

The Essays of Montaigne — Volume 09 eBook

The Essays of Montaigne — Volume 09 by Michel de Montaigne

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Page 1

OF THE INCONSTANCY OF OUR ACTIONS

Such as make it their business to oversee human actions, do not find themselves in anything so much perplexed as to reconcile them and bring them into the world's eye with the same lustre and reputation; for they commonly so strangely contradict one another that it seems impossible they should proceed from one and the same person. We find the younger Marius one while a son of Mars and another a son of Venus. Pope Boniface *viii.* entered, it is said, into his Papacy like a fox, behaved himself in it like a lion, and died like a dog; and who could believe it to be the same Nero, the perfect image of all cruelty, who, having the sentence of a condemned man brought to him to sign, as was the custom, cried out, "O that I had never been taught to write!" so much it went to his heart to condemn a man to death. All story is full of such examples, and every man is able to produce so many to himself, or out of his own practice or observation, that I sometimes wonder to see men of understanding give themselves the trouble of sorting these pieces, considering that irresolution appears to me to be the most common and manifest vice of our nature witness the famous verse of the player Publius:

"Malum consilium est, quod mutari non potest."

["'Tis evil counsel that will admit no change."
—Pub. Mim., ex Aul. Gell., xvii. 14.]

There seems some reason in forming a judgment of a man from the most usual methods of his life; but, considering the natural instability of our manners and opinions, I have often thought even the best authors a little out in so obstinately endeavouring to make of us any constant and solid contexture; they choose a general air of a man, and according to that interpret all his actions, of which, if they cannot bend some to a uniformity with the rest, they are presently imputed to dissimulation. Augustus has escaped them, for there was in him so apparent, sudden, and continual variety of actions all the whole course of his life, that he has slipped away clear and undecided from the most daring critics. I can more hardly believe a man's constancy than any other virtue, and believe nothing sooner than the contrary. He that would judge of a man in detail and distinctly, bit by bit, would oftener be able to speak the truth. It is a hard matter, from all antiquity, to pick out a dozen men who have formed their lives to one certain and constant course, which is the principal design of wisdom; for to comprise it all in one word, says one of the ancients, and to contract all the rules of human life into one, "it is to will, and not to will, always one and the same thing: I will not vouchsafe," says he, "to add, provided the will be just, for if it be not just, it is impossible it should be always one." I have indeed formerly learned that vice is nothing but irregularity, and want of measure, and therefore 'tis impossible to fix constancy to it. 'Tis a saying of Demosthenes, "that the beginning of all virtue is consultation and

deliberation; the end and perfection, constancy.” If we would resolve on any certain course by reason, we should pitch upon the best, but nobody has thought on’t:

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“Quod petiit, spernit; repetit, quod nuper omisit;
AEstuat, et vitae disconvenit ordine toto.”

[“That which he sought he despises; what he lately lost, he seeks again. He fluctuates, and is inconsistent in the whole order of life.”—Horace, Ep., i. 1, 98.]

Our ordinary practice is to follow the inclinations of our appetite, be it to the left or right, upwards or downwards, according as we are wafted by the breath of occasion. We never meditate what we would have till the instant we have a mind to have it; and change like that little creature which receives its colour from what it is laid upon. What we but just now proposed to ourselves we immediately alter, and presently return again to it; 'tis nothing but shifting and inconsistency:

“Ducimur, ut nervis alienis mobile lignum.”

[“We are turned about like the top with the thong of others.”
—Idem, Sat., ii. 7, 82.]

We do not go, we are driven; like things that float, now leisurely, then with violence, according to the gentleness or rapidity of the current:

“Nonne videmus,
Quid sibi quisque velit, nescire, et quaerere semper
Commutare locum, quasi onus deponere possit?”

[“Do we not see them, uncertain what they want, and always asking for something new, as if they could get rid of the burthen.”
—Lucretius, iii. 1070.]

Every day a new whimsy, and our humours keep motion with the time.

“Tales sunt hominum mentes, quali pater ipse
Juppiter auctificas lustravit lumine terras.”

[“Such are the minds of men, that they change as the light with which father Jupiter himself has illumined the increasing earth.”
—Cicero, Frag. Poet, lib. x.]

We fluctuate betwixt various inclinations; we will nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing constantly. In any one who had prescribed and established determinate laws and rules in his head for his own conduct, we should perceive an equality of manners, an order and an infallible relation of one thing or action to another, shine through his whole life; Empedocles observed this discrepancy in the Agrigentines, that they gave themselves up to delights, as if every day was their last, and built as if they had been to



live for ever. The judgment would not be hard to make, as is very evident in the younger Cato; he who therein has found one step, it will lead him to all the rest; 'tis a harmony of very according sounds, that cannot jar. But with us 't is quite contrary; every particular action requires a particular judgment. The surest way to steer, in my opinion, would be to take our measures from the nearest allied circumstances, without engaging in a longer inquisition, or without concluding any other consequence. I was told, during the civil disorders of our poor kingdom, that a maid, hard by the place where I then was, had thrown herself out



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of a window to avoid being forced by a common soldier who was quartered in the house; she was not killed by the fall, and therefore, repeating her attempt would have cut her own throat, had she not been prevented; but having, nevertheless, wounded herself to some show of danger, she voluntarily confessed that the soldier had not as yet importuned her otherwise; than by courtship, earnest solicitation, and presents; but that she was afraid that in the end he would have proceeded to violence, all which she delivered with such a countenance and accent, and withal embued in her own blood, the highest testimony of her virtue, that she appeared another Lucretia; and yet I have since been very well assured that both before and after she was not so difficult a piece. And, according to my host's tale in Ariosto, be as handsome a man and as worthy a gentleman as you will, do not conclude too much upon your mistress's inviolable chastity for having been repulsed; you do not know but she may have a better stomach to your muleteer.

Antigonus, having taken one of his soldiers into a great degree of favour and esteem for his valour, gave his physicians strict charge to cure him of a long and inward disease under which he had a great while languished, and observing that, after his cure, he went much more coldly to work than before, he asked him what had so altered and cowed him: "Yourself, sir," replied the other, "by having eased me of the pains that made me weary of my life." Lucullus's soldier having been rifled by the enemy, performed upon them in revenge a brave exploit, by which having made himself a gainer, Lucullus, who had conceived a good opinion of him from that action, went about to engage him in some enterprise of very great danger, with all the plausible persuasions and promises he could think of;

"Verbis, quae timido quoque possent addere mentem"

["Words which might add courage to any timid man."
—Horace, Ep., ii. 2, 1, 2.]

"Pray employ," answered he, "some miserable plundered soldier in that affair":

"Quantumvis rusticus, ibit,
Ibit eo, quo vis, qui zonam perdidit, inquit;"

["Some poor fellow, who has lost his purse, will go whither you wish, said he."—Horace, Ep., ii. 2, 39.]

and flatly refused to go. When we read that Mahomet having furiously rated Chasan, Bassa of the Janissaries, because he had seen the Hungarians break into his squadrons, and himself behave very ill in the business, and that Chasan, instead of any other answer, rushed furiously alone, scimitar in hand, into the first body of the enemy,



where he was presently cut to pieces, we are not to look upon that action, peradventure, so much as vindication as a turn of mind, not so much natural valour as a sudden despite. The man you saw yesterday so adventurous and brave, you must not think it strange to see him as great a poltroon the next: anger, necessity, company, wine, or the sound of the trumpet had roused his spirits; this is no valour formed and established by reason, but accidentally created by such circumstances, and therefore it is no wonder if by contrary circumstances it appear quite another thing.



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These supple variations and contradictions so manifest in us, have given occasion to some to believe that man has two souls; other two distinct powers that always accompany and incline us, the one towards good and the other towards ill, according to their own nature and propension; so abrupt a variety not being imaginable to flow from one and the same source.

For my part, the puff of every accident not only carries me along with it according to its own proclivity, but moreover I discompose and trouble myself by the instability of my own posture; and whoever will look narrowly into his own bosom, will hardly find himself twice in the same condition. I give to my soul sometimes one face and sometimes another, according to the side I turn her to. If I speak variously of myself, it is because I consider myself variously; all the contrarieties are there to be found in one corner or another; after one fashion or another: bashful, insolent; chaste, lustful; prating, silent; laborious, delicate; ingenious, heavy; melancholic, pleasant; lying, true; knowing, ignorant; liberal, covetous, and prodigal: I find all this in myself, more or less, according as I turn myself about; and whoever will sift himself to the bottom, will find in himself, and even in his own judgment, this volubility and discordance. I have nothing to say of myself entirely, simply, and solidly without mixture and confusion. 'Distinguo' is the most universal member of my logic. Though I always intend to speak well of good things, and rather to interpret such things as fall out in the best sense than otherwise, yet such is the strangeness of our condition, that we are often pushed on to do well even by vice itself, if well-doing were not judged by the intention only. One gallant action, therefore, ought not to conclude a man valiant; if a man were brave indeed, he would be always so, and upon all occasions. If it were a habit of valour and not a sally, it would render a man equally resolute in all accidents; the same alone as in company; the same in lists as in a battle: for, let them say what they will, there is not one valour for the pavement and another for the field; he would bear a sickness in his bed as bravely as a wound in the field, and no more fear death in his own house than at an assault. We should not then see the same man charge into a breach with a brave assurance, and afterwards torment himself like a woman for the loss of a trial at law or the death of a child; when, being an infamous coward, he is firm in the necessities of poverty; when he shrinks at the sight of a barber's razor, and rushes fearless upon the swords of the enemy, the action is commendable, not the man.

Many of the Greeks, says Cicero,—[Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., ii. 27.]— cannot endure the sight of an enemy, and yet are courageous in sickness; the Cimbrians and Celtiberians quite contrary;

“Nihil enim potest esse aequabile,
quod non a certa ratione proficiscatur.”



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["Nothing can be regular that does not proceed from a fixed ground of reason."—Idem, *ibid.*, c. 26.]

No valour can be more extreme in its kind than that of Alexander: but it is of but one kind, nor full enough throughout, nor universal. Incomparable as it is, it has yet some blemishes; of which his being so often at his wits' end upon every light suspicion of his captains conspiring against his life, and the carrying himself in that inquisition with so much vehemence and indiscreet injustice, and with a fear that subverted his natural reason, is one pregnant instance. The superstition, also, with which he was so much tainted, carries along with it some image of pusillanimity; and the excess of his penitence for the murder of Clytus is also a testimony of the unevenness of his courage. All we perform is no other than a cento, as a man may say, of several pieces, and we would acquire honour by a false title. Virtue cannot be followed but for herself, and if one sometimes borrows her mask to some other purpose, she presently pulls it away again. 'Tis a vivid and strong tincture which, when the soul has once thoroughly imbibed it, will not out but with the piece. And, therefore, to make a right judgment of a man, we are long and very observingly to follow his trace: if constancy does not there stand firm upon her own proper base,

"Cui vivendi via considerata atque provisa est,"

["If the way of his life is thoroughly considered and traced out."
—Cicero, *Paradox*, v. 1.]

if the variety of occurrences makes him alter his pace (his path, I mean, for the pace may be faster or slower) let him go; such an one runs before the wind, "Avau le dent," as the motto of our Talebot has it.

'Tis no wonder, says one of the ancients, that chance has so great a dominion over us, since it is by chance we live. It is not possible for any one who has not designed his life for some certain end, it is impossible for any one to arrange the pieces, who has not the whole form already contrived in his imagination. Of what use are colours to him that knows not what he is to paint? No one lays down a certain design for his life, and we only deliberate thereof by pieces. The archer ought first to know at what he is to aim, and then accommodate his arm, bow, string, shaft, and motion to it; our counsels deviate and wander, because not levelled to any determinate end. No wind serves him who addresses his voyage to no certain port. I cannot acquiesce in the judgment given by one in the behalf of Sophocles, who concluded him capable of the management of domestic affairs, against the accusation of his son, from having read one of his tragedies.



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Neither do I allow of the conjecture of the Parians, sent to regulate the Milesians sufficient for such a consequence as they from thence derived coming to visit the island, they took notice of such grounds as were best husbanded, and such country-houses as were best governed; and having taken the names of the owners, when they had assembled the citizens, they appointed these farmers for new governors and magistrates; concluding that they, who had been so provident in their own private concerns, would be so of the public too. We are all lumps, and of so various and inform a contexture, that every piece plays, every moment, its own game, and there is as much difference betwixt us and ourselves as betwixt us and others:

“Magnam rem puta, unum hominem agere.”

[“Esteem it a great thing always to act as one and the same man.”—Seneca, Ep., 150.]

Since ambition can teach man valour, temperance, and liberality, and even justice too; seeing that avarice can inspire the courage of a shop-boy, bred and nursed up in obscurity and ease, with the assurance to expose himself so far from the fireside to the mercy of the waves and angry Neptune in a frail boat; that she further teaches discretion and prudence; and that even Venus can inflate boys under the discipline of the rod with boldness and resolution, and infuse masculine courage into the heart of tender virgins in their mothers’ arms:

“Hac duce, custodes furtim transgressa jacentes,
Ad juvenem tenebris sola puella venit.”

[“She leading, the maiden, furtively passing by the recumbent guards, goes alone in the darkness to the youth.”
—Tibullus, ii. 2, 75.]

’tis not all the understanding has to do, simply to judge us by our outward actions; it must penetrate the very soul, and there discover by what springs the motion is guided. But that being a high and hazardous undertaking, I could wish that fewer would attempt it.

CHAPTER II

OF DRUNKENNESS

The world is nothing but variety and dissemblance, vices are all alike, as they are vices, and peradventure the Stoics understand them so; but although they are equally vices, yet they are not all equal vices; and he who has transgressed the ordinary bounds a hundred paces:



“Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum,”

[“Beyond or within which the right cannot exist.”

—Horace, Sat., i, 1, 107.]

should not be in a worse condition than he that has advanced but ten, is not to be believed; or that sacrilege is not worse than stealing a cabbage:

“Nec vincet ratio hoc, tantumdem ut peccet, idemque,
Qui teneros caules alieni fregerit horti,
Et qui nocturnus divum sacra legerit.”



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There is in this as great diversity as in anything whatever. The confounding of the order and measure of sins is dangerous: murderers, traitors, and tyrants get too much by it, and it is not reasonable they should flatter their consciences, because another man is idle, lascivious, or not assiduous at his devotion. Every one overrates the offence of his companions, but extenuates his own. Our very instructors themselves rank them sometimes, in my opinion, very ill. As Socrates said that the principal office of wisdom was to distinguish good from evil, we, the best of whom are vicious, ought also to say the same of the science of distinguishing betwixt vice and vice, without which, and that very exactly performed, the virtuous and the wicked will remain confounded and unrecognised.

Now, amongst the rest, drunkenness seems to me to be a gross and brutish vice. The soul has greater part in the rest, and there are some vices that have something, if a man may so say, of generous in them; there are vices wherein there is a mixture of knowledge, diligence, valour, prudence, dexterity, and address; this one is totally corporeal and earthly. And the rudest nation this day in Europe is that alone where it is in fashion. Other vices discompose the understanding: this totally overthrows it and renders the body stupid:

“Cum vini vis penetravit . . .
Consequitur gravitas membrorum, praepediuntur
Crura vacillanti, tardescit lingua, madet mens,
Nant oculi; clamor, singultus, jurgia, gliscunt.”

[“When the power of wine has penetrated us, a heaviness of the limbs follows, the legs of the tottering person are impeded; the tongue grows torpid, the mind is dimmed, the eyes swim; noise, hiccup, and quarrels arise.—“Lucretius, i. 3, 475.]

The worst state of man is that wherein he loses the knowledge and government of himself. And 'tis said amongst other things upon this subject, that, as the must fermenting in a vessel, works up to the top whatever it has in the bottom, so wine, in those who have drunk beyond measure, vents the most inward secrets:

“Tu sapientum
Curas et arcanum jocosum
Consilium retegis Lyaeo.”

[“Thou discloseth to the merry Lyacus the cares and secret counsel of the wise.”—Horace, Od., xxi. 1, 114.]

[Lyacus, a name given to Bacchus.]

Josephus tells us that by giving an ambassador the enemy had sent to him his full dose of liquor, he wormed out his secrets. And yet, Augustus, committing the most inward



secrets of his affairs to Lucius Piso, who conquered Thrace, never found him faulty in the least, no more than Tiberias did Cossus, with whom he intrusted his whole counsels, though we know they were both so given to drink that they have often been fain to carry both the one and the other drunk out of the Senate:



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“Hesterno inflatum venas ut semper, Lyaeo.”

[“Their veins full, as usual, of yesterday’s wine.”
—Virgil, Egl., vi. 15.]

And the design of killing Caesar was as safely communicated to Cimber, though he would often be drunk, as to Cassius, who drank nothing but water.

[As to which Cassius pleasantly said: “What, shall I bear a tyrant, I who cannot bear wine?”]

We see our Germans, when drunk as the devil, know their post, remember the word, and keep to their ranks:

“Nec facilis victoria de madidis, et
Blaesis, atque mero titubantibus.”

[“Nor is a victory easily obtained over men so drunk, they can scarce speak or stand.”—Juvenal, Sat., xv. 47.]

I could not have believed there had been so profound, senseless, and dead a degree of drunkenness had I not read in history that Attalus having, to put a notable affront upon him, invited to supper the same Pausanias, who upon the very same occasion afterwards killed Philip of Macedon, a king who by his excellent qualities gave sufficient testimony of his education in the house and company of Epaminondas, made him drink to such a pitch that he could after abandon his beauty, as of a hedge strumpet, to the muleteers and servants of the basest office in the house. And I have been further told by a lady whom I highly honour and esteem, that near Bordeaux and about Castres where she lives, a country woman, a widow of chaste repute, perceiving in herself the first symptoms of breeding, innocently told her neighbours that if she had a husband she should think herself with child; but the causes of suspicion every day more and more increasing, and at last growing up to a manifest proof, the poor woman was reduced to the necessity of causing it to be proclaimed in her parish church, that whoever had done that deed and would frankly confess it, she did not only promise to forgive, but moreover to marry him, if he liked the motion; whereupon a young fellow that served her in the quality of a labourer, encouraged by this proclamation, declared that he had one holiday found her, having taken too much of the bottle, so fast asleep by the chimney and in so indecent a posture, that he could conveniently do his business without waking her; and they yet live together man and wife.

It is true that antiquity has not much decried this vice; the writings even of several philosophers speak very tenderly of it, and even amongst the Stoics there are some who advise folks to give themselves sometimes the liberty to drink, nay, to drunkenness, to refresh the soul:



“Hoc quoque virtutum quondam certamine, magnum
Socratem palmam promeruisse ferunt.”

[“In this trial of power formerly they relate that the great
Socrates deserved the palm.”—Cornet. Gallus, Ep., i. 47.]

That censor and reprover of others, Cato, was reproached that he was a hard drinker:



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“Narratur et prisci Catonis
Saepe mero caluisse virtus.”

[“And of old Cato it is said, that his courage was often warmed with wine.”—Horace, *Od.*, xxi. 3, 11.—Cato the Elder.]

Cyrus, that so renowned king, amongst the other qualities by which he claimed to be preferred before his brother Artaxerxes, urged this excellence, that he could drink a great deal more than he. And in the best governed nations this trial of skill in drinking is very much in use. I have heard Silvius, an excellent physician of Paris, say that lest the digestive faculties of the stomach should grow idle, it were not amiss once a month to rouse them by this excess, and to spur them lest they should grow dull and rusty; and one author tells us that the Persians used to consult about their most important affairs after being well warmed with wine.

My taste and constitution are greater enemies to this vice than my discourse; for besides that I easily submit my belief to the authority of ancient opinions, I look upon it indeed as an unmanly and stupid vice, but less malicious and hurtful than the others, which, almost all, more directly jostle public society. And if we cannot please ourselves but it must cost us something, as they hold, I find this vice costs a man’s conscience less than the others, besides that it is of no difficult preparation, nor hard to be found, a consideration not altogether to be despised. A man well advanced both in dignity and age, amongst three principal commodities that he said remained to him of life, reckoned to me this for one, and where would a man more justly find it than amongst the natural conveniences? But he did not take it right, for delicacy and the curious choice of wines is therein to be avoided. If you found your pleasure upon drinking of the best, you condemn yourself to the penance of drinking of the worst. Your taste must be more indifferent and free; so delicate a palate is not required to make a good toper. The Germans drink almost indifferently of all wines with delight; their business is to pour down and not to taste; and it’s so much the better for them: their pleasure is so much the more plentiful and nearer at hand.

Secondly, to drink, after the French fashion, but at two meals, and then very moderately, is to be too sparing of the favours of the god. There is more time and constancy required than so. The ancients spent whole nights in this exercise, and oftentimes added the day following to eke it out, and therefore we are to take greater liberty and stick closer to our work. I have seen a great lord of my time, a man of high enterprise and famous success, that without setting himself to’t, and after his ordinary rate of drinking at meals, drank not much less than five quarts of wine, and at his going away appeared but too wise and discreet, to the detriment of our affairs. The pleasure we hold in esteem

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for the course of our lives ought to have a greater share of our time dedicated to it; we should, like shopboys and labourers, refuse no occasion nor omit any opportunity of drinking, and always have it in our minds. Methinks we every day abridge and curtail the use of wine, and that the after breakfasts, dinner snatches, and collations I used to see in my father's house, when I was a boy, were more usual and frequent than now.

Is it that we pretend to a reformation? Truly, no: but it may be we are more addicted to Venus than our fathers were. They are two exercises that thwart and hinder one another in their vigour. Lechery weakens our stomach on the one side; and on the other sobriety renders us more spruce and amorous for the exercise of love.

'Tis wonderful what strange stories I have heard my father tell of the chastity of that age wherein he lived. It was for him to say it, being both by art and nature cut out and finished for the service of ladies. He spoke well and little: ever mixing his language with some illustration out of authors most in use, especially in Spanish, and among the Spanish he whom they called Marcus Aurelius—[Guevara's Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.]—was ordinarily in his mouth. His behaviour was gently grave, humble, and very modest; he was very solicitous of neatness and propriety both in his person and clothes, whether on horseback or afoot, he was monstrously punctual in his word; and of a conscience and religion generally tending rather towards superstition than otherwise. For a man of little stature, very strong, well proportioned, and well knit; of a pleasing countenance inclining to brown, and very adroit in all noble exercises. I have yet in the house to be seen canes poured full of lead, with which they say he exercised his arms for throwing the bar or the stone, or in fencing; and shoes with leaden soles to make him lighter for running or leaping. Of his vaulting he has left little miracles behind him: I have seen him when past three score laugh at our exercises, and throw himself in his furred gown into the saddle, make the tour of a table upon his thumbs and scarce ever mount the stairs into his chamber without taking three or four steps at a time. But as to what I was speaking of before; he said there was scarce one woman of quality of ill fame in the whole province: he would tell of strange confidences, and some of them his own, with virtuous women, free from any manner of suspicion of ill, and for his own part solemnly swore he was a virgin at his marriage; and yet it was after a long practice of arms beyond the mountains, of which wars he left us a journal under his own hand, wherein he has given a precise account from point to point of all passages, both relating to the public and to himself. And he was, moreover, married at a well advanced maturity, in the year 1528, the three-and-thirtieth year of his age, upon his way home from Italy. But let us return to our bottles.



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The incommodities of old age, that stand in need of some refreshment and support, might with reason beget in me a desire of this faculty, it being as it were the last pleasure the course of years deprives us of. The natural heat, say the good-fellows, first seats itself in the feet: that concerns infancy; thence it mounts into the middle region, where it makes a long abode and produces, in my opinion, the sole true pleasures of human life; all other pleasures in comparison sleep; towards the end, like a vapour that still mounts upward, it arrives at the throat, where it makes its final residence, and concludes the progress. I do not, nevertheless, understand how a man can extend the pleasure of drinking beyond thirst, and forge in his imagination an appetite artificial and against nature; my stomach would not proceed so far; it has enough to do to deal with what it takes in for its necessity. My constitution is not to care for drink but as following eating and washing down my meat, and for that reason my last draught is always the greatest. And seeing that in old age we have our palate furred with phlegms or depraved by some other ill constitution, the wine tastes better to us as the pores are cleaner washed and laid more open. At least, I seldom taste the first glass well. Anacharsis wondered that the Greeks drank in greater glasses towards the end of a meal than at the beginning; which was, I suppose, for the same reason the Germans do the same, who then begin the battle of drink.

Plato forbids children wine till eighteen years of age, and to get drunk till forty; but, after forty, gives them leave to please themselves, and to mix a little liberally in their feasts the influence of Dionysos, that good deity who restores to younger men their gaiety and to old men their youth; who mollifies the passions of the soul, as iron is softened by fire; and in his Lazes allows such merry meetings, provided they have a discreet chief to govern and keep them in order, as good and of great utility; drunkenness being, he says, a true and certain trial of every one's nature, and, withal, fit to inspire old men with mettle to divert themselves in dancing and music; things of great use, and that they dare not attempt when sober. He, moreover, says that wine is able to supply the soul with temperance and the body with health. Nevertheless, these restrictions, in part borrowed from the Carthaginians, please him: that men forbear excesses in the expeditions of war; that every judge and magistrate abstain from it when about the administrations of his place or the consultations of the public affairs; that the day is not to be employed with it, that being a time due to other occupations, nor the night on which a man intends to get children.

'Tis said that the philosopher Stilpo, when oppressed with age, purposely hastened his end by drinking pure wine. The same thing, but not designed by him, despatched also the philosopher Arcesilaus.



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But 'tis an old and pleasant question, whether the soul of a wise man can be overcome by the strength of wine?

“Si munitae adhibet vim sapientiae.”

To what vanity does the good opinion we have of ourselves push us? The most regular and most perfect soul in the world has but too much to do to keep itself upright, and from being overthrown by its own weakness. There is not one of a thousand that is right and settled so much as one minute in a whole life, and that may not very well doubt, whether according to her natural condition she ever can be; but to join constancy to it is her utmost perfection; I mean when nothing should jostle and discompose her, which a thousand accidents may do. 'Tis to much purpose that the great poet Lucretius keeps such a clatter with his philosophy, when, behold! he goes mad with a love philtre. Is it to be imagined that an apoplexy will not stun Socrates as well as a porter? Some men have forgotten their own names by the violence of a disease; and a slight wound has turned the judgment of others topsy-turvy. Let him be as wise as he will, after all he is but a man; and than that what is there more frail, more miserable, or more nothing? Wisdom does not force our natural dispositions,

“Sudores itaque, et pallorem exsistere toto
Corpore, et infringi linguam, vocemque aboriri,
Caligare oculos, sonere aures, succidere artus,
Demque concidere, ex animi terrore, videmus.”

[“Sweat and paleness come over the whole body, the tongue is rendered powerless, the voice dies away, the eyes are darkened, there is ringing in the ears, the limbs sink under us by the influence of fear.”—Lucretius, iii. 155.]

he must shut his eyes against the blow that threatens him; he must tremble upon the margin of a precipice, like a child; nature having reserved these light marks of her authority, not to be forced by our reason and the stoic virtue, to teach man his mortality and our weakness; he turns pale with fear, red with shame, and groans with the cholic, if not with desperate outcry, at least with hoarse and broken voice:

“Humani a se nihil alienum putet.”

[“Let him not think himself exempt from that which is incidental to men in general.”—Terence, *Heauton*, i. 1, 25.]

The poets, that feign all things at pleasure, dare not acquit their greatest heroes of tears:

“Sic fatur lacrymans, classique immittit habenas.”



["Thus he speaks, weeping, and then sets sail with his fleet."
—Aeneid, vi. i.]

'Tis sufficient for a man to curb and moderate his inclinations, for totally to suppress them is not in him to do. Even our great Plutarch, that excellent and perfect judge of human actions, when he sees Brutus and Torquatus kill their children, begins to doubt whether virtue could proceed so far, and to question whether these persons had not rather been stimulated by some other passion.—[Plutarch, Life of Publicola, c. 3.] —All actions exceeding the ordinary bounds are liable to sinister interpretation, for as much as our liking no more holds with what is above than with what is below it.



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Let us leave that other sect, that sets up an express profession of scornful superiority— [The Stoics.]—: but when even in that sect, reputed the most quiet and gentle, we hear these rhodomontades of Metrodorus:

“Occupavi te, Fortuna, atque cepi: omnesque aditus tuos
interclusi ut ad me aspirare non posses;”

[“Fortune, I have got the better of thee, and have made all the
avenues so sure thou canst not come at me.”

—Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., v. 9.]

when Anaxarchus, by command of Nicocreon the tyrant of Cyprus, was put into a stone mortar, and laid upon with mauls of iron, ceases not to say, “Strike, batter, break; ’tis not Anaxarchus, ’tis but his sheath that you pound and bray so”; when we hear our martyrs cry out to the tyrant from the middle of the flame, “This side is roasted enough, fall to and eat, it is enough done; fall to work with the other;” when we hear the child in Josephus’ torn piece-meal with pincers, defying Antiochus, and crying out with a constant and assured voice: “Tyrant, thou lovest thy labour, I am still at ease; where is the pain, where are the torments with which thou didst so threaten me? Is this all thou canst do? My constancy torments thee more than thy cruelty does me. O pitiful coward, thou faintest, and I grow stronger; make me complain, make me bend, make me yield if thou canst; encourage thy guards, cheer up thy executioners; see, see they faint, and can do no more; arm them, flesh them anew, spur them up”; truly, a man must confess that there is some phrenzy, some fury, how holy soever, that at that time possesses those souls. When we come to these Stoical sallies: “I had rather be mad than voluptuous,” a saying of Antisthenes. When Sextius tells us, “he had rather be fettered with affliction than pleasure”: when Epicurus takes upon him to play with his gout, and, refusing health and ease, defies all torments, and despising the lesser pains, as disdainful to contend with them, he covets and calls out for others sharper, more violent, and more worthy of him;

“Spumantemque dari, pecora inter inertia, votis
Optat aprum, aut fulvum descendere monte leonem:”

[“And instead of timid beasts, wishes the foaming boar or tawny lion
would come from the mountain.”—Aeneid, iv. 158.]

who but must conclude that these are wild sallies pushed on by a courage that has broken loose from its place? Our soul cannot from her own seat reach so high; ’tis necessary she must leave it, raise herself up, and, taking the bridle in her teeth, transport her man so far that he shall afterwards himself be astonished at what he has done; as, in war, the heat of battle impels generous soldiers to perform things of so infinite danger, as afterwards, recollecting them, they themselves are the first to wonder

at; as it also fares with the poets, who are often rapt with admiration of their own writings, and know not



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where again to find the track through which they performed so fine a Career; which also is in them called fury and rapture. And as Plato says, 'tis to no purpose for a sober-minded man to knock at the door of poesy: so Aristotle says, that no excellent soul is exempt from a mixture of madness; and he has reason to call all transports, how commendable soever, that surpass our own judgment and understanding, madness; forasmuch as wisdom is a regular government of the soul, which is carried on with measure and proportion, and for which she is to herself responsible. Plato argues thus, that the faculty of prophesying is so far above us, that we must be out of ourselves when we meddle with it, and our prudence must either be obstructed by sleep or sickness, or lifted from her place by some celestial rapture.

CHAPTER III

A CUSTOM OF THE ISLE OF CEA

[Cos. Cea is the form of the name given by Pliny]

If to philosophise be, as 'tis defined, to doubt, much more to write at random and play the fool, as I do, ought to be reputed doubting, for it is for novices and freshmen to inquire and to dispute, and for the chairman to moderate and determine.

My moderator is the authority of the divine will, that governs us without contradiction, and that is seated above these human and vain contestations.

Philip having forcibly entered into Peloponnesus, and some one saying to Damidas that the Lacedaemonians were likely very much to suffer if they did not in time reconcile themselves to his favour: "Why, you pitiful fellow," replied he, "what can they suffer who do not fear to die?" It being also asked of Agis, which way a man might live free? "Why," said he, "by despising death." These, and a thousand other sayings to the same purpose, distinctly sound of something more than the patient attending the stroke of death when it shall come; for there are several accidents in life far worse to suffer than death itself. Witness the Lacedaemonian boy taken by Antigonus, and sold for a slave, who being by his master commanded to some base employment: "Thou shalt see," says the boy, "whom thou hast bought; it would be a shame for me to serve, being so near the reach of liberty," and having so said, threw himself from the top of the house. Antipater severely threatening the Lacedaemonians, that he might the better incline them to acquiesce in a certain demand of his: "If thou threatenest us with more than death," replied they, "we shall the more willingly die"; and to Philip, having written them word that he would frustrate all their enterprises: "What, wilt thou also hinder us from dying?" This is the meaning of the sentence, "That the wise man lives as long as he

ought, not so long as he can; and that the most obliging present Nature has made us, and which takes from us all colour of complaint of our condition, is to have delivered into



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our own custody the keys of life; she has only ordered, one door into life, but a hundred thousand ways out. We may be straitened for earth to live upon, but earth sufficient to die upon can never be wanting, as Boiocalus answered the Romans.”—[Tacitus, *Annal.*, xiii. 56.]—Why dost thou complain of this world? it detains thee not; thy own cowardice is the cause, if thou livest in pain. There needs no more to die but to will to die:

“Ubique mors est; optime hoc cavit deus.
Eripere vitam nemo non homini potest;
At nemo mortem; mille ad hanc aditus patent.”

[“Death is everywhere: heaven has well provided for that. Any one may deprive us of life; no one can deprive us of death. To death there are a thousand avenues.”—Seneca, *Theb.*, i, l, 151.]

Neither is it a recipe for one disease only; death is the infallible cure of all; 'tis a most assured port that is never to be feared, and very often to be sought. It comes all to one, whether a man give himself his end, or stays to receive it by some other means; whether he pays before his day, or stay till his day of payment come; from whencesoever it comes, it is still his; in what part soever the thread breaks, there's the end of the clue. The most voluntary death is the finest. Life depends upon the pleasure of others; death upon our own. We ought not to accommodate ourselves to our own humour in anything so much as in this. Reputation is not concerned in such an enterprise; 'tis folly to be concerned by any such apprehension. Living is slavery if the liberty of dying be wanting. The ordinary method of cure is carried on at the expense of life; they torment us with caustics, incisions, and amputations of limbs; they interdict aliment and exhaust our blood; one step farther and we are cured indeed and effectually. Why is not the jugular vein as much at our disposal as the median vein? For a desperate disease a desperate cure. Servius the grammarian, being tormented with the gout, could think of no better remedy than to apply poison to his legs, to deprive them of their sense; let them be gouty at their will, so they were insensible of pain. God gives us leave enough to go when He is pleased to reduce us to such a condition that to live is far worse than to die. 'Tis weakness to truckle under infirmities, but it's madness to nourish them. The Stoics say, that it is living according to nature in a wise man to, take his leave of life, even in the height of prosperity, if he do it opportunely; and in a fool to prolong it, though he be miserable, provided he be not indigent of those things which they repute to be according to nature. As I do not offend the law against thieves when I embezzle my own money and cut my own purse; nor that against incendiaries when I burn my own wood; so am I not under the lash of those made against murderers for having deprived myself of my own life. Hegesias said, that as the condition of life did, so the condition of death ought to depend upon our own choice. And Diogenes meeting the philosopher Speusippus, so blown up with an inveterate dropsy that he was fain to be carried in a litter, and by him saluted with the compliment, “I wish you good

health.” “No health to thee,” replied the other, “who art content to live in such a condition.”



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And in fact, not long after, Speusippus, weary of so languishing a state of life, found a means to die.

But this does not pass without admitting a dispute: for many are of opinion that we cannot quit this garrison of the world without the express command of Him who has placed us in it; and that it appertains to God who has placed us here, not for ourselves only but for His Glory and the service of others, to dismiss us when it shall best please Him, and not for us to depart without His licence: that we are not born for ourselves only, but for our country also, the laws of which require an account from us upon the score of their own interest, and have an action of manslaughter good against us; and if these fail to take cognisance of the fact, we are punished in the other world as deserters of our duty:

“Proxima deinde tenent maesti loca, qui sibi letum
Insontes peperere manu, lucemque perosi
Proiecere animas.”

["Thence the sad ones occupy the next abodes, who, though free from guilt, were by their own hands slain, and, hating light, sought death."—Aeneid, vi. 434.]

There is more constancy in suffering the chain we are tied to than in breaking it, and more pregnant evidence of fortitude in Regulus than in Cato; 'tis indiscretion and impatience that push us on to these precipices: no accidents can make true virtue turn her back; she seeks and requires evils, pains, and grief, as the things by which she is nourished and supported; the menaces of tyrants, racks, and tortures serve only to animate and rouse her:

“Duris ut ilex tonsa bipennibus
Nigrae feraci frondis in Algido,
Per damma, percmdes, ab ipso
Ducit opes, animumque ferro.”

["As in Mount Algidus, the sturdy oak even from the axe itself derives new vigour and life."—Horace, Od., iv. 4, 57.]

And as another says:

“Non est, ut putas, virtus, pater,
Timere vitam; sed malis ingentibus
Obstare, nec se vertere, ac retro dare.”

["Father, 'tis no virtue to fear life, but to withstand great misfortunes, nor turn back from them."—Seneca, Theb., i. 190.]



Or as this:

“Rebus in adversis facile est contemnere mortem
Fortius ille facit, qui miser esse potest.”

[“It is easy in adversity to despise death; but he acts more
bravely, who can live wretched.”—Martial, xi. 56, 15.]

’Tis cowardice, not virtue, to lie squat in a furrow, under a tomb, to evade the blows of
fortune; virtue never stops nor goes out of her path, for the greatest storm that blows:

“Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinae.”

[“Should the world’s axis crack, the ruins will but crush
a fearless head.”—Horace, Od., iii. 3, 7.]

For the most part, the flying from other inconveniences brings us to this; nay,
endeavouring to evade death, we often run into its very mouth:



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“Hic, rogo, non furor est, ne moriari, mori?”

[“Tell me, is it not madness, that one should die for fear of dying?”—Martial, ii. 80, 2.]

like those who, from fear of a precipice, throw themselves headlong into it;

“Multos in summa pericula misfit
Venturi timor ipse mali: fortissimus ille est,
Qui promptus metuenda pati, si cominus instent,
Et differre potest.”

[“The fear of future ills often makes men run into extreme danger; he is truly brave who boldly dares withstand the mischiefs he apprehends, when they confront him and can be deferred.” —Lucan, vii. 104.]“Usque adeo, mortis formidine, vitae Percipit humanos odium, lucisque videndae, Ut sibi consciscant moerenti pectore lethum Obliti fontem curarum hunc esse timorem.”[“Death to that degree so frightens some men, that causing them to hate both life and light, they kill themselves, miserably forgetting that this same fear is the fountain of their cares.” —Lucretius, iii. 79.]

Plato, in his *Laws*, assigns an ignominious sepulture to him who has deprived his nearest and best friend, namely himself, of life and his destined course, being neither compelled so to do by public judgment, by any sad and inevitable accident of fortune, nor by any insupportable disgrace, but merely pushed on by cowardice and the imbecility of a timorous soul. And the opinion that makes so little of life, is ridiculous; for it is our being, 'tis all we have. Things of a nobler and more elevated being may, indeed, reproach ours; but it is against nature for us to contemn and make little account of ourselves; 'tis a disease particular to man, and not discerned in any other creatures, to hate and despise itself. And it is a vanity of the same stamp to desire to be something else than what we are; the effect of such a desire does not at all touch us, forasmuch as it is contradicted and hindered in itself. He that desires of a man to be made an angel, does nothing for himself; he would be never the better for it; for, being no more, who shall rejoice or be sensible of this benefit for him.

“Debet enim, misere cui forti, aegreque futurum est,
Ipse quoque esse in eo turn tempore, cum male possit
Accidere.”

[“For he to whom misery and pain are to be in the future, must himself then exist, when these ills befall him.”
—Idem, *ibid.*, 874.]



Security, indolence, impassability, the privation of the evils of this life, which we pretend to purchase at the price of dying, are of no manner of advantage to us: that man evades war to very little purpose who can have no fruition of peace; and as little to the purpose does he avoid trouble who cannot enjoy repose.



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Amongst those of the first of these two opinions, there has been great debate, what occasions are sufficient to justify the meditation of self-murder, which they call “A reasonable exit.”—[Diogenes Laertius, Life of Zeno.]—For though they say that men must often die for trivial causes, seeing those that detain us in life are of no very great weight, yet there is to be some limit. There are fantastic and senseless humours that have prompted not only individual men, but whole nations to destroy themselves, of which I have elsewhere given some examples; and we further read of the Milesian virgins, that by a frantic compact they hanged themselves one after another till the magistrate took order in it, enacting that the bodies of such as should be found so hanged should be drawn by the same halter stark naked through the city. When Theyrkion tried to persuade Cleomenes to despatch himself, by reason of the ill posture of his affairs, and, having missed a death of more honour in the battle he had lost, to accept of this the second in honour to it, and not to give the conquerors leisure to make him undergo either an ignominious death or an infamous life; Cleomenes, with a courage truly Stoic and Lacedaemonian, rejected his counsel as unmanly and mean; “that,” said he, “is a remedy that can never be wanting, but which a man is never to make use of, whilst there is an inch of hope remaining”: telling him, “that it was sometimes constancy and valour to live; that he would that even his death should be of use to his country, and would make of it an act of honour and virtue.” Theyrkion, notwithstanding, thought himself in the right, and did his own business; and Cleomenes afterwards did the same, but not till he had first tried the utmost malevolence of fortune. All the inconveniences in the world are not considerable enough that a man should die to evade them; and, besides, there being so many, so sudden and unexpected changes in human things, it is hard rightly to judge when we are at the end of our hope:

“Sperat et in saeva victus gladiator arena,
Sit licet infesto pollice turba minax.”

[“The gladiator conquered in the lists hopes on, though the menacing spectators, turning their thumb, order him to die.”
—Pentadius, De Spe, ap. Virgillii Catadecta.]

All things, says an old adage, are to be hoped for by a man whilst he lives; ay, but, replies Seneca, why should this rather be always running in a man’s head that fortune can do all things for the living man, than this, that fortune has no power over him that knows how to die? Josephus, when engaged in so near and apparent danger, a whole people being violently bent against him, that there was no visible means of escape, nevertheless, being, as he himself says, in this extremity counselled by one of his friends to despatch himself, it was well for him that he yet maintained himself in hope, for fortune diverted the



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accident beyond all human expectation, so that he saw himself delivered without any manner of inconvenience. Whereas Brutus and Cassius, on the contrary, threw away the remains of the Roman liberty, of which they were the sole protectors, by the precipitation and temerity wherewith they killed themselves before the due time and a just occasion. Monsieur d'Anguien, at the battle of Serisolles, twice attempted to run himself through, despairing of the fortune of the day, which went indeed very untowardly on that side of the field where he was engaged, and by that precipitation was very near depriving himself of the enjoyment of so brave a victory. I have seen a hundred hares escape out of the very teeth of the greyhounds:

“Aliquis carnifici suo superstes fuit.”

[“Some have survived their executioners.”—Seneca, Ep., 13.]

“Multa dies, variusque labor mutabilis nevi
Rettulit in melius; multos alterna revisens
Lusit, et in solido rursus fortuna locavit.”

[“Length of days, and the various labour of changeful time, have brought things to a better state; fortune turning, shews a reverse face, and again restores men to prosperity.”—AEneid, xi. 425.]

Piny says there are but three sorts of diseases, to escape which a man has good title to destroy himself; the worst of which is the stone in the bladder, when the urine is suppressed.

[“In the quarto edition of these essays, in 1588, Pliny is said to mention two more, viz., a pain in the stomach and a headache, which, he says (lib. xxv. c. 9.), were the only three distempers almost for which men killed themselves.”]

Seneca says those only which for a long time are discomposing the functions of the soul. And some there have been who, to avoid a worse death, have chosen one to their own liking. Democritus, general of the AEtolians, being brought prisoner to Rome, found means to make his escape by night: but close pursued by his keepers, rather than suffer himself to be retaken, he fell upon his own sword and died. Antinous and Theodotus, their city of Epirus being reduced by the Romans to the last extremity, gave the people counsel universally to kill themselves; but, these preferring to give themselves up to the enemy, the two chiefs went to seek the death they desired, rushing furiously upon the enemy, with intention to strike home but not to ward a blow. The Island of Gozzo being taken some years ago by the Turks, a Sicilian, who had two beautiful daughters marriageable, killed them both with his own hand, and their mother, running in to save them, to boot, which having done, sallying out of the house with a



cross-bow and harquebus, with two shots he killed two of the Turks nearest to his door, and drawing his sword, charged furiously in amongst the rest, where he was suddenly enclosed and cut to pieces, by that means delivering his family



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and himself from slavery and dishonour. The Jewish women, after having circumcised their children, threw them and themselves down a precipice to avoid the cruelty of Antigonus. I have been told of a person of condition in one of our prisons, that his friends, being informed that he would certainly be condemned, to avoid the ignominy of such a death suborned a priest to tell him that the only means of his deliverance was to recommend himself to such a saint, under such and such vows, and to fast eight days together without taking any manner of nourishment, what weakness or faintness soever he might find in himself during the time; he followed their advice, and by that means destroyed himself before he was aware, not dreaming of death or any danger in the experiment. Scribonia advising her nephew Libo to kill himself rather than await the stroke of justice, told him that it was to do other people's business to preserve his life to put it after into the hands of those who within three or four days would fetch him to execution, and that it was to serve his enemies to keep his blood to gratify their malice.

We read in the Bible that Nicanor, the persecutor of the law of God, having sent his soldiers to seize upon the good old man Razis, surnamed in honour of his virtue the father of the Jews: the good man, seeing no other remedy, his gates burned down, and the enemies ready to seize him, choosing rather to die nobly than to fall into the hands of his wicked adversaries and suffer himself to be cruelly butchered by them, contrary to the honour of his rank and quality, stabbed himself with his own sword, but the blow, for haste, not having been given home, he ran and threw himself from the top of a wall headlong among them, who separating themselves and making room, he pitched directly upon his head; notwithstanding which, feeling yet in himself some remains of life, he renewed his courage, and starting up upon his feet all bloody and wounded as he was, and making his way through the crowd to a precipitous rock, there, through one of his wounds, drew out his bowels, which, tearing and pulling to pieces with both his hands, he threw amongst his pursuers, all the while attesting and invoking the Divine vengeance upon them for their cruelty and injustice.

Of violences offered to the conscience, that against the chastity of woman is, in my opinion, most to be avoided, forasmuch as there is a certain pleasure naturally mixed with it, and for that reason the dissent therein cannot be sufficiently perfect and entire, so that the violence seems to be mixed with a little consent of the forced party. The ecclesiastical history has several examples of devout persons who have embraced death to secure them from the outrages prepared by tyrants against their religion and honour. Pelagia and Sophronia, both canonised, the first of these precipitated herself with her mother and sisters into the river to avoid being forced by some soldiers, and the last also killed herself to avoid being ravished by the Emperor Maxentius.



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It may, peradventure, be an honour to us in future ages, that a learned author of this present time, and a Parisian, takes a great deal of pains to persuade the ladies of our age rather to take any other course than to enter into the horrid meditation of such a despair. I am sorry he had never heard, that he might have inserted it amongst his other stories, the saying of a woman, which was told me at Toulouse, who had passed through the handling of some soldiers: "God be praised," said she, "that once at least in my life I have had my fill without sin." In truth, these cruelties are very unworthy the French good nature, and also, God be thanked, our air is very well purged of them since this good advice: 'tis enough that they say "no" in doing it, according to the rule of the good Marot.

"Un doux nenny, avec un doux sourire
Est tant honneste."—Marot.

History is everywhere full of those who by a thousand ways have exchanged a painful and irksome life for death. Lucius Aruntius killed himself, to fly, he said, both the future and the past. Granius Silvanus and Staius Proximus, after having been pardoned by Nero, killed themselves; either disdaining to live by the favour of so wicked a man, or that they might not be troubled, at some other time, to obtain a second pardon, considering the proclivity of his nature to suspect and credit accusations against worthy men. Spargapises, son of Queen Tomyris, being a prisoner of war to Cyrus, made use of the first favour Cyrus shewed him, in commanding him to be unbound, to kill himself, having pretended to no other benefit of liberty, but only to be revenged of himself for the disgrace of being taken. Boges, governor in Eion for King Xerxes, being besieged by the Athenian army under the conduct of Cimon, refused the conditions offered, that he might safe return into Asia with all his wealth, impatient to survive the loss of a place his master had given him to keep; wherefore, having defended the city to the last extremity, nothing being left to eat, he first threw all the gold and whatever else the enemy could make booty of into the river Strymon, and then causing a great pile to be set on fire, and the throats of all the women, children, concubines, and servants to be cut, he threw their bodies into the fire, and at last leaped into it himself.

Ninachetuen, an Indian lord, so soon as he heard the first whisper of the Portuguese Viceroy's determination to dispossess him, without any apparent cause, of his command in Malacca, to transfer it to the King of Campar, he took this resolution with himself: he caused a scaffold, more long than broad, to be erected, supported by columns royally adorned with tapestry and strewed with flowers and abundance of perfumes; all which being prepared, in a robe of cloth of gold, set full of jewels of great value, he came out into the street, and mounted the steps to the scaffold, at one corner of which he had a pile lighted



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of aromatic wood. Everybody ran to see to what end these unusual preparations were made; when Ninachetuen, with a manly but displeased countenance, set forth how much he had obliged the Portuguese nation, and with how unspotted fidelity he had carried himself in his charge; that having so often, sword in hand, manifested in the behalf of others, that honour was much more dear to him than life, he was not to abandon the concern of it for himself: that fortune denying him all means of opposing the affront designed to be put upon him, his courage at least enjoined him to free himself from the sense of it, and not to serve for a fable to the people, nor for a triumph to men less deserving than himself; which having said he leaped into the fire.

Sextilia, wife of Scaurus, and Paxaea, wife of Labeo, to encourage their husbands to avoid the dangers that pressed upon them, wherein they had no other share than conjugal affection, voluntarily sacrificed their own lives to serve them in this extreme necessity for company and example. What they did for their husbands, Cocceius Nerva did for his country, with less utility though with equal affection: this great lawyer, flourishing in health, riches, reputation, and favour with the Emperor, had no other cause to kill himself but the sole compassion of the miserable state of the Roman Republic. Nothing can be added to the beauty of the death of the wife of Fulvius, a familiar favourite of Augustus: Augustus having discovered that he had vented an important secret he had entrusted him withal, one morning that he came to make his court, received him very coldly and looked frowningly upon him. He returned home, full of, despair, where he sorrowfully told his wife that, having fallen into this misfortune, he was resolved to kill himself: to which she roundly replied, "'tis but reason you should, seeing that having so often experienced the incontinence of my tongue, you could not take warning: but let me kill myself first," and without any more saying ran herself through the body with a sword. Vibius Virrius, despairing of the safety of his city besieged by the Romans and of their mercy, in the last deliberation of his city's senate, after many arguments conducing to that end, concluded that the most noble means to escape fortune was by their own hands: telling them that the enemy would have them in honour, and Hannibal would be sensible how many faithful friends he had abandoned; inviting those who approved of his advice to come to a good supper he had ready at home, where after they had eaten well, they would drink together of what he had prepared; a beverage, said he, that will deliver our bodies from torments, our souls from insult, and our eyes and ears from the sense of so many hateful mischiefs, as the conquered suffer from cruel and implacable conquerors. I have, said he, taken order for fit persons to throw our bodies into a funeral pile before my door so soon as we are dead. Many enough approved this high



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resolution, but few imitated it; seven-and-twenty senators followed him, who, after having tried to drown the thought of this fatal determination in wine, ended the feast with the mortal mess; and embracing one another, after they had jointly deplored the misfortune of their country, some retired home to their own houses, others stayed to be burned with Vibius in his funeral pyre; and were all of them so long in dying, the vapour of the wine having prepossessed the veins, and by that means deferred the effect of poison, that some of them were within an hour of seeing the enemy inside the walls of Capua, which was taken the next morning, and of undergoing the miseries they had at so dear a rate endeavoured to avoid. Jubellius Taurea, another citizen of the same country, the Consul Fulvius returning from the shameful butchery he had made of two hundred and twenty-five senators, called him back fiercely by name, and having made him stop: "Give the word," said he, "that somebody may dispatch me after the massacre of so many others, that thou mayest boast to have killed a much more valiant man than thyself." Fulvius, disdainng him as a man out of his wits, and also having received letters from Rome censuring the inhumanity of his execution which tied his hands, Jubellius proceeded: "Since my country has been taken, my friends dead, and having with my own hands slain my wife and children to rescue them from the desolation of this ruin, I am denied to die the death of my fellow-citizens, let me borrow from virtue vengeance on this hated life," and therewithal drawing a short sword he carried concealed about him, he ran it through his own bosom, falling down backward, and expiring at the consul's feet.

Alexander, laying siege to a city of the Indies, those within, finding themselves very hardly set, put on a vigorous resolution to deprive him of the pleasure of his victory, and accordingly burned themselves in general, together with their city, in despite of his humanity: a new kind of war, where the enemies sought to save them, and they to destroy themselves, doing to make themselves sure of death, all that men do to secure life.

Astapa, a city of Spain, finding itself weak in walls and defence to withstand the Romans, the inhabitants made a heap of all their riches and furniture in the public place; and, having ranged upon this heap all the women and children, and piled them round with wood and other combustible matter to take sudden fire, and left fifty of their young men for the execution of that whereon they had resolved, they made a desperate sally, where for want of power to overcome, they caused themselves to be every man slain. The fifty, after having massacred every living soul throughout the whole city, and put fire to this pile, threw themselves lastly into it, finishing their generous liberty, rather after an insensible, than after a sorrowful and disgraceful manner, giving the enemy to understand, that if fortune had been so pleased, they had as well the courage to snatch from them victory as they had to frustrate and render it dreadful, and even mortal to those who, allured by the splendour of the gold melting in this flame, having approached

it, a great number were there suffocated and burned, being kept from retiring by the crowd that followed after.

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The Abydeans, being pressed by King Philip, put on the same resolution; but, not having time, they could not put it 'in effect. The king, who was struck with horror at the rash precipitation of this execution (the treasure and movables that they had condemned to the flames being first seized), drawing off his soldiers, granted them three days' time to kill themselves in, that they might do it with more order and at greater ease: which time they filled with blood and slaughter beyond the utmost excess of all hostile cruelty, so that not so much as any one soul was left alive that had power to destroy itself. There are infinite examples of like popular resolutions which seem the more fierce and cruel in proportion as the effect is more universal, and yet are really less so than when singly executed; what arguments and persuasion cannot do with individual men, they can do with all, the ardour of society ravishing particular judgments.

The condemned who would live to be executed in the reign of Tiberius, forfeited their goods and were denied the rites of sepulture; those who, by killing themselves, anticipated it, were interred, and had liberty to dispose of their estates by will.

But men sometimes covet death out of hope of a greater good. "I desire," says St. Paul, "to be with Christ," and "who shall rid me of these bands?" Cleombrotus of Ambracia, having read Plato's Pheedo, entered into so great a desire of the life to come that, without any other occasion, he threw himself into the sea. By which it appears how improperly we call this voluntary dissolution, despair, to which the eagerness of hope often inclines us, and, often, a calm and temperate desire proceeding from a mature and deliberate judgment. Jacques du Chastel, bishop of Soissons, in St. Louis's foreign expedition, seeing the king and whole army upon the point of returning into France, leaving the affairs of religion imperfect, took a resolution rather to go into Paradise; wherefore, having taken solemn leave of his friends, he charged alone, in the sight of every one, into the enemy's army, where he was presently cut to pieces. In a certain kingdom of the new discovered world, upon a day of solemn procession, when the idol they adore is drawn about in public upon a chariot of marvellous greatness; besides that many are then seen cutting off pieces of their flesh to offer to him, there are a number of others who prostrate themselves upon the place, causing themselves to be crushed and broken to pieces under the weighty wheels, to obtain the veneration of sanctity after death, which is accordingly paid them. The death of the bishop, sword in hand, has more of magnanimity in it, and less of sentiment, the ardour of combat taking away part of the latter.

There are some governments who have taken upon them to regulate the justice and opportunity of voluntary death. In former times there was kept in our city of Marseilles a poison prepared out of hemlock, at the public charge, for those who had a mind to hasten their end, having first, before the six hundred, who were their senate, given account of the reasons and motives of their design, and it was not otherwise lawful, than by leave from the magistrate and upon just occasion to do violence to themselves.— [Valerius Maximus, ii. 6, 7.]—The same law was also in use in other places.



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Sextus Pompeius, in his expedition into Asia, touched at the isle of Cea in Negropont: it happened whilst he was there, as we have it from one that was with him, that a woman of great quality, having given an account to her citizens why she was resolved to put an end to her life, invited Pompeius to her death, to render it the more honourable, an invitation that he accepted; and having long tried in vain by the power of his eloquence, which was very great, and persuasion, to divert her from that design, he acquiesced in the end in her own will. She had passed the age of four score and ten in a very happy state, both of body and mind; being then laid upon her bed, better dressed than ordinary and leaning upon her elbow, "The gods," said she, "O Sextus Pompeius, and rather those I leave than those I go to seek, reward thee, for that thou hast not disdained to be both the counsellor of my life and the witness of my death. For my part, having always experienced the smiles of fortune, for fear lest the desire of living too long may make me see a contrary face, I am going, by a happy end, to dismiss the remains of my soul, leaving behind two daughters of my body and a legion of nephews"; which having said, with some exhortations to her family to live in peace, she divided amongst them her goods, and recommending her domestic gods to her eldest daughter, she boldly took the bowl that contained the poison, and having made her vows and prayers to Mercury to conduct her to some happy abode in the other world, she roundly swallowed the mortal poison. This being done, she entertained the company with the progress of its operation, and how the cold by degrees seized the several parts of her body one after another, till having in the end told them it began to seize upon her heart and bowels, she called her daughters to do the last office and close her eyes.

Pliny tells us of a certain Hyperborean nation where, by reason of the sweet temperature of the air, lives rarely ended but by the voluntary surrender of the inhabitants, who, being weary of and satiated with living, had the custom, at a very old age, after having made good cheer, to precipitate themselves into the sea from the top of a certain rock, assigned for that service. Pain and the fear of a worse death seem to me the most excusable incitements.

CHAPTER IV

TO-MORROW'S A NEW DAY

I give, as it seems to me, with good reason the palm to Jacques Amyot of all our French writers, not only for the simplicity and purity of his language, wherein he excels all others, nor for his constancy in going through so long a work, nor for the depth of his knowledge, having been able so successfully to smooth and unravel so knotty and intricate an author (for let people tell me what they will, I understand nothing of Greek; but I meet with sense so well united and maintained throughout his whole translation, that certainly he



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either knew the true fancy of the author, or having, by being long conversant with him, imprinted a vivid and general idea of that of Plutarch in his soul, he has delivered us nothing that either derogates from or contradicts him), but above all, I am the most taken with him for having made so discreet a choice of a book so worthy and of so great utility wherewith to present his country. We ignorant fellows had been lost, had not this book raised us out of the dirt; by this favour of his we dare now speak and write; the ladies are able to read to schoolmasters; 'tis our breviary. If this good man be yet living, I would recommend to him Xenophon, to do as much by that; 'tis a much more easy task than the other, and consequently more proper for his age. And, besides, though I know not how, methinks he does briskly—and clearly enough trip over steps another would have stumbled at, yet nevertheless his style seems to be more his own where he does not encounter those difficulties, and rolls away at his own ease.

I was just now reading this passage where Plutarch says of himself, that Rusticus being present at a declamation of his at Rome, there received a packet from the emperor, and deferred to open it till all was done: for which, says he, all the company highly applauded the gravity of this person. 'Tis true, that being upon the subject of curiosity and of that eager passion for news, which makes us with so much indiscretion and impatience leave all to entertain a newcomer, and without any manner of respect or outcry, tear open on a sudden, in what company soever, the letters that are delivered to us, he had reason to applaud the gravity of Rusticus upon this occasion; and might moreover have added to it the commendation of his civility and courtesy, that would not interrupt the current of his declamation. But I doubt whether any one can commend his prudence; for receiving unexpected letters, and especially from an emperor, it might have fallen out that the deferring to read them might have been of great prejudice. The vice opposite to curiosity is negligence, to which I naturally incline, and wherein I have seen some men so extreme that one might have found letters sent them three or four days before, still sealed up in their pockets.

I never open any letters directed to another; not only those intrusted with me, but even such as fortune has guided to my hand; and am angry with myself if my eyes unawares steal any contents of letters of importance he is reading when I stand near a great man. Never was man less inquisitive or less prying into other men's affairs than I.



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In our fathers' days, Monsieur de Boutieres had like to have lost Turin from having, while engaged in good company at supper, delayed to read information that was sent him of the treason plotted against that city where he commanded. And this very Plutarch has given me to understand, that Julius Caesar had preserved himself, if, going to the Senate the day he was assassinated by the conspirators, he had read a note which was presented to him by the way. He tells also the story of Archias, the tyrant of Thebes, that the night before the execution of the design Pelopidas had plotted to kill him to restore his country to liberty, he had a full account sent him in writing by another Archias, an Athenian, of the whole conspiracy, and that, this packet having been delivered to him while he sat at supper, he deferred the opening of it, saying, which afterwards turned to a proverb in Greece, "Business to-morrow."

A wise man may, I think, out of respect to another, as not to disturb the company, as Rusticus did, or not to break off another affair of importance in hand, defer to read or hear any new thing that is brought him; but for his own interest or particular pleasure, especially if he be a public minister, that he will not interrupt his dinner or break his sleep is inexcusable. And there was anciently at Rome, the consular place, as they called it, which was the most honourable at the table, as being a place of most liberty, and of more convenient access to those who came in to speak to the person seated there; by which it appears, that being at meat, they did not totally abandon the concern of other affairs and incidents. But when all is said, it is very hard in human actions to give so exact a rule upon moral reasons, that fortune will not therein maintain her own right.

CHAPTER V

OF CONSCIENCE

The Sieur de la Brousse, my brother, and I, travelling one day together during the time of our civil wars, met a gentleman of good sort. He was of the contrary party, though I did not know so much, for he pretended otherwise: and the mischief on't is, that in this sort of war the cards are so shuffled, your enemy not being distinguished from yourself by any apparent mark either of language or habit, and being nourished under the same law, air, and manners, it is very hard to avoid disorder and confusion. This made me afraid myself of meeting any of our troops in a place where I was not known, that I might not be in fear to tell my name, and peradventure of something worse; as it had befallen me before, where, by such a mistake, I lost both men and horses, and amongst others an Italian gentleman my page, whom I bred with the greatest care and affection, was miserably slain, in whom a youth of great promise and expectation was extinguished. But the gentleman my brother and I met had so desperate, half-dead a fear upon him at meeting with any horse, or passing by any of the

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towns that held for the King, that I at last discovered it to be alarms of conscience. It seemed to the poor man as if through his visor and the crosses upon his cassock, one would have penetrated into his bosom and read the most secret intentions of his heart; so wonderful is the power of conscience. It makes us betray, accuse, and fight against ourselves, and for want of other witnesses, to give evidence against ourselves:

“Occultum quatiens animo tortore flagellum.”

[“The torturer of the soul brandishing a sharp scourge within.”
—Juvenal, iii. 195.]

This story is in every child’s mouth: Bessus the Paeonian, being reproached for wantonly pulling down a nest of young sparrows and killing them, replied, that he had reason to do so, seeing that those little birds never ceased falsely to accuse him of the murder of his father. This parricide had till then been concealed and unknown, but the revenging fury of conscience caused it to be discovered by him himself, who was to suffer for it. Hesiod corrects the saying of Plato, that punishment closely follows sin, it being, as he says, born at the same time with it. Whoever expects punishment already suffers it, and whoever has deserved it expects it. Wickedness contrives torments against itself:

“Malum consilium consultori pessimum.”

[“Ill designs are worst to the contriver.”
—Apud Aul. Gellium, iv. 5.]

as the wasp stings and hurts another, but most of all itself, for it there loses its sting and its use for ever,

“Vitasque in vulnere ponunt.”

[“And leave their own lives in the wound.”
—Virgil, Geo., iv. 238.]

Cantharides have somewhere about them, by a contrariety of nature, a counterpoison against their poison. In like manner, at the same time that men take delight in vice, there springs in the conscience a displeasure that afflicts us sleeping and waking with various tormenting imaginations:

“Quippe ubi se multi, per somnia saepe loquentes,
Aut morbo delirantes, protraxe ferantur,
Et celata diu in medium peccata dedisse.”



["Surely where many, often talking in their sleep, or raving in disease, are said to have betrayed themselves, and to have given publicity to offences long concealed."—Lucretius, v. 1157.]

Apollodorus dreamed that he saw himself flayed by the Scythians and afterwards boiled in a cauldron, and that his heart muttered these words "I am the cause of all these mischiefs that have befallen thee." Epicurus said that no hiding-hole could conceal the wicked, since they could never assure themselves of being hid whilst their conscience discovered them to themselves.

"Prima est haec ultio, quod se
Judice nemo nocens absolitur."

["Tis the first punishment of sin that no man absolves himself." or:
"This is the highest revenge, that by its judgment no offender is absolved."—Juvenal, xiii. 2.]



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As an ill conscience fills us with fear, so a good one gives us greater confidence and assurance; and I can truly say that I have gone through several hazards with a more steady pace in consideration of the secret knowledge I had of my own will and the innocence of my intentions:

“Conscia mens ut cuique sua est, ita concipit intra
Pectora pro facto spemque metumque suo.”

[“As a man’s conscience is, so within hope or fear prevails, suiting to his design.”—Ovid, *Fast.*, i. 485.]

Of this are a thousand examples; but it will be enough to instance three of one and the same person. Scipio, being one day accused before the people of Rome of some crimes of a very high nature, instead of excusing himself or flattering his judges: “It will become you well,” said he, “to sit in judgment upon a head, by whose means you have the power to judge all the world.” Another time, all the answer he gave to several impeachments brought against him by a tribune of the people, instead of making his defence: “Let us go, citizens,” said he, “let us go render thanks to the gods for the victory they gave me over the Carthaginians as this day,” and advancing himself before towards the Temple, he had presently all the assembly and his very accuser himself following at his heels. And Petilius, having been set on by Cato to demand an account of the money that had passed through his hands in the province of Antioch, Scipio being come into the senate to that purpose, produced a book from under his robe, wherein he told them was an exact account of his receipts and disbursements; but being required to deliver it to the prothonotary to be examined, he refused, saying, he would not do himself so great a disgrace; and in the presence of the whole senate tore the book with his own hands to pieces. I do not believe that the most seared conscience could have counterfeited so great an assurance. He had naturally too high a spirit and was accustomed to too high a fortune, says Titius Livius, to know how to be criminal, and to lower himself to the meanness of defending his innocence. The putting men to the rack is a dangerous invention, and seems to be rather a trial of patience than of truth. Both he who has the fortitude to endure it conceals the truth, and he who has not: for why should pain sooner make me confess what really is, than force me to say what is not? And, on the contrary, if he who is not guilty of that whereof he is accused, has the courage to undergo those torments, why should not he who is guilty have the same, so fair a reward as life being in his prospect? I believe the ground of this invention proceeds from the consideration of the force of conscience: for, to the guilty, it seems to assist the rack to make him confess his fault and to shake his resolution; and, on the other side, that it fortifies the innocent against the torture. But when all is done, ’tis in plain truth, a trial full of uncertainty and danger what would not a man say, what would not a man do, to avoid so intolerable torments?



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“Etiam innocentes cogit mentiri dolor.”

[“Pain will make even the innocent lie.”—Publius Syrus, De Dolore.]

Whence it comes to pass, that him whom the judge has racked that he may not die innocent, he makes him die both innocent and racked. A thousand and a thousand have charged their own heads by false confessions, amongst whom I place Philotas, considering the circumstances of the trial Alexander put upon him and the progress of his torture. But so it is that some say it is the least evil human weakness could invent; very inhumanly, notwithstanding, and to very little purpose, in my opinion.

Many nations less barbarous in this than the Greeks and Romans who call them so, repute it horrible and cruel to torment and pull a man to pieces for a fault of which they are yet in doubt. How can he help your ignorance? Are not you unjust, that, not to kill him without cause, do worse than kill him? And that this is so, do but observe how often men prefer to die without reason than undergo this examination, more painful than execution itself; and that oft-times by its extremity anticipates execution, and perform it. I know not where I had this story, but it exactly matches the conscience of our justice in this particular. A country-woman, to a general of a very severe discipline, accused one of his soldiers that he had taken from her children the little soup meat she had left to nourish them withal, the army having consumed all the rest; but of this proof there was none. The general, after having cautioned the woman to take good heed to what she said, for that she would make herself guilty of a false accusation if she told a lie, and she persisting, he presently caused the soldier's belly to be ripped up to clear the truth of the fact, and the woman was found to be right. An instructive sentence.

CHAPTER VI

USE MAKES PERFECT

'Tis not to be expected that argument and instruction, though we never so voluntarily surrender our belief to what is read to us, should be of force to lead us on so far as to action, if we do not, over and above, exercise and form the soul by experience to the course for which we design it; it will, otherwise, doubtless find itself at a loss when it comes to the pinch of the business. This is the reason why those amongst the philosophers who were ambitious to attain to a greater excellence, were not contented to await the severities of fortune in the retirement and repose of their own habitations, lest he should have surprised them raw and inexpert in the combat, but sallied out to meet her, and purposely threw themselves into the proof of difficulties. Some of them abandoned riches to exercise themselves in a voluntary poverty; others sought out labour and an austerity of life, to inure them to hardships and inconveniences; others have deprived themselves of their dearest members, as of sight, and of the instruments

of generation, lest their too delightful and effeminate service should soften and debauch the stability of their souls.



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But in dying, which is the greatest work we have to do, practice can give us no assistance at all. A man may by custom fortify himself against pain, shame, necessity, and such-like accidents, but as to death, we can experiment it but once, and are all apprentices when we come to it. There have, anciently, been men so excellent managers of their time that they have tried even in death itself to relish and taste it, and who have bent their utmost faculties of mind to discover what this passage is, but they are none of them come back to tell us the news:

“Nemo expergitus exstat,
Frigida quern semel est vitai pausa sequuta.”

[“No one wakes who has once fallen into the cold sleep of death.”
—Lucretius, iii. 942]

Julius Canus, a noble Roman, of singular constancy and virtue, having been condemned to die by that worthless fellow Caligula, besides many marvellous testimonies that he gave of his resolution, as he was just going to receive the stroke of the executioner, was asked by a philosopher, a friend of his: “Well, Canus, whereabouts is your soul now? what is she doing? What are you thinking of?”—“I was thinking,” replied the other, “to keep myself ready, and the faculties of my mind full settled and fixed, to try if in this short and quick instant of death, I could perceive the motion of the soul when she parts from the body, and whether she has any sentiment at the separation, that I may after come again if I can, to acquaint my friends with it.” This man philosophises not unto death only, but in death itself. What a strange assurance was this, and what bravery of courage, to desire his death should be a lesson to him, and to have leisure to think of other things in so great an affair:

“Jus hoc animi morientis habebat.”

[“This mighty power of mind he had dying.”—Lucan, viii. 636.]

And yet I fancy, there is a certain way of making it familiar to us, and in some sort of making trial what it is. We may gain experience, if not entire and perfect, yet such, at least, as shall not be totally useless to us, and that may render us more confident and more assured. If we cannot overtake it, we may approach it and view it, and if we do not advance so far as the fort, we may at least discover and make ourselves acquainted with the avenues. It is not without reason that we are taught to consider sleep as a resemblance of death: with how great facility do we pass from waking to sleeping, and with how little concern do we lose the knowledge of light and of ourselves. Peradventure, the faculty of sleeping would seem useless and contrary to nature, since it deprives us of all action and sentiment, were it not that by its nature instructs us that she has equally made us to die as to live; and in life presents to us the eternal state she reserves for us after it, to accustom us to it and to take from us the fear of it. But such as have by violent



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accident fallen into a swoon, and in it have lost all sense, these, methinks, have been very near seeing the true and natural face of death; for as to the moment of the passage, it is not to be feared that it brings with it any pain or displeasure, forasmuch as we can have no feeling without leisure; our sufferings require time, which in death is so short, and so precipitous, that it must necessarily be insensible. They are the approaches that we are to fear, and these may fall within the limits of experience.

Many things seem greater by imagination than they are in effect; I have passed a good part of my life in a perfect and entire health; I say, not only entire, but, moreover, sprightly and wanton. This state, so full of verdure, jollity, and vigour, made the consideration of sickness so formidable to me, that when I came to experience it, I found the attacks faint and easy in comparison with what I had apprehended. Of this I have daily experience; if I am under the shelter of a warm room, in a stormy and tempestuous night, I wonder how people can live abroad, and am afflicted for those who are out in the fields: if I am there myself, I do not wish to be anywhere else. This one thing of being always shut up in a chamber I fancied insupportable: but I was presently inured to be so imprisoned a week, nay a month together, in a very weak, disordered, and sad condition; and I have found that, in the time of my health, I much more pitied the sick, than I think myself to be pitied when I am so, and that the force of my imagination enhances near one-half of the essence and reality of the thing. I hope that when I come to die I shall find it the same, and that, after all, it is not worth the pains I take, so much preparation and so much assistance as I call in, to undergo the stroke. But, at all events, we cannot give ourselves too much advantage.

In the time of our third or second troubles (I do not well remember which), going one day abroad to take the air, about a league from my own house, which is seated in the very centre of all the bustle and mischief of the late civil wars in France; thinking myself in all security and so near to my retreat that I stood in need of no better equipage, I had taken a horse that went very easy upon his pace, but was not very strong. Being upon my return home, a sudden occasion falling out to make use of this horse in a kind of service that he was not accustomed to, one of my train, a lusty, tall fellow, mounted upon a strong German horse, that had a very ill mouth, fresh and vigorous, to play the brave and set on ahead of his fellows, comes thundering full speed in the very track where I was, rushing like a Colossus upon the little man and the little horse, with such a career of strength and weight, that he turned us both over and over, topsy-turvy with our heels in the air: so that there lay the horse overthrown and stunned with the fall, and I ten or twelve paces from him stretched out at length, with my face all battered



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and broken, my sword which I had had in my hand, above ten paces beyond that, and my belt broken all to pieces, without motion or sense any more than a stock. 'Twas the only swoon I was ever in till that hour in my life. Those who were with me, after having used all the means they could to bring me to myself, concluding me dead, took me up in their arms, and carried me with very much difficulty home to my house, which was about half a French league from thence. On the way, having been for more than two hours given over for a dead man, I began to move and to fetch my breath; for so great abundance of blood was fallen into my stomach, that nature had need to rouse her forces to discharge it. They then raised me upon my feet, where I threw off a whole bucket of clots of blood, as this I did also several times by the way. This gave me so much ease, that I began to recover a little life, but so leisurely and by so small advances, that my first sentiments were much nearer the approaches of death than life:

“Perche, dubbiosa ancor del suo ritorno,
Non s’assicura attonita la mente.”

[“For the soul, doubtful as to its return, could not compose itself”
—Tasso, *Gierus*. Lib., xii. 74.]

The remembrance of this accident, which is very well imprinted in my memory, so naturally representing to me the image and idea of death, has in some sort reconciled me to that untoward adventure. When I first began to open my eyes, it was with so perplexed, so weak and dead a sight, that I could yet distinguish nothing but only discern the light:

“Come quel ch’or apre, or’chiude
Gli occhi, mezzo tra’l sonno e l’esser desto.”

[“As a man that now opens, now shuts his eyes, between sleep
and waking.”—Tasso, *Gierus*. Lib., viii., 26.]

As to the functions of the soul, they advanced with the same pace and measure with those of the body. I saw myself all bloody, my doublet being stained all over with the blood I had vomited. The first thought that came into my mind was that I had a harquebuss shot in my head, and indeed, at the time there were a great many fired round about us. Methought my life but just hung upon my lips: and I shut my eyes, to help, methought, to thrust it out, and took a pleasure in languishing and letting myself go. It was an imagination that only superficially floated upon my soul, as tender and weak as all the rest, but really, not only exempt from anything displeasing, but mixed with that sweetness that people feel when they glide into a slumber.



I believe it is the very same condition those people are in, whom we see swoon with weakness in the agony of death we pity them without cause, supposing them agitated with grievous dolours, or that their souls suffer under painful thoughts. It has ever been my belief, contrary to the opinion of many, and particularly of La Boetie, that those whom we see so subdued and stupefied at the approaches of their end, or oppressed with the length of the disease, or by accident of an apoplexy or falling sickness,



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“Vi morbi saepe coactus
Ante oculos aliquis nostros, ut fulminis ictu,
Concidit, et spumas agit; ingemit, et tremit artus;
Desipit, extentat nervos, torquetur, anhelat,
Inconstanter, et in jactando membra fatigat;”

[“Often, compelled by the force of disease, some one as thunderstruck falls under our eyes, and foams, groans, and trembles, stretches, twists, breathes irregularly, and in paroxysms wears out his strength.”—Lucretius, iii. 485.]

or hurt in the head, whom we hear to mutter, and by fits to utter grievous groans; though we gather from these signs by which it seems as if they had some remains of consciousness, and that there are movements of the body; I have always believed, I say, both the body and the soul benumbed and asleep,

“Vivit, et est vitae nescius ipse suae,”

[“He lives, and does not know that he is alive.”
—Ovid, *Trist.*, i. 3, 12.]

and could not believe that in so great a stupefaction of the members and so great a defection of the senses, the soul could maintain any force within to take cognisance of herself, and that, therefore, they had no tormenting reflections to make them consider and be sensible of the misery of their condition, and consequently were not much to be pitied.

I can, for my part, think of no state so insupportable and dreadful, as to have the soul vivid and afflicted, without means to declare itself; as one should say of such as are sent to execution with their tongues first cut out (were it not that in this kind of dying, the most silent seems to me the most graceful, if accompanied with a grave and constant countenance); or if those miserable prisoners, who fall into the hands of the base hangman soldiers of this age, by whom they are tormented with all sorts of inhuman usage to compel them to some excessive and impossible ransom; kept, in the meantime, in such condition and place, where they have no means of expressing or signifying their thoughts and their misery. The poets have feigned some gods who favour the deliverance of such as suffer under a languishing death:

“Hunc ego Diti
Sacrum jussa fero, teque isto corpore solvo.”

[“I bidden offer this sacred thing to Pluto, and from that body dismiss thee.”—Aeneid, iv. 782.]



both the interrupted words, and the short and irregular answers one gets from them sometimes, by bawling and keeping a clutter about them; or the motions which seem to yield some consent to what we would have them do, are no testimony, nevertheless, that they live, an entire life at least. So it happens to us in the yawning of sleep, before it has fully possessed us, to perceive, as in a dream, what is done about us, and to follow the last things that are said with a perplexed and uncertain hearing which seems but to touch upon the borders of the soul; and to make answers to the last words that have been spoken to us, which have more in them of chance than sense.



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Now seeing I have in effect tried it, I have no doubt but I have hitherto made a right judgment; for first, being in a swoon, I laboured to rip open the buttons of my doublet with my nails, for my sword was gone; and yet I felt nothing in my imagination that hurt me; for we have many motions in us that do not proceed from our direction;

“Semianimesque micant digiti, ferrumque retractant;”

[“Half-dead fingers grope about, and grasp again the sword.”

—Aeneid, x. 396.]

so falling people extend their arms before them by a natural impulse, which prompts our limbs to offices and motions without any commission from our reason.

“Falciferos memorant currus abscindere membra . . .

Ut tremere in terra videatur ab artubus id quod

Decidit abscissum; cum mens tamen atque hominis vis

Mobilitate mali, non quit sentire dolorem.”

[“They relate that scythe-bearing chariots mow off limbs, so that they quiver on the ground; and yet the mind of him from whom the limb is taken by the swiftness of the blow feels no pain.” —Lucretius, iii. 642.]

My stomach was so oppressed with the coagulated blood, that my hands moved to that part, of their own voluntary motion, as they frequently do to the part that itches, without being directed by our will. There are several animals, and even men, in whom one may perceive the muscles to stir and tremble after they are dead. Every one experimentally knows that there are some members which grow stiff and flag without his leave. Now, those passions which only touch the outward bark of us, cannot be said to be ours: to make them so, there must be a concurrence of the whole man; and the pains which are felt by the hand or the foot while we are sleeping, are none of ours.

As I drew near my own house, where the alarm of my fall was already got before me, and my family were come out to meet me, with the hubbub usual in such cases, not only did I make some little answer to some questions which were asked me; but they moreover tell me, that I was sufficiently collected to order them to bring a horse to my wife whom on the road, I saw struggling and tiring herself which is hilly and rugged. This should seem to proceed from a soul its functions; but it was nothing so with me. I knew not what I said or did, and they were nothing but idle thoughts in the clouds, that were stirred up by the senses of the eyes and ears, and proceeded not from me. I knew not for all that, whence I came or whither I went, neither was I capable to weigh and consider what was said to me: these were light effects, that the senses produced of themselves as of custom; what the soul contributed was in a dream, lightly touched, licked and bedewed by the soft impression of the senses. Notwithstanding, my

condition was, in truth, very easy and quiet; I had no affliction upon me, either for others or myself; it was an extreme



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languor and weakness, without any manner of pain. I saw my own house, but knew it not. When they had put me to bed I found an inexpressible sweetness in that repose; for I had been desperately tugged and lugged by those poor people who had taken the pains to carry me upon their arms a very great and a very rough way, and had in so doing all quite tired out themselves, twice or thrice one after another. They offered me several remedies, but I would take none, certainly believing that I was mortally wounded in the head. And, in earnest, it had been a very happy death, for the weakness of my understanding deprived me of the faculty of discerning, and that of my body of the sense of feeling; I was suffering myself to glide away so sweetly and after so soft and easy a manner, that I scarce find any other action less troublesome than that was. But when I came again to myself and to resume my faculties:

“Ut tandem sensus convaluere mei,”

["When at length my lost senses again returned."
—Ovid, *Trist.*, i. 3, 14.]

which was two or three hours after, I felt myself on a sudden involved in terrible pain, having my limbs battered and ground with my fall, and was. so ill for two or three nights after, that I thought I was once more dying again, but a more painful death, having concluded myself as good as dead before, and to this hour am sensible of the bruises of that terrible shock. I will not here omit, that the last thing I could make them beat into my head, was the memory of this accident, and I had it over and over again repeated to me, whither I was going, from whence I came, and at what time of the day this mischance befell me, before I could comprehend it. As to the manner of my fall, that was concealed from me in favour to him who had been the occasion, and other flim-flams were invented. But a long time after, and the very next day that my memory began to return and to represent to me the state wherein I was, at the instant that I perceived this horse coming full drive upon me (for I had seen him at my heels, and gave myself for gone, but this thought had been so sudden, that fear had had no leisure to introduce itself) it seemed to me like a flash of lightning that had pierced my soul, and that I came from the other world.

This long story of so light an accident would appear vain enough, were it not for the knowledge I have gained by it for my own use; for I do really find, that to get acquainted with death, needs no more but nearly to approach it. Every one, as Pliny says, is a good doctrine to himself, provided he be capable of discovering himself near at hand. Here, this is not my doctrine, 'tis my study; and is not the lesson of another, but my own; and if I communicate it, it ought not to be ill taken, for that which is of use to me, may also, peradventure, be useful to another. As to the rest, I spoil nothing, I make use of nothing but my own; and if I play the



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fool, 'tis at my own expense, and nobody else is concerned in't; for 'tis a folly that will die with me, and that no one is to inherit. We hear but of two or three of the ancients, who have beaten this path, and yet I cannot say if it was after this manner, knowing no more of them but their names. No one since has followed the track: 'tis a rugged road, more so than it seems, to follow a pace so rambling and uncertain, as that of the soul; to penetrate the dark profundities of its intricate internal windings; to choose and lay hold of so many little nimble motions; 'tis a new and extraordinary undertaking, and that withdraws us from the common and most recommended employments of the world. 'Tis now many years since that my thoughts have had no other aim and level than myself, and that I have only pried into and studied myself: or, if I study any other thing, 'tis to apply it to or rather in myself. And yet I do not think it a fault, if, as others do by other much less profitable sciences, I communicate what I have learned in this, though I am not very well pleased with my own progress. There is no description so difficult, nor doubtless of so great utility, as that of a man's self: and withal, a man must curl his hair and set out and adjust himself, to appear in public: now I am perpetually tricking myself out, for I am eternally upon my own description. Custom has made all speaking of a man's self vicious, and positively interdicts it, in hatred to the boasting that seems inseparable from the testimony men give of themselves:

"In vitium ducit culpae fuga."

["The avoiding a mere fault often leads us into a greater."]

Or: "The escape from a fault leads into a vice"

—Horace, De Arte Poetics, verse 31.]

Instead of blowing the child's nose, this is to take his nose off altogether. I think the remedy worse than the disease. But, allowing it to be true that it must of necessity be presumption to entertain people with discourses of one's self, I ought not, pursuing my general design, to forbear an action that publishes this infirmity of mine, nor conceal the fault which I not only practise but profess. Notwithstanding, to speak my thought freely, I think that the custom of condemning wine, because some people will be drunk, is itself to be condemned; a man cannot abuse anything but what is good in itself; and I believe that this rule has only regard to the popular vice. They are bits for calves, with which neither the saints whom we hear speak so highly of themselves, nor the philosophers, nor the divines will be curbed; neither will I, who am as little the one as the other, if they do not write of it expressly, at all events, when the occasions arise, they don't hesitate to put themselves on the public highway. Of what does Socrates treat more largely than of himself? To what does he more direct and address the discourses of his disciples, than to speak of themselves, not of



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the lesson in their book, but of the essence and motion of their souls? We confess ourselves religiously to God and our confessor; as our neighbours, do to all the people. But some will answer that we there speak nothing but accusation against ourselves; why then, we say all; for our very virtue itself is faulty and penetrable. My trade and art is to live; he that forbids me to speak according to my own sense, experience, and practice, may as well enjoin an architect not to speak of building according to his own knowledge, but according to that of his neighbour; according to the knowledge of another, and not according to his own. If it be vainglory for a man to publish his own virtues, why does not Cicero prefer the eloquence of Hortensius, and Hortensius that of Cicero? Peradventure they mean that I should give testimony of myself by works and effects, not barely by words. I chiefly paint my thoughts, a subject void of form and incapable of operative production; 'tis all that I can do to couch it in this airy body of the voice; the wisest and devoutest men have lived in the greatest care to avoid all apparent effects. Effects would more speak of fortune than of me; they manifest their own office and not mine, but uncertainly and by conjecture; patterns of some one particular virtue. I expose myself entire; 'tis a body where, at one view, the veins, muscles, and tendons are apparent, every of them in its proper place; here the effects of a cold; there of the heart beating, very dubiously. I do not write my own acts, but myself and my essence.

I am of opinion that a man must be very cautious how he values himself, and equally conscientious to give a true report, be it better or worse, impartially. If I thought myself perfectly good and wise, I would rattle it out to some purpose. To speak less of one's self than what one really is is folly, not modesty; and to take that for current pay which is under a man's value is pusillanimity and cowardice, according to, Aristotle. No virtue assists itself with falsehood; truth is never matter of error. To speak more of one's self than is really true is not always mere presumption; 'tis, moreover, very often folly; to, be immeasurably pleased with what one is, and to fall into an indiscreet self-love, is in my opinion the substance of this vice. The most sovereign remedy to cure it, is to do quite contrary to what these people direct who, in forbidding men to speak of themselves, consequently, at the same time, interdict thinking of themselves too. Pride dwells in the thought; the tongue can have but a very little share in it.



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They fancy that to think of one's self is to be delighted with one's self; to frequent and converse with one's self, to be overindulgent; but this excess springs only in those who take but a superficial view of themselves, and dedicate their main inspection to their affairs; who call it mere reverie and idleness to occupy one's self with one's self, and the building one's self up a mere building of castles in the air; who look upon themselves as a third person only, a stranger. If any one be in rapture with his own knowledge, looking only on those below him, let him but turn his eye upward towards past ages, and his pride will be abated, when he shall there find so many thousand wits that trample him under foot. If he enter into a flattering presumption of his personal valour, let him but recollect the lives of Scipio, Epaminondas; so many armies, so many nations, that leave him so far behind them. No particular quality can make any man proud, that will at the same time put the many other weak and imperfect ones he has in the other scale, and the nothingness of human condition to make up the weight. Because Socrates had alone digested to purpose the precept of his god, "to know himself," and by that study arrived at the perfection of setting himself at nought, he only was reputed worthy the title of a sage. Whosoever shall so know himself, let him boldly speak it out.

ETEXT *editor's bookmarks:*

Addresses his voyage to no certain, port
All apprentices when we come to it (death)
Any one may deprive us of life; no one can deprive us of death
Business to-morrow
Condemning wine, because some people will be drunk
Conscience makes us betray, accuse, and fight against ourselves
Curiosity and of that eager passion for news
Delivered into our own custody the keys of life
Drunkenness a true and certain trial of every one's nature
I can more hardly believe a man's constancy than any virtue
"I wish you good health." "No health to thee," replied the other
If to philosophise be, as 'tis defined, to doubt
Improperly we call this voluntary dissolution, despair
It's madness to nourish infirmity
Let him be as wise as he will, after all he is but a man
Living is slavery if the liberty of dying be wanting.
Look upon themselves as a third person only, a stranger
Lower himself to the meanness of defending his innocence
Much difference betwixt us and ourselves
No alcohol the night on which a man intends to get children
No excellent soul is exempt from a mixture of madness
Not conclude too much upon your mistress's inviolable chastity
One door into life, but a hundred thousand ways out
Ordinary method of cure is carried on at the expense of life
Plato forbids children wine till eighteen years of age

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Shame for me to serve, being so near the reach of liberty
Speak less of one's self than what one really is is folly
Taught to consider sleep as a resemblance of death
The action is commendable, not the man
The most voluntary death is the finest
The vice opposite to curiosity is negligence
Things seem greater by imagination than they are in effect
Thy own cowardice is the cause, if thou livest in pain
Tis evil counsel that will admit no change
Torture: rather a trial of patience than of truth
We do not go, we are driven
What can they suffer who do not fear to die?
Whoever expects punishment already suffers it
Wise man lives as long as he ought, not so long as he can