasion; for it is in my power to do something more than I do, or than I love to do. I did not, to my knowledge, omit anything that my duty really required. I easily forgot those offices that ambition mixes with duty and palliates with its title; these are they that, for the most part, fill the eyes and ears, and give men the most satisfaction; not the thing but the appearance contents them; if they hear no noise, they think men sleep. My

³⁴⁸“As being always quiet by nature, so also now by age.” —Cicero, *De Petit. Consul.*, c. 2.

humour is no friend to tumult; I could appease a commotion without commotion, and chastise a disorder without being myself disorderly; if I stand in need of anger and inflammation, I borrow it, and put it on. My manners are languid, rather faint than sharp. I do not condemn a magistrate who sleeps, provided the people under his charge sleep as well as he: the laws in that case sleep too. For my part, I commend a gliding, staid, and silent life:

*"Neque submissam et abjectam, neque se efferentem;"*³⁴⁹

my fortune will have it so. I am descended from a family that has lived without lustre or tumult, and, time out of mind, particularly ambitious of a character for probity.

Our people nowadays are so bred up to bustle and ostentation, that good nature, moderation, equability, constancy, and such like quiet and obscure qualities, are no more thought on or regarded. Rough bodies make themselves felt; the smooth are imperceptibly handled: sickness is felt, health little or not at all; no more than the oils that foment us, in comparison of the pains for which we are fomented. 'Tis acting for one's particular reputation and profit, not for the public good, to refer that to be done in the public squares which one may do in the council chamber; and to noon day what might have been done the night before; and to be jealous to do that himself which his colleague can do as well as he; so were some surgeons of Greece wont to perform their operations upon scaffolds in the sight of the people, to draw more practice and profit. They think that good rules cannot be understood but by the sound of trumpet. Ambition is not a vice of little people, nor of such modest means as ours. One said to Alexander: "Your father will leave you a great dominion, easy and pacific"; this youth was emulous of his father's victories and of the justice of his government; he would not have enjoyed the empire of the world in ease and peace. Alcibiades, in Plato, had rather die young, beautiful, rich, noble, and learned, and all this in full excellence, than to stop short of such condition; this disease is, peradventure, excusable in so strong and so full a soul. When wretched and dwarfish little souls cajole and deceive themselves, and think to spread their fame for having given right judgment in an affair, or maintained the discipline of the guard of a gate of their city, the more they think to exalt their heads the more they show their tails. This little well-doing has neither body nor life; it vanishes in the first mouth,

³⁴⁹"Neither subject and abject, nor obtrusive." —Cicero, *De Offic.*, i. 34

and goes no further than from one street to another. Talk of it by all means to your son or your servant, like that old fellow who, having no other auditor of his praises nor approver of his valour, boasted to his chambermaid, crying, "O Perrete, what a brave, clever man hast thou for thy master!" At the worst, talk of it to yourself, like a councillor of my acquaintance, who, having disgorged a whole cartful of law jargon with great heat and as great folly, coming out of the council chamber to make water, was heard very complacently to mutter betwixt his teeth:

*"Non nobis, domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam."*³⁵⁰

He who gets it of nobody else, let him pay himself out of his own purse.

Fame is not prostituted at so cheap a rate: rare and exemplary actions, to which it is due, would not endure the company of this prodigious crowd of petty daily performances. Marble may exalt your titles, as much as you please, for having repaired a rod of wall or cleansed a public sewer; but not men of sense. Renown does not follow all good deeds, if novelty and difficulty be not conjoined; nay, so much as mere esteem, according to the Stoics, is not due to every action that proceeds from virtue; nor will they allow him bare thanks who, out of temperance, abstains from an old blear-eyed crone. Those who have known the admirable qualities of Scipio Africanus, deny him the glory that Panaetius attributes to him, of being abstinent from gifts, as a glory not so much his as that of his age. We have pleasures suitable to our lot; let us not usurp those of grandeur: our own are more natural, and by so much more solid and sure, as they are lower. If not for that of conscience, yet at least for ambition's sake, let us reject ambition; let us disdain that thirst of honour and renown, so low and mendicant, that it makes us beg it of all sorts of people:

*"Quae est ista laus quae: possit e macello peti?"*³⁵¹

by abject means, and at what cheap rate soever: 'tis dishonour to be so honoured. Let us learn to be no more greedy, than we are capable, of

³⁵⁰"Not unto us, O Lord, not to us: but unto Thy name be the glory." —Psalm cxiii. I.

³⁵¹"What praise is that which is to be got in the market-place (meat market)?" —Cicero, De Fin., ii. 15.

glory. To be puffed up with every action that is innocent or of use, is only for those with whom such things are extraordinary and rare: they will value it as it costs them. The more a good effect makes a noise, the more do I abate of its goodness as I suspect that it was more performed for the noise, than upon account of the goodness: exposed upon the stall, 'tis half sold. Those actions have much more grace and lustre, that slip from the hand of him that does them, negligently and without noise, and that some honest man thereafter finds out and raises from the shade, to produce it to the light upon its own account,

*“Mihi quidem laudabiliora videntur omnia, quae sine venditione, et sine populo teste fiunt,”*³⁵²

says the most ostentatious man that ever lived.

I had but to conserve and to continue, which are silent and insensible effects: innovation is of great lustre; but 'tis interdicted in this age, when we are pressed upon and have nothing to defend ourselves from but novelties. To forbear doing is often as generous as to do; but 'tis less in the light, and the little good I have in me is of this kind. In fine, occasions in this employment of mine have been confederate with my humour, and I heartily thank them for it. Is there any who desires to be sick, that he may see his physician at work? and would not the physician deserve to be whipped who should wish the plague amongst us, that he might put his art in practice? I have never been of that wicked humour, and common enough, to desire that troubles and disorders in this city should elevate and honour my government; I have ever heartily contributed all I could to their tranquillity and ease.

He who will not thank me for the order, the sweet and silent calm that has accompanied my administration, cannot, however, deprive me of the share that belongs to me by title of my good fortune. And I am of such a composition, that I would as willingly be lucky as wise, and had rather owe my successes purely to the favour of Almighty God, than to any operation of my own. I had sufficiently published to the world my unfitness for such public offices; but I have something in me yet worse than incapacity itself; which is, that I am not much displeas'd at it, and that I do not much go about to cure it, considering the course of life that I have proposed to myself.

³⁵²“All things truly seem more laudable to me that are performed without ostentation, and without the testimony of the people.” —Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., ii. 26.

Neither have I satisfied myself in this employment; but I have very near arrived at what I expected from my own performance, and have much surpassed what I promised them with whom I had to do: for I am apt to promise something less than what I am able to do, and than what I hope to make good. I assure myself that I have left no offence or hatred behind me; to leave regret or desire for me amongst them, I at least know very well that I never much aimed at it:

*“Mene huic confidere monstro!
Mene salis placidi vultum, fluctusque quietos
Ignorare?”³⁵³*

³⁵³“Should I place confidence in this monster?
Should I be ignorant of the dangers of that seeming placid sea, those now quiet waves?” –
Virgil, Aeneid, V. 849.

CHAPTER XI

OF CRIPPLES

'TIS NOW TWO or three years ago that they made the year ten days shorter in France.³⁵⁴ How many changes may we expect should follow this reformation! it was really moving heaven and earth at once. Yet nothing for all that stirs from its place my neighbours still find their seasons of sowing and reaping, the opportunities of doing their business, the hurtful and propitious days, dust at the same time where they had, time out of mind, assigned them; there was no more error perceived in our old use, than there is amendment found in the alteration; so great an uncertainty there is throughout; so gross, obscure, and obtuse is our perception. 'Tis said that this regulation might have been carried on with less inconvenience, by subtracting for some years, according to the example of Augustus, the Bissextile, which is in some sort a day of impediment and trouble, till we had exactly satisfied this debt, the which itself is not done by this correction, and we yet remain some days in arrear: and yet, by this means, such order might be taken for the future, arranging that after the revolution of such or such a number of years, the supernumerary day might be always thrown out, so that we could not, henceforward, err above four-and-twenty hours in our computation. We have no other account of time but years; the world has for many ages made use of that only; and yet it is a measure that to this day we are not agreed upon, and one that we still doubt what form other nations have variously given to it, and what was the true use of it. What does this saying of some mean, that the heavens in growing old bow themselves down nearer towards us, and put us into an uncertainty even of hours and days? and that which Plutarch says

³⁵⁴By the adoption of the Gregorian calendar.

of the months, that astrology had not in his time determined as to the motion of the moon; what a fine condition are we in to keep records of things past.

I was just now ruminating, as I often do, what a free and roving thing human reason is. I ordinarily see that men, in things propounded to them, more willingly study to find out reasons than to ascertain truth: they slip over presuppositions, but are curious in examination of consequences; they leave the things, and fly to the causes. Pleasant talkers! The knowledge of causes only concerns him who has the conduct of things; not us, who are merely to undergo them, and who have perfectly full and accomplished use of them, according to our need, without penetrating into the original and essence; wine is none the more pleasant to him who knows its first faculties. On the contrary, both the body and the soul interrupt and weaken the right they have of the use of the world and of themselves, by mixing with it the opinion of learning; effects concern us, but the means not at all. To determine and to distribute appertain to superiority and command; as it does to subjection to accept. Let me reprehend our custom. They commonly begin thus: "How is such a thing done?" Whereas they should say, "Is such a thing done?" Our reason is able to create a hundred other worlds, and to find out the beginnings and contexture; it needs neither matter nor foundation: let it but run on, it builds as well in the air as on the earth, and with inanity as well as with matter:

*"Dare pondus idonea fumo."*³⁵⁵

I find that almost throughout we should say, "there is no such thing," and should myself often make use of this answer, but I dare not: for they cry that it is an evasion produced from ignorance and weakness of understanding; and I am fain, for the most part, to juggle for company, and prate of frivolous subjects and tales that I believe not a word of; besides that, in truth, 'tis a little rude and quarrelsome flatly to deny a stated fact; and few people but will affirm, especially in things hard to be believed, that they have seen them, or at least will name witnesses whose authority will stop our mouths from contradiction. In this way, we know the foundations and means of things that never were; and the world scuffles about a thousand questions, of which both the Pro and the Con are false.

³⁵⁵"Able to give weight to smoke." —Persius, v. 20.

“Ita finitima sunt falsa veris, ut in praecipitem locum non debeat se sapiens committere.”³⁵⁶

Truth and lies are faced alike; their port, taste, and proceedings are the same, and we look upon them with the same eye. I find that we are not only remiss in defending ourselves from deceit, but that we seek and offer ourselves to be gulled; we love to entangle ourselves in vanity, as a thing conformable to our being.

I have seen the birth of many miracles in my time; which, although they were abortive, yet have we not failed to foresee what they would have come to, had they lived their full age. 'Tis but finding the end of the clew, and a man may wind off as much as he will; and there is a greater distance betwixt nothing and the least thing in the world than there is betwixt this and the greatest. Now the first that are imbued with this beginning of novelty, when they set out with their tale, find, by the oppositions they meet with, where the difficulty of persuasion lies, and so caulk up that place with some false piece;³⁵⁷ besides that:

“Insita hominibus libido alendi de industria rumores,”³⁵⁸

we naturally make a conscience of restoring what has been lent us, without some usury and accession of our own. The particular error first makes the public error, and afterwards, in turn, the public error makes the particular one; and thus all this vast fabric goes forming and piling itself up from hand to hand, so that the remotest witness knows more about it than those who were nearest, and the last informed is better persuaded than the first.

'Tis a natural progress; for whoever believes anything, thinks it a work of charity to persuade another into the same opinion; which the better to do, he will make no difficulty of adding as much of his own invention as he conceives necessary to his tale to encounter the resistance or want of conception he meets with in others. I myself, who make a great conscience of lying, and am not very solicitous of giving credit and authority to what I say, yet find that in the arguments

³⁵⁶“False things are so near the true, that a wise man should not trust himself in a precipitous place” —Cicero, Acad., ii. 21.

³⁵⁷Voltaire says of this passage, “He who would learn to doubt should read this whole chapter of Montaigne, the least methodical of all philosophers, but the wisest and most amiable.” —*Melanges Historiques*, xvii. 694, ed. of Lefevre.

³⁵⁸“Men having a natural desire to nourish reports.” —Livy, xxviii. 24.

I have in hand, being heated with the opposition of another, or by the proper warmth of my own narration, I swell and puff up my subject by voice, motion, vigour, and force of words, and moreover, by extension and amplification, not without some prejudice to the naked truth; but I do it conditionally withal, that to the first who brings me to myself, and who asks me the plain and bare truth, I presently surrender my passion, and deliver the matter to him without exaggeration, without emphasis, or any painting of my own. A quick and earnest way of speaking, as mine is, is apt to run into hyperbole. There is nothing to which men commonly are more inclined than to make way for their own opinions; where the ordinary means fail us, we add command, force, fire, and sword. 'Tis a misfortune to be at such a pass, that the best test of truth is the multitude of believers in a crowd, where the number of fools so much exceeds the wise:

*"Quasi vero quidquam sit tam valde, quam nil sapere, vulgare."*³⁵⁹

*"Sanitatis patrociniū est, insanientium turba."*³⁶⁰

'Tis hard to resolve a man's judgment against the common opinions: the first persuasion, taken from the very subject itself, possesses the simple, and from them diffuses itself to the wise, under the authority of the number and antiquity of the witnesses. For my part, what I should not believe from one, I should not believe from a hundred and one: and I do not judge opinions by years.

'Tis not long since one of our princes, in whom the gout had spoiled an excellent nature and sprightly disposition, suffered himself to be so far persuaded with the report made to him of the marvellous operations of a certain priest who by words and gestures cured all sorts of diseases, as to go a long journey to seek him out, and by the force of his mere imagination, for some hours so persuaded and laid his legs asleep, as to obtain that service from them they had long time forgotten. Had fortune heaped up five or six such-like incidents, it had been enough to have brought this miracle into nature. There was afterwards discovered so much simplicity and so little art in the author of these performances, that he was thought too contemptible to be punished, as would be thought of most such things, were they well examined:

³⁵⁹"As if anything were so common as ignorance." –Cicero, De Divin., ii.

³⁶⁰"The multitude of fools is a protection to the wise." –St. Augustine, De Civit. Dei, vi.
10.

*“Miramur ex intervallo fallentia.”*³⁶¹

So does our sight often represent to us strange images at a distance that vanish on approaching near:

*“Nunquam ad liquidum fama perducitur.”*³⁶²

’Tis wonderful from how many idle beginnings and frivolous causes such famous impressions commonly, proceed. This it is that obstructs information; for whilst we seek out causes and solid and weighty ends, worthy of so great a name, we lose the true ones; they escape our sight by their littleness. And, in truth, a very prudent, diligent, and subtle inquisition is required in such searches, indifferent, and not prepossessed. To this very hour, all these miracles and strange events have concealed themselves from me: I have never seen greater monster or miracle in the world than myself: one grows familiar with all strange things by time and custom, but the more I frequent and the better I know myself, the more does my own deformity astonish me, the less I understand myself.

The principal right of advancing and producing such accidents is reserved to fortune. Passing the day before yesterday through a village two leagues from my house, I found the place yet warm with a miracle that had lately failed of success there, where with first the neighbourhood had been several months amused; then the neighbouring provinces began to take it up, and to run thither in great companies of all sorts of people. A young fellow of the place had one night in sport counterfeited the voice of a spirit in his own house, without any other design at present, but only for sport; but this having succeeded with him better than he expected, to extend his farce with more actors he associated with him a stupid silly country girl, and at last there were three of them of the same age and understanding, who from domestic, proceeded to public, preachings, hiding themselves under the altar of the church, never speaking but by night, and forbidding any light to be brought. From words which tended to the conversion of the world, and threats of the day of judgment (for these are subjects under the authority and reverence of which imposture most securely lurks), they

³⁶¹“We admire after an interval (or at a distance) things that deceive.” –Seneca, Ep., 118, 2.

³⁶²“Report is never fully substantiated.” –Quintus Curtius, ix. 2.

proceeded to visions and gesticulations so simple and ridiculous that—nothing could hardly be so gross in the sports of little children. Yet had fortune never so little favoured the design, who knows to what height this juggling might have at last arrived? These poor devils are at present in prison, and are like shortly to pay for the common folly; and I know not whether some judge will not also make them smart for his. We see clearly into this, which is discovered; but in many things of the like nature that exceed our knowledge, I am of opinion that we ought to suspend our judgment, whether as to rejection or as to reception.

Great abuses in the world are begotten, or, to speak more boldly, all the abuses of the world are begotten, by our being taught to be afraid of professing our ignorance, and that we are bound to accept all things we are not able to refute: we speak of all things by precepts and decisions. The style at Rome was that even that which a witness deposed to having seen with his own eyes, and what a judge determined with his most certain knowledge, was couched in this form of speaking: “it seems to me.” They make me hate things that are likely, when they would impose them upon me as infallible. I love these words which mollify and moderate the temerity of our propositions: “peradventure; in some sort; some; ‘tis said, I think,” and the like: and had I been set to train up children I had put this way of answering into their mouths, inquiring and not resolving: “What does this mean? I understand it not; it may be: is it true?” so that they should rather have retained the form of pupils at threescore years old than to go out doctors, as they do, at ten. Whoever will be cured of ignorance must confess it.

Iris is the daughter of Thaumás;³⁶³

admiration is the foundation of all philosophy, inquisition the progress, ignorance the end. But there is a sort of ignorance, strong and generous, that yields nothing in honour and courage to knowledge; an ignorance which to conceive requires no less knowledge than to conceive knowledge itself. I read in my younger years a trial that Corras,³⁶⁴

a councillor of Toulouse, printed, of a strange incident, of two men who presented themselves the one for the other. I remember (and I

³⁶³“That is, of Admiration. She (Iris, the rainbow) is beautiful, and for that reason, because she has a face to be admired, she is said to have been the daughter of Thamus.” —Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.*, iii. 20.

³⁶⁴A celebrated Calvinist lawyer, born at Toulouse; 1513, and assassinated there, 4th October 1572.

hardly remember anything else) that he seemed to have rendered the imposture of him whom he judged to be guilty, so wonderful and so far exceeding both our knowledge and his own, who was the judge, that I thought it a very bold sentence that condemned him to be hanged. Let us have some form of decree that says, "The court understands nothing of the matter" more freely and ingenuously than the Areopagites did, who, finding themselves perplexed with a cause they could not unravel, ordered the parties to appear again after a hundred years.

The witches of my neighbourhood run the hazard of their lives upon the report of every new author who seeks to give body to their dreams. To accommodate the examples that Holy Writ gives us of such things, most certain and irrefragable examples, and to tie them to our modern events, seeing that we neither see the causes nor the means, will require another sort-of wit than ours. It, peradventure, only appertains to that sole all-potent testimony to tell us. "This is, and that is, and not that other." God ought to be believed; and certainly with very good reason; but not one amongst us for all that who is astonished at his own narration (and he must of necessity be astonished if he be not out of his wits), whether he employ it about other men's affairs or against himself.

I am plain and heavy, and stick to the solid and the probable, avoiding those ancient reproaches:

*"Majorem fidem homines adhibent iis, quae non intelligunt;—Cupidine humani ingenii libentius obscura creduntur."*³⁶⁵

I see very well that men get angry, and that I am forbidden to doubt upon pain of execrable injuries; a new way of persuading! Thank God, I am not to be cuffed into belief. Let them be angry with those who accuse their opinion of falsity; I only accuse it of difficulty and boldness, and condemn the opposite affirmation equally, if not so imperiously, with them. He who will establish this proposition by authority and huffing discovers his reason to be very weak. For a verbal and scholastic altercation let them have as much appearance as their contradictors;

³⁶⁵"Men are most apt to believe what they least understand: and from the acquisitiveness of the human intellect, obscure things are more easily credited." The second sentence is from Tacitus, Hist. 1. 22.

*"Videantur sane, non affirmentur modo;"*³⁶⁶

but in the real consequence they draw from it these have much the advantage. To kill men, a clear and strong light is required, and our life is too real and essential to warrant these supernatural and fantastic accidents.

As to drugs and poisons, I throw them out of my count, as being the worst sort of homicides: yet even in this, 'tis said, that men are not always to rely upon the personal confessions of these people; for they have sometimes been known to accuse themselves of the murder of persons who have afterwards been found living and well. In these other extravagant accusations, I should be apt to say, that it is sufficient a man, what recommendation soever he may have, be believed as to human things; but of what is beyond his conception, and of supernatural effect, he ought then only to be believed when authorised by a supernatural approbation. The privilege it has pleased Almighty God to give to some of our witnesses, ought not to be lightly communicated and made cheap. I have my ears battered with a thousand such tales as these: "Three persons saw him such a day in the east three, the next day in the west: at such an hour, in such a place, and in such habit"; assuredly I should not believe it myself. How much more natural and likely do I find it that two men should lie than that one man in twelve hours' time should fly with the wind from east to west? How much more natural that our understanding should be carried from its place by the volubility of our disordered minds, than that one of us should be carried by a strange spirit upon a broomstaff, flesh and bones as we are, up the shaft of a chimney? Let not us seek illusions from without and unknown, we who are perpetually agitated with illusions domestic and our own. Methinks one is pardonable in disbelieving a miracle, at least, at all events where one can elude its verification as such, by means not miraculous; and I am of St. Augustine's opinion, that, "'tis better to lean towards doubt than assurance, in things hard to prove and dangerous to believe."

'Tis now some years ago that I travelled through the territories of a sovereign prince, who, in my favour, and to abate my incredulity, did me the honour to let me see, in his own presence, and in a private place, ten or twelve prisoners of this kind, and amongst others, an old

³⁶⁶"They may indeed appear to be; let them not be affirmed (Let them state the probabilities, but not affirm.)" —Cicero, Acad., n. 27.

woman, a real witch in foulness and deformity, who long had been famous in that profession. I saw both proofs and free confessions, and I know not what insensible mark upon the miserable creature: I examined and talked with her and the rest as much and as long as I would, and gave the best and soundest attention I could, and I am not a man to suffer my judgment to be made captive by prepossession. In the end, and in all conscience, I should rather have prescribed them hellebore than hemlock;

*"Captisque res magis mentibus, quam consceleratis similis
visa;"*³⁶⁷

justice has its corrections proper for such maladies. As to the oppositions and arguments that worthy men have made to me, both there, and often in other places, I have met with none that have convinced me, and that have not admitted a more likely solution than their conclusions. It is true, indeed, that the proofs and reasons that are founded upon experience and fact, I do not go about to untie, neither have they any end; I often cut them, as Alexander did the Gordian knot. After all, 'tis setting a man's conjectures at a very high price upon them to cause a man to be roasted alive.

We are told by several examples, as Praestantius of his father, that being more profoundly, asleep than men usually are, he fancied himself to be a mare, and that he served the soldiers for a sumpter; and what he fancied himself to be, he really proved. If sorcerers dream so materially; if dreams can sometimes so incorporate themselves with effects, still I cannot believe that therefore our will should be accountable to justice; which I say as one who am neither judge nor privy councillor, and who think myself by many degrees unworthy so to be, but a man of the common sort, born and avowed to the obedience of the public reason, both in its words and acts. He who should record my idle talk as being to the prejudice of the pettiest law, opinion, or custom of his parish, would do himself a great deal of wrong, and me much more; for, in what I say, I warrant no other certainty, but that 'tis what I had then in my thought, a tumultuous and wavering thought. All I say is by way of discourse, and nothing by way of advice:

³⁶⁷"The thing was rather to be attributed to madness, than malice." ("The thing seemed to resemble minds possessed rather than guilty.") –Livy, viii, 18.

*"Nec me pudet, ut istos fateri nescire, quod nesciam;"*³⁶⁸

I should not speak so boldly, if it were my due to be believed; and so I told a great man, who complained of the tartness and contentiousness of my exhortations. Perceiving you to be ready and prepared on one part, I propose to you the other, with all the diligence and care I can, to clear your judgment, not to compel it. God has your hearts in His hands, and will furnish you with the means of choice. I am not so presumptuous even as to desire that my opinions should bias you—in a thing of so great importance: my fortune has not trained them up to so potent and elevated conclusions. Truly, I have not only a great many humours, but also a great many opinions, that I would endeavour to make my son dislike, if I had one. What, if the truest are not always the most commodious to man, being of so wild a composition?

Whether it be to the purpose or not, tis no great matter: 'tis a common proverb in Italy, that he knows not Venus in her perfect sweetness who has never lain with a lame mistress. Fortune, or some particular incident, long ago put this saying into the mouths of the people; and the same is said of men as well as of women; for the queen of the Amazons answered the Scythian who courted her to love, "Lame men perform best." In this feminine republic, to evade the dominion of the males, they lamed them in their infancy—arms, legs, and other members that gave them advantage over them, and only made use of them in that wherein we, in these parts of the world, make use of them. I should have been apt to think; that the shuffling pace of the lame mistress added some new pleasure to the work, and some extraordinary titillation to those who were at the sport; but I have lately learnt that ancient philosophy has itself determined it, which says that the legs and thighs of lame women, not receiving, by reason of their imperfection, their due aliment, it falls out that the genital parts above are fuller and better supplied and much more vigorous; or else that this defect, hindering exercise, they who are troubled with it less dissipate their strength, and come more entire to the sports of Venus; which also is the reason why the Greeks decried the women-weavers as being more hot than other women by reason of their sedentary trade, which they carry on without any great exercise of the body. What is it we may not reason of at this rate? I might also say of these, that the juggling

³⁶⁸"Neither am I ashamed, as they are, to confess my ignorance of what I do not know." —Cicero, *Tusc. Quaes.*, i. 25.

about whilst so sitting at work, rouses and provokes their desire, as the swinging and jolting of coaches does that of our ladies.

Do not these examples serve to make good what I said at first: that our reasons often anticipate the effect, and have so infinite an extent of jurisdiction that they judge and exercise themselves even on inanity itself and non-existency? Besides the flexibility of our invention to forge reasons of all sorts of dreams, our imagination is equally facile to receive impressions of falsity by very frivolous appearances; for, by the sole authority of the ancient and common use of this proverb, I have formerly made myself believe that I have had more pleasure in a woman by reason she was not straight, and accordingly reckoned that deformity amongst her graces.

Torquato Tasso, in the comparison he makes betwixt France and Italy, says that he has observed that our legs are generally smaller than those of the Italian gentlemen, and attributes the cause of it to our being continually on horseback; which is the very same cause from which Suetonius draws a quite opposite conclusion; for he says, on the contrary, that Germanicus had made his legs bigger by the continuation of the same exercise.

Nothing is so supple and erratic as our understanding; it is the shoe of Theramenes, fit for all feet. It is double and diverse, and the matters are double and diverse too. "Give me a drachm of silver," said a Cynic philosopher to Antigonus. "That is not a present befitting a king," replied he. "Give me then a talent," said the other. "That is not a present befitting a Cynic."

*"Seu plures calor ille vias et caeca relaxat
Spiramenta, novas veniat qua succus in herbas
Seu durat magis, et venas astringit hiantes;
Ne tenues pluviae, rapidive potentia colic
Acrior, aut Boreae penetrabile frigus adurat."*³⁶⁹
*"Ogni medaglia ha il suo rovescio."*³⁷⁰

This is the reason why Clitomachus said of old that Carneades had outdone the labours of Hercules, in having eradicated consent from

³⁶⁹"Whether the heat opens more passages and secret pores through which the sap may be derived into the new-born herbs; or whether it rather hardens and binds the gaping veins that the small showers and keen influence of the violent sun or penetrating cold of Boreas may not hurt them." -Virg., Georg., i. 89.

³⁷⁰"Every medal has its reverse." -Italian Proverb.

men, that is to say, opinion and the courage of judging. This so vigorous fancy of Carneades sprang, in my opinion, anciently from the impudence of those who made profession of knowledge and their immeasurable self-conceit. AEsop was set to sale with two other slaves; the buyer asked the first of these what he could do; he, to enhance his own value, promised mountains and marvels, saying he could do this and that, and I know not what; the second said as much of himself or more: when it came to AEsop's turn, and that he was also asked what he could do; "Nothing," said he, "for these two have taken up all before me; they know everything." So has it happened in the school of philosophy: the pride of those who attributed the capacity of all things to the human mind created in others, out of despite and emulation, this opinion, that it is capable of nothing: the one maintain the same extreme in ignorance that the others do in knowledge; to make it undeniably manifest that man is immoderate throughout, and can never stop but of necessity and the want of ability to proceed further.

CHAPTER XII

OF PHYSIOGNOMY

ALMOST all the opinions we have are taken on authority and trust; and 'tis not amiss; we could not choose worse than by ourselves in so weak an age. That image of Socrates' discourses, which his friends have transmitted to us, we approve upon no other account than a reverence to public sanction: 'tis not according to our own knowledge; they are not after our way; if anything of the kind should spring up now, few men would value them. We discern no graces that are not pointed and puffed out and inflated by art; such as glide on in their own purity and simplicity easily escape so gross a sight as ours; they have a delicate and concealed beauty, such as requires a clear and purified sight to discover its secret light. Is not simplicity, as we take it, cousin-german to folly and a quality of reproach? Socrates makes his soul move a natural and common motion: a peasant said this; a woman said that; he has never anybody in his mouth but carters, joiners, cobblers, and masons; his are inductions and similitudes drawn from the most common and known actions of men; every one understands him. We should never have recognised the nobility and splendour of his admirable conceptions under so mean a form; we, who think all things low and flat that are not elevated, by learned doctrine, and who discern no riches but in pomp and show. This world of ours is only formed for ostentation: men are only puffed up with wind, and are banded to and fro like tennis-balls. He proposed to himself no vain and idle fancies; his design was to furnish us with precepts and things that more really and fitly serve to the use of life;

“Servare modum, finemque tenere,

*Naturamque sequi.*³⁷¹

He was also always one and the same, and raised himself, not by starts but by complexion, to the highest pitch of vigour; or, to say better, mounted not at all, but rather brought down, reduced, and subjected all asperities and difficulties to his original and natural condition; for in Cato 'tis most manifest that 'tis a procedure extended far beyond the common ways of men: in the brave exploits of his life, and in his death, we find him always mounted upon the great horse; whereas the other ever creeps upon the ground, and with a gentle and ordinary pace, treats of the most useful matters, and bears himself, both at his death and in the rudest difficulties that could present themselves, in the ordinary way of human life.

It has fallen out well that the man most worthy to be known and to be presented to the world for example should be he of whom we have the most certain knowledge; he has been pried into by the most clear-sighted men that ever were; the testimonies we have of him are admirable both in fidelity and fulness. 'Tis a great thing that he was able so to order the pure imaginations of a child, that, without altering or wresting them, he thereby produced the most beautiful effects of our soul: he presents it neither elevated nor rich; he only represents it sound, but assuredly with a brisk and full health. By these common and natural springs, by these ordinary and popular fancies, without being moved or put out, he set up not only the most regular, but the most high and vigorous beliefs, actions, and manners that ever were. 'Tis he who brought again from heaven, where she lost her time, human wisdom, to restore her to man with whom her most just and greatest business lies. See him plead before his judges; observe by what reasons he rouses his courage to the hazards of war; with what arguments he fortifies his patience against calumny, tyranny, death, and the perverseness of his wife: you will find nothing in all this borrowed from arts and sciences: the simplest may there discover their own means and strength; 'tis not possible more to retire or to creep more low. He has done human nature a great kindness in showing it how much it can do of itself.

We are all of us richer than we think we are; but we are taught to borrow and to beg, and brought up more to make use of what is another's than of our own. Man can in nothing fix himself to his actual necessity:

³⁷¹"To keep a just mean, to observe a just limit, and to follow Nature."—Lucan, ii. 381.

of pleasure, wealth, and power, he grasps at more than he can hold; his greediness is incapable of moderation. And I find that in curiosity of knowing he is the same; he cuts himself out more work than he can do, and more than he needs to do: extending the utility of knowledge to the full of its matter:

*"Ut omnium rerum, sic litterarum quoque, intemperantia laboramus."*³⁷²

And Tacitus had reason to commend the mother of Agricola for having restrained her son in his too violent appetite for learning.

'Tis a good, if duly considered, which has in it, as the other goods of men have, a great deal of vanity and weakness, proper and natural to itself, and that costs very dear. Its acquisition is far more hazardous than that of all other meat or drink; for, as to other things, what we have bought we carry home in some vessel, and there have full leisure to examine our purchase, how much we shall eat or drink of it, and when: but sciences we can, at the very first, stow into no other vessel than the soul; we swallow them in buying, and return from the market, either already infected or amended: there are some that only burden and overcharge the stomach, instead of nourishing; and, moreover, some that, under colour of curing, poison us. I have been pleased, in places where I have been, to see men in devotion vow ignorance as well as chastity, poverty, and penitence: 'tis also a gelding of our unruly appetites, to blunt this cupidity that spurs us on to the study of books, and to deprive the soul of this voluptuous complacency that tickles us with the opinion of knowledge: and 'tis plenary to accomplish the vow of poverty, to add unto it that of the mind. We need little doctrine to live at our ease; and Socrates teaches us that this is in us, and the way how to find it, and the manner how to use it: All our sufficiency which exceeds the natural is well-nigh superfluous and vain: 'tis much if it does not rather burden and cumber us than do us good:

*"Paucis opus est literis ad mentem bonam:"*³⁷³

'tis a feverish excess of the mind; a tempestuous and unquiet instrument. Do but recollect yourself, and you will find in yourself natural

³⁷²"We carry intemperance into the study of literature, as well as into everything else." — Seneca, Ep., 106.

³⁷³"Little learning is needed to form a sound mind." —Seneca, Ep., 106.

arguments against death, true, and the fittest to serve you in time of necessity: 'tis they that make a peasant, and whole nations, die with as much firmness as a philosopher. Should I have died less cheerfully before I had read Cicero's Tusculan Questions? I believe not; and when I find myself at the best, I perceive that my tongue is enriched indeed, but my courage little or nothing elevated by them; that is just as nature framed it at first, and defends itself against the conflict only after a natural and ordinary way. Books have not so much served me for instruction as exercise. What if knowledge, trying to arm us with new defences against natural inconveniences, has more imprinted in our fancies their weight and greatness, than her reasons and subtleties to secure us from them? They are subtleties, indeed, with which she often alarms us to little purpose. Do but observe how many slight and frivolous, and, if nearly examined, incorporeal arguments, the closest and wisest authors scatter about one good one: they are but verbal quirks and fallacies to amuse and gull us: but forasmuch as it may be with some profit, I will sift them no further; many of that sort are here and there dispersed up and down this book, either borrowed or by imitation. Therefore one ought to take a little heed not to call that force which is only a pretty knack of writing, and that solid which is only sharp, or that good which is only fine:

*"Quae magis gustata quam potata, delectant,"*³⁷⁴

everything that pleases does not nourish:

*"Ubi non ingenii, sed animi negotium agitur."*³⁷⁵

To see the trouble that Seneca gives himself to fortify himself against death; to see him so sweat and pant to harden and encourage himself, and bustle so long upon this perch, would have lessened his reputation with me, had he not very bravely held himself at the last. His so ardent and frequent agitations discover that he was in himself impetuous and passionate,

*"Magnus animus remissius loquitur, et securius...
non est alius ingenio, alius ammo color;"*³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴"Which more delight in the tasting than in being drunk." –Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., v. 5.

³⁷⁵"Where the question is not about the wit, but about the soul." –Seneca, Ep., 75.

³⁷⁶"A great courage speaks more calmly and more securely. There is not one complexion for the wit and another for the mind." –Seneca, Ep. 114, 115

he must be convinced at his own expense; and he in some sort discovers that he was hard pressed by his enemy. Plutarch's way, by how much it is more disdainful and farther stretched, is, in my opinion, so much more manly and persuasive: and I am apt to believe that his soul had more assured and more regular motions. The one more sharp, pricks and makes us start, and more touches the soul; the other more constantly solid, forms, establishes, and supports us, and more touches the understanding. That ravishes the judgment, this wins it. I have likewise seen other writings, yet more revered than these, that in the representation of the conflict they maintain against the temptations of the flesh, paint them, so sharp, so powerful and invincible, that we ourselves, who are of the common herd, are as much to wonder at the strangeness and unknown force of their temptation, as at the resisting it.

To what end do we so arm ourselves with this harness of science? Let us look down upon the poor people that we see scattered upon the face of the earth, prone and intent upon their business, that neither know Aristotle nor Cato, example nor precept; from these nature every day extracts effects of constancy and patience, more pure and manly than those we so inquisitively study in the schools: how many do I ordinarily see who slight poverty? how many who desire to die, or who die without alarm or regret? He who is now digging in my garden, has this morning buried his father or his son. The very names by which they call diseases sweeten and mollify the sharpness of them: the phthisic is with them no more than a cough, dysentery but a looseness, the pleurisy but a stitch; and, as they gently name them, so they patiently endure them; they are very great and grievous indeed when they hinder their ordinary labour; they never keep their beds but to die:

*"Simplex illa et aperta virtus in obscuram et solertem scientiam versa est."*³⁷⁷

I was writing this about the time when a great load of our intestine troubles for several months lay with all its weight upon me; I had the enemy at my door on one side, and the freebooters, worse enemies, on the other,

³⁷⁷"That overt and simple virtue is converted into an obscure and subtle science." — Seneca, Ep., 95.

*"Non armis, sed vitiis, certatur;"*³⁷⁸

and underwent all sorts of military injuries at once:

*"Hostis adest dextra laevaue a parte timendus.
Vicinoque malo terret utrumque latus."*³⁷⁹

A monstrous war! Other wars are bent against strangers, this against itself, destroying itself with its own poison. It is of so malignant and ruinous a nature, that it ruins itself with the rest; and with its own rage mangles and tears itself to pieces. We more often see it dissolve of itself than through scarcity of any necessary thing or by force of the enemy. All discipline evades it; it comes to compose sedition, and is itself full of it; would chastise disobedience, and itself is the example; and, employed for the defence of the laws, rebels against its own. What a condition are we in! Our physic makes us sick!

*"Nostre mal s'empoisonne
Du secours qu'on luy donne."*

*"Exuperat magis, aegrescitque medendo."*³⁸⁰

*"Omnia fanda, nefanda, malo permista furore,
Justificam nobis mentem avertere deorum."*³⁸¹

In the beginning of these popular maladies, one may distinguish the sound from the sick; but when they come to continue, as ours have done, the whole body is then infected from head to foot; no part is free from corruption, for there is no air that men so greedily draw in that diffuses itself so soon and that penetrates so deep as that of licence. Our armies only subsist and are kept together by the cement of foreigners; for of Frenchmen there is now no constant and regular army to be made. What a shame it is! there is no longer any discipline but what we see in the mercenary soldiers. As to ourselves, our conduct is at discretion, and that not of the chief, but every one at his own. The

³⁷⁸"The fight is not with arms, but with vices." —Seneca, Ep. 95.

³⁷⁹"Right and left a formidable enemy is to be feared, and threatens me on both sides with impending danger." —Ovid, De Ponto, i. 3, 57.

³⁸⁰"Our disease is poisoned with its very remedies" —Aeneid, xii. 46.

³⁸¹"Right and wrong, all shuffled together in this wicked fury, have deprived us of the gods' protection." —Catullus, De Nuptiis Pelei et Thetidos, V. 405.

general has a harder game to play within than he has without; he it is who has to follow, to court the soldiers, to give way to them; he alone has to obey: all the rest if dissolution and free licence. It pleases me to observe how much pusillanimity and cowardice there is in ambition; by how abject and servile ways it must arrive at its end; but it displeases me to see good and generous natures, and that are capable of justice, every day corrupted in the management and command of this confusion. Long toleration begets habit; habit, consent and imitation. We had ill-formed souls enough, without spoiling those that were generous and good; so that, if we hold on, there will scarcely remain any with whom to intrust the health of this State of ours, in case fortune chance to restore it:

*“Hunc saltem everso juvenem succurrere seclo,
Ne prohibete.”*³⁸²

What has become of the old precept, “That soldiers ought more to fear their chief than the enemy”?³⁸³ and of that wonderful example, that an orchard being enclosed within the precincts of a camp of the Roman army, was seen at their dislodgment the next day in the same condition, not an apple, though ripe and delicious, being pulled off, but all left to the possessor? I could wish that our youth, instead of the time they spend in less fruitful travels and less honourable employments, would bestow one half of that time in being an eye-witness of naval exploits, under some good captain of Rhodes, and the other half in observing the discipline of the Turkish armies; for they have many differences and advantages over ours; one of these is, that our soldiers become more licentious in expeditions, theirs more temperate and circumspect; for the thefts and insolencies committed upon the common people, which are only punished with a cudgel in peace, are capital in war; for an egg taken by a Turkish soldier without paying for it, fifty blows with a stick is the fixed rate; for anything else, of what sort or how trivial soever, not necessary to nourishment, they are presently impaled or beheaded without mercy. I am astonished, in the history of Selim, the most cruel conqueror that ever was, to see that when he subdued Egypt, the beautiful gardens about Damascus being all open, and in a conquered land, and his army encamped upon the very place,

³⁸²“Forbid not, at least, that this young man repair this ruined age.” –Virgil, Georg., i. 500. Montaigne probably refers to Henry, king of Navarre, afterwards Henry IV.

³⁸³Valerius Maximus, Ext. 2.

should be left untouched by the hands of the soldiers, by reason they had not received the signal of pillage.

But is there any disease in a government that it is worth while to physic with such a mortal drug?³⁸⁴ No, said Favonius, not even the tyrannical usurpation of a Commonwealth. Plato, likewise, will not consent that a man should violate the peace of his country in order to cure it, and by no means approves of a reformation that disturbs and hazards all, and that is to be purchased at the price of the citizens' blood and ruin; determining it to be the duty of a good patriot in such a case to let it alone, and only to pray to God for his extraordinary assistance: and he seems to be angry with his great friend Dion, for having proceeded somewhat after another manner. I was a Platonist in this point before I knew there had ever been such a man as Plato in the world. And if this person ought absolutely to be rejected from our society (he who by the sincerity of his conscience merited from the divine favour to penetrate so far into the Christian light, through the universal darkness wherein the world was involved in his time), I do not think it becomes us to suffer ourselves to be instructed by a heathen, how great an impiety it is not to expect from God any relief simply his own and without our co-operation. I often doubt, whether amongst so many men as meddle in such affairs, there is not to be found some one of so weak understanding as to have been really persuaded that he went towards reformation by the worst of deformations; and advanced towards salvation by the most express causes that we have of most assured damnation; that by overthrowing government, the magistracy, and the laws, in whose protection God has placed him, by dismembering his good mother, and giving her limbs to be mangled by her old enemies, filling fraternal hearts with parricidal hatreds, calling devils and furies to his aid, he can assist the most holy sweetness and justice of the divine law. Ambition, avarice, cruelty, and revenge have not sufficient natural impetuosity of their own; let us bait them with the glorious titles of justice and devotion. There cannot a worse state of things be imagined than where wickedness comes to be legitimate, and assumes, with the magistrates' permission, the cloak of virtue:

*"Nihil in speciem fallacius, quam prava religio, ubi deorum numen prxtenditur celeribus."*³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴i.e. as civil war.

³⁸⁵"Nothing has a more deceiving face than false religion, where the divinity of the gods is obscured by crimes." —Livy, xxxix. 16.

The extremest sort of injustice, according to Plato, is where that which is unjust should be reputed for just.

The common people then suffered very much, and not present damage only:

*“Undique totis
Usque adeo turbatur agris,”*³⁸⁶

but future too; the living were to suffer, and so were they who were yet unborn; they stript them, and consequently myself, even of hope, taking from them all they had laid up in store to live on for many years:

*“Quae nequeunt secum ferre aut abducere, perdunt;
Et cremat insontes turba scelestas casas...
Muris nulla fides, squalent populatibus agri.”*³⁸⁷

Besides this shock, I suffered others: I underwent the inconveniences that moderation brings along with it in such a disease: I was robbed on all hands; to the Ghibelline I was a Guelph, and to the Guelph a Ghibelline; one of my poets expresses this very well, but I know not where it is.³⁸⁸

The situation of my house, and my friendliness with my neighbours, presented me with one face; my life and my actions with another. They did not lay formal accusations to my charge, for they had no foundation for so doing; I never hide my head from the laws, and whoever would have questioned me, would have done himself a greater prejudice than me; they were only mute suspicions that were whispered about, which never want appearance in so confused a mixture, no more than envious or idle heads. I commonly myself lend a hand to injurious presumptions that fortune scatters abroad against me, by a way I have ever had of evading to justify, excuse, or explain myself; conceiving that it were to compromise my conscience to plead in its behalf:

*“Perspicuitas enim argumentatione elevatur;”*³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶“Such great disorders overtake our fields on every side.” –Virgil, Eclog., i. II.

³⁸⁷“What they cannot bear away, they spoil; and the wicked mob burn harmless houses; walls cannot secure their masters, and the fields are squalid with devastation.” –Ovid, Trist., iii. 10, 35; Claudianus, In Eutyop., i. 244.

³⁸⁸“So Tories called me Whig, and Whigs a Tory.” –Pope, after Horace.

³⁸⁹“For perspicuity is lessened by argument.” (“The clearness of a cause is clouded by argumentation.”) –Cicero, De Nat. Deor., iii. 4.

and, as if every one saw as clearly into me as I do myself, instead of retiring from an accusation, I step up to meet it, and rather give it some kind of colour by an ironical and scoffing confession, if I do not sit totally mute, as of a thing not worth my answer. But such as look upon this kind of behaviour of mine as too haughty a confidence, have as little kindness for me as they who interpret the weakness of an indefensible cause; namely, the great folks, towards whom want of submission is the great fault, harsh towards all justice that knows and feels itself, and is not submissive humble, and suppliant; I have often knocked my head against this pillar. So it is that at what then befell me, an ambitious man would have hanged himself, and a covetous man would have done the same. I have no manner of care of getting;

*“Si mihi, quod nunc est, etiam minus; et mihi vivam
Quod superest aevi, si quid superesse volent dii:”*³⁹⁰

but the losses that befall me by the injury of others, whether by theft or violence, go almost as near my heart as they would to that of the most avaricious man. The offence troubles me, without comparison, more than the loss. A thousand several sorts of mischiefs fell upon me in the neck of one another; I could more cheerfully have borne them all at once.

I was already considering to whom, amongst my friends, I might commit a necessitous and discredited old age; and having turned my eyes quite round, I found myself bare. To let one's self fall plump down, and from so great a height, it ought to be in the arms of a solid, vigorous, and fortunate friendship: these are very rare, if there be any. At last, I saw that it was safest for me to trust to myself in my necessity; and if it should so fall out, that I should be but upon cold terms in Fortune's favour, I should so much the more pressingly recommend me to my own, and attach myself and look to myself all the more closely. Men on all occasions throw themselves upon foreign assistance to spare their own, which is alone certain and sufficient to him who knows how therewith to arm himself. Every one runs elsewhere, and to the future, forasmuch as no one is arrived at himself. And I was satisfied that they were profitable inconveniences; forasmuch as, first, ill scholars are to be admonished with the rod, when reason will not do, as a crooked piece of wood is by fire and straining reduced to

³⁹⁰“If I may have what I now own, or even less, and may live for myself what of life remains, if the gods grant me remaining years.” —Horace, Ep., i. 18, 107.

straightness. I have a great while preached to myself to stick close to my own concerns, and separate myself from the affairs of others; yet I am still turning my eyes aside. A bow, a favourable word, a kind look from a great person tempts me; of which God knows if there is scarcity in these days, and what they signify. I, moreover, without wrinkling my forehead, hearken to the persuasions offered me, to draw me into the marketplace, and so gently refuse, as if I were half willing to be overcome. Now for so indocile a spirit blows are required; this vessel which thus chops and cleaves, and is ready to fall one piece from another, must have the hoops forced down with good sound strokes of a mallet. Secondly, that this accident served me for exercise to prepare me for worse, if I, who both by the benefit of fortune, and by the condition of my manners, hoped to be among the last, should happen to be one of the first assailed by this storm; instructing myself betimes to constrain my life, and fit it for a new state. The true liberty is to be able to do what a man will with himself:

*"Potentissimus est, qui se habet in potestate."*³⁹¹

In an ordinary and quiet time, a man prepares himself for moderate and common accidents; but in the confusion wherein we have been for these thirty years, every Frenchman, whether personal or in general, sees himself every hour upon the point of the total ruin and overthrow of his fortune: by so much the more ought he to have his courage supplied with the strongest and most vigorous provisions. Let us thank fortune, that has not made us live in an effeminate, idle, and languishing age; some who could never have been so by other means will be made famous by their misfortunes. As I seldom read in histories the confusions of other states without regret that I was not present, the better to consider them, so does my curiosity make me in some sort please myself in seeing with my own eyes this notable spectacle of our public death, its form and symptoms; and since I cannot hinder it, I am content to have been destined to be present therein, and thereby to instruct myself. So do we eagerly covet to see, though but in shadow and the fables of theatres, the pomp of tragic representations of human fortune; 'tis not without compassion at what we hear, but we please ourselves in rousing our displeasure, by the rarity of these pitiable events. Nothing tickles that does not pinch. And good historians skip over, as stagnant

³⁹¹"He is most potent who is master of himself."—Seneca, Ep., 94.

water and dead sea, calm narrations, to return to seditions, to wars, to which they know that we invite them.

I question whether I can decently confess with how small a sacrifice of its repose and tranquillity I have passed over above the one half of my life amid the ruin of my country. I lend myself my patience somewhat too cheap, in accidents that do not privately assail me; and do not so much regard what they take from me, as what remains safe, both within and without. There is comfort in evading, one while this, another while that, of the evils that are levelled at ourselves too, at last, but at present hurt others only about us; as also, that in matters of public interest, the more universally my affection is dispersed, the weaker it is: to which may be added, that it is half true:

*“Tantum ex publicis malis sentimus, quantum ad privatas res pertinet;”*³⁹²

and that the health from which we fell was so ill, that itself relieves the regret we should have for it. It was health, but only in comparison with the sickness that has succeeded it: we are not fallen from any great height; the corruption and brigandage which are in dignity and office seem to me the least supportable: we are less injuriously rifled in a wood than in a place of security. It was an universal juncture of particular members, each corrupted by emulation of the others, and most of them with old ulcers, that neither received nor required any cure. This convulsion, therefore, really more animated than pressed me, by the assistance of my conscience, which was not only at peace within itself, but elevated, and I did not find any reason to complain of myself. Also, as God never sends evils, any more than goods, absolutely pure to men, my health continued at that time more than usually good; and, as I can do nothing without it, there are few things that I cannot do with it. It afforded me means to rouse up all my faculties, and to lay my hand before the wound that would else, peradventure, have gone farther; and I experienced, in my patience, that I had some stand against fortune, and that it must be a great shock could throw me out of the saddle. I do not say this to provoke her to give me a more vigorous charge: I am her humble servant, and submit to her pleasure: let her be content, in God’s name. Am I sensible of her assaults? Yes, I am. But,

³⁹²“We are only so far sensible of public evils as they respect our private affairs.” —Livy, xxx. 44.

as those who are possessed and oppressed with sorrow sometimes suffer themselves, nevertheless, by intervals to taste a little pleasure, and are sometimes surprised with a smile, so have I so much power over myself, as to make my ordinary condition quiet and free from disturbing thoughts; yet I suffer myself, withal, by fits to be surprised with the stings of those displeasing imaginations that assault me, whilst I am arming myself to drive them away, or at least to wrestle with them.

But behold another aggravation of the evil which befell me in the tail of the rest: both without doors and within I was assailed with a most violent plague, violent in comparison of all others; for as sound bodies are subject to more grievous maladies, forasmuch as they, are not to be forced but by such, so my very healthful air, where no contagion, however near, in the memory of man, ever took footing, coming to be corrupted, produced strange effects:

*“Mista senum et juvenum densentur funera; nullum
Saeva caput Proserpina fugit;”*³⁹³

I had to suffer this pleasant condition, that the sight of my house, was frightful to me; whatever I had there was without guard, and left to the mercy of any one who wished to take it. I myself, who am so hospitable, was in very great distress for a retreat for my family; a distracted family, frightful both to its friends and itself, and filling every place with horror where it attempted to settle, having to shift its abode so soon as any one’s finger began but to ache; all diseases are then concluded to be the plague, and people do not stay to examine whether they are so or no. And the mischief on’t is that, according to the rules of art, in every danger that a man comes near, he must undergo a quarantine in fear of the evil, your imagination all the while tormenting you at pleasure, and turning even your health itself into a fever. Yet all this would have much less affected me had I not withal been compelled to be sensible of the sufferings of others, and miserably to serve six months together for a guide to this caravan; for I carry my own antidotes within myself, which are resolution and patience. Apprehension, which is particularly feared in this disease, does not much trouble me; and, if being alone, I should have been taken, it had been a less cheerless and more remote departure; ‘tis a kind of death that I do not think

³⁹³“Old and young die in mixed heaps. Cruel Proserpine forbears none.” —Horace, *Od.*, i. 28, 19.

of the worst sort; 'tis commonly short, stupid, without pain, and consoled by the public condition; without ceremony, without mourning, without a crowd. But as to the people about us, the hundredth part of them could not be saved:

*"Videas desertaque regna
Pastorum, et longe saltus lateque vacantes."*³⁹⁴

In this place my largest revenue is manual: what an hundred men ploughed for me, lay a long time fallow.

But then, what example of resolution did we not see in the simplicity of all this people? Generally, every one renounced all care of life; the grapes, the principal wealth of the country, remained untouched upon the vines; every man indifferently prepared for and expected death, either to-night or to-morrow, with a countenance and voice so far from fear, as if they had come to terms with this necessity, and that it was an universal and inevitable sentence. 'Tis always such; but how slender hold has the resolution of dying? The distance and difference of a few hours, the sole consideration of company, renders its apprehension various to us. Observe these people; by reason that they die in the same month, children, young people, and old, they are no longer astonished at it; they no longer lament. I saw some who were afraid of staying behind, as in a dreadful solitude; and I did not commonly observe any other solicitude amongst them than that of sepulture; they were troubled to see the dead bodies scattered about the fields, at the mercy of the wild beasts that presently flocked thither. How differing are the fancies of men; the Neorites, a nation subjected by Alexander, threw the bodies of their dead into the deepest and less frequented part of their woods, on purpose to have them there eaten; the only sepulture reputed happy amongst them. Some, who were yet in health, dug their own graves; others laid themselves down in them whilst alive; and a labourer of mine, in dying, with his hands and feet pulled the earth upon him. Was not this to nestle and settle himself to sleep at greater ease? A bravery in some sort like that of the Roman soldiers who, after the battle of Cannae, were found with their heads thrust into holes in the earth, which they had made, and in suffocating themselves, with their own hands pulled the earth about their ears. In short, a whole

³⁹⁴"You would see shepherds' haunts deserted, and far and wide empty pastures." — Virgil, Georg., iii. 476.

province was, by the common usage, at once brought to a course nothing inferior in undauntedness to the most studied and premeditated resolution.

Most of the instructions of science to encourage us herein have in them more of show than of force, and more of ornament than of effect. We have abandoned Nature, and will teach her what to do; teach her who so happily and so securely conducted us; and in the meantime, from the footsteps of her instruction, and that little which, by the benefit of ignorance, remains of her image imprinted in the life of this rustic rout of unpolished men, science is constrained every day to borrow patterns for her disciples of constancy, tranquillity, and innocence. It is pretty to see that these persons, full of so much fine knowledge, have to imitate this foolish simplicity, and this in the primary actions of virtue; and that our wisdom must learn even from beasts the most profitable instructions in the greatest and most necessary concerns of our life; as, how we are to live and die, manage our property, love and bring up our children, maintain justice: a singular testimony of human infirmity; and that this reason we so handle at our pleasure, finding evermore some diversity and novelty, leaves in us no apparent trace of nature. Men have done with nature as perfumers with oils; they have sophisticated her with so many argumentations and far-fetched discourses, that she is become variable and particular to each, and has lost her proper, constant, and universal face; so that we must seek testimony from beasts, not subject to favour, corruption, or diversity of opinions. It is, indeed, true that even these themselves do not always go exactly in the path of nature, but wherein they swerve, it is so little that you may always see the track; as horses that are led make many bounds and curvets, but 'tis always at the length of the halter, and still follow him that leads them; and as a young hawk takes its flight, but still under the restraint of its tether:

*"Exsilia, torments, bells, morbos, naufragia meditare... ut nullo sis malo tiro."*³⁹⁵

What good will this curiosity do us, to anticipate all the inconveniences of human nature, and to prepare ourselves with so much trouble against things which, peradventure, will never befall us?

³⁹⁵"To meditate upon banishments, tortures, wars, diseases, and shipwrecks, that thou mayest not be a novice in any disaster." —Seneca, Ep., 91, 107.

*"Parem passis tristitiam facit, pati posse;"*³⁹⁶

not only the blow, but the wind of the blow strikes us: or, like phrenetic people—for certainly it is a phrensy—to go immediately and whip yourself, because it may so fall out that Fortune may one day make you undergo it; and to put on your furred gown at Midsummer, because you will stand in need of it at Christmas! Throw yourselves, say they, into the experience of all the evils, the most extreme evils that can possibly befall you, and so be assured of them. On the contrary, the most easy and most natural way would be to banish even the thoughts of them; they will not come soon enough; their true being will not continue with us long enough; our mind must lengthen and extend them; we must incorporate them in us beforehand, and there entertain them, as if they would not otherwise sufficiently press upon our senses. "We shall find them heavy enough when they come," says one of our masters, of none of the tender sects, but of the most severe; "in the meantime, favour thyself; believe what pleases thee best; what good will it do thee to anticipate thy ill fortune, to lose the present for fear of the future: and to make thyself miserable now, because thou art to be so in time?" These are his words. Science, indeed, does us one good office in instructing us exactly as to the dimensions of evils,

*"Curis acuens mortalia corda!"*³⁹⁷

'Twere pity that any part of their greatness should escape our sense and knowledge.

'Tis certain that for the most part the preparation for death has administered more torment than the thing itself. It was of old truly said, and by a very judicious author:

*"Minus afficit sensus fatigatio, quam cogitatio."*³⁹⁸

The sentiment of present death sometimes, of itself, animates us with a prompt resolution not to avoid a thing that is utterly inevitable: many gladiators have been seen in the olden time, who, after having fought

³⁹⁶"It troubles men as much that they may possibly suffer, as if they really did suffer." — Idem, *ibid.*, 74.

³⁹⁷"Probing mortal hearts with cares." —Virgil, *Georg.*, i. 23.

³⁹⁸"Suffering itself less afflicts the senses than the apprehension of suffering." — Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.*, i. 12.

timorously and ill, have courageously entertained death, offering their throats to the enemies' sword and bidding them despatch. The sight of future death requires a courage that is slow, and consequently hard to be got. If you know not how to die, never trouble yourself; nature will, at the time, fully and sufficiently instruct you: she will exactly do that business for you; take you no care—

*“Incertam frustra, mortales, funeris horam,
Quaeritis et qua sit mors aditura via....
Poena minor certam subito perferre ruinam;
Quod timeas, gravius sustinuisse diu.”*³⁹⁹

We trouble life by the care of death, and death by the care of life: the one torments, the other frights us. It is not against death that we prepare, that is too momentary a thing; a quarter of an hour's suffering, without consequence and without damage, does not deserve especial precepts: to say the truth, we prepare ourselves against the preparations of death. Philosophy ordains that we should always have death before our eyes, to see and consider it before the time, and then gives us rules and precautions to provide that this foresight and thought do us no harm; just so do physicians, who throw us into diseases, to the end they may have whereon to employ their drugs and their art. If we have not known how to live, 'tis injustice to teach us how to die, and make the end difform from all the rest; if we have known how to live firmly and quietly, we shall know how to die so too. They may boast as much as they please:

*“Tota philosophorum vita commentatio mortis est;”*⁴⁰⁰

but I fancy that, though it be the end, it is not the aim of life; 'tis its end, its extremity, but not, nevertheless, its object; it ought itself to be its own aim and design; its true study is to order, govern, and suffer itself. In the number of several other offices, that the general and principal chapter of Knowing how to live comprehends, is this article of

³⁹⁹“Mortals, in vain you seek to know the uncertain hour of death, and by what channel it will come upon you.” —Propertius, ii. 27, 1.

“’Tis less painful to undergo sudden destruction; 'tis hard to bear that which you long fear.” —Incert. Auct.

⁴⁰⁰“The whole life of philosophers is the meditation of death.” —Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., ii. 30.

Knowing how to die; and, did not our fears give it weight, one of the lightest too.

To judge of them by utility and by the naked truth, the lessons of simplicity are not much inferior to those which learning teaches us: nay, quite the contrary. Men differ in sentiment and force; we must lead them to their own good according to their capacities and by various ways:

*“Quo me comque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes.”*⁴⁰¹

I never saw any peasant among my neighbours cogitate with what countenance and assurance he should pass over his last hour; nature teaches him not to think of death till he is dying; and then he does it with a better grace than Aristotle, upon whom death presses with a double weight, both of itself and from so long a premeditation; and, therefore, it was the opinion of Caesar, that the least premeditated death was the easiest and the most happy:

*“Plus dolet quam necesse est, qui ante dolet, quam necesse est.”*⁴⁰²

The sharpness of this imagination springs from our curiosity: 'tis thus we ever impede ourselves, desiring to anticipate and regulate natural prescripts. It is only for the doctors to dine worse for it, when in the best health, and to frown at the image of death; the common sort stand in need of no remedy or consolation, but just in the shock, and when the blow comes; and consider on't no more than just what they endure. Is it not then, as we say, that the stolidity and want of apprehension in the vulgar give them that patience in present evils, and that profound carelessness of future sinister accidents? That their souls, in being more gross and dull, are less penetrable and not so easily moved? If it be so, let us henceforth, in God's name, teach nothing but ignorance; 'tis the utmost fruit the sciences promise us, to which this stolidity so gently leads its disciples.

We have no want of good masters, interpreters of natural simplicity. Socrates shall be one; for, as I remember, he speaks something to this purpose to the judges who sat upon his life and death.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹“Wherever the season takes me,(where the tempest drives me) there I am carried as a guest.” –Horace, Ep., i. i, 15.

⁴⁰²“He grieves more than is necessary, who grieves before it is necessary.” –Seneca, Ep., 98.

⁴⁰³That which follows is taken from the Apology of Socrates in Plato, chap. 17, &c.

“I am afraid, my masters, that if I entreat you not to put me to death, I shall confirm the charge of my accusers, which is, that I pretend to be wiser than others, as having some more secret knowledge of things that are above and below us. I have neither frequented nor known death, nor have ever seen any person that has tried its qualities, from whom to inform myself. Such as fear it, presuppose they know it; as for my part, I neither know what it is, nor what they do in the other world. Death is, peradventure, an indifferent thing; peradventure, a thing to be desired. ‘Tis nevertheless to be believed, if it be a transmigration from one place to another, that it is a bettering of one’s condition to go and live with so many great persons deceased, and to be exempt from having any more to do with unjust and corrupt judges; if it be an annihilation of our being, ‘tis yet a bettering of one’s condition to enter into a long and peaceable night; we find nothing more sweet in life than quiet repose and a profound sleep without dreams. The things that I know to be evil, as to injure one’s neighbour and to disobey one’s superior, whether it be God or man, I carefully avoid; such as I do not know whether they be good or evil, I cannot fear them. If I am to die and leave you alive, the gods alone only know whether it will go better with you or with me. Wherefore, as to what concerns me, you may do as you shall think fit. But according to my method of advising just and profitable things, I say that you will do your consciences more right to set me at liberty, unless you see further into my cause than I do; and, judging according to my past actions, both public and private, according to my intentions, and according to the profit that so many of our citizens, both young and old, daily extract from my conversation, and the fruit that you all reap from me, you cannot more duly acquit yourselves towards my merit than in ordering that, my poverty considered, I should be maintained at the Prytanaeum, at the public expense, a thing that I have often known you, with less reason, grant to others. Do not impute it to obstinacy or disdain that I do not, according to the custom, supplicate and go about to move you to commiseration. I have both friends and kindred, not being, as Homer says, begotten of wood or of stone, no more than others, who might well present themselves before you with tears and mourning, and I have three desolate children with whom to move you to compassion; but I should do a shame to our city at the age I am, and in the reputation of wisdom which is now charged against me, to appear in such an abject form. What would men say of the other Athenians? I have always admonished those who have frequented my lectures, not to redeem their lives by

an unbecoming action; and in the wars of my country, at Amphipolis, Potidea, Delia, and other expeditions where I have been, I have effectually manifested how far I was from securing my safety by my shame. I should, moreover, compromise your duty, and should invite you to unbecoming things; for 'tis not for my prayers to persuade you, but for the pure and solid reasons of justice. You have sworn to the gods to keep yourselves upright; and it would seem as if I suspected you, or would recriminate upon you that I do not believe that you are so; and I should testify against myself, not to believe them as I ought, mistrusting their conduct, and not purely committing my affair into their hands. I wholly rely upon them; and hold myself assured they will do in this what shall be most fit both for you and for me: good men, whether living or dead, have no reason to fear the gods."

Is not this an innocent child's pleading of an unimaginable loftiness, true, frank, and just, unexampled?—and in what a necessity employed! Truly, he had very good reason to prefer it before that which the great orator Lysias had penned for him: admirably couched, indeed, in the judiciary style, but unworthy of so noble a criminal. Had a suppliant voice been heard out of the mouth of Socrates, that lofty virtue had struck sail in the height of its glory; and ought his rich and powerful nature to have committed her defence to art, and, in her highest proof, have renounced truth and simplicity, the ornaments of his speaking, to adorn and deck herself with the embellishments of figures and the flourishes of a premeditated speech? He did very wisely, and like himself, not to corrupt the tenor of an incorrupt life, and so sacred an image of the human form, to spin out his decrepitude another year, and to betray the immortal memory of that glorious end. He owed his life not to himself, but to the example of the world; had it not been a public damage, that he should have concluded it after a lazy and obscure manner? Assuredly, that careless and indifferent consideration of his death deserved that posterity should consider it so much the more, as indeed they did; and there is nothing so just in justice than that which fortune ordained for his recommendation; for the Athenians abominated all those who had been causers of his death to such a degree, that they avoided them as excommunicated persons, and looked upon everything as polluted that had been touched by them; no one would wash with them in the public baths, none would salute or own acquaintance with them: so that, at last, unable longer to support this public hatred, they hanged themselves.

If any one shall think that, amongst so many other examples that

I had to choose out of in the sayings of Socrates for my present purpose, I have made an ill choice of this, and shall judge this discourse of his elevated above common conceptions, I must tell them that I have properly selected it; for I am of another opinion, and hold it to be a discourse, in rank and simplicity, much below and behind common conceptions. He represents, in an inartificial boldness and infantine security, the pure and first impression and ignorance of nature; for it is to be believed that we have naturally a fear of pain, but not of death, by reason of itself; 'tis a part of our being, and no less essential than living.

To what end should nature have begotten in us a hatred to it and a horror of it, considering that it is of so great utility to her in maintaining the succession and vicissitude of her works? and that in this universal republic, it conduces more to birth and augmentation than to loss or ruin?

"Sic rerum summa novatur."

"Mille animas una necata dedit."

"The failing of one life is the passage to a thousand other lives."

Nature has imprinted in beasts the care of themselves and of their conservation; they proceed so far as hitting or hurting to be timorous of being worse, of themselves, of our haltering and beating them, accidents subject to their sense and experience; but that we should kill them, they cannot fear, nor have they the faculty to imagine and conclude such a thing as death; it is said, indeed, that we see them not only cheerfully undergo it, horses for the most part neighing and swans singing when they die, but, moreover, seek it at need, of which elephants have given many examples.

Besides, the method of arguing, of which Socrates here makes use, is it not equally admirable both in simplicity and vehemence? Truly it is much more easy to speak like Aristotle and to live like Caesar than to speak and live as Socrates did; there lies the extreme degree of perfection and difficulty; art cannot reach it. Now, our faculties are not so trained up; we do not try, we do not know them; we invest ourselves with those of others, and let our own lie idle; as some one may say of me, that I have here only made a nosegay of foreign flowers, having furnished nothing of my own but the thread to tie them.

Certainly I have so far yielded to public opinion, that those borrowed ornaments accompany me; but I do not mean that they shall cover me

and hide me; that is quite contrary to my design, who desire to make a show of nothing but what is my own, and what is my own by nature; and had I taken my own advice, I had at all hazards spoken purely alone, I more and more load myself every day,⁴⁰⁴

beyond my purpose and first method, upon the account of idleness and the humour of the age. If it misbecome me, as I believe it does, 'tis no matter; it may be of use to some others. Such there are who quote Plato and Homer, who never saw either of them; and I also have taken things out of places far enough distant from their source. Without pains and without learning, having a thousand volumes about me in the place where I write, I can presently borrow, if I please, from a dozen such scrap-gatherers, people about whom I do not much trouble myself, wherewith to trick up this treatise of Physiognomy; there needs no more but a preliminary epistle of a German to stuff me with quotations. And so it is we go in quest of a tickling story to cheat the foolish world. These lumber pies of commonplaces, wherewith so many furnish their studies, are of little use but to common subjects, and serve but to show us, and not to direct us: a ridiculous fruit of learning, that Socrates so pleasantly discusses against Euthydemus. I have seen books made of things that were never either studied or understood; the author committing to several of his learned friends the examination of this and t'other matter to compile it, contenting himself, for his share, with having projected the design, and by his industry to have tied together this faggot of unknown provisions; the ink and paper, at least, are his. This is to buy or borrow a book, and not to make one; 'tis to show men not that he can make a book, but that, whereof they may be in doubt, he cannot make one. A president, where I was, boasted that he had amassed together two hundred and odd commonplaces in one of his judgments; in telling which, he deprived himself of the glory he had got by it: in my opinion, a pusillanimous and absurd vanity for such a subject and such a person. I do the contrary; and amongst so many borrowed things, am glad if I can steal one, disguising and altering it for some new service; at the hazard of having it said that 'tis for want of understanding its natural use; I give it some particular touch of my own hand, to the end it may not be so absolutely foreign. These

⁴⁰⁴In fact, the first edition of the *Essays* (Bordeaux, 1580) has very few quotations. These became more numerous in the edition of 1588; but the multitude of classical texts which at times encumber Montaigne's text, only dates from the posthumous edition of 1595, he had made these collections in the four last years of his life, as an amusement of his "idleness."—Le Clerc. They grow, however, more sparing in the Third Book.

set their thefts in show and value themselves upon them, and so have more credit with the laws than I have: we naturalists I think that there is a great and incomparable preference in the honour of invention over that of allegation.

If I would have spoken by learning, I had spoken sooner; I had written of the time nearer to my studies, when I had more wit and better memory, and should sooner have trusted to the vigour of that age than of this, would I have made a business of writing. And what if this gracious favour⁴⁰⁵ which Fortune has lately offered me upon the account of this work, had befallen me in that time of my life, instead of this, wherein 'tis equally desirable to possess, soon to be lost! Two of my acquaintance, great men in this faculty, have, in my opinion, lost half, in refusing to publish at forty years old, that they might stay till three-score. Maturity has its defects as well as green years, and worse; and old age is as unfit for this kind of business as any other. He who commits his decrepitude to the press plays the fool if he think to squeeze anything out thence that does not relish of dreaming, dotage, and drivelling; the mind grows costive and thick in growing old. I deliver my ignorance in pomp and state, and my learning meagrely and poorly; this accidentally and accessorially, that principally and expressly; and write specifically of nothing but nothing, nor of any science but of that inscience. I have chosen a time when my life, which I am to give an account of, lies wholly before me; what remains has more to do with death; and of my death itself, should I find it a prating death, as others do, I would willingly give an account at my departure.

Socrates was a perfect exemplar in all great qualities, and I am vexed that he had so deformed a face and body as is said, and so unsuitable to the beauty of his soul, himself being so amorous and such an admirer of beauty: Nature did him wrong. There is nothing more probable than the conformity and relation of the body to the soul:

*"Ipsi animi magni refert, quali in corpore locati sint: multo enim a corpore existunt, quæ acuant mentem: multa qua obtundant;"*⁴⁰⁶

this refers to an unnatural ugliness and deformity of limbs; but we call ugliness also an unseemliness at first sight, which is principally lodged

⁴⁰⁵His acquaintance with Mademoiselle de Gournay.

⁴⁰⁶"It is of great consequence in what bodies minds are placed, for many things spring from the body that may sharpen the mind, and many that may blunt it." -Cicero, Tusc. Quæes., i. 33.

in the face, and disgusts us on very slight grounds: by the complexion, a spot, a rugged countenance, for some reasons often wholly inexplicable, in members nevertheless of good symmetry and perfect. The deformity, that clothed a very beautiful soul in La Boetie, was of this predicament: that superficial ugliness, which nevertheless is always the most imperious, is of least prejudice to the state of the mind, and of little certainty in the opinion of men. The other, which is never properly called deformity, being more substantial, strikes deeper in. Not every shoe of smooth shining leather, but every shoe well-made, shews the shape of the foot within. As Socrates said of his, it betrayed equal ugliness in his soul, had he not corrected it by education; but in saying so, I hold he was in jest, as his custom was; never so excellent a soul formed itself.

I cannot often enough repeat how great an esteem I have for beauty, that potent and advantageous quality; he (La Boetie) called it "a short tyranny," and Plato, "the privilege of nature." We have nothing that excels it in reputation; it has the first place in the commerce of men; it presents itself in the front; seduces and prepossesses our judgments with great authority and wonderful impression. Phryne had lost her cause in the hands of an excellent advocate, if, opening her robe, she had not corrupted her judges by the lustre of her beauty. And I find that Cyrus, Alexander, and Caesar, the three masters of the world, never neglected beauty in their greatest affairs; no more did the first Scipio. The same word in Greek signifies both fair and good; and the Holy Word often says good when it means fair: I should willingly maintain the priority in good things, according to the song that Plato calls an idle thing, taken out of some ancient poet: "health, beauty, riches." Aristotle says that the right of command appertains to the beautiful; and that, when there is a person whose beauty comes near the images of the gods, veneration is equally due to him. To him who asked why people oftener and longer frequent the company of handsome persons: "That question," said he, "is only to be asked by the blind." Most of the philosophers, and the greatest, paid for their schooling, and acquired wisdom by the favour and mediation of their beauty. Not only in the men that serve me, but also in the beasts, I consider it within two fingers' breadth of goodness.

And yet I fancy that those features and moulds of face, and those lineaments, by which men guess at our internal complexions and our fortunes to come, is a thing that does not very directly and simply lie under the chapter of beauty and deformity, no more than every good

odour and serenity of air promises health, nor all fog and stink infection in a time of pestilence. Such as accuse ladies of contradicting their beauty by their manners, do not always hit right; for, in a face which is none of the best, there may dwell some air of probity and trust; as, on the contrary, I have read, betwixt two beautiful eyes, menaces of a dangerous and malignant nature. There are favourable physiognomies, so that in a crowd of victorious enemies, you shall presently choose, amongst men you never saw before, one rather than another to whom to surrender, and with whom to intrust your life; and yet not properly upon the consideration of beauty.

A person's look is but a feeble warranty; and yet it is something considerable too; and if I had to lash them, I would most severely scourge the wicked ones who belie and betray the promises that nature has planted in their foreheads; I should with greater severity punish malice under a mild and gentle aspect. It seems as if there were some lucky and some unlucky faces; and I believe there is some art in distinguishing affable from merely simple faces, severe from rugged, malicious from pensive, scornful from melancholic, and such other bordering qualities. There are beauties which are not only haughty, but sour, and others that are not only gentle, but more than that, insipid; to prognosticate from them future events is a matter that I shall leave undecided.

I have, as I have said elsewhere as to my own concern, simply and implicitly embraced this ancient rule, "That we cannot fail in following Nature," and that the sovereign precept is to conform ourselves to her. I have not, as Socrates did, corrected my natural composition by the force of reason, and have not in the least disturbed my inclination by art; I have let myself go as I came: I contend not; my two principal parts live, of their own accord, in peace and good intelligence, but my nurse's milk, thank God, was tolerably wholesome and good. Shall I say this by the way, that I see in greater esteem than 'tis worth, and in use solely among ourselves, a certain image of scholastic probity, a slave to precepts, and fettered with hope and fear? I would have it such as that laws and religions should not make, but perfect and authorise it; that finds it has wherewithal to support itself without help, born and rooted in us from the seed of universal reason, imprinted in every man by nature. That reason which strengthens Socrates from his vicious bend renders him obedient to the gods and men of authority in his city: courageous in death, not because his soul is immortal, but because he is mortal. 'Tis a doctrine ruinous to all government, and

much more hurtful than ingenious and subtle, which persuades the people that a religious belief is alone sufficient, and without conduct, to satisfy the divine justice. Use demonstrates to us a vast distinction betwixt devotion and conscience.

I have a favourable aspect, both in form and in interpretation:

*"Quid dixi, habere me? imo habui, Chreme."*⁴⁰⁷

*"Heu! tantum attriti corporis ossa vides;"*⁴⁰⁸

and that makes a quite contrary show to that of Socrates. It has often befallen me, that upon the mere credit of my presence and air, persons who had no manner of knowledge of me have put a very great confidence in me, whether in their own affairs or mine; and I have in foreign parts thence obtained singular and rare favours. But the two following examples are, peradventure, worth particular relation. A certain person planned to surprise my house and me in it; his scheme was to come to my gates alone, and to be importunate to be let in. I knew him by name, and had fair reason to repose confidence in him, as being my neighbour and something related to me. I caused the gates to be opened to him, as I do to every one. There I found him, with every appearance of alarm, his horse panting and very tired. He entertained me with this story: "That, about half a league off, he had met with a certain enemy of his, whom I also knew, and had heard of their quarrel; that his enemy had given him a very brisk chase, and that having been surprised in disorder, and his party being too weak, he had fled to my gates for refuge; and that he was in great trouble for his followers, whom (he said) he concluded to be all either dead or taken." I innocently did my best to comfort, assure, and refresh him. Shortly after came four or five of his soldiers, who presented themselves in the same countenance and affright, to get in too; and after them more, and still more, very well mounted and armed, to the number of five-and-twenty or thirty, pretending that they had the enemy at their heels. This mystery began a little to awaken my suspicion; I was not ignorant what an age I lived in, how much my house might be envied, and I had several examples of others of my acquaintance to whom a mishap of this sort had happened. But thinking there was nothing to be got by having begun to do a courtesies, unless I went through with it, and

⁴⁰⁷"What did I say? that I have? no, Chremes, I had." —Terence, Heaut., act i., sec. 2, v. 42.

⁴⁰⁸"Alas! of a worn body thou seest only the bones"

that I could not disengage myself from them without spoiling all, I let myself go the most natural and simple way, as I always do, and invited them all to come in. And in truth I am naturally very little inclined to suspicion and distrust; I willingly incline towards excuse and the gentlest interpretation; I take men according to the common order, and do not more believe in those perverse and unnatural inclinations, unless convinced by manifest evidence, than I do in monsters and miracles; and I am, moreover, a man who willingly commit myself to Fortune, and throw myself headlong into her arms; and I have hitherto found more reason to applaud than to blame myself for so doing, having ever found her more discreet about, and a greater friend to, my affairs than I am myself. There are some actions in my life whereof the conduct may justly be called difficult, or, if you please, prudent; of these, supposing the third part to have been my own, doubtless the other two-thirds were absolutely hers. We make, methinks, a mistake in that we do not enough trust Heaven with our affairs, and pretend to more from our own conduct than appertains to us; and therefore it is that our designs so often miscarry. Heaven is jealous of the extent that we attribute to the right of human prudence above its own, and cuts it all the shorter by how much the more we amplify it. The last comers remained on horseback in my courtyard, whilst their leader, who was with me in the parlour, would not have his horse put up in the stable, saying he should immediately retire, so soon as he had news of his men. He saw himself master of his enterprise, and nothing now remained but its execution. He has since several times said (for he was not ashamed to tell the story himself) that my countenance and frankness had snatched the treachery out of his hands. He again mounted his horse; his followers, who had their eyes intent upon him, to see when he would give the signal, being very much astonished to find him come away and leave his prey behind him.

Another time, relying upon some truce just published in the army, I took a journey through a very ticklish country. I had not ridden far, but I was discovered, and two or three parties of horse, from various places, were sent out to seize me; one of them overtook me on the third day, and I was attacked by fifteen or twenty gentlemen in vizors, followed at a distance by a band of foot-soldiers. I was taken, withdrawn into the thick of a neighbouring forest, dismounted, robbed, my trunks rifled, my money-box taken, and my horses and equipage divided amongst new masters. We had, in this copse, a very long contest about my ransom, which they set so high, that it was manifest that

I was not known to them. They were, moreover, in a very great debate about my life; and, in truth, there were various circumstances that clearly showed the danger I was in:

*“Tunc animis opus, AEnea, tunc pectore firmo.”*⁴⁰⁹

I still insisted upon the truce, too willing they should have the gain of what they had already taken from me, which was not to be despised, without promise of any other ransom. After two or three hours that we had been in this place, and that they had mounted me upon a horse that was not likely to run from them, and committed me to the guard of fifteen or twenty harquebusiers, and dispersed my servants to others, having given order that they should carry us away prisoners several ways, and I being already got some two or three musket-shots from the place,

*“Jam prece Pollucis, jam Castoris, implorata,”*⁴¹⁰

behold a sudden and unexpected alteration; I saw the chief return to me with gentler language, making search amongst the troopers for my scattered property, and causing as much as could be recovered to be restored to me, even to my money-box; but the best present they made was my liberty, for the rest did not much concern me at that time. The true cause of so sudden a change, and of this reconsideration, without any apparent impulse, and of so miraculous a repentance, in such a time, in a planned and deliberate enterprise, and become just by usage (for, at the first dash, I plainly confessed to them of what party I was, and whither I was going), truly, I do not yet rightly understand. The most prominent amongst them, who pulled off his vizer and told me his name, repeatedly told me at the time, over and over again, that I owed my deliverance to my countenance, and the liberty and boldness of my speech, that rendered me unworthy of such a misadventure, and should secure me from its repetition. 'Tis possible that the Divine goodness willed to make use of this vain instrument for my preservation; and it, moreover, defended me the next day from other and worse ambushes, of which these my assailants had given me warning. The last of these two gentlemen is yet living himself to tell the story; the first was killed not long ago.

⁴⁰⁹“Then, AEneas, there is need of courage, of a firm heart.” –AEneid, vi. 261.

⁴¹⁰“By a prayer addressed now to Pollux, now to Castor.” –Catullus, lxvi. 65.

If my face did not answer for me, if men did not read in my eyes and in my voice the innocence of intention, I had not lived so long without quarrels and without giving offence, seeing the indiscreet whatever comes into my head, and to judge so rashly of things. This way may, with reason, appear uncivil, and ill adapted to our way of conversation; but I have never met with any who judged it outrageous or malicious, or that took offence at my liberty, if he had it from my own mouth; words repeated have another kind of sound and sense. Nor do I hate any person; and I am so slow to offend, that I cannot do it, even upon the account of reason itself; and when occasion has required me to sentence criminals, I have rather chosen to fail in point of justice than to do it:

*“Ut magis peccari nolim, quam satis animi ad vindicanda peccata habeam.”*⁴¹¹

Aristotle, 'tis said, was reproached for having been too merciful to a wicked man: “I was indeed,” said he, “merciful to the man, but not to his wickedness.” Ordinary judgments exasperate themselves to punishment by the horror of the fact: but it cools mine; the horror of the first murder makes me fear a second; and the deformity of the first cruelty makes me abhor all imitation of it.’ That may be applied to me, who am but a Squire of Clubs, which was said of Charillus, king of Sparta: “He cannot be good, seeing he is not evil even to the wicked.” Or thus—for Plutarch delivers it both these ways, as he does a thousand other things, variously and contradictorily—“He must needs be good, because he is so even to the wicked.” Even as in lawful actions I dislike to employ myself when for such as are displeas'd at it; so, to say the truth, in unlawful things I do not make conscience enough of employing myself when it is for such as are willing.

⁴¹¹“So that I had rather men should not commit faults than that I should have sufficient courage to condemn them.” —Livy, xxxix. 21.

CHAPTER XIII

OF EXPERIENCE

THERE is no desire more natural than that of knowledge. We try all ways that can lead us to it; where reason is wanting, we therein employ experience,

*“Per varios usus artem experientia fecit,
Exemplo monstrante viam,”*⁴¹²

which is a means much more weak and cheap; but truth is so great a thing that we ought not to disdain any mediation that will guide us to it. Reason has so many forms that we know not to which to take; experience has no fewer; the consequence we would draw from the comparison of events is unsure, by reason they are always unlike. There is no quality so universal in this image of things as diversity and variety. Both the Greeks and the Latins and we, for the most express example of similitude, employ that of eggs; and yet there have been men, particularly one at Delphos, who could distinguish marks of difference amongst eggs so well that he never mistook one for another, and having many hens, could tell which had laid it.

Dissimilitude intrudes itself of itself in our works; no art can arrive at perfect similitude: neither Perrozet nor any other can so carefully polish and blanch the backs of his cards that some gamesters will not distinguish them by seeing them only shuffled by another. Resemblance does not so much make one as difference makes another. Nature has obliged herself to make nothing other that was not unlike.

⁴¹²“By various trials experience created art, example shewing the way.” —Manilius, i. 59.

And yet I am not much pleased with his opinion, who thought by the multitude of laws to curb the authority of judges in cutting out for them their several parcels; he was not aware that there is as much liberty and latitude in the interpretation of laws as in their form; and they but fool themselves, who think to lessen and stop our disputes by recalling us to the express words of the Bible: forasmuch as our mind does not find the field less spacious wherein to controvert the sense of another than to deliver his own; and as if there were less animosity and tartness in commentary than in invention. We see how much he was mistaken, for we have more laws in France than all the rest of the world put together, and more than would be necessary for the government of all the worlds of Epicurus:

*“Ut olim flagitiis, sic nunc legibus, laboramus.”*⁴¹³

and yet we have left so much to the opinions and decisions of our judges that there never was so full a liberty or so full a license. What have our legislators gained by culling out a hundred thousand particular cases, and by applying to these a hundred thousand laws? This number holds no manner of proportion with the infinite diversity of human actions; the multiplication of our inventions will never arrive at the variety of examples; add to these a hundred times as many more, it will still not happen that, of events to come, there shall one be found that, in this vast number of millions of events so chosen and recorded, shall so tally with any other one, and be so exactly coupled and matched with it that there will not remain some circumstance and diversity which will require a diverse judgment. There is little relation betwixt our actions, which are in perpetual mutation, and fixed and immutable laws; the most to be desired are those that are the most rare, the most simple and general; and I am even of opinion that we had better have none at all than to have them in so prodigious a number as we have.

Nature always gives them better and happier than those we make ourselves; witness the picture of the Golden Age of the Poets and the state wherein we see nations live who have no other. Some there are, who for their only judge take the first passer-by that travels along their mountains, to determine their cause; and others who, on their market day, choose out some one amongst them upon the spot to decide their

⁴¹³“As we were formerly by crimes, so we are now overburdened by laws.”—Tacitus, Annal., iii. 25.

controversies. What danger would there be that the wisest amongst us should so determine ours, according to occurrences and at sight, without obligation of example and consequence? For every foot its own shoe. King Ferdinand, sending colonies to the Indies, wisely provided that they should not carry along with them any students of jurisprudence, for fear lest suits should get footing in that new world, as being a science in its own nature, breeder of altercation and division; judging with Plato, "that lawyers and physicians are bad institutions of a country."

Whence does it come to pass that our common language, so easy for all other uses, becomes obscure and unintelligible in wills and contracts? and that he who so clearly expresses himself in whatever else he speaks or writes, cannot find in these any way of declaring himself that does not fall into doubt and contradiction? if it be not that the princes of that art, applying themselves with a peculiar attention to cull out portentous words and to contrive artificial sentences, have so weighed every syllable, and so thoroughly sifted every sort of quirking connection that they are now confounded and entangled in the infinity of figures and minute divisions, and can no more fall within any rule or prescription, nor any certain intelligence:

*"Confusum est, quidquid usque in pulverem sectum est."*⁴¹⁴

As you see children trying to bring a mass of quicksilver to a certain number of parts, the more they press and work it and endeavour to reduce it to their own will, the more they irritate the liberty of this generous metal; it evades their endeavour and sprinkles itself into so many separate bodies as frustrate all reckoning; so is it here, for in subdividing these subtilties we teach men to increase their doubts; they put us into a way of extending and diversifying difficulties, and lengthen and disperse them. In sowing and retailing questions they make the world fructify and increase in uncertainties and disputes, as the earth is made fertile by being crumbled and dug deep.

*'Difficultatem facit doctrina.'*⁴¹⁵

We doubted of Ulpian, and are still now more perplexed with Bartolus and Baldus. We should efface the trace of this innumerable diversity of opinions; not adorn ourselves with it, and fill posterity with

⁴¹⁴"Whatever is beaten into powder is undistinguishable (confused)." —Seneca, Ep., 89.

⁴¹⁵"Learning (Doctrine) begets difficulty." —Quintilian, *Instat. Orat.*, x. 3.

crotchets. I know not what to say to it; but experience makes it manifest, that so many interpretations dissipate truth and break it. Aristotle wrote to be understood; if he could not do this, much less will another that is not so good at it; and a third than he, who expressed his own thoughts. We open the matter, and spill it in pouring out: of one subject we make a thousand, and in multiplying and subdividing them, fall again into the infinity of atoms of Epicurus. Never did two men make the same judgment of the same thing; and 'tis impossible to find two opinions exactly alike, not only in several men, but in the same man, at diverse hours. I often find matter of doubt in things of which the commentary has disdained to take notice; I am most apt to stumble in an even country, like some horses that I have known, that make most trips in the smoothest way.

Who will not say that glosses augment doubts and ignorance, since there's no book to be found, either human or divine, which the world busies itself about, whereof the difficulties are cleared by interpretation. The hundredth commentator passes it on to the next, still more knotty and perplexed than he found it. When were we ever agreed amongst ourselves: "This book has enough; there is now no more to be said about it"? This is most apparent in the law; we give the authority of law to infinite doctors, infinite decrees, and as many interpretations; yet do we find any end of the need of interpreting? is there, for all that, any progress or advancement towards peace, or do we stand in need of any fewer advocates and judges than when this great mass of law was yet in its first infancy? On the contrary, we darken and bury intelligence; we can no longer discover it, but at the mercy of so many fences and barriers. Men do not know the natural disease of the mind; it does nothing but ferret and inquire, and is eternally wheeling, juggling, and perplexing itself like silkworms, and then suffocates itself in its work; "Mus in pice."⁴¹⁶ It thinks it discovers at a great distance, I know not what glimpses of light and imaginary truth: but whilst running to it, so many difficulties, hindrances, and new inquisitions cross it, that it loses its way, and is made drunk with the motion: not much unlike AEsop's dogs, that seeing something like a dead body floating in the sea, and not being able to approach it, set to work to drink the water and lay the passage dry, and so choked themselves. To which what one Crates' said of the writings of Heraclitus falls pat enough, "that they required a reader who could swim well," so that the depth and weight of his learning might not overwhelm and stifle him. 'Tis

⁴¹⁶"A mouse in a pitch barrel."

nothing but particular weakness that makes us content with what others or ourselves have found out in this chase after knowledge: one of better understanding will not rest so content; there is always room for one to follow, nay, even for ourselves; and another road; there is no end of our inquisitions; our end is in the other world. 'Tis a sign either that the mind has grown shortsighted when it is satisfied, or that it has got weary. No generous mind can stop in itself; it will still tend further and beyond its power; it has sallies beyond its effects; if it do not advance and press forward, and retire, and rush and wheel about, 'tis but half alive; its pursuits are without bound or method; its aliment is admiration, the chase, ambiguity, which Apollo sufficiently declared in always speaking to us in a double, obscure, and oblique sense: not feeding, but amusing and puzzling us. 'Tis an irregular and perpetual motion, without model and without aim; its inventions heat, pursue, and interproduce one another:

Estienne de la Boetie; thus translated by Cotton:

*“So in a running stream one wave we see
 After another roll incessantly
 And as they glide, each does successively
 Pursue the other, each the other fly
 By this that’s evermore pushed on, and this
 By that continually preceded is:
 The water still does into water swill,
 Still the same brook, but different water still.”*

There is more ado to interpret interpretations than to interpret things, and more books upon books than upon any other subject; we do nothing but comment upon one another. Every place swarms with commentaries; of authors there is great scarcity. Is it not the principal and most reputed knowledge of our later ages to understand the learned? Is it not the common and final end of all studies? Our opinions are grafted upon one another; the first serves as a stock to the second, the second to the third, and so forth; thus step by step we climb the ladder; whence it comes to pass that he who is mounted highest has often more honour than merit, for he is got up but an inch upon the shoulders of the last, but one.

How often, and, peradventure, how foolishly, have I extended my book to make it speak of itself; foolishly, if for no other reason but this, that it should remind me of what I say of others who do the same: that

the frequent amorous glances they cast upon their work witness that their hearts pant with self-love, and that even the disdainful severity wherewith they scourge them are but the dandlings and caressings of maternal love; as Aristotle, whose valuing and undervaluing himself often spring from the same air of arrogance. My own excuse is, that I ought in this to have more liberty than others, forasmuch as I write specifically of myself and of my writings, as I do of my other actions; that my theme turns upon itself; but I know not whether others will accept this excuse.

I observed in Germany that Luther has left as many divisions and disputes about the doubt of his opinions, and more, than he himself raised upon the Holy Scriptures. Our contest is verbal: I ask what nature is, what pleasure, circle, and substitution are? the question is about words, and is answered accordingly. A stone is a body; but if a man should further urge: "And what is a body?"—"Substance"; "And what is substance?" and so on, he would drive the respondent to the end of his Calepin.⁴¹⁷

We exchange one word for another, and often for one less understood. I better know what man is than I know what Animal is, or Mortal, or Rational. To satisfy one doubt, they give me three; 'tis the Hydra's head. Socrates asked Menon, "What virtue was." "There is," says Menon, "the virtue of a man and of a woman, of a magistrate and of a private person, of an old man and of a child." "Very fine," cried Socrates, "we were in quest of one virtue, and thou hast brought us a whole swarm." We put one question, and they return us a whole hive. As no event, no face, entirely resembles another, so do they not entirely differ: an ingenious mixture of nature. If our faces were not alike, we could not distinguish man from beast; if they were not unlike, we could not distinguish one man from another; all things hold by some similitude; every example halts, and the relation which is drawn from experience is always faulty and imperfect. Comparisons are ever-coupled at one end or other: so do the laws serve, and are fitted to every one of our affairs, by some wrested, biassed, and forced interpretation.

Since the ethic laws, that concern the particular duty of every one in himself, are so hard to be framed, as we see they are, 'tis no wonder if those which govern so many particulars are much more so. Do but consider the form of this justice that governs us; 'tis a true testimony of

⁴¹⁷Calepin (Ambrogio da Calepio), a famous lexicographer of the fifteenth century. His Polyglot Dictionary became so famous, that Calepin became a common appellation for a lexicon

human weakness, so full is it of error and contradiction. What we find to be favour and severity in justice—and we find so much of them both, that I know not whether the medium is as often met with as sickly and unjust members of the very body and essence of justice. Some country people have just brought me news in great haste, that they presently left in a forest of mine a man with a hundred wounds upon him, who was yet breathing, and begged of them water for pity's sake, and help to carry him to some place of relief; they tell me they durst not go near him, but have run away, lest the officers of justice should catch them there; and as happens to those who are found near a murdered person, they should be called in question about this accident, to their utter ruin, having neither money nor friends to defend their innocence. What could I have said to these people? 'Tis certain that this office of humanity would have brought them into trouble.

How many innocent people have we known that have been punished, and this without the judge's fault; and how many that have not arrived at our knowledge? This happened in my time: certain men were condemned to die for a murder committed; their sentence, if not pronounced, at least determined and concluded on. The judges, just in the nick, are informed by the officers of an inferior court hard by, that they have some men in custody, who have directly confessed the murder, and made an indubitable discovery of all the particulars of the fact. Yet it was gravely deliberated whether or not they ought to suspend the execution of the sentence already passed upon the first accused: they considered the novelty of the example judicially, and the consequence of reversing judgments; that the sentence was passed, and the judges deprived of repentance; and in the result, these poor devils were sacrificed by the forms of justice. Philip, or some other, provided against a like inconvenience after this manner. He had condemned a man in a great fine towards another by an absolute judgment. The truth some time after being discovered, he found that he had passed an unjust sentence. On one side was the reason of the cause; on the other side, the reason of the judicial forms: he in some sort satisfied both, leaving the sentence in the state it was, and out of his own purse recompensing the condemned party. But he had to do with a reparable affair; my men were irreparably hanged. How many condemnations have I seen more criminal than the crimes themselves?

All which makes me remember the ancient opinions, "That 'tis of necessity a man must do wrong by retail who will do right in gross; and injustice in little things, who would come to do justice in great:

that human justice is formed after the model of physic, according to which, all that is useful is also just and honest: and of what is held by the Stoics, that Nature herself proceeds contrary to justice in most of her works: and of what is received by the Cyrenaics, that there is nothing just of itself, but that customs and laws make justice: and what the Theodorians held that theft, sacrilege, and all sorts of uncleanness, are just in a sage, if he knows them to be profitable to him." There is no remedy: I am in the same case that Alcibiades was, that I will never, if I can help it, put myself into the hands of a man who may determine as to my head, where my life and honour shall more depend upon the skill and diligence of my attorney than on my own innocence. I would venture myself with such justice as would take notice of my good deeds, as well as my ill; where I had as much to hope as to fear: indemnity is not sufficient pay to a man who does better than not to do amiss. Our justice presents to us but one hand, and that the left hand, too; let him be who he may, he shall be sure to come off with loss.

In China, of which kingdom the government and arts, without commerce with or knowledge of ours, surpass our examples in several excellent features, and of which the history teaches me how much greater and more various the world is than either the ancients or we have been able to penetrate, the officers deputed by the prince to visit the state of his provinces, as they punish those who behave themselves ill in their charge, so do they liberally reward those who have conducted themselves better than the common sort, and beyond the necessity of their duty; these there present themselves, not only to be approved but to get; not simply to be paid, but to have a present made to them.

No judge, thank God, has ever yet spoken to me in the quality of a judge, upon any account whatever, whether my own or that of a third party, whether criminal or civil; nor no prison has ever received me, not even to walk there. Imagination renders the very outside of a jail displeasing to me; I am so enamoured of liberty, that should I be interdicted the access to some corner of the Indies, I should live a little less at my ease; and whilst I can find earth or air open elsewhere, I shall never lurk in any place where I must hide myself. My God! how ill should I endure the condition wherein I see so many people, nailed to a corner of the kingdom, deprived of the right to enter the principal cities and courts, and the liberty of the public roads, for having quarrelled with our laws. If those under which I live should shake a finger at me by way of menace, I would immediately go seek out others, let them be where they would. All my little prudence in the civil wars wherein we

are now engaged is employed that they may not hinder my liberty of going and coming.

Now, the laws keep up their credit, not for being just, but because they are laws; 'tis the mystic foundation of their authority; they have no other, and it well answers their purpose. They are often made by fools, still oftener by men who, out of hatred to equality, fail in equity, but always by men, vain and irresolute authors. There is nothing so much, nor so grossly, nor so ordinarily faulty, as the laws. Whoever obeys them because they are just, does not justly obey them as he ought. Our French laws, by their irregularity and deformity, lend, in some sort, a helping hand to the disorder and corruption that all manifest in their dispensation and execution: the command is so perplexed and inconstant, that it in some sort excuses alike disobedience and defect in the interpretation, the administration and the observation of it. What fruit then soever we may extract from experience, that will little advantage our institution, which we draw from foreign examples, if we make so little profit of that we have of our own, which is more familiar to us, and, doubtless, sufficient to instruct us in that whereof we have need. I study myself more than any other subject; 'tis my metaphysic, my physic:

*"Quis deus hanc mundi temperet arte domum:
 Qua venit exoriens, qua deficit: unde coactis
 Cornibus in plenum menstrua luna redit
 Unde salo superant venti, quid flamine captet
 Eurus, et in nubes unde perennis aqua;
 Sit ventura dies mundi quae subruat arces..."⁴¹⁸
 "Quaerite, quos agitatur mundi labor."⁴¹⁹*

In this universality, I suffer myself to be ignorantly and negligently led by the general law of the world: I shall know it well enough when I feel it; my learning cannot make it alter its course; it will not change itself for me; 'tis folly to hope it, and a greater folly to concern one's self about it, seeing it is necessarily alike public and common. The

⁴¹⁸"What god may govern with skill this dwelling of the world? whence rises the monthly moon, whither wanes she? how is it that her horns are contracted and reopen? whence do winds prevail on the main? what does the east wind court with its blasts? and whence are the clouds perpetually supplied with water? is a day to come which may undermine the world?" -Propertius, iii. 5, 26.

⁴¹⁹"Ask whom the cares of the world trouble"-Lucan, i. 417.

goodness and capacity of the governor ought absolutely to discharge us of all care of the government: philosophical inquisitions and contemplations serve for no other use but to increase our curiosity. The philosophers; with great reason, send us back to the rules of nature; but they have nothing to do with so sublime a knowledge; they falsify them, and present us her face painted with too high and too adulterate a complexion, whence spring so many different pictures of so uniform a subject. As she has given us feet to walk with, so has she given us prudence to guide us in life: not so ingenious, robust, and pompous a prudence as that of their invention; but yet one that is easy, quiet, and salutary, and that very well performs what the other promises, in him who has the good luck to know how to employ it sincerely and regularly, that is to say, according to nature. The most simply to commit one's self to nature is to do it most wisely. Oh, what a soft, easy, and wholesome pillow is ignorance and incuriosity, whereon to repose a well-ordered head!

I had rather understand myself well in myself, than in Cicero. Of the experience I have of myself, I find enough to make me wise, if I were but a good scholar: whoever will call to mind the excess of his past anger, and to what a degree that fever transported him, will see the deformity of this passion better than in Aristotle, and conceive a more just hatred against it; whoever will remember the ills he has undergone, those that have threatened him, and the light occasions that have removed him from one state to another, will by that prepare himself for future changes, and the knowledge of his condition. The life of Caesar has no greater example for us than our own: though popular and of command, 'tis still a life subject to all human accidents. Let us but listen to it; we apply to ourselves all whereof we have principal need; whoever shall call to memory how many and many times he has been mistaken in his own judgment, is he not a great fool if he does not ever after suspect it? When I find myself convinced, by the reason of another, of a false opinion, I do not so much learn what he has said to me that is new and the particular ignorance—that would be no great acquisition—as, in general, I learn my own debility and the treachery of my understanding, whence I extract the reformation of the whole mass. In all my other errors I do the same, and find from this rule great utility to life; I regard not the species and individual as a stone that I have stumbled at; I learn to suspect my steps throughout, and am careful to place them right. To learn that a man has said or done a foolish thing is nothing: a man must learn that he is nothing but a fool, a much more

ample, and important instruction. The false steps that my memory has so often made, even then when it was most secure and confident of itself, are not idly thrown away; it vainly swears and assures me I shake my ears; the first opposition that is made to its testimony puts me into suspense, and I durst not rely upon it in anything of moment, nor warrant it in another person's concerns: and were it not that what I do for want of memory, others do more often for want of good faith, I should always, in matter of fact, rather choose to take the truth from another's mouth than from my own. If every one would pry into the effects and circumstances of the passions that sway him, as I have done into those which I am most subject to, he would see them coming, and would a little break their impetuosity and career; they do not always seize us on a sudden; there is threatening and degrees

*"Fluctus uti primo coepit cum albescere vento,
Paulatim sese tollit mare, et altius undas
Erigit, inde imo consurgit ad aethera fundo."*⁴²⁰

Judgment holds in me a magisterial seat; at least it carefully endeavours to make it so: it leaves my appetites to take their own course, hatred and friendship, nay, even that I bear to myself, without change or corruption; if it cannot reform the other parts according to its own model, at least it suffers not itself to be corrupted by them, but plays its game apart.

The advice to every one, "to know themselves," should be of important effect, since that god of wisdom and light' caused it to be written on the front of his temple,⁴²¹ as comprehending all he had to advise us. Plato says also, that prudence is no other thing than the execution of this ordinance; and Socrates minutely verifies it in Xenophon. The difficulties and obscurity are not discerned in any science but by those who are got into it; for a certain degree of intelligence is required to be able to know that a man knows not, and we must push against a door to know whether it be bolted against us or no: whence this Platonic subtlety springs, that "neither they who know are to enquire, forasmuch as they know; nor they who do not know, forasmuch as to inquire they must know what they inquire of." So in this, "of knowing a man's self," that every man is seen so resolved and satisfied with

⁴²⁰"As with the first wind the sea begins to foam, and swells, thence higher swells, and higher raises the waves, till the ocean rises from its depths to the sky." —Aeneid, vii. 528.

⁴²¹At Delphi

himself, that every man thinks himself sufficiently intelligent, signifies that every one knows nothing about the matter; as Socrates gives Euthydemus to understand. I, who profess nothing else, therein find so infinite a depth and variety, that all the fruit I have reaped from my learning serves only to make me sensible how much I have to learn. To my weakness, so often confessed, I owe the propension I have to modesty, to the obedience of belief prescribed me, to a constant coldness and moderation of opinions, and a hatred of that troublesome and wrangling arrogance, wholly believing and trusting in itself, the capital enemy of discipline and truth. Do but hear them domineer; the first fopperies they utter, 'tis in the style wherewith men establish religions and laws:

“Nihil est turpius, quam cognitioni et perceptionis assertionem approbationemque praecurrere.”⁴²²

Aristarchus said that anciently there were scarce seven sages to be found in the world, and in his time scarce so many fools: have not we more reason than he to say so in this age of ours? Affirmation and obstinacy are express signs of want of wit. This fellow may have knocked his nose against the ground a hundred times in a day, yet he will be at his Ergo's as resolute and sturdy as before. You would say he had had some new soul and vigour of understanding infused into him since, and that it happened to him, as to that ancient son of the earth, who took fresh courage and vigour by his fall;

“Cui cum tetigere parentem jam defecta vigent renovata robore membra.”⁴²³

does not this incorrigible coxcomb think that he assumes a new understanding by undertaking a new dispute? 'Tis by my own experience that I accuse human ignorance, which is, in my opinion, the surest part of the world's school. Such as will not conclude it in themselves, by so vain an example as mine, or their own, let them believe it from Socrates, the master of masters; for the philosopher Antisthenes said to his disciples, “Let us go and hear Socrates; there I will be a pupil

⁴²²“Nothing is worse than that assertion and decision should precede knowledge and perception.” —Cicero, Acad., i. 13.

⁴²³“Whose broken limbs, when they touched his mother earth, immediately new force acquired.” —Lucan, iv. 599.

with you"; and, maintaining this doctrine of the Stoic sect, "that virtue was sufficient to make a life completely happy, having no need of any other thing whatever"; except of the force of Socrates, added he.

That long attention that I employ in considering myself, also fits rite to judge tolerably enough of others; and there are few things whereof I speak better and with better excuse. I happen very often more exactly to see and distinguish the qualities of my friends than they do themselves: I have astonished some with the pertinence of my description, and have given them warning of themselves. By having from my infancy been accustomed to contemplate my own life in those of others, I have acquired a complexion studious in that particular; and when I am once interit upon it, I let few things about me, whether countenances, humours, or discourses, that serve to that purpose, escape me. I study all, both what I am to avoid and what I am to follow. Also in my friends, I discover by their productions their inward inclinations; not by arranging this infinite variety of so diverse and unconnected actions into certain species and chapters, and distinctly distributing my parcels and divisions under known heads and classes;

*"Sed neque quam multae species, nec nomina quae sint,
Est numerus."*⁴²⁴

The wise speak and deliver their fancies more specifically, and piece by piece; I, who see no further into things than as use informs me, present mine generally without rule and experimentally: I pronounce my opinion by disjointed articles, as a thing that cannot be spoken at once and in gross; relation and conformity are not to be found in such low and common souls as ours. Wisdom is a solid and entire building, of which every piece keeps its place and bears its mark:

*"Sola sapientia in se tota conversa est."*⁴²⁵

I leave it to artists, and I know not whether or no they will be able to bring it about, in so perplexed, minute, and fortuitous a thing, to marshal into distinct bodies this infinite diversity of faces, to settle our inconstancy, and set it in order. I do not only find it hard to piece our actions to one another, but I moreover find it hard properly to design each

⁴²⁴"But neither can we enumerate how many kinds there what are their names." –Virgil, *Georg.*, ii. 103.

⁴²⁵"Wisdom only is wholly within itself" –Cicero, *De Fin.*, iii. 7.

by itself by any principal quality, so ambiguous and variform they are with diverse lights. That which is remarked for rare in Perseus, king of Macedon, "that his mind, fixing itself to no one condition, wandered in all sorts of living, and represented manners so wild and erratic that it was neither known to himself or any other what kind of man he was," seems almost to fit all the world; and, especially, I have seen another of his make, to whom I think this conclusion might more properly be applied; no moderate settledness, still running headlong from one extreme to another, upon occasions not to be guessed at; no line of path without traverse and wonderful contrariety: no one quality simple and unmixed; so that the best guess men can one day make will be, that he affected and studied to make himself known by being not to be known. A man had need have sound ears to hear himself frankly criticised; and as there are few who can endure to hear it without being nettled, those who hazard the undertaking it to us manifest a singular effect of friendship; for 'tis to love sincerely indeed, to venture to wound and offend us, for our own good. I think it harsh to judge a man whose ill qualities are more than his good ones: Plato requires three things in him who will examine the soul of another: knowledge, benevolence, boldness.

I was sometimes asked, what I should have thought myself fit for, had any one designed to make use of me, while I was of suitable years:

*"Dum melior vires sanguis dabat, aemula necdum
Temporibus geminis canebat sparsa senectus."*⁴²⁶

"for nothing," said I; and I willingly excuse myself from knowing anything which enslaves me to others. But I had told the truth to my master,⁴²⁷ and had regulated his manners, if he had so pleased, not in gross, by scholastic lessons, which I understand not, and from which I see no true reformation spring in those that do; but by observing them by leisure, at all opportunities, and simply and naturally judging them as an eye-witness, distinctly one by one; giving him to understand upon what terms he was in the common opinion, in opposition to his flatterers. There is none of us who would not be worse than kings, if so continually corrupted as they are with that sort of canaille. How,

⁴²⁶"Whilst better blood gave me vigour, and before envious old age whitened and thinned my temples." —Aeneid, V. 415.

⁴²⁷Was this Henri VI.? D.W.

if Alexander, that great king and philosopher, cannot defend himself from them!

I should have had fidelity, judgment, and freedom enough for that purpose. It would be a nameless office, otherwise it would lose its grace and its effect; and 'tis a part that is not indifferently fit for all men; for truth itself has not the privilege to be spoken at all times and indiscriminately; its use, noble as it is, has its circumspections and limits. It often falls out, as the world goes, that a man lets it slip into the ear of a prince, not only to no purpose, but moreover injuriously and unjustly; and no man shall make me believe that a virtuous remonstrance may not be viciously applied, and that the interest of the substance is not often to give way to that of the form.

For such a purpose, I would have a man who is content with his own fortune:

*"Quod sit, esse velit, nihilque malit,"*⁴²⁸

and of moderate station; forasmuch as, on the one hand, he would not be afraid to touch his master's heart to the quick, for fear by that means of losing his preferment: and, on the other hand, being of no high quality, he would have more easy communication with all sorts of people. I would have this office limited to only one person; for to allow the privilege of his liberty and privacy to many, would beget an inconvenient irreverence; and of that one, I would above all things require the fidelity of silence.

A king is not to be believed when he brags of his constancy in standing the shock of the enemy for his glory, if for his profit and amendment he cannot stand the liberty of a friend's advice, which has no other power but to pinch his ear, the remainder of its effect being still in his own hands. Now, there is no condition of men whatever who stand in so great need of true and free advice and warning, as they do: they sustain a public life, and have to satisfy the opinion of so many spectators, that, as those about them conceal from them whatever should divert them from their own way, they insensibly find themselves involved in the hatred and detestation of their people, often upon occasions which they might have avoided without any prejudice even of their pleasures themselves, had they been advised and set right in time. Their favourites commonly have more regard to themselves than

⁴²⁸"Who is pleased with what he is and desires nothing further." —Martial, x. ii, 18.

to their master; and indeed it answers with them, forasmuch as, in truth, most offices of real friendship, when applied to the sovereign, are under a rude and dangerous hazard, so that therein there is great need, not only of very great affection and freedom, but of courage too.

In fine, all this hodge-podge which I scribble here, is nothing but a register of the essays of my own life, which, for the internal soundness, is exemplary enough to take instruction against the grain; but as to bodily health, no man can furnish out more profitable experience than I, who present it pure, and no way corrupted and changed by art or opinion. Experience is properly upon its own dunghill in the subject of physic, where reason wholly gives it place: Tiberius said that whoever had lived twenty years ought to be responsible to himself for all things that were hurtful or wholesome to him, and know how to order himself without physic;⁴²⁹

and he might have learned it of Socrates, who, advising his disciples to be solicitous of their health as a chief study, added that it was hard if a man of sense, having a care to his exercise and diet, did not better know than any physician what was good or ill for him. And physic itself professes always to have experience for the test of its operations: so Plato had reason to say that, to be a right physician, it would be necessary that he who would become such, should first himself have passed through all the diseases he pretends to cure, and through all the accidents and circumstances whereof he is to judge. 'Tis but reason they should get the pox, if they will know how to cure it; for my part, I should put myself into such hands; the others but guide us, like him who paints seas and rocks and ports sitting at table, and there makes the model of a ship sailing in all security; but put him to the work itself, he knows not at which end to begin. They make such a description of our maladies as a town crier does of a lost horse or dog—such a color, such a height, such an ear—but bring it to him and he knows it not, for all that. If physic should one day give me some good and visible relief, then truly I will cry out in good earnest:

*“Tandem effcaci do manus scientiae.”*⁴³⁰

⁴²⁹All that Suetonius says in his Life of Tiberius is that this emperor, after he was thirty years old, governed his health without the aid of physicians; and what Plutarch tells us, in his essay on the Rules and Precepts of Health, is that Tiberius said that the man who, having attained sixty years, held out his pulse to a physician was a fool.

⁴³⁰“Show me and efficacious science, and I will take it by the hand.” —Horace, xvii. I.

The arts that promise to keep our bodies and souls in health promise a great deal; but, withal, there are none that less keep their promise. And, in our time, those who make profession of these arts amongst us, less manifest the effects than any other sort of men; one may say of them, at the most, that they sell medicinal drugs; but that they are physicians, a man cannot say.⁴³¹

I have lived long enough to be able to give an account of the custom that has carried me so far; for him who has a mind to try it, as his taster, I have made the experiment. Here are some of the articles, as my memory shall supply me with them; I have no custom that has not varied according to circumstances; but I only record those that I have been best acquainted with, and that hitherto have had the greatest possession of me.

My form of life is the same in sickness as in health; the same bed, the same hours, the same meat, and even the same drink, serve me in both conditions alike; I add nothing to them but the moderation of more or less, according to my strength and appetite. My health is to maintain my wonted state without disturbance. I see that sickness puts me off it on one side, and if I will be ruled by the physicians, they will put me off on the other; so that by fortune and by art I am out of my way. I believe nothing more certainly than this, that I cannot be hurt by the use of things to which I have been so long accustomed. 'Tis for custom to give a form to a man's life, such as it pleases him; she is all in all in that: 'tis the potion of Circe, that varies our nature as she best pleases. How many nations, and but three steps from us, think the fear of the night-dew, that so manifestly is hurtful to us, a ridiculous fancy; and our own watermen and peasants laugh at it. You make a German sick if you lay him upon a mattress, as you do an Italian if you lay him on a feather-bed, and a Frenchman, if without curtains or fire. A Spanish stomach cannot hold out to eat as we can, nor ours to drink like the Swiss. A German made me very merry at Augsburg, by finding fault with our hearths, by the same arguments which we commonly make use of in decrying their stoves: for, to say the truth, the smothered heat, and then the smell of that heated matter of which the fire is composed, very much offend such as are not used to them; not me; and, indeed, the heat being always equal, constant, and universal, without flame, without smoke, and without the wind that comes down our chimneys, they may many ways sustain comparison with ours. Why do we not

⁴³¹The edition of 1588 adds: "Judging by themselves, and those who are ruled by them."

imitate the Roman architecture? for they say that anciently fires were not made in the houses, but on the outside, and at the foot of them, whence the heat was conveyed to the whole fabric by pipes contrived in the wall, which were drawn twining about the rooms that were to be warmed: which I have seen plainly described somewhere in Seneca. This German hearing me commend the conveniences and beauties of his city, which truly deserves it, began to compassionate me that I had to leave it; and the first inconvenience he alleged to me was, the heaviness of head that the chimneys elsewhere would bring upon me. He had heard some one make this complaint, and fixed it upon us, being by custom deprived of the means of perceiving it at home. All heat that comes from the fire weakens and dulls me. Evenus said that fire was the best condiment of life: I rather choose any other way of making myself warm.

We are afraid to drink our wines, when toward the bottom of the cask; in Portugal those fumes are reputed delicious, and it is the beverage of princes. In short, every nation has many customs and usages that are not only unknown to other nations, but savage and miraculous in their sight. What should we do with those people who admit of no evidence that is not in print, who believe not men if they are not in a book, nor truth if it be not of competent age? we dignify our fopperies when we commit them to the press: 'tis of a great deal more weight to say, "I have read such a thing," than if you only say, "I have heard such a thing." But I, who no more disbelieve a man's mouth than his pen, and who know that men write as indiscreetly as they speak, and who look upon this age as one that is past, as soon quote a friend as Aulus Gellius or Macrobius; and what I have seen, as what they have written. And, as 'tis held of virtue, that it is not greater for having continued longer, so do I hold of truth, that for being older it is none the wiser. I often say, that it is mere folly that makes us run after foreign and scholastic examples; their fertility is the same now that it was in the time of Homer and Plato. But is it not that we seek more honour from the quotation, than from the truth of the matter in hand? As if it were more to the purpose to borrow our proofs from the shops of Vascosan or Plantin, than from what is to be seen in our own village; or else, indeed, that we have not the wit to cull out and make useful what we see before us, and to judge of it clearly enough to draw it into example: for if we say that we want authority to give faith to our testimony, we speak from the purpose; forasmuch as, in my opinion, of the most ordinary, common, and known things, could we but find out their light, the

greatest miracles of nature might be formed, and the most wonderful examples, especially upon the subject of human actions.

Now, upon this subject, setting aside the examples I have gathered from books, and what Aristotle says of Andron the Argian, that he travelled over the arid sands of Lybia without drinking: a gentleman, who has very well behaved himself in several employments, said, in a place where I was, that he had ridden from Madrid to Lisbon, in the heat of summer, without any drink at all. He is very healthful and vigorous for his age, and has nothing extraordinary in the use of his life, but this, to live sometimes two or three months, nay, a whole year, as he has told me, without drinking. He is sometimes thirsty, but he lets it pass over, and he holds that it is an appetite which easily goes off of itself; and he drinks more out of caprice than either for need or pleasure.

Here is another example: 'tis not long ago that I found one of the learnedest men in France, among those of not inconsiderable fortune, studying in a corner of a hall that they had separated for him with tapestry, and about him a rabble of his servants full of licence. He told me, and Seneca almost says the same of himself, he made an advantage of this hubbub; that, beaten with this noise, he so much the more collected and retired himself into himself for contemplation, and that this tempest of voices drove back his thoughts within himself. Being a student at Padua, he had his study so long situated amid the rattle of coaches and the tumult of the square, that he not only formed himself to the contempt, but even to the use of noise, for the service of his studies. Socrates answered Alcibiades, who was astonished how he could endure the perpetual scolding of his wife, "Why," said he, "as those do who are accustomed to the ordinary noise of wheels drawing water." I am quite otherwise; I have a tender head and easily discomposed; when 'tis bent upon anything, the least buzzing of a fly murders it.

Seneca in his youth having warmly espoused the example of Sextius, of eating nothing that had died, for a whole year dispensed with such food, and, as he said, with pleasure, and discontinued it that he might not be suspected of taking up this rule from some new religion by which it was prescribed: he adopted, in like manner, from the precepts of Attalus a custom not to lie upon any sort of bedding that gave way under his weight, and, even to his old age, made use of such as would not yield to any pressure. What the usage of his time made him account roughness, that of ours makes us look upon as effeminacy.

Do but observe the difference betwixt the way of living of my labour-

ers and my own; the Scythians and Indians have nothing more remote both from my capacity and my form. I have picked up charity boys to serve me: who soon after have quitted both my kitchen and livery, only that they might return to their former course of life; and I found one afterwards, picking mussels out of the sewer for his dinner, whom I could neither by entreaties nor threats reclaim from the sweetness he found in indigence. Beggars have their magnificences and delights, as well as the rich, and, 'tis said, their dignities and polities. These are the effects of custom; she can mould us, not only into what form she pleases (the sages say we ought to apply ourselves to the best, which she will soon make easy to us), but also to change and variation, which is the most noble and most useful instruction of all she teaches us. The best of my bodily conditions is that I am flexible and not very obstinate: I have inclinations more my own and ordinary, and more agreeable than others; but I am diverted from them with very little ado, and easily slip into a contrary course. A young man ought to cross his own rules, to awaken his vigour and to keep it from growing faint and rusty; and there is no course of life so weak and sottish as that which is carried on by rule and discipline;

*“Ad primum lapidem vectari quum placet, hora
Sumitur ex libro; si prurit frictus ocelli
Angulus, inspecta genesi, collyria quaerit;”*⁴³²

he shall often throw himself even into excesses, if he will take my advice; otherwise the least debauch will destroy him, and render him troublesome and disagreeable in company. The worst quality in a well-bred man is over-fastidiousness, and an obligation to a certain particular way; and it is particular, if not pliable and supple. It is a kind of reproach, not to be able, or not to dare, to do what we see those about us do; let such as these stop at home. It is in every man unbecoming, but in a soldier vicious and intolerable: who, as Philopocemen said, ought to accustom himself to every variety and inequality of life.

Though I have been brought up, as much as was possible, to liberty and independence, yet so it is that, growing old, and having by indifference more settled upon certain forms (my age is now past instruction, and has henceforward nothing to do but to keep itself up as

⁴³²“When he is pleased to have himself carried to the first milestone, the hour is chosen from the almanac; if he but rub the corner of his eye, his horoscope having been examined, he seeks the aid of salves.” —Juvenal, vi. 576.

well as it can), custom has already, ere I was aware, so imprinted its character in me in certain things, that I look upon it as a kind of excess to leave them off; and, without a force upon myself, cannot sleep in the daytime, nor eat between meals, nor breakfast, nor go to bed, without a great interval betwixt eating and sleeping,⁴³³ as of three hours after supper; nor get children but before I sleep, nor get them standing; nor endure my own sweat; nor quench my thirst either with pure water or pure wine; nor keep my head long bare, nor cut my hair after dinner; and I should be as uneasy without my gloves as without my shirt, or without washing when I rise from table or out of my bed; and I could not lie without a canopy and curtains, as if they were essential things. I could dine without a tablecloth, but without a clean napkin, after the German fashion, very incommodiously; I foul them more than the Germans or Italians do, and make but little use either of spoon or fork. I complain that they did not keep up the fashion, begun after the example of kings, to change our napkin at every service, as they do our plate. We are told of that laborious soldier Marius that, growing old, he became nice in his drink, and never drank but out of a particular cup of his own I, in like manner, have suffered myself to fancy a certain form of glasses, and not willingly to drink in common glasses, no more than from a strange common hand: all metal offends me in comparison of a clear and transparent matter: let my eyes taste, too, according to their capacity. I owe several other such niceties to custom. Nature has also, on the other side, helped me to some of hers: as not to be able to endure more than two full meals in one day, without overcharging my stomach, nor a total abstinence from one of those meals without filling myself with wind, drying up my mouth, and dulling my appetite; the finding great inconvenience from overmuch evening air; for of late years, in night marches, which often happen to be all night long, after five or six hours my stomach begins to be queasy, with a violent pain in my head, so that I always vomit before the day can break. When the others go to breakfast, I go to sleep; and when I rise, I am as brisk and gay as before. I had always been told that the night dew never rises but in the beginning of the night; but for some years past, long and familiar intercourse with a lord, possessed with the opinion that the night dew is more sharp and dangerous about the declining of the sun, an hour or two before it sets, which he carefully avoids, and despises that of the night, he almost impressed upon me, not so much his reasoning as his experiences. What, shall mere doubt and inquiry strike our imagina-

⁴³³Gastroesophageal Reflux. D.W.

tion, so as to change us? Such as absolutely and on a sudden give way to these propensions, draw total destruction upon themselves. I am sorry for several gentlemen who, through the folly of their physicians, have in their youth and health wholly shut themselves up: it were better to endure a cough, than, by disuse, for ever to lose the commerce of common life in things of so great utility. Malignant science, to interdict us the most pleasant hours of the day! Let us keep our possession to the last; for the most part, a man hardens himself by being obstinate, and corrects his constitution, as Caesar did the falling sickness, by dint of contempt. A man should addict himself to the best rules, but not enslave himself to them, except to such, if there be any such, where obligation and servitude are of profit.

Both kings and philosophers go to stool, and ladies too; public lives are bound to ceremony; mine, that is obscure and private, enjoys all natural dispensation; soldier and Gascon are also qualities a little subject to indiscretion; wherefore I shall say of this act of relieving nature, that it is desirable to refer it to certain prescribed and nocturnal hours, and compel one's self to this by custom, as I have done; but not to subject one's self, as I have done in my declining years, to a particular convenience of place and seat for that purpose, and make it troublesome by long sitting; and yet, in the fouler offices, is it not in some measure excusable to require more care and cleanliness?

*"Naturt homo mundum et elegans animal est."*⁴³⁴

Of all the actions of nature, I am the most impatient of being interrupted in that. I have seen many soldiers troubled with the unruliness of their bellies; whereas mine and I never fail of our punctual assignation, which is at leaping out of bed, if some indispensable business or sickness does not molest us.

I think then, as I said before, that sick men cannot better place themselves anywhere in more safety, than in sitting still in that course of life wherein they have been bred and trained up; change, be it what it will, distempers and puts one out. Do you believe that chestnuts can hurt a Perigordin or a Lucchese, or milk and cheese the mountain people? We enjoin them not only a new, but a contrary, method of life; a change that the healthful cannot endure. Prescribe water to a Breton of three-score and ten; shut a seaman up in a stove; forbid a Basque footman to walk: you will deprive them of motion, and in the end of air and light:

⁴³⁴"Man is by nature a clean and delicate creature." —Seneca, Ep., 92.

*“An vivere tanti est?
 Cogimur a suetis animum suspendere rebus,
 Atque, ut vivamus, vivere desinimus.
 Hos superesse reor, quibus et spirabilis aer
 Et lux, qua regimur, redditur ipsa gravis.”*⁴³⁵

If they do no other good, they do this at least, that they prepare patients betimes for death, by little and little undermining and cutting off the use of life.

Both well and sick, I have ever willingly suffered myself to obey the appetites that pressed upon me. I give great rein to my desires and propensities; I do not love to cure one disease by another; I hate remedies that are more troublesome than the disease itself. To be subject to the colic and subject to abstain from eating oysters are two evils instead of one; the disease torments us on the one side, and the remedy on the other. Since we are ever in danger of mistaking, let us rather run the hazard of a mistake, after we have had the pleasure. The world proceeds quite the other way, and thinks nothing profitable that is not painful; it has great suspicion of facility. My appetite, in various things, has of its own accord happily enough accommodated itself to the health of my stomach. Relish and pungency in sauces were pleasant to me when young; my stomach disliking them since, my taste incontinently followed. Wine is hurtful to sick people, and 'tis the first thing that my mouth then finds distasteful, and with an invincible dislike. Whatever I take against my liking does me harm; and nothing hurts me that I eat with appetite and delight. I never received harm by any action that was very pleasant to me; and accordingly have made all medicinal conclusions largely give way to my pleasure; and I have, when I was young,

*“Quem circumcursans huc atque huc saepe Cupido
 Fulgebat crocink splendidus in tunic.”*⁴³⁶

given myself the rein as licentiously and inconsiderately to the desire that was predominant in me, as any other whomsoever:

⁴³⁵“Is life worth so much? We are compelled to withhold the mind from things to which we are accustomed; and, that we may live, we cease to live... Do I conceive that they still live, to whom the respirable air, and the light itself, by which we are governed, is rendered oppressive?” —Pseudo-Gallus, Eclog., i. 155, 247.

⁴³⁶“When Cupid, fluttering round me here and there, shone in his rich purple mantle.” — Catullus, lxvi. 133.

*"Et militavi non sine gloria;"*⁴³⁷

yet more in continuation and holding out, than in sally:

*"Sex me vix memini sustinuisse vices."*⁴³⁸

'Tis certainly a misfortune and a miracle at once to confess at what a tender age I first came under the subjection of love: it was, indeed, by chance; for it was long before the years of choice or knowledge; I do not remember myself so far back; and my fortune may well be coupled with that of Quartilla, who could not remember when she was a maid:

*"Inde tragus, celeresque pili, mirandaque matri Barba
meae."*⁴³⁹

Physicians modify their rules according to the violent longings that happen to sick persons, ordinarily with good success; this great desire cannot be imagined so strange and vicious, but that nature must have a hand in it. And then how easy a thing is it to satisfy the fancy? In my opinion; this part wholly carries it, at least, above all the rest. The most grievous and ordinary evils are those that fancy loads us with; this Spanish saying pleases me in several aspects:

*"Defenda me Dios de me."*⁴⁴⁰

I am sorry when I am sick, that I have not some longing that might give me the pleasure of satisfying it; all the rules of physic would hardly be able to divert me from it. I do the same when I am well; I can see very little more to be hoped or wished for. 'Twere pity a man should be so weak and languishing, as not to have even wishing left to him.

The art of physic is not so fixed, that we need be without authority for whatever we do; it changes according to climates and moons, according to Fernel and to Scaliger.⁴⁴¹ If your physician does not think it

⁴³⁷"And I have played the soldier not ingloriously." —Horace, Od., iii. 26, 2.

⁴³⁸"I can scarcely remember six bouts in one night" —Ovid, Amor., iii. 7, 26.

⁴³⁹"Thence the odour of the arm-pits, the precocious hair, and the beard which astonished my mother." —Martial, xi. 22, 7.

⁴⁴⁰"God defend me from myself."

⁴⁴¹Physicians to Henry II.

good for you to sleep, to drink wine, or to eat such and such meats, never trouble yourself; I will find you another that shall not be of his opinion; the diversity of medical arguments and opinions embraces all sorts and forms. I saw a miserable sick person panting and burning for thirst, that he might be cured, who was afterwards laughed at for his pains by another physician, who condemned that advice as prejudicial to him: had he not tormented himself to good purpose? There lately died of the stone a man of that profession, who had made use of extreme abstinence to contend with his disease: his fellow-physicians say that, on the contrary, this abstinence had dried him up and baked the gravel in his kidneys.

I have observed, that both in wounds and sicknesses, speaking discomposes and hurts me, as much as any irregularity I can commit. My voice pains and tires me, for 'tis loud and forced; so that when I have gone to a whisper some great persons about affairs of consequence, they have often desired me to moderate my voice.

This story is worth a diversion. Some one in a certain Greek school speaking loud as I do, the master of the ceremonies sent to him to speak softly: "Tell him, then, he must send me," replied the other, "the tone he would have me speak in." To which the other replied, "That he should take the tone from the ears of him to whom he spake." It was well said, if it is to be understood: "Speak according to the affair you are speaking about to your auditor," for if it mean, "'tis sufficient that he hear you, or govern yourself by him," I do not find it to be reason. The tone and motion of my voice carries with it a great deal of the expression and signification of my meaning, and 'tis I who am to govern it, to make myself understood: there is a voice to instruct, a voice to flatter, and a voice to reprehend. I will not only that my voice reach him, but, peradventure, that it strike and pierce him. When I rate my valet with sharp and bitter language, it would be very pretty for him to say; "Pray, master, speak lower; I hear you very well":

*"Est quaedam vox ad auditum accommodata, non magnitudine, sed proprietate."*⁴⁴²

Speaking is half his who speaks, and half his who hears; the latter ought to prepare himself to receive it, according to its bias; as with

⁴⁴²"There is a certain voice accommodated to the hearing, not by its loudness, but by its propriety." —Quintilian, xi. 3.

tennis-players, he who receives the ball, shifts and prepares, according as he sees him move who strikes the stroke, and according to the stroke itself.

Experience has, moreover, taught me this, that we ruin ourselves by impatience. Evils have their life and limits, their diseases and their recovery.

The constitution of maladies is formed by the pattern of the constitution of animals; they have their fortune and their days limited from their birth; he who attempts imperiously to cut them short by force in the middle of their course, lengthens and multiplies them, and incenses instead of appeasing them. I am of Crantor's opinion, that we are neither obstinately and deafly to oppose evils, nor succumb to them from want of courage; but that we are naturally to give way to them, according to their condition and our own. We ought to grant free passage to diseases; I find they stay less with me, who let them alone; and I have lost some, reputed the most tenacious and obstinate, by their own decay, without help and without art, and contrary to its rules. Let us a little permit Nature to take her own way; she better understands her own affairs than we. But such an one died of it; and so shall you: if not of that disease, of another. And how many have not escaped dying, who have had three physicians at their tails? Example is a vague and universal mirror, and of various reflections. If it be a delicious medicine, take it: 'tis always so much present good. I will never stick at the name nor the colour, if it be pleasant and grateful to the palate: pleasure is one of the chiefest kinds of profit. I have suffered colds, gouty defluxions, relaxations, palpitations of the heart, megrims, and other accidents, to grow old and die in time a natural death. I have so lost them when I was half fit to keep them: they are sooner prevailed upon by courtesy than huffing. We must patiently suffer the laws of our condition; we are born to grow old, to grow weak, and to be sick, in despite of all medicine. 'Tis the first lesson the Mexicans teach their children; so soon as ever they are born they thus salute them: "Thou art come into the world, child, to endure: endure, suffer, and say nothing." 'Tis injustice to lament that which has befallen any one which may befall every one:

*"Indignare, si quid in to inique proprio constitutum est."*⁴⁴³

⁴⁴³"Then be angry, when there is anything unjustly decreed against thee alone." – Seneca, Ep., 91.

See an old man who begs of God that he will maintain his health vigorous and entire; that is to say, that he restore him to youth:

*“Stulte, quid haec frustra votis puerilibus optas?”*⁴⁴⁴

is it not folly? his condition is not capable of it. The gout, the stone, and indigestion are symptoms of long years; as heat, rains, and winds are of long journeys. Plato does not believe that AEsculapius troubled himself to provide by regimen to prolong life in a weak and wasted body, useless to his country and to his profession, or to beget healthful and robust children; and does not think this care suitable to the Divine justice and prudence, which is to direct all things to utility. My good friend, your business is done; nobody can restore you; they can, at the most, but patch you up, and prop you a little, and by that means prolong your misery an hour or two:

*“Non secus instantem cupiens fulcire ruinam,
Diversis contra nititur obiicibus;
Donec certa dies, omni compage soluta,
Ipsam cum rebus subruat auxilium.”*⁴⁴⁵

We must learn to suffer what we cannot evade; our life, like the harmony of the world, is composed of contrary things—of diverse tones, sweet and harsh, sharp and flat, sprightly and solemn: the musician who should only affect some of these, what would he be able to do? he must know how to make use of them all, and to mix them; and so we should mingle the goods and evils which are consubstantial with our life; our being cannot subsist without this mixture, and the one part is no less necessary to it than the other. To attempt to combat natural necessity, is to represent the folly of Ctesiphon, who undertook to kick with his mule.⁴⁴⁶

I consult little about the alterations I feel: for these doctors take advantage; when they have you at their mercy, they surfeit your ears with their prognostics; and formerly surprising me, weakened with sickness, injuriously handled me with their dogmas and magisterial

⁴⁴⁴“Fool! why do you vainly form these puerile wishes?” —Ovid., *Trist.*, 111. 8, II.

⁴⁴⁵“Like one who, desiring to stay an impending ruin, places various props against it, till, in a short time, the house, the props, and all, giving way, fall together.” —Pseudo-Gallus, i. 171.

⁴⁴⁶Plutarch, *How to restrain Anger*, c. 8.

fopperies—one while menacing me with great pains, and another with approaching death. Hereby I was indeed moved and shaken, but not subdued nor jostled from my place; and though my judgment was neither altered nor distracted, yet it was at least disturbed: 'tis always agitation and combat.

Now, I use my imagination as gently as I can, and would discharge it, if I could, of all trouble and contest; a man must assist, flatter, and deceive it, if he can; my mind is fit for that office; it needs no appearances throughout: could it persuade as it preaches, it would successfully relieve me. Will you have an example? It tells me: "that 'tis for my good to have the stone: that the structure of my age must naturally suffer some decay, and it is now time it should begin to disjoin and to confess a breach; 'tis a common necessity, and there is nothing in it either miraculous or new; I therein pay what is due to old age, and I cannot expect a better bargain; that society ought to comfort me, being fallen into the most common infirmity of my age; I see everywhere men tormented with the same disease, and am honoured by the fellowship, forasmuch as men of the best quality are most frequently afflicted with it: 'tis a noble and dignified disease: that of such as are struck with it, few have it to a less degree of pain; that these are put to the trouble of a strict diet and the daily taking of nauseous potions, whereas I owe my better state purely to my good fortune; for some ordinary broths of eringo or burst-wort that I have twice or thrice taken to oblige the ladies, who, with greater kindness than my pain was sharp, would needs present me half of theirs, seemed to me equally easy to take and fruitless in operation, the others have to pay a thousand vows to AEsculapius, and as many crowns to their physicians, for the voiding a little gravel, which I often do by the aid of nature: even the decorum of my countenance is not disturbed in company; and I can hold my water ten hours, and as long as any man in health. The fear of this disease," says my mind, "formerly affrighted thee, when it was unknown to thee; the cries and despairing groans of those who make it worse by their impatience, begot a horror in thee. 'Tis an infirmity that punishes the members by which thou hast most offended. Thou art a conscientious fellow;"

*"Quae venit indigne poena, dolenda venit:"*⁴⁴⁷

"consider this chastisement: 'tis very easy in comparison of others, and inflicted with a paternal tenderness: do but observe how late it comes;

⁴⁴⁷"We are entitled to complain of a punishment that we have not deserved." —Ovid, Heroid., v. 8.

it only seizes on and incommodes that part of thy life which is, one way and another, sterile and lost; having, as it were by composition, given time for the licence and pleasures of thy youth. The fear and the compassion that the people have of this disease serve thee for matter of glory; a quality whereof if thou bast thy judgment purified, and that thy reason has somewhat cured it, thy friends notwithstanding, discern some tincture in thy complexion. 'Tis a pleasure to hear it said of oneself what strength of mind, what patience! Thou art seen to sweat with pain, to turn pale and red, to tremble, to vomit blood, to suffer strange contractions and convulsions, at times to let great tears drop from thine eyes, to urine thick, black, and dreadful water, or to have it suppressed by some sharp and craggy stone, that cruelly pricks and tears the neck of the bladder, whilst all the while thou entertainest the company with an ordinary countenance; droning by fits with thy people; making one in a continuous discourse, now and then making excuse for thy pain, and representing thy suffering less than it is. Dost thou call to mind the men of past times, who so greedily sought diseases to keep their virtue in breath and exercise? Put the case that nature sets thee on and impels thee to this glorious school, into which thou wouldst never have entered of thy own free will. If thou tellest me that it is a dangerous and mortal disease, what others are not so? for 'tis a physical cheat to expect any that they say do not go direct to death: what matters if they go thither by accident, or if they easily slide and slip into the path that leads us to it? But thou dost not die because thou art sick; thou diest because thou art living: death kills thee without the help of sickness: and sickness has deferred death in some, who have lived longer by reason that they thought themselves always dying; to which may be added, that as in wounds, so in diseases, some are medicinal and wholesome. The stone is often no less long-lived than you; we see men with whom it has continued from their infancy even to their extreme old age; and if they had not broken company, it would have been with them longer still; you more often kill it than it kills you. And though it should present to you the image of approaching death, were it not a good office to a man of such an age, to put him in mind of his end? And, which is worse, thou hast no longer anything that should make thee desire to be cured. Whether or no, common necessity will soon call thee away. Do but consider how skilfully and gently she puts thee out of concern with life, and weans thee from the world; not forcing thee with a tyrannical subjection, like so many other infirmities which thou seest old men afflicted withal, that hold them in continual torment,

and keep them in perpetual and unintermitted weakness and pains, but by warnings and instructions at intervals, intermixing long pauses of repose, as it were to give thee opportunity to meditate and ruminate upon thy lesson, at thy own ease and leisure. To give thee means to judge aright, and to assume the resolution of a man of courage, it presents to thee the state of thy entire condition, both in good and evil; and one while a very cheerful and another an insupportable life, in one and the same day. If thou embracest not death, at least thou shakest hands with it once a month; whence thou hast more cause to hope that it will one day surprise thee without menace; and that being so often conducted to the water-side, but still thinking thyself to be upon the accustomed terms, thou and thy confidence will at one time or another be unexpectedly wafted over. A man cannot reasonably complain of diseases that fairly divide the time with health."

I am obliged to Fortune for having so often assaulted me with the same sort of weapons: she forms and fashions me by use, hardens and habituates me, so that I can know within a little for how much I shall be quit. For want of natural memory, I make one of paper; and as any new symptom happens in my disease, I set it down, whence it falls out that, having now almost passed through all sorts of examples, if anything striking threatens me, turning over these little loose notes, as the Sybilline leaves, I never fail of finding matter of consolation from some favourable prognostic in my past experience. Custom also makes me hope better for the time to come; for, the conduct of this clearing out having so long continued, 'tis to be believed that nature will not alter her course, and that no other worse accident will happen than what I already feel. And besides, the condition of this disease is not unsuitable to my prompt and sudden complexion: when it assaults me gently, I am afraid, for 'tis then for a great while; but it has, naturally, brisk and vigorous excesses; it claws me to purpose for a day or two. My kidneys held out an age without alteration; and I have almost now lived another, since they changed their state; evils have their periods, as well as benefits: peradventure, the infirmity draws towards an end. Age weakens the heat of my stomach, and, its digestion being less perfect, sends this crude matter to my kidneys; why, at a certain revolution, may not the heat of my kidneys be also abated, so that they can no more petrify my phlegm, and nature find out some other way of purgation. Years have evidently helped me to drain certain rheums; and why not these excrements which furnish matter for gravel? But is there anything delightful in comparison of this sudden change, when

from an excessive pain, I come, by the voiding of a stone, to recover, as by a flash of lightning, the beautiful light of health, so free and full, as it happens in our sudden and sharpest colics? Is there anything in the pain suffered, that one can counterpoise to the pleasure of so sudden an amendment? Oh, how much does health seem the more pleasant to me, after a sickness so near and so contiguous, that I can distinguish them in the presence of one another, in their greatest show; when they appear in emulation, as if to make head against and dispute it with one another! As the Stoics say that vices are profitably introduced to give value to and to set off virtue, we can, with better reason and less temerity of conjecture, say that nature has given us pain for the honour and service of pleasure and indolence. When Socrates, after his fetters were knocked off, felt the pleasure of that itching which the weight of them had caused in his legs, he rejoiced to consider the strict alliance betwixt pain and pleasure; how they are linked together by a necessary connection, so that by turns they follow and mutually beget one another; and cried out to good AEsop, that he ought out of this consideration to have taken matter for a fine fable.

The worst that I see in other diseases is, that they are not so grievous in their effect as they are in their issue: a man is a whole year in recovering, and all the while full of weakness and fear. There is so much hazard, and so many steps to arrive at safety, that there is no end on't before they have unmuffled you of a kerchief, and then of a cap, before they allow you to walk abroad and take the air, to drink wine, to lie with your wife, to eat melons, 'tis odds you relapse into some new distemper. The stone has this privilege, that it carries itself clean off: whereas the other maladies always leave behind them some impression and alteration that render the body subject to a new disease, and lend a hand to one another. Those are excusable that content themselves with possessing us, without extending farther and introducing their followers; but courteous and kind are those whose passage brings us any profitable issue. Since I have been troubled with the stone, I find myself freed from all other accidents, much more, methinks, than I was before, and have never had any fever since; I argue that the extreme and frequent vomitings that I am subject to purge me: and, on the other hand, my distastes for this and that, and the strange fasts I am forced to keep, digest my peccant humours, and nature, with those stones, voids whatever there is in me superfluous and hurtful. Let them never tell me that it is a medicine too dear bought: for what avail so many stinking draughts, so many caustics, incisions, sweats, setons, diets, and so

many other methods of cure, which often, by reason we are not able to undergo their violence and importunity, bring us to our graves? So that when I have the stone, I look upon it as phisic; when free from it, as an absolute deliverance.

And here is another particular benefit of my disease; which is, that it almost plays its game by itself, and lets 'me play mine, if I have only courage to do it; for, in its greatest fury, I have endured it ten hours together on horseback. Do but endure only; you need no other regimen play, run, dine, do this and t'other, if you can; your debauch will do you more good than harm; say as much to one that has the pox, the gout, or hernia! The other diseases have more universal obligations; rack our actions after another kind of manner, disturb our whole order, and to their consideration engage the whole state of life: this only pinches the skin; it leaves the understanding and the will wholly at our own disposal, and the tongue, the hands, and the feet; it rather awakens than stupefies you. The soul is struck with the ardour of a fever, overwhelmed with an epilepsy, and displaced by a sharp megrim, and, in short, astounded by all the diseases that hurt the whole mass and the most noble parts; this never meddles with the soul; if anything goes amiss with her, 'tis her own fault; she betrays, dismounts, and abandons herself. There are none but fools who suffer themselves to be persuaded that this hard and massive body which is baked in our kidneys is to be dissolved by drinks; wherefore, when it is once stirred, there is nothing to be done but to give it passage; and, for that matter, it will itself make one.

I moreover observe this particular convenience in it, that it is a disease wherein we have little to guess at: we are dispensed from the trouble into which other diseases throw us by the uncertainty of their causes, conditions, and progress; a trouble that is infinitely painful: we have no need of consultations and doctoral interpretations; the senses well enough inform us both what it is and where it is.

By suchlike arguments, weak and strong, as Cicero with the disease of his old age, I try to rock asleep and amuse my imagination, and to dress its wounds. If I find them worse tomorrow, I will provide new stratagems. That this is true: I am come to that pass of late, that the least motion forces pure blood out of my kidneys: what of that? I move about, nevertheless, as before, and ride after my hounds with a juvenile and insolent ardour; and hold that I have very good satisfaction for an accident of that importance, when it costs me no more but a dull heaviness and uneasiness in that part; 'tis some great stone

that wastes and consumes the substance of my kidneys and my life, which I by little and little evacuate, not without some natural pleasure, as an excrement henceforward superfluous and troublesome. Now if I feel anything stirring, do not fancy that I trouble myself to consult my pulse or my urine, thereby to put myself upon some annoying prevention; I shall soon enough feel the pain, without making it more and longer by the disease of fear. He who fears he shall suffer, already suffers what he fears. To which may be added that the doubts and ignorance of those who take upon them to expound the designs of nature and her internal progressions, and the many false prognostics of their art, ought to give us to understand that her ways are inscrutable and utterly unknown; there is great uncertainty, variety, and obscurity in what she either promises or threatens. Old age excepted, which is an indubitable sign of the approach of death, in all other accidents I see few signs of the future, whereon we may ground our divination. I only judge of myself by actual sensation, not by reasoning: to what end, since I am resolved to bring nothing to it but expectation and patience? Will you know how much I get by this? observe those who do otherwise, and who rely upon so many diverse persuasions and counsels; how often the imagination presses upon them without any bodily pain. I have many times amused myself, being well and in safety, and quite free from these dangerous attacks in communicating them to the physicians as then beginning to discover themselves in me; I underwent the decree of their dreadful conclusions, being all the while quite at my ease, and so much the more obliged to the favour of God and better satisfied of the vanity of this art.

There is nothing that ought so much to be recommended to youth as activity and vigilance our life is nothing but movement. I bestir myself with great difficulty, and am slow in everything, whether in rising, going to bed, or eating: seven of the clock in the morning is early for me, and where I rule, I never dine before eleven, nor sup till after six. I formerly attributed the cause of the fevers and other diseases I fell into to the heaviness that long sleeping had brought upon me, and have ever repented going to sleep again in the morning. Plato is more angry at excess of sleeping than at excess of drinking. I love to lie hard and alone, even without my wife, as kings do; pretty well covered with clothes. They never warm my bed, but since I have grown old they give me at need cloths to lay to my feet and stomach. They found fault with the great Scipio that he was a great sleeper; not, in my opinion, for any other reason than that men were displeased that he alone should have

nothing in him to be found fault with. If I am anything fastidious in my way of living 'tis rather in my lying than anything else; but generally I give way and accommodate myself as well as any one to necessity. Sleeping has taken up a great part of my life, and I yet continue, at the age I now am, to sleep eight or nine hours at one breath. I wean myself with utility from this proneness to sloth, and am evidently the better for so doing. I find the change a little hard indeed, but in three days 'tis over; and I see but few who live with less sleep, when need requires, and who more constantly exercise themselves, or to whom long journeys are less troublesome. My body is capable of a firm, but not of a violent or sudden agitation. I escape of late from violent exercises, and such as make me sweat: my limbs grow weary before they are warm. I can stand a whole day together, and am never weary of walking; but from my youth I have ever preferred to ride upon paved roads; on foot, I get up to the haunches in dirt, and little fellows as I am are subject in the streets to be elbowed and jostled for want of presence; I have ever loved to repose myself, whether sitting or lying, with my heels as high or higher than my seat.

There is no profession as pleasant as the military, a profession both noble in its execution (for valour is the stoutest, proudest, and most generous of all virtues), and noble in its cause: there is no utility either more universal or more just than the protection of the peace and greatness of one's country. The company of so many noble, young, and active men delights you; the ordinary sight of so many tragic spectacles; the freedom of the conversation, without art; a masculine and unceremonious way of living, please you; the variety of a thousand several actions; the encouraging harmony of martial music that ravishes and inflames both your ears and souls; the honour of this occupation, nay, even its hardships and difficulties, which Plato holds so light that in his Republic he makes women and children share in them, are delightful to you. You put yourself voluntarily upon particular exploits and hazards, according as you judge of their lustre and importance; and, a volunteer, find even life itself excusably employed:

*"Pulchrumque mori succurrit in armis."*⁴⁴⁸

To fear common dangers that concern so great a multitude of men; not to dare to do what so many sorts of souls, what a whole people

⁴⁴⁸"'Tis fine to die sword in hand." ("And he remembers that it is honourable to die in arms.") –Aeneid, ii. 317.

dare, is for a heart that is poor and mean beyond all measure: company encourages even children. If others excel you in knowledge, in gracefulness, in strength, or fortune, you have alternative resources at your disposal; but to give place to them in stability of mind, you can blame no one for that but yourself. Death is more abject, more languishing and troublesome, in bed than in a fight: fevers and catarrhs as painful and mortal as a musket-shot. Whoever has fortified himself valiantly to bear the accidents of common life need not raise his courage to be a soldier:

_Q="Vivere, mi Lucili, militare est."⁴⁴⁹

I do not remember that I ever had the itch, and yet scratching is one of nature's sweetest gratifications, and so much at hand; but repentance follows too near. I use it most in my ears, which are at intervals apt to itch.

I came into the world with all my senses entire, even to perfection. My stomach is commodiously good, as also is my head and my breath; and, for the most part, uphold themselves so in the height of fevers. I have passed the age to which some nations, not without reason, have prescribed so just a term of life that they would not suffer men to exceed it; and yet I have some intermissions, though short and inconstant, so clean and sound as to be little inferior to the health and pleasantness of my youth. I do not speak of vigour and sprightliness; 'tis not reason they should follow me beyond their limits:

*"Non hoc amplius est liminis, aut aquae Coelestis, patiens
latus."*⁴⁵⁰

My face and eyes presently discover my condition; all my alterations begin there, and appear somewhat worse than they really are; my friends often pity me before I feel the cause in myself. My looking-glass does not frighten me; for even in my youth it has befallen me more than once to have a scurvy complexion and of ill augury, without any great consequence, so that the physicians, not finding any cause within answerable to that outward alteration, attributed it to the mind and to some secret passion that tormented me within; but they were deceived. If my body would govern itself as well, according to my rule, as my mind does, we should move a little more at our ease. My

⁴⁴⁹"To live, my Lucilius, is (to make war) to be a soldier." —Seneca, Ep., 96.

⁴⁵⁰"I am no longer able to stand waiting at a door in the rain." —Horace, Od., iii. 10, 9.

mind was then not only free from trouble, but, moreover, full of joy and satisfaction, as it commonly is, half by its complexion, half by its design:

*"Nec vitiant artus aegrae contagia mentis."*⁴⁵¹

I am of the opinion that this temperature of my soul has often raised my body from its lapses; this is often depressed; if the other be not brisk and gay, 'tis at least tranquil and at rest. I had a quartan ague four or five months, that made me look miserably ill; my mind was always, if not calm, yet pleasant. If the pain be without me, the weakness and languor do not much afflict me; I see various corporal faintings, that beget a horror in me but to name, which yet I should less fear than a thousand passions and agitations of the mind that I see about me. I make up my mind no more to run; 'tis enough that I can crawl along; nor do I more complain of the natural decadence that I feel in myself:

*"Quis tumidum guttur miratur in Alpibus?"*⁴⁵²

than I regret that my duration shall not be as long and entire as that of an oak.

I have no reason to complain of my imagination; I have had few thoughts in my life that have so much as broken my sleep, except those of desire, which have awakened without afflicting me. I dream but seldom, and then of chimaeras and fantastic things, commonly produced from pleasant thoughts, and rather ridiculous than sad; and I believe it to be true that dreams are faithful interpreters of our inclinations; but there is art required to sort and understand them

*"Res, quae in vita usurpant homines, cogitant, curant, vident,
Quaeque agunt vigilantes, agitantque, ea si cui in somno
accidunt,
Minus mirandum est."*⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹"Nor do the troubles of the body ever affect my mind." —Ovid, *Trist.*, iii. 8, 25.

⁴⁵²"Who is surprised to see a swollen goitre in the Alps?" —Juvenal, xiii. 162.

⁴⁵³"'Tis less wonder, what men practise, think, care for, see, and do when waking, (should also run in their heads and disturb them when they are asleep) and which affect their feelings, if they happen to any in sleep." —Attius, cited in Cicero, *De Divin.*, i. 22.

Plato, moreover, says, that 'tis the office of prudence to draw instructions of divination of future things from dreams: I don't know about this, but there are wonderful instances of it that Socrates, Xenophon, and Aristotle, men of irreproachable authority, relate. Historians say that the Atlantes never dream; who also never eat any animal food, which I add, forasmuch as it is, peradventure, the reason why they never dream, for Pythagoras ordered a certain preparation of diet to beget appropriate dreams. Mine are very gentle, without any agitation of body or expression of voice. I have seen several of my time wonderfully disturbed by them. Theon the philosopher walked in his sleep, and so did Pericles servant, and that upon the tiles and top of the house.

I hardly ever choose my dish at table, but take the next at hand, and unwillingly change it for another. A confusion of meats and a clatter of dishes displease me as much as any other confusion: I am easily satisfied with few dishes: and am an enemy to the opinion of Favorinus, that in a feast they should snatch from you the meat you like, and set a plate of another sort before you; and that 'tis a pitiful supper, if you do not sate your guests with the rumps of various fowls, the beccafico only deserving to be all eaten. I usually eat salt meats, yet I prefer bread that has no salt in it; and my baker never sends up other to my table, contrary to the custom of the country. In my infancy, what they had most to correct in me was the refusal of things that children commonly best love, as sugar, sweetmeats, and march-panes. My tutor contended with this aversion to delicate things, as a kind of over-nicety; and indeed 'tis nothing else but a difficulty of taste, in anything it applies itself to. Whoever cures a child of an obstinate liking for brown bread, bacon, or garlic, cures him also of pampering his palate. There are some who affect temperance and plainness by wishing for beef and ham amongst the partridges; 'tis all very fine; this is the delicacy of the delicate; 'tis the taste of an effeminate fortune that disrelishes ordinary and accustomed things.

*"Per qux luxuria divitiarum taedio ludit."*⁴⁵⁴

Not to make good cheer with what another is enjoying, and to be curious in what a man eats, is the essence of this vice:

*"Si modica coenare times olus omne patella."*⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴"By which the luxury of wealth causes tedium." –Seneca, Ep., 18.

⁴⁵⁵"If you can't be content with herbs in a small dish for supper." –Horace, Ep., i. 5, 2.

There is indeed this difference, that 'tis better to oblige one's appetite to things that are most easy to be had; but 'tis always vice to oblige one's self. I formerly said a kinsman of mine was overnice, who, by being in our galleys, had unlearned the use of beds and to undress when he went to sleep.

If I had any sons, I should willingly wish them my fortune. The good father that God gave me (who has nothing of me but the acknowledgment of his goodness, but truly 'tis a very hearty one) sent me from my cradle to be brought up in a poor village of his, and there continued me all the while I was at nurse, and still longer, bringing me up to the meanest and most common way of living:

*"Magna pars libertatis est bene moratus venter."*⁴⁵⁶

Never take upon yourselves, and much less give up to your wives, the care of their nurture; leave the formation to fortune, under popular and natural laws; leave it to custom to train them up to frugality and hardship, that they may rather descend from rigour than mount up to it. This humour of his yet aimed at another end, to make me familiar with the people and the condition of men who most need our assistance; considering that I should rather regard them who extend their arms to me, than those who turn their backs upon me; and for this reason it was that he provided to hold me at the font persons of the meanest fortune, to oblige and attach me to them.

Nor has his design succeeded altogether ill; for, whether upon the account of the more honour in such a condescension, or out of a natural compassion that has a very great power over me, I have an inclination towards the meaner sort of people. The faction which I should condemn in our wars, I should more sharply condemn, flourishing and successful; it will somewhat reconcile me to it, when I shall see it miserable and overwhelmed. How willingly do I admire the fine humour of Cheilonis, daughter and wife to kings of Sparta. Whilst her husband Cleombrotus, in the commotion of her city, had the advantage over Leonidas her father, she, like a good daughter, stuck close to her father in all his misery and exile, in opposition to the conqueror. But so soon as the chance of war turned, she changed her will with the change of fortune, and bravely turned to her husband's side, whom she accompanied throughout, where his ruin carried him: admitting, as it appears

⁴⁵⁶"A well-governed stomach is a great part of liberty." —Seneca, Ep., 123.

to me, no other choice than to cleave to the side that stood most in need of her, and where she could best manifest her compassion. I am naturally more apt to follow the example of Flaminius, who rather gave his assistance to those who had most need of him than to those who had power to do him good, than I do to that of Pyrrhus, who was of an humour to truckle under the great and to domineer over the poor.

Long sittings at table both trouble me and do me harm; for, be it that I was so accustomed when a child, I eat all the while I sit. Therefore it is that at my own house, though the meals there are of the shortest, I usually sit down a little while after the rest, after the manner of Augustus, but I do not imitate him in rising also before the rest; on the contrary, I love to sit still a long time after, and to hear them talk, provided I am none of the talkers: for I tire and hurt myself with speaking upon a full stomach, as much as I find it very wholesome and pleasant to argue and to strain my voice before dinner.

The ancient Greeks and Romans had more reason than we in setting apart for eating, which is a principal action of life, if they were not prevented by other extraordinary business, many hours and the greatest part of the night; eating and drinking more deliberately than we do, who perform all our actions post-haste; and in extending this natural pleasure to more leisure and better use, intermixing with profitable conversation.

They whose concern it is to have a care of me, may very easily hinder me from eating anything they think will do me harm; for in such matters I never covet nor miss anything I do not see; but withal, if it once comes in my sight, 'tis in vain to persuade me to forbear; so that when I design to fast I must be kept apart from the suppers, and must have only so much given me as is required for a prescribed collation; for if to table, I forget my resolution. When I order my cook to alter the manner of dressing any dish, all my family know what it means, that my stomach is out of order, and that I shall not touch it.

I love to have all meats, that will endure it, very little boiled or roasted, and prefer them very high, and even, as to several, quite gone. Nothing but hardness generally offends me (of any other quality I am as patient and indifferent as any man I have known); so that, contrary to the common humour, even in fish it often happens that I find them both too fresh and too firm; not for want of teeth, which I ever had good, even to excellence, and which age does not now begin to threaten; I have always been used every morning to rub them with a napkin, and before and after dinner. God is favourable to those whom

He makes to die by degrees; 'tis the only benefit of old age; the last death will be so much the less painful; it will kill but a half or a quarter of a man. There is one tooth lately fallen out without drawing and without pain; it was the natural term of its duration; in that part of my being and several others, are already dead, others half dead, of those that were most active and in the first rank during my vigorous years; 'tis so I melt and steal away from myself. What a folly it would be in my understanding to apprehend the height of this fall, already so much advanced, as if it were from the very top! I hope I shall not. I, in truth, receive a principal consolation in meditating my death, that it will be just and natural, and that henceforward I cannot herein either require or hope from Destiny any other but unlawful favour. Men make themselves believe that we formerly had longer lives as well as greater stature. But they deceive themselves; and Solon, who was of those elder times, limits the duration of life to threescore and ten years. I, who have so much and so universally adored that "The mean is best," of the passed time, and who have concluded the most moderate measures to be the most perfect, shall I pretend to an immeasurable and prodigious old age? Whatever happens contrary to the course of nature may be troublesome; but what comes according to her should always be pleasant:

*"Omnia, quae secundum naturam fiunt, sunt habenda in bonis."*⁴⁵⁷

And so, says Plato, the death which is occasioned by wounds and diseases is violent; but that which comes upon us, old age conducting us to it, is of all others the most easy, and in some sort delicious:

*"Vitam adolescentibus vis aufert, senibus maturitas."*⁴⁵⁸

Death mixes and confounds itself throughout with life; decay anticipates its hour, and shoulders itself even into the course of our advance. I have portraits of myself taken at five-and-twenty and five-and-thirty years of age. I compare them with that lately drawn: how many times is it no longer me; how much more is my present image unlike the former, than unlike my dying one? It is too much to abuse nature, to

⁴⁵⁷"All things that are done according to nature are to be accounted good." —Cicero, De Senect., c. 19.

⁴⁵⁸"Young men are taken away by violence, old men by maturity." —Cicero, ubi sup.

make her trot so far that she must be forced to leave us, and abandon our conduct, our eyes, teeth, legs, and all the rest to the mercy of a foreign and haggard countenance, and to resign us into the hands of art, being weary of following us herself.

I am not excessively fond either of salads or fruits, except melons. My father hated all sorts of sauces; I love them all. Eating too much hurts me; but, as to the quality of what I eat, I do not yet certainly know that any sort of meat disagrees with me; neither have I observed that either full moon or decrease, autumn or spring, have any influence upon me. We have in us motions that are inconstant and unknown; for example, I found radishes first grateful to my stomach, since that nauseous, and now again grateful. In several other things, I find my stomach and appetite vary after the same manner; I have changed again and again from white wine to claret, from claret to white wine.

I am a great lover of fish, and consequently make my fasts feasts and feasts fasts; and I believe what some people say, that it is more easy of digestion than flesh. As I make a conscience of eating flesh upon fish-days, so does my taste make a conscience of mixing fish and flesh; the difference betwixt them seems to me too remote.

From my youth, I have sometimes kept out of the way at meals; either to sharpen my appetite against the next morning (for, as Epicurus fasted and made lean meals to accustom his pleasure to make shift without abundance, I, on the contrary, do it to prepare my pleasure to make better and more cheerful use of abundance); or else I fasted to preserve my vigour for the service of some action of body or mind: for both the one and the other of these is cruelly dulled in me by repletion; and, above all things, I hate that foolish coupling of so healthful and sprightly a goddess with that little belching god, bloated with the fumes of his liquor⁴⁵⁹ or to cure my sick stomach, or for want of fit company; for I say, as the same Epicurus did, that one is not so much to regard what he eats, as with whom; and I commend Chilo, that he would not engage himself to be at Periander's feast till he was first informed who were to be the other guests; no dish is so acceptable to me, nor no sauce so appetising, as that which is extracted from society. I think it more wholesome to eat more leisurely and less, and to eat oftener; but I would have appetite and hunger attended to; I should take no pleasure to be fed with three or four pitiful and stinted repasts a day, after a medicinal manner: who will assure me that, if I have a

⁴⁵⁹Montaigne did not approve of coupling Bacchus with Venus.

good appetite in the morning, I shall have the same at supper? But we old fellows especially, let us take the first opportune time of eating, and leave to almanac-makers hopes and prognostics. The utmost fruit of my health is pleasure; let us take hold of the present and known. I avoid the invariable in these laws of fasting; he who would have one form serve him, let him avoid the continuing it; we harden ourselves in it; our strength is there stupefied and laid asleep; six months after, you shall find your stomach so inured to it, that all you have got is the loss of your liberty of doing otherwise but to your prejudice.

I never keep my legs and thighs warmer in winter than in summer; one simple pair of silk stockings is all. I have suffered myself, for the relief of my colds, to keep my head warmer, and my belly upon the account of my colic: my diseases in a few days habituate themselves thereto, and disdained my ordinary provisions: we soon get from a coif to a kerchief over it, from a simple cap to a quilted hat; the trimmings of the doublet must not merely serve for ornament: there must be added a hare's skin or a vulture's skin, and a cap under the hat: follow this gradation, and you will go a very fine way to work. I will do nothing of the sort, and would willingly leave off what I have begun. If you fall into any new inconvenience, all this is labour lost; you are accustomed to it; seek out some other. Thus do they destroy themselves who submit to be pestered with these enforced and superstitious rules; they must add something more, and something more after that; there is no end on't.

For what concerns our affairs and pleasures, it is much more commodious, as the ancients did, to lose one's dinner, and defer making good cheer till the hour of retirement and repose, without breaking up a day; and so was I formerly used to do. As to health, I since by experience find, on the contrary, that it is better to dine, and that the digestion is better while awake. I am not very used to be thirsty, either well or sick; my mouth is, indeed, apt to be dry, but without thirst; and commonly I never drink but with thirst that is created by eating, and far on in the meal; I drink pretty well for a man of my pitch: in summer, and at a relishing meal, I do not only exceed the limits of Augustus, who drank but thrice precisely; but not to offend Democritus rule, who forbade that men should stop at four times as an unlucky number, I proceed at need to the fifth glass, about three half-pints; for the little glasses are my favourites, and I like to drink them off, which other people avoid as an unbecoming thing. I mix my wine sometimes with half, sometimes with the third part water; and when I am at home,

by an ancient custom that my father's physician prescribed both to him and himself, they mix that which is designed for me in the buttry, two or three hours before 'tis brought in. 'Tis said that Cranabs, king of Attica, was the inventor of this custom of diluting wine; whether useful or no, I have heard disputed. I think it more decent and wholesome for children to drink no wine till after sixteen or eighteen years of age. The most usual and common method of living is the most becoming; all particularity, in my opinion, is to be avoided; and I should as much hate a German who mixed water with his wine, as I should a Frenchman who drank it pure. Public usage gives the law in these things.

I fear a mist, and fly from smoke as from the plague: the first repairs I fell upon in my own house were the chimneys and houses of office, the common and insupportable defects of all old buildings; and amongst the difficulties of war I reckon the choking dust they made us ride in a whole day together. I have a free and easy respiration, and my colds for the most part go off without offence to the lungs and without a cough.

The heat of summer is more an enemy to me than the cold of winter; for, besides the incommodity of heat, less remediable than cold, and besides the force of the sunbeams that strike upon the head, all glittering light offends my eyes, so that I could not now sit at dinner over against a flaming fire.

To dull the whiteness of paper, in those times when I was more wont to read, I laid a piece of glass upon my book, and found my eyes much relieved by it. I am to this hour—to the age of fifty-four—Ignorant of the use of spectacles; and I can see as far as ever I did, or any other. 'Tis true that in the evening I begin to find a little disturbance and weakness in my sight if I read, an exercise I have always found troublesome, especially by night. Here is one step back, and a very manifest one; I shall retire another: from the second to the third, and so to the fourth, so gently, that I shall be stark blind before I shall be sensible of the age and decay of my sight: so artificially do the Fatal Sisters untwist our lives. And so I doubt whether my hearing begins to grow thick; and you will see I shall have half lost it, when I shall still lay the fault on the voices of those who speak to me. A man must screw up his soul to a high pitch to make it sensible how it ebbs away.

My walking is quick and firm; and I know not which of the two, my mind or my body, I have most to do to keep in the same state. That preacher is very much my friend who can fix my attention a whole sermon through: in places of ceremony, where every one's countenance is so starched, where I have seen the ladies keep even their eyes so fixed,

I could never order it so, that some part or other of me did not lash out; so that though I was seated, I was never settled; and as to gesticulation, I am never without a switch in my hand, walking or riding. As the philosopher Chrysippus' maid said of her master, that he was only drunk in his legs, for it was his custom to be always kicking them about in what place soever he sat; and she said it when, the wine having made all his companions drunk, he found no alteration in himself at all; it may have been said of me from my infancy, that I had either folly or quicksilver in my feet, so much stirring and unsettledness there is in them, wherever they are placed.

'Tis indecent, besides the hurt it does to one's health, and even to the pleasure of eating, to eat greedily as I do; I often bite my tongue, and sometimes my fingers, in my haste. Diogenes, meeting a boy eating after that manner, gave his tutor a box on the ear! There were men at Rome that taught people to chew, as well as to walk, with a good grace. I lose thereby the leisure of speaking, which gives great relish to the table, provided the discourse be suitable, that is, pleasant and short.

There is jealousy and envy amongst our pleasures; they cross and hinder one another. Alcibiades, a man who well understood how to make good cheer, banished even music from the table, that it might not disturb the entertainment of discourse, for the reason, as Plato tells us, "that it is the custom of ordinary people to call fiddlers and singing men to feasts, for want of good discourse and pleasant talk, with which men of understanding know how to entertain one another." Varro requires all this in entertainments: "Persons of graceful presence and agreeable conversation, who are neither silent nor garrulous; neatness and delicacy, both of meat and place; and fair weather." The art of dining well is no slight art, the pleasure not a slight pleasure; neither the greatest captains nor the greatest philosophers have disdained the use or science of eating well. My imagination has delivered three repasts to the custody of my memory, which fortune rendered sovereignly sweet to me, upon several occasions in my more flourishing age; my present state excludes me; for every one, according to the good temper of body and mind wherein he then finds himself, furnishes for his own share a particular grace and savour. I, who but crawl upon the earth, hate this inhuman wisdom, that will have us despise and hate all culture of the body; I look upon it as an equal injustice to loath natural pleasures as to be too much in love with them. Xerxes was a blockhead, who, environed with all human delights, proposed a reward to him

who could find out others; but he is not much less so who cuts off any of those pleasures that nature has provided for him. A man should neither pursue nor avoid them, but receive them. I receive them, I confess, a little too warmly and kindly, and easily suffer myself to follow my natural propensions. We have no need to exaggerate their inanity; they themselves will make us sufficiently sensible of it, thanks to our sick wet-blanket mind, that puts us out of taste with them as with itself; it treats both itself and all it receives, one while better, and another worse, according to its insatiable, vagabond, and versatile essence:

*"Sincerum est nisi vas, quodcunque infundis, acescit."*⁴⁶⁰

I, who boast that I so curiously and particularly embrace the conveniences of life, find them, when I most nearly consider them, very little more than wind. But what? We are all wind throughout; and, moreover, the wind itself, more discreet than we, loves to bluster and shift from corner to corner, and contents itself with its proper offices without desiring stability and solidity-qualities not its own.

The pure pleasures, as well as the pure displeasures, of the imagination, say some, are the greatest, as was expressed by the balance of Critolaiis. 'Tis no wonder; it makes them to its own liking, and cuts them out of the whole cloth; of this I every day see notable examples, and, peradventure, to be desired. But I, who am of a mixed and heavy condition, cannot snap so soon at this one simple object, but that I negligently suffer myself to be carried away with the present pleasures of the, general human law, intellectually sensible, and sensibly intellectual. The Cyrenaic philosophers will have it that as corporal pains, so corporal pleasures are more powerful, both as double and as more just. There are some, as Aristotle says, who out of a savage kind of stupidity dislike them; and I know others who out of ambition do the same. Why do they not, moreover, forswear breathing? why do they not live of their own? why not refuse light, because it is gratuitous, and costs them neither invention nor exertion? Let Mars, Pallas, or Mercury afford them their light by which to see, instead of Venus, Ceres, and Bacchus. These boastful humours may counterfeit some content, for what will not fancy do? But as to wisdom, there is no touch of it. Will they not seek the quadrature of the circle, even when on their wives? I hate that we should be enjoined to have our minds in the clouds, when our

⁴⁶⁰"Unless the vessel be clean, it will sour whateve you put into it." —Horace, Ep., i. 2, 54.

bodies are at table; I would not have the mind nailed there, nor wallow there; I would have it take place there and sit, but not lie down. Aristippus maintained nothing but the body, as if we had no soul; Zeno comprehended only the soul, as if we had no body: both of them faultily. Pythagoras, they say, followed a philosophy that was all contemplation, Socrates one that was all conduct and action; Plato found a mean betwixt the two; but they only say this for the sake of talking. The true temperament is found in Socrates; and, Plato is much more Socratic than Pythagoric, and it becomes him better. When I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep. Nay, when I walk alone in a beautiful orchard, if my thoughts are some part of the time taken up with external occurrences, I some part of the time call them back again to my walk, to the orchard, to the sweetness of that solitude, and to myself.

Nature has mother-like observed this, that the actions she has enjoined us for our necessity should be also pleasurable to us; and she invites us to them, not only by reason, but also by appetite, and 'tis injustice to infringe her laws. When I see alike Caesar and Alexander, in the midst of his greatest business, so fully enjoy human and corporal pleasures, I do not say that he relaxed his mind: I say that he strengthened it, by vigour of courage subjecting those violent employments and laborious thoughts to the ordinary usage of life: wise, had he believed the last was his ordinary, the first his extraordinary, vocation. We are great fools. "He has passed his life in idleness," say we: "I have done nothing to-day." What? have you not lived? that is not only the fundamental, but the most illustrious, of your occupations. "Had I been put to the management of great affairs, I should have made it seen what I could do." "Have you known how to meditate and manage your life? you have performed the greatest work of all." In order to shew and develop herself, nature needs only fortune; she equally manifests herself in all stages, and behind a curtain as well as without one. Have you known how to regulate your conduct, you have done a great deal more than he who has composed books. Have you known how to take repose, you have done more than he who has taken empires and cities.

The glorious masterpiece of man is to live to purpose; all other things: to reign, to lay up treasure, to build, are but little appendices and props. I take pleasure in seeing a general of an army, at the foot of a breach he is presently to assault, give himself up entire and free at dinner, to talk and be merry with his friends. And Brutus, when heaven and earth were conspired against him and the Roman liberty, stealing

some hour of the night from his rounds to read and scan Polybius in all security. 'Tis for little souls, buried under the weight of affairs, not from them to know how clearly to disengage themselves, not to know how to lay them aside and take them up again:

*"O fortes, pejoraque passi
Mecum saepe viri! nunc vino pellite curas
Cras ingens iterabimus aequor."*⁴⁶¹

Whether it be in jest or earnest, that the theological and Sorbonnical wine, and their feasts, are turned into a proverb, I find it reasonable they should dine so much more commodiously and pleasantly, as they have profitably and seriously employed the morning in the exercise of their schools. The conscience of having well spent the other hours, is the just and savoury sauce of the dinner-table. The sages lived after that manner; and that inimitable emulation to virtue, which astonishes us both in the one and the other Cato, that humour of theirs, so severe as even to be importunate, gently submits itself and yields to the laws of the human condition, of Venus and Bacchus; according to the precepts of their sect, that require the perfect sage to be as expert and intelligent in the use of natural pleasures as in all other duties of life:

"Cui cor sapiat, ei et sapiat palatus."

Relaxation and facility, methinks, wonderfully honour and best become a strong and generous soul. Epaminondas did not think that to take part, and that heartily, in songs and sports and dances with the young men of his city, were things that in any way derogated from the honour of his glorious victories and the perfect purity of manners that was in him. And amongst so many admirable actions of Scipio the grandfather, a person worthy to be reputed of a heavenly extraction, there is nothing that gives him a greater grace than to see him carelessly and childishly trifling at gathering and selecting cockle shells, and playing at quoits,⁴⁶²

amusing and tickling himself in representing by writing in comedies the meanest and most popular actions of men. And his head full of

⁴⁶¹"O brave spirits, who have often suffered sorrow with me, drink cares away; tomorrow we will embark once more on the vast sea." —Horace, *Od.*, i. 7, 30.

⁴⁶²This game, as the "Dictionnaire de Trevoux" describes it, is one wherein two persons contend which of them shall soonest pick up some object.

that wonderful enterprise of Hannibal and Africa, visiting the schools in Sicily, and attending philosophical lectures, to the extent of arming the blind envy of his enemies at Rome. Nor is there anything more remarkable in Socrates than that, old as he was, he found time to make himself taught dancing and playing upon instruments, and thought it time well spent. This same man was seen in an ecstasy, standing upon his feet a whole day and a night together, in the presence of all the Grecian army, surprised and absorbed by some profound thought. He was the first, amongst so many valiant men of the army, to run to the relief of Alcibiades, oppressed with the enemy, to shield him with his own body, and disengage him from the crowd by absolute force of arms. It was he who, in the Delian battle, raised and saved Xenophon when fallen from his horse; and who, amongst all the people of Athens, enraged as he was at so unworthy a spectacle, first presented himself to rescue Theramenes, whom the thirty tyrants were leading to execution by their satellites, and desisted not from his bold enterprise but at the remonstrance of Theramenes himself, though he was only followed by two more in all. He was seen, when courted by a beauty with whom he was in love, to maintain at need a severe abstinence. He was seen ever to go to the wars, and walk upon ice, with bare feet; to wear the same robe, winter and summer; to surpass all his companions in patience of bearing hardships, and to eat no more at a feast than at his own private dinner. He was seen, for seven-and-twenty years together, to endure hunger, poverty, the indocility of his children, and the nails of his wife, with the same countenance. And, in the end, calumny, tyranny, imprisonment, fetters, and poison. But was this man obliged to drink full bumpers by any rule of civility? he was also the man of the whole army with whom the advantage in drinking, remained. And he never refused to play at noisettes, nor to ride the hobby-horse with children, and it became him well; for all actions, says philosophy, equally become and equally honour a wise man. We have enough wherewithal to do it, and we ought never to be weary of presenting the image of this great man in all the patterns and forms of perfection. There are very few examples of life, full and pure; and we wrong our teaching every day, to propose to ourselves those that are weak and imperfect, scarce good for any one service, and rather pull us back; corrupters rather than correctors of manners. The people deceive themselves; a man goes much more easily indeed by the ends, where the extremity serves for a bound, a stop, and guide, than by the middle way, large and open; and according to art, more than according to nature: but

withal much less nobly and commendably.

Greatness of soul consists not so much in mounting and in pressing forward, as in knowing how to govern and circumscribe itself; it takes everything for great, that is enough, and demonstrates itself in preferring moderate to eminent things. There is nothing so fine and legitimate as well and duly to play the man; nor science so arduous as well and naturally to know how to live this life; and of all the infirmities we have, 'tis the most barbarous to despise our being.

Whoever has a mind to isolate his spirit, when the body is ill at ease, to preserve it from the contagion, let him by all means do it if he can: but otherwise let him on the contrary favour and assist it, and not refuse to participate of its natural pleasures with a conjugal complacency, bringing to it, if it be the wiser, moderation, lest by indiscretion they should get confounded with displeasure. Intemperance is the pest of pleasure; and temperance is not its scourge, but rather its seasoning. Euxodus, who therein established the sovereign good, and his companions, who set so high a value upon it, tasted it in its most charming sweetness, by the means of temperance, which in them was singular and exemplary.

I enjoin my soul to look upon pain and pleasure with an eye equally regulated:

*"Eodem enim vitio est effusio animi in laetitia quo in dolore contractio,"*⁴⁶³

and equally firm; but the one gaily and the other severely, and so far as it is able, to be careful to extinguish the one as to extend the other. The judging rightly of good brings along with it the judging soundly of evil: pain has something of the inevitable in its tender beginnings, and pleasure something of the evitable in its excessive end. Plato couples them together, and wills that it should be equally the office of fortitude to fight against pain, and against the immoderate and charming blandishments of pleasure: they are two fountains, from which whoever draws, when and as much as he needs, whether city, man, or beast, is very fortunate. The first is to be taken medicinally and upon necessity, and more scantily; the other for thirst, but not to, drunkenness. Pain,

⁴⁶³"For from the same imperfection arises the expansion of the mind in pleasure and its contraction in sorrow." —Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., iv. 31.

pleasure, love and hatred are the first things that a child is sensible of: if, when reason comes, they apply it to themselves, that is virtue.

I have a special vocabulary of my own; I "pass away time," when it is ill and uneasy, but when 'tis good I do not pass it away: "I taste it over again and adhere to it"; one must run over the ill and settle upon the good. This ordinary phrase of pastime, and passing away the time, represents the usage of those wise sort of people who think they cannot do better with their lives than to let them run out and slide away, pass them over, and baulk them, and, as much as they can, ignore them and shun them as a thing of troublesome and contemptible quality: but I know it to be another kind of thing, and find it both valuable and commodious, even in its latest decay, wherein I now enjoy it; and nature has delivered it into our hands in such and so favourable circumstances that we have only ourselves to blame if it be troublesome to us, or escapes us unprofitably:

*"Stulti vita ingrata est, trepida est, tota in futurum fertur."*⁴⁶⁴

Nevertheless I compose myself to lose mine without regret; but withal as a thing that is perishable by its condition, not that it molests or annoys me. Nor does it properly well become any not to be displeased when they die, excepting such as are pleased to live. There is good husbandry in enjoying it: I enjoy it double to what others do; for the measure of its fruition depends upon our more or less application to it. Chiefly that I perceive mine to be so short in time, I desire to extend it in weight; I will stop the promptitude of its flight by the promptitude of my grasp; and by the vigour of using it compensate the speed of its running away. In proportion as the possession of life is more short, I must make it so much deeper and fuller.

Others feel the pleasure of content and prosperity; I feel it too, as well as they, but not as it passes and slips by; one should study, taste, and ruminate upon it to render condign thanks to Him who grants it to us. They enjoy the other pleasures as they do that of sleep, without knowing it. To the end that even sleep itself should not so stupidly escape from me, I have formerly caused myself to be disturbed in my sleep, so that I might the better and more sensibly relish and taste it. I ponder with myself of content; I do not skim over, but sound it; and I bend

⁴⁶⁴"The life of a fool is thankless, timorous, and wholly bent upon the future."—Seneca, Ep., 15.

my reason, now grown perverse and peevish, to entertain it. Do I find myself in any calm composedness? is there any pleasure that tickles me? I do not suffer it to dally with my senses only; I associate my soul to it too: not there to engage itself, but therein to take delight; not there to lose itself, but to be present there; and I employ it, on its part, to view itself in this prosperous state, to weigh and appreciate its happiness and to amplify it. It reckons how much it stands indebted to God that its conscience and the intestine passions are in repose; that it has the body in its natural disposition, orderly and competently enjoying the soft and soothing functions by which He, of His grace is pleased to compensate the sufferings wherewith His justice at His good pleasure chastises us. It reflects how great a benefit it is to be so protected, that which way soever it turns its eye the heavens are calm around it. No desire, no fear, no doubt, troubles the air; no difficulty, past, present, or to, come, that its imagination may not pass over without offence. This consideration takes great lustre from the comparison of different conditions. So it is that I present to my thought, in a thousand aspects, those whom fortune or their own error carries away and torments. And, again, those who, more like to me, so negligently and incuriously receive their good fortune. Those are folks who spend their time indeed; they pass over the present and that which they possess, to wait on hope, and for shadows and vain images which fancy puts before them:

*“Morte obita quales fama est volitare figuras,
Aut quae sopitos deludunt somnia sensus:”*⁴⁶⁵

which hasten and prolong their flight, according as they are pursued. The fruit and end of their pursuit is to pursue; as Alexander said, that the end of his labour was to labour:

*“Nil actum credens, cum quid superesset agendum.”*⁴⁶⁶

For my part then, I love life and cultivate it, such as it has pleased God to bestow it upon us. I do not desire it should be without the necessity of eating and drinking; and I should think it a not less excusable failing to wish it had been twice as long;

⁴⁶⁵“Such forms as those which after death are reputed to hover about, or dreams which delude the senses in sleep.” —Aeneid, x. 641.

⁴⁶⁶“Thinking nothing done, if anything remained to be done. —“Lucan, ii. 657.

*“Sapiens divitiarum naturalium quaesitor acerrimus:”*⁴⁶⁷

nor that we should support ourselves by putting only a little of that drug into our mouths, by which Epimenides took away his appetite and kept himself alive; nor that we should stupidly beget children with our fingers or heels, but rather; with reverence be it spoken, that we might voluptuously beget them with our fingers and heels; nor that the body should be without desire and without titillation. These are ungrateful and wicked complaints. I accept kindly, and with gratitude, what nature has done for me; am well pleased with it, and proud of it. A man does wrong to that great and omnipotent giver to refuse, annul, or disfigure his gift: all goodness himself, he has made everything good:

*“Omnia quae secundum naturam sunt, aestimatione digna sunt.”*⁴⁶⁸

Of philosophical opinions, I preferably embrace those that are most solid, that is to say, the most human and most our own: my discourse is, suitable to my manners, low and humble: philosophy plays the child, to my thinking, when it puts itself upon its Ergos to preach to us that ‘tis a barbarous alliance to marry the divine with the earthly, the reasonable with the unreasonable, the severe with the indulgent, the honest with the dishonest. That pleasure is a brutish quality, unworthy to be tasted by a wise man; that the sole pleasure he extracts from the enjoyment of a fair young wife is a pleasure of his conscience to perform an action according to order, as to put on his boots for a profitable journey. Oh, that its followers had no more right, nor nerves, nor vigour in getting their wives’ maidenheads than in its lesson.

This is not what Socrates says, who is its master and ours: he values, as he ought, bodily pleasure; but he prefers that of the mind as having more force, constancy, facility, variety, and dignity. This, according to him, goes by no means alone—he is not so fantastic—but only it goes first; temperance with him is the moderatrix, not the adversary of pleasure. Nature is a gentle guide, but not more sweet and gentle than prudent and just.

⁴⁶⁷“A wise man is the keenest seeker for natural riches.” —Seneca, Ep., 119.

⁴⁶⁸“All things that are according to nature are worthy of esteem.” —Cicero, De Fin., iii. 6.

*"Intrandum est in rerum naturam, et penitus, quid ea postulet, pervidendum."*⁴⁶⁹

I hunt after her foot throughout: we have confounded it with artificial traces; and that academic and peripatetic good, which is "to live according to it," becomes on this account hard to limit and explain; and that of the Stoics, neighbour to it, which is "to consent to nature." Is it not an error to esteem any actions less worthy, because they are necessary? And yet they will not take it out of my head, that it is not a very convenient marriage of pleasure with necessity, with which, says an ancient, the gods always conspire. To what end do we dismember by divorce a building united by so close and brotherly a correspondence? Let us, on the contrary, confirm it by mutual offices; let the mind rouse and quicken the heaviness of the body, and the body stay and fix the levity of the soul:

"Qui, velut summum bonum, laudat animam naturam, et, tanquam malum,

*naturam carnis accusat, profectum et animam carnaliter appetit, et carnem carnaliter fugit; quoniam id vanitate sentit humans, non veritate divina."*⁴⁷⁰

In this present that God has made us, there is nothing unworthy our care; we stand accountable for it even to a hair; and is it not a commission to man, to conduct man according to his condition; 'tis express, plain, and the very principal one, and the Creator has seriously and strictly prescribed it to us. Authority has power only to work in regard to matters of common judgment, and is of more weight in a foreign language; therefore let us again charge at it in this place:

*"Stultitiam propriam quis non dixerit, ignave et contumaciter facere, quae facienda sunt; et alio corpus impellere, alio animum; distrahique inter diversissimos motus?"*⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹"A man must search into the nature of things, and fully examine what she requires." —Cicero, *De Fin.*, V. 16.

⁴⁷⁰"He who commends the nature of the soul as the supreme good, and condemns the nature of the flesh as evil, at once both carnally desires the soul, and carnally flies the flesh, because he feels thus from human vanity, not from divine truth." —St. Augustin, *De Civit. Dei*, xiv. 5.

⁴⁷¹"Who will not say, that it is the property of folly, slothfully and contumaciously to perform what is to be done, and to bend the body one way and the mind another, and to be distracted betwixt wholly different motions?" —Seneca, *Ep.*, 74.

To make this apparent, ask any one, some day, to tell you what whimsies and imaginations he put into his pate, upon the account of which he diverted his thoughts from a good meal, and regrets the time he spends in eating; you will find there is nothing so insipid in all the dishes at your table as this wise meditation of his (for the most part he had better sleep than wake to the purpose we wake); and that his discourses and notions are not worth the worst mess there. Though they were the ecstasies of Archimedes himself, what then? I do not here speak of, nor mix with the rabble of us ordinary men, and the vanity of the thoughts and desires that divert us, those venerable souls, elevated by the ardour of devotion and religion, to a constant and conscientious meditation of divine things, who, by the energy of vivid and vehement hope, prepossessing the use of the eternal nourishment, the final aim and last step of Christian desires, the sole constant, and incorruptible pleasure, disdain to apply themselves to our necessitous, fluid, and ambiguous conveniences, and easily resign to the body the care and use of sensual and temporal pasture; 'tis a privileged study. Between ourselves, I have ever observed supercelestial opinions and subterranean manners to be of singular accord.

Æsop, that great man, saw his master piss as he walked: "What then," said he, "must we drop as we run?" Let us manage our time; there yet remains a great deal idle and ill employed. The mind has not willingly other hours enough wherein to do its business, without disassociating itself from the body, in that little space it must have for its necessity. They would put themselves out of themselves, and escape from being men. It is folly; instead of transforming themselves into angels, they transform themselves into beasts; instead of elevating, they lay themselves lower. These transcendental humours affright me, like high and inaccessible places; and nothing is hard for me to digest in the life of Socrates but his ecstasies and communication with demons; nothing so human in Plato as that for which they say he was called divine; and of our sciences, those seem to be the most terrestrial and low that are highest mounted; and I find nothing so humble and mortal in the life of Alexander as his fancies about his immortalisation. Philotas pleasantly quipped him in his answer; he congratulated him by letter concerning the oracle of Jupiter Ammon, which had placed him amongst the gods: "Upon thy account I am glad of it, but the men are to be pitied who are to live with a man, and to obey him, who exceeds and is not contented with the measure of a man."

*"Diis to minorem quod geris, imperas."*⁴⁷²

The pretty inscription wherewith the Athenians honoured the entry of Pompey into their city is conformable to my sense: "By so much thou art a god, as thou confessest thee a man." 'Tis an absolute and, as it were, a divine perfection, for a man to know how loyally to enjoy his being. We seek other conditions, by reason we do not understand the use of our own; and go out of ourselves, because we know not how there to reside. 'Tis to much purpose to go upon stilts, for, when upon stilts, we must yet walk with our legs; and when seated upon the most elevated throne in the world, we are but seated upon our breech. The fairest lives, in my opinion, are those which regularly accommodate themselves to the common and human model without miracle, without extravagance. Old age stands a little in need of a more gentle treatment. Let us recommend that to God, the protector of health and wisdom, but let it be gay and sociable:

*"Frui paratis et valido mihi
Latoe, dones, et precor, integra
Cum mente; nec turpem senectam
Degere, nec Cithara carentem."*⁴⁷³

Or:⁴⁷⁴

APOLOGY

*In fact, the first edition of the Essays (Bordeaux, 1580) has very few quotations. These became more numerous in the edition of 1588; but the multitude of classical texts which at times encumber Montaigne's text, only dates from the posthumous edition of 1595*⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷²"Because thou carriest thyself lower than the gods, thou rulest." –Horace, Od., iii. 6, 5.

⁴⁷³"Grant it to me, Apollo, that I may enjoy my possessions in good health; let me be sound in mind; let me not lead a dishonourable old age, nor want the cittern." –Horace, Od., i. 31, 17.

⁴⁷⁴"Grant it to me, Apollo, that I may enjoy what I have in good health; let me be sound in body and mind; let me live in honour when old, nor let music be wanting."

⁴⁷⁵He had made these collections in the four last years of his life, as an amusement of his "idleness." –Le Clerc. They grow, however, more sparing in the Third Book.