

# **The Essays of Montaigne — Volume 11 eBook**

## **The Essays of Montaigne — Volume 11 by Michel de Montaigne**

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# Page 1

## OF JUDGING OF THE DEATH OF ANOTHER

When we judge of another's assurance in death, which, without doubt, is the most remarkable action of human life, we are to take heed of one thing, which is that men very hardly believe themselves to have arrived to that period. Few men come to die in the opinion that it is their latest hour; and there is nothing wherein the flattery of hope more deludes us; It never ceases to whisper in our ears, "Others have been much sicker without dying; your condition is not so desperate as 'tis thought; and, at the worst, God has done other miracles." Which happens by reason that we set too much value upon ourselves; it seems as if the universality of things were in some measure to suffer by our dissolution, and that it commiserates our condition, forasmuch as our disturbed sight represents things to itself erroneously, and that we are of opinion they stand in as much need of us as we do of them, like people at sea, to whom mountains, fields, cities, heaven and earth are tossed at the same rate as they are:

"Provehimur portu, terraeque urbesque recedunt:"

["We sail out of port, and cities and lands recede."  
—Aeneid, iii. 72.]

Whoever saw old age that did not applaud the past and condemn the present time, laying the fault of his misery and discontent upon the world and the manners of men?

"Jamque caput quassans, grandis suspirat arator.  
Et cum tempora temporibus praesentia confert  
Praeteritis, laudat fortunas saepe parentis,  
Et crepat antiquum genus ut pietate repletum."

["Now the old ploughman, shaking his head, sighs, and compares present times with past, often praises his parents' happiness, and talks of the old race as full of piety."—Lucretius, ii. 1165.]

We will make all things go along with us; whence it follows that we consider our death as a very great thing, and that does not so easily pass, nor without the solemn consultation of the stars:

"Tot circa unum caput tumultuantes dens,"

["All the gods to agitation about one man."  
—Seneca, Suasor, i. 4.]

and so much the more think it as we more value ourselves. "What, shall so much knowledge be lost, with so much damage to the world, without a particular concern of the destinies? Does so rare and exemplary a soul cost no more the killing than one that

is common and of no use to the public? This life, that protects so many others, upon which so many other lives depend, that employs so vast a number of men in his service, that fills so many places, shall it drop off like one that hangs but by its own simple thread? None of us lays it enough to heart that he is but one: thence proceeded those words of Caesar to his pilot, more tumid than the sea that threatened him:

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"Italiam si coelo auctore recusas,  
Me pete: sola tibi causa est haec justa timoris,  
Vectorem non nosce tuum; perrumpe procellas,  
Tutela secure mea."

["If you decline to sail to Italy under the God's protection, trust to mine; the only just cause you have to fear is, that you do not know your passenger; sail on, secure in my guardianship." —Lucan, V. 579.]

And these:

"Credit jam digna pericula Caesar  
Fatis esse suis; tantusne evertere, dixit,  
Me superis labor est, parva quern puppe sedentem,  
Tam magno petiere mari;"

["Caesar now deemed these dangers worthy of his destiny: 'What!' said he, 'is it for the gods so great a task to overthrow me, that they must be fain to assail me with great seas in a poor little bark.'"—Lucan, v. 653.]

and that idle fancy of the public, that the sun bore on his face mourning for his death a whole year:

"Ille etiam extincto miseratus Caesare Romam,  
Cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine textit:"

["Caesar being dead, the sun in mourning clouds, pitying Rome, clothed himself."—Virgil, Georg., i. 466.]

and a thousand of the like, wherewith the world suffers itself to be so easily imposed upon, believing that our interests affect the heavens, and that their infinity is concerned at our ordinary actions:

"Non tanta caelo societas nobiscum est, ut nostro  
fato mortalis sit ille quoque siderum fulgor."

["There is no such alliance betwixt us and heaven, that the brightness of the stars should be made also mortal by our death."  
—Pliny, Nat. Hist., ii. 8.]

Now, to judge of constancy and resolution in a man who does not yet believe himself to be certainly in danger, though he really is, is not reason; and 'tis not enough that he die in this posture, unless he purposely put himself into it for this effect. It commonly falls out in most men that they set a good face upon the matter and speak with great indifference, to acquire reputation, which they hope afterwards, living, to enjoy. Of all





whom I have seen die, fortune has disposed their countenances and no design of theirs; and even of those who in ancient times have made away with themselves, there is much to be considered whether it were a sudden or a lingering death. That cruel Roman Emperor would say of his prisoners, that he would make them feel death, and if any one killed himself in prison, "That fellow has made an escape from me"; he would prolong death and make it felt by torments:

"Vidimus et toto quamvis in corpore caeso  
Nil anima lethale datum, moremque nefandae,  
Durum saevitix, pereuntis parcere morti."

["We have seen in tortured bodies, amongst the wounds, none that have been mortal, inhuman mode of dire cruelty, that means to kill, but will not let men die."—Lucan, iv. i. 78.]

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In plain truth, it is no such great matter for a man in health and in a temperate state of mind to resolve to kill himself; it is very easy to play the villain before one comes to the point, insomuch that Heliogabalus, the most effeminate man in the world, amongst his lowest sensualities, could forecast to make himself die delicately, when he should be forced thereto; and that his death might not give the lie to the rest of his life, had purposely built a sumptuous tower, the front and base of which were covered with planks enriched with gold and precious stones, thence to precipitate himself; and also caused cords twisted with gold and crimson silk to be made, wherewith to strangle himself; and a sword with the blade of gold to be hammered out to fall upon; and kept poison in vessels of emerald and topaz wherewith to poison himself according as he should like to choose one of these ways of dying:

“Impiger. . . ad letum et fortis virtute coacta.”

["Resolute and brave in the face of death by a forced courage.  
—“Lucan, iv. 798.]

Yet in respect of this person, the effeminacy of his preparations makes it more likely that he would have thought better on't, had he been put to the test. But in those who with greater resolution have determined to despatch themselves, we must examine whether it were with one blow which took away the leisure of feeling the effect for it is to be questioned whether, perceiving life, by little and little, to steal away the sentiment of the body mixing itself with that of the soul, and the means of repenting being offered, whether, I say, constancy and obstinacy in so dangerous an intention would have been found.

In the civil wars of Caesar, Lucius Domitius, being taken in the Abruzzi, and thereupon poisoning himself, afterwards repented. It has happened in our time that a certain person, being resolved to die and not having gone deep enough at the first thrust, the sensibility of the flesh opposing his arm, gave himself two or three wounds more, but could never prevail upon himself to thrust home. Whilst Plautius Silvanus was upon his trial, Urgulania, his grandmother, sent him a poniard with which, not being able to kill himself, he made his servants cut his veins. Albucilla in Tiberius time having, to kill himself, struck with too much tenderness, gave his adversaries opportunity to imprison and put him to death their own way.' And that great leader, Demosthenes, after his rout in Sicily, did the same; and C. Fimbria, having struck himself too weakly, entreated his servant to despatch him. On the contrary, Ostorius, who could not make use of his own arm, disdained to employ that of his servant to any other use but only to hold the poniard straight and firm; and bringing his throat to it, thrust himself through. 'Tis, in truth, a morsel that is to be swallowed without chewing, unless a man be thoroughly resolved; and yet Adrian the emperor made his physician mark and encircle on

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his pap the mortal place wherein he was to stab to whom he had given orders to kill him. For this reason it was that Caesar, being asked what death he thought to be the most desired, made answer, "The least premeditated and the shortest."—[Tacitus, Annals, xvi. 15]— If Caesar dared to say it, it is no cowardice in me to believe it." A short death," says Pliny, "is the sovereign good hap of human life. "People do not much care to recognise it. No one can say that he is resolute for death who fears to deal with it and cannot undergo it with his eyes open: they whom we see in criminal punishments run to their death and hasten and press their execution, do it not out of resolution, but because they will not give them selves leisure to consider it; it does not trouble them to be dead, but to die:

"Emodi nolo, sed me esse mortem nihil astigmia."

["I have no mind to die, but I have no objection to be dead."  
—Epicharmus, apud Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., i. 8.]

'tis a degree of constancy to which I have experimented, that I can arrive, like those who plunge into dangers, as into the sea, with their eyes shut.

There is nothing, in my opinion, more illustrious in the life of Socrates, than that he had thirty whole days wherein to ruminate upon the sentence of his death, to have digested it all that time with a most assured hope, without care, and without alteration, and with a series of words and actions rather careless and indifferent than any way stirred or discomposed by the weight of such a thought.

That Pomponius Atticus, to whom Cicero writes so often, being sick, caused Agrippa, his son-in-law, and two or three more of his friends, to be called to him, and told them, that having found all means practised upon him for his recovery to be in vain, and that all he did to prolong his life also prolonged and augmented his pain, he was resolved to put an end both to the one and the other, desiring them to approve of his determination, or at least not to lose their labour in endeavouring to dissuade him. Now, having chosen to destroy himself by abstinence, his disease was thereby cured: the remedy that he had made use of to kill himself restored him to health. His physicians and friends, rejoicing at so happy an event, and coming to congratulate him, found themselves very much deceived, it being impossible for them to make him alter his purpose, he telling them, that as he must one day die, and was now so far on his way, he would save himself the labour of beginning another time. This man, having surveyed death at leisure, was not only not discouraged at its approach, but eagerly sought it; for being content that he had engaged in the combat, he made it a point of bravery to see the end; 'tis far beyond not fearing death to taste and relish it.



The story of the philosopher Cleanthes is very like this: he had his gums swollen and rotten; his physicians advised him to great abstinence: having fasted two days, he was so much better that they pronounced him cured, and permitted him to return to his ordinary course of diet; he, on the contrary, already tasting some sweetness in this faintness of his, would not be persuaded to go back, but resolved to proceed, and to finish what he had so far advanced.

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Tullius Marcellinus, a young man of Rome, having a mind to anticipate the hour of his destiny, to be rid of a disease that was more trouble to him than he was willing to endure, though his physicians assured him of a certain, though not sudden, cure, called a council of his friends to deliberate about it; of whom some, says Seneca, gave him the counsel that out of unmanliness they would have taken themselves; others, out of flattery, such as they thought he would best like; but a Stoic said this to him: "Do not concern thyself, Marcellinus, as if thou didst deliberate of a thing of importance; 'tis no great matter to live; thy servants and beasts live; but it is a great thing to die handsomely, wisely, and firmly. Do but think how long thou hast done the same things, eat, drink, and sleep, drink, sleep, and eat: we incessantly wheel in the same circle. Not only ill and insupportable accidents, but even the satiety of living, inclines a man to desire to die." Marcellinus did not stand in need of a man to advise, but of a man to assist him; his servants were afraid to meddle in the business, but this philosopher gave them to understand that domestics are suspected even when it is in doubt whether the death of the master were voluntary or no; otherwise, that it would be of as ill example to hinder him as to kill him, forasmuch as:

"Invitum qui servat, idem facit occidenti."

["He who makes a man live against his will, 'tis as cruel as to kill him."—Horat., *De Arte Poet.*, 467]

He then told Marcellinus that it would not be unbecoming, as what is left on the tables when we have eaten is given to the attendants, so, life being ended, to distribute something to those who have been our servants. Now Marcellinus was of a free and liberal spirit; he, therefore, divided a certain sum of money amongst his servants, and consoled them. As to the rest, he had no need of steel nor of blood: he resolved to go out of this life and not to run out of it; not to escape from death, but to essay it. And to give himself leisure to deal with it, having forsaken all manner of nourishment, the third day following, after having caused himself to be sprinkled with warm water, he fainted by degrees, and not without some kind of pleasure, as he himself declared.

In fact, such as have been acquainted with these faintings, proceeding from weakness, say that they are therein sensible of no manner of pain, but rather feel a kind of delight, as in the passage to sleep and best. These are studied and digested deaths.

But to the end that Cato only may furnish out the whole example of virtue, it seems as if his good with which the leisure to confront and struggle with death, reinforcing his destiny had put his ill one into the hand he gave himself the blow, seeing he had courage in the danger, instead of letting it go less. And if I had had to represent him in his supreme station, I should have done it in the posture of tearing out his bloody bowels, rather than with his sword in his hand, as did the statuary of his time, for this second murder was much more furious than the first.

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### CHAPTER XIV

#### THAT OUR MIND HINDERS ITSELF

'Tis a pleasant imagination to fancy a mind exactly balanced betwixt two equal desires: for, doubtless, it can never pitch upon either, forasmuch as the choice and application would manifest an inequality of esteem; and were we set betwixt the bottle and the ham, with an equal appetite to drink and eat, there would doubtless be no remedy, but we must die of thirst and hunger. To provide against this inconvenience, the Stoics, when they are asked whence the election in the soul of two indifferent things proceeds, and that makes us, out of a great number of crowns, rather take one than another, they being all alike, and there being no reason to incline us to such a preference, make answer, that this movement of the soul is extraordinary and irregular, entering into us by a foreign, accidental, and fortuitous impulse. It might rather, methinks, he said, that nothing presents itself to us wherein there is not some difference, how little soever; and that, either by the sight or touch, there is always some choice that, though it be imperceptibly, tempts and attracts us; so, whoever shall presuppose a packthread equally strong throughout, it is utterly impossible it should break; for, where will you have the breaking to begin? and that it should break altogether is not in nature. Whoever, also, should hereunto join the geometrical propositions that, by the certainty of their demonstrations, conclude the contained to be greater than the containing, the centre to be as great as its circumference, and that find out two lines incessantly approaching each other, which yet can never meet, and the philosopher's stone, and the quadrature of the circle, where the reason and the effect are so opposite, might, peradventure, find some argument to second this bold saying of Pliny:

“Solum certum nihil esse certi,  
et homine nihil miserius ant superbius.”

[“It is only certain that there is nothing certain, and that nothing is more miserable or more proud than man.”—Nat. Hist., ii. 7.]

### CHAPTER XV

#### THAT OUR DESIRES ARE AUGMENTED BY DIFFICULTY

There is no reason that has not its contrary, say the wisest of the philosophers. I was just now ruminating on the excellent saying one of the ancients alleges for the contempt of life: “No good can bring pleasure, unless it be that for the loss of which we are beforehand prepared.”

“In aequo est dolor amissae rei, et timor amittendae,”

["The grief of losing a thing, and the fear of losing it,  
are equal."—Seneca, Ep., 98.]

meaning by this that the fruition of life cannot be truly pleasant to us if we are in fear of losing it. It might, however, be said, on the contrary, that we hug and embrace this good so much the more earnestly, and with so much greater affection, by how much we see it the less assured and fear to have it taken from us: for it is evident, as fire burns with greater fury when cold comes to mix with it, that our will is more obstinate by being opposed:

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“Si nunquam Danaen habuisset ahenea turris,  
Non esses, Danae, de Jove facta parens;”

[“If a brazen tower had not held Danae, you would not, Danae, have been made a mother by Jove.”—Ovid, *Amoy.*, ii. 19, 27.]

and that there is nothing naturally so contrary to our taste as satiety which proceeds from facility; nor anything that so much whets it as rarity and difficulty:

“Omnium rerum voluptas ipso, quo debet fugare, periculo crescit.”

[“The pleasure of all things increases by the same danger that should deter it.”—Seneca, *De Benef.*, vii. 9.]

“Galla, nega; satiatur amor, nisi gaudia torquent.”

[“Galla, refuse me; love is glutted with joys that are not attended with trouble.”—Martial, iv. 37.]

To keep love in breath, Lycurgus made a decree that the married people of Lacedaemon should never enjoy one another but by stealth; and that it should be as great a shame to take them in bed together as committing with others. The difficulty of assignations, the danger of surprise, the shame of the morning,

“Et languor, et silentium,  
Et latere petitus imo Spiritus.”

[“And languor, and silence, and sighs, coming from the innermost heart.”—Hor., *Epod.*, xi. 9.]

these are what give the piquancy to the sauce. How many very wantonly pleasant sports spring from the most decent and modest language of the works on love? Pleasure itself seeks to be heightened with pain; it is much sweeter when it smarts and has the skin rippled. The courtesan Flora said she never lay with Pompey but that she made him wear the prints of her teeth.—[Plutarch, *Life of Pompey*, c. i.]

“Quod petiere, premunt arcte, faciuntque dolorem  
Corporis, et dentes inlidunt saepe labellis . . .  
Et stimuli subsunt, qui instigant laedere ad ipsum,  
Quodcunque est, rabies unde illae germina surgunt.”

[“What they have sought they dress closely, and cause pain; on the lips fix the teeth, and every kiss indents: urged by latent stimulus the part to wound”—Lucretius, i. 4.]



And so it is in everything: difficulty gives all things their estimation; the people of the march of Ancona more readily make their vows to St. James, and those of Galicia to Our Lady of Loreto; they make wonderful to-do at Liege about the baths of Lucca, and in Tuscany about those of Aspa: there are few Romans seen in the fencing school of Rome, which is full of French. That great Cato also, as much as us, nauseated his wife whilst she was his, and longed for her when in the possession of another. I was fain to turn out into the paddock an old horse, as he was not to be governed when he smelt a mare: the facility presently sated him as towards his own, but towards strange mares, and the first that passed by the pale of his pasture, he would again fall to his importunate neighings and his furious heats as before. Our appetite contemns and passes by what it has in possession, to run after that it has not:

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“Transvolat in medio posita, et fugientia captat.”

["He slights her who is close at hand, and runs after her who flees from him."—Horace, Sat., i. 2, 108.]

To forbid us anything is to make us have a mind to't:

“Nisi to servare puellam  
Incipis, incipiet desinere esse mea.”

["Unless you begin to guard your mistress, she will soon begin to be no longer mine."—Ovid, Amoy., ii. 19, 47.]

to give it wholly up to us is to beget in us contempt. Want and abundance fall into the same inconvenience:

“Tibi quod superest, mihi quod desit, dolet.”

["Your superfluities trouble you, and what I want troubles me.—“Terence, Phoy., i. 3, 9.]

Desire and fruition equally afflict us. The rigors of mistresses are troublesome, but facility, to say truth, still more so; forasmuch as discontent and anger spring from the esteem we have of the thing desired, heat and actuate love, but satiety begets disgust; 'tis a blunt, dull, stupid, tired, and slothful passion:

“Si qua volet regnare diu, contemnat amantem.”

["She who would long retain her power must use her lover ill."  
—Ovid, Amor., ii. 19, 33]

“Contemnite, amantes:  
Sic hodie veniet, si qua negavit heri.”

["Slight your mistress; she will to-day come who denied you yesterday.—“Propertius, ii. 14, 19.]

Why did Poppea invent the use of a mask to hide the beauties of her face, but to enhance it to her lovers? Why have they veiled, even below the heels, those beauties that every one desires to show, and that every one desires to see? Why do they cover with so many hindrances, one over another, the parts where our desires and their own have their principal seat? And to what serve those great bastion farthingales, with which our ladies fortify their haunches, but to allure our appetite and to draw us on by removing them farther from us?

“Et fugit ad salices, et se cupit ante videri.”

["She flies to the osiers, and desires beforehand to be seen going."  
—Virgil, *Eclog.*, iii. 65.]

“Interdum tunica duxit operta moram.”

["The hidden robe has sometimes checked love."  
—Propertius, ii. 15, 6.]

To what use serves the artifice of this virgin modesty, this grave coldness, this severe countenance, this professing to be ignorant of things that they know better than we who instruct them in them, but to increase in us the desire to overcome, control, and trample underfoot at pleasure all this ceremony and all these obstacles? For there is not only pleasure, but, moreover, glory, in conquering and debauching that soft sweetness and that childish modesty, and to reduce

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a cold and matronlike gravity to the mercy of our ardent desires: 'tis a glory, say they, to triumph over modesty, chastity, and temperance; and whoever dissuades ladies from those qualities, betrays both them and himself. We are to believe that their hearts tremble with affright, that the very sound of our words offends the purity of their ears, that they hate us for talking so, and only yield to our importunity by a compulsive force. Beauty, all powerful as it is, has not wherewithal to make itself relished without the mediation of these little arts. Look into Italy, where there is the most and the finest beauty to be sold, how it is necessitated to have recourse to extrinsic means and other artifices to render itself charming, and yet, in truth, whatever it may do, being venal and public, it remains feeble and languishing. Even so in virtue itself, of two like effects, we notwithstanding look upon that as the fairest and most worthy, wherein the most trouble and hazard are set before us.

'Tis an effect of the divine Providence to suffer the holy Church to be afflicted, as we see it, with so many storms and troubles, by this opposition to rouse pious souls, and to awaken them from that drowsy lethargy wherein, by so long tranquillity, they had been immersed. If we should lay the loss we have sustained in the number of those who have gone astray, in the balance against the benefit we have had by being again put in breath, and by having our zeal and strength revived by reason of this opposition, I know not whether the utility would not surmount the damage.

We have thought to tie the nuptial knot of our marriages more fast and firm by having taken away all means of dissolving it, but the knot of the will and affection is so much the more slackened and made loose, by how much that of constraint is drawn closer; and, on the contrary, that which kept the marriages at Rome so long in honour and inviolate, was the liberty every one who so desired had to break them; they kept their wives the better, because they might part with them, if they would; and, in the full liberty of divorce, five hundred years and more passed away before any one made use on't.

"Quod licet, ingratum est; quod non licet, acrius urit."

["What you may, is displeasing; what is forbidden, whets the appetite.—"Ovid, *Amor.*, ii. 19.]

We might here introduce the opinion of an ancient upon this occasion, "that executions rather whet than dull the edge of vices: that they do not beget the care of doing well, that being the work of reason and discipline, but only a care not to be taken in doing ill:"

"Latius excisae pestis contagia serpunt."

["The plague-sore being lanced, the infection spreads all the more."  
—Rutilius, *Itinerar.* 1, 397.]

I do not know that this is true; but I experimentally know, that never civil government was by that means reformed; the order and regimen of manners depend upon some other expedient.

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The Greek histories make mention of the Argippians, neighbours to Scythia, who live without either rod or stick for offence; where not only no one attempts to attack them, but whoever can fly thither is safe, by reason of their virtue and sanctity of life, and no one is so bold as to lay hands upon them; and they have applications made to them to determine the controversies that arise betwixt men of other countries. There is a certain nation, where the enclosures of gardens and fields they would preserve, are made only of a string of cotton; and, so fenced, is more firm and secure than by our hedges and ditches.

*"Furem signata sollicitant . . .  
aperta effractarius praeterit."*

*["Things sealed, up invite a thief: the housebreaker  
passes by open doors."—Seneca, Epist., 68.]*

Peradventure, the facility of entering my house, amongst other things, has been a means to preserve it from the violence of our civil wars: defence allures attempt, and defiance provokes an enemy. I enervated the soldiers' design by depriving the exploit of danger and all manner of military glory, which is wont to serve them for pretence and excuse: whatever is bravely, is ever honourably, done, at a time when justice is dead. I render them the conquest of my house cowardly and base; it is never shut to any one that knocks; my gate has no other guard than a porter, and he of ancient custom and ceremony; who does not so much serve to defend it as to offer it with more decorum and grace; I have no other guard nor sentinel than the stars. A gentleman would play the fool to make a show of defence, if he be not really in a condition to defend himself. He who lies open on one side, is everywhere so; our ancestors did not think of building frontier garrisons. The means of assaulting, I mean without battery or army, and of surprising our houses, increases every day more and more beyond the means to guard them; men's wits are generally bent that way; in invasion every one is concerned: none but the rich in defence. Mine was strong for the time when it was built; I have added nothing to it of that kind, and should fear that its strength might turn against myself; to which we are to consider that a peaceable time would require it should be dismantled. There is danger never to be able to regain it, and it would be very hard to keep; for in intestine dissensions, your man may be of the party you fear; and where religion is the pretext, even a man's nearest relations become unreliable, with some colour of justice. The public exchequer will not maintain our domestic garrisons; they would exhaust it: we ourselves have not the means to do it without ruin, or, which is more inconvenient and injurious, without ruining the people. The condition of my loss would be scarcely worse. As to the rest, you there lose all; and even your friends will be more ready to accuse your want of vigilance

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and your improvidence, and your ignorance of and indifference to your own business, than to pity you. That so many garrisoned houses have been undone whereas this of mine remains, makes me apt to believe that they were only lost by being guarded; this gives an enemy both an invitation and colour of reason; all defence shows a face of war. Let who will come to me in God's name; but I shall not invite them; 'tis the retirement I have chosen for my repose from war. I endeavour to withdraw this corner from the public tempest, as I also do another corner in my soul. Our war may put on what forms it will, multiply and diversify itself into new parties; for my part, I stir not. Amongst so many garrisoned houses, myself alone amongst those of my rank, so far as I know, in France, have trusted purely to Heaven for the protection of mine, and have never removed plate, deeds, or hangings. I will neither fear nor save myself by halves. If a full acknowledgment acquires the Divine favour, it will stay with me to the end: if not, I have still continued long enough to render my continuance remarkable and fit to be recorded. How? Why, there are thirty years that I have thus lived.

## CHAPTER XVI

### OF GLORY

There is the name and the thing: the name is a voice which denotes and signifies the thing; the name is no part of the thing, nor of the substance; 'tis a foreign piece joined to the thing, and outside it. God, who is all fulness in Himself and the height of all perfection, cannot augment or add anything to Himself within; but His name may be augmented and increased by the blessing and praise we attribute to His exterior works: which praise, seeing we cannot incorporate it in Him, forasmuch as He can have no accession of good, we attribute to His name, which is the part out of Him that is nearest to us. Thus is it that to God alone glory and honour appertain; and there is nothing so remote from reason as that we should go in quest of it for ourselves; for, being indigent and necessitous within, our essence being imperfect, and having continual need of amelioration, 'tis to that we ought to employ all our endeavour. We are all hollow and empty; 'tis not with wind and voice that we are to fill ourselves; we want a more solid substance to repair us: a man starving with hunger would be very simple to seek rather to provide himself with a gay garment than with a good meal: we are to look after that whereof we have most need. As we have it in our ordinary prayers:

"Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus."

We are in want of beauty, health, wisdom, virtue, and such like essential qualities: exterior ornaments should, be looked after when we have made provision for necessary things. Divinity treats amply and more pertinently of this subject, but I am not much versed in it.

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Chrysippus and Diogenes were the earliest and firmest advocates of the contempt of glory; and maintained that, amongst all pleasures, there was none more dangerous nor more to be avoided than that which proceeds from the approbation of others. And, in truth, experience makes us sensible of many very hurtful treasons in it. There is nothing that so poisons princes as flattery, nor anything whereby wicked men more easily obtain credit and favour with them; nor panderism so apt and so usually made use of to corrupt the chastity of women as to wheedle and entertain them with their own praises. The first charm the Syrens made use of to allure Ulysses is of this nature:

“Deca vers nous, deca, o tres-louable Ulysse,  
Et le plus grand honneur don’t la Grece fleurisse.”

[“Come hither to us, O admirable Ulysses, come hither, thou greatest ornament and pride of Greece.”—Homer, *Odysseus*, xii. 184.]

These philosophers said, that all the glory of the world was not worth an understanding man’s holding out his finger to obtain it:

“Gloria quantalibet quid erit, si gloria tantum est?”

[“What is glory, be it as glorious as it may be, if it be no more than glory?”—Juvenal, *Sat.*, vii. 81.]

I say for it alone; for it often brings several commodities along with it, for which it may justly be desired: it acquires us good-will, and renders us less subject and exposed to insult and offence from others, and the like. It was also one of the principal doctrines of Epicurus; for this precept of his sect, Conceal thy life, that forbids men to encumber themselves with public negotiations and offices, also necessarily presupposes a contempt of glory, which is the world’s approbation of those actions we produce in public.—[Plutarch, *Whether the saying, Conceal thy life, is well said.*]—He that bids us conceal ourselves, and to have no other concern but for ourselves, and who will not have us known to others, would much less have us honoured and glorified; and so advises Idomeneus not in any sort to regulate his actions by the common reputation or opinion, except so as to avoid the other accidental inconveniences that the contempt of men might bring upon him.

These discourses are, in my opinion, very true and rational; but we are, I know not how, double in ourselves, which is the cause that what we believe we do not believe, and cannot disengage ourselves from what we condemn. Let us see the last and dying words of Epicurus; they are grand, and worthy of such a philosopher, and yet they carry some touches of the recommendation of his name and of that humour he had decried by his precepts. Here is a letter that he dictated a little before his last gasp:

“EPICUYUS to HEYMACHUS, health.



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“Whilst I was passing over the happy and last day of my life, I write this, but, at the same time, afflicted with such pain in my bladder and bowels that nothing can be greater, but it was recompensed with the pleasure the remembrance of my inventions and doctrines brought to my soul. Now, as the affection thou hast ever from thy infancy borne towards me and philosophy requires, take upon thee the protection of Metrodorus’ children.”

This is the letter. And that which makes me interpret that the pleasure he says he had in his soul concerning his inventions, has some reference to the reputation he hoped for thence after his death, is the manner of his will, in which he gives order that Aynomachus and Timocrates, his heirs, should, every January, defray the expense of the celebration of his birthday as Hermachus should appoint; and also the expense that should be made the twentieth of every moon in entertaining the philosophers, his friends, who should assemble in honour of the memory of him and of Metrodorus.—  
[Cicero, De Finibus, ii. 30.]

Carneades was head of the contrary opinion, and maintained that glory was to be desired for itself, even as we embrace our posthumous issue for themselves, having no knowledge nor enjoyment of them. This opinion has not failed to be the more universally followed, as those commonly are that are most suitable to our inclinations. Aristotle gives it the first place amongst external goods; and avoids, as too extreme vices, the immoderate either seeking or evading it. I believe that, if we had the books Cicero wrote upon this subject, we should there find pretty stories; for he was so possessed with this passion, that, if he had dared, I think he could willingly have fallen into the excess that others did, that virtue itself was not to be coveted, but upon the account of the honour that always attends it:

“Paulum sepulchrae distat inertiae  
Celata virtus:”

["Virtue concealed little differs from dead sloth."  
—Horace, Od., iv. 9, 29.]

which is an opinion so false, that I am vexed it could ever enter into the understanding of a man that was honoured with the name of philosopher.

If this were true, men need not be virtuous but in public; and we should be no further concerned to keep the operations of the soul, which is the true seat of virtue, regular and in order, than as they are to arrive at the knowledge of others. Is there no more in it, then, but only slyly and with circumspection to do ill? “If thou knowest,” says Carneades, “of a serpent lurking in a place where, without suspicion, a person is going to sit down, by whose death thou expectest an advantage, thou dost ill if thou dost not give him caution of his danger; and so much the more because the action is to be

known by none but thyself.” If we do not take up of ourselves the rule of well-doing, if impunity pass with us for justice, to how many

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sorts of wickedness shall we every day abandon ourselves? I do not find what Sextus Peduceus did, in faithfully restoring the treasure that C. Plotius had committed to his sole secrecy and trust, a thing that I have often done myself, so commendable, as I should think it an execrable baseness, had we done otherwise; and I think it of good use in our days to recall the example of P. Sextilius Rufus, whom Cicero accuses to have entered upon an inheritance contrary to his conscience, not only not against law, but even by the determination of the laws themselves; and M. Crassus and Hortensius, who, by reason of their authority and power, having been called in by a stranger to share in the succession of a forged will, that so he might secure his own part, satisfied themselves with having no hand in the forgery, and refused not to make their advantage and to come in for a share: secure enough, if they could shroud themselves from accusations, witnesses, and the cognisance of the laws:

“Meminerint Deum se habere testem, id est (ut ego arbitror) mentem suam.”

["Let them consider they have God to witness, that is (as I interpret it), their own consciences."—Cicero, *De Offic.*, iii. 10.]

Virtue is a very vain and frivolous thing if it derive its recommendation from glory; and 'tis to no purpose that we endeavour to give it a station by itself, and separate it from fortune; for what is more accidental than reputation?

“Profecto fortuna in omni re dominatur: ea res cunctas ex libidine magis, quam ex vero, celebrat, obscuratque.”

["Fortune rules in all things; it advances and depresses things more out of its own will than of right and justice."  
—Sallust, *Catilina*, c. 8.]

So to order it that actions may be known and seen is purely the work of fortune; 'tis chance that helps us to glory, according to its own temerity. I have often seen her go before merit, and often very much outstrip it. He who first likened glory to a shadow did better than he was aware of; they are both of them things pre-eminently vain glory also, like a shadow, goes sometimes before the body, and sometimes in length infinitely exceeds it. They who instruct gentlemen only to employ their valour for the obtaining of honour:

“Quasi non sit honestum, quod nobilitatum non sit;”

["As though it were not a virtue, unless celebrated"  
—Cicero *De Offic.* iii. 10.]

what do they intend by that but to instruct them never to hazard themselves if they are not seen, and to observe well if there be witnesses present who may carry news of their valour, whereas a thousand occasions of well-doing present themselves which cannot be taken notice of? How many brave individual actions are buried in the crowd of a battle? Whoever shall take upon him to watch another's behaviour in such a confusion is not very busy himself, and the testimony he shall give of his companions' deportment will be evidence against himself:

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“Vera et sapiens animi magnitudo, honestum illud,  
quod maxime naturam sequitur, in factis positum,  
non in gloria, iudicat.”

["The true and wise magnanimity judges that the bravery which most  
follows nature more consists in act than glory."  
—Cicero, *De Offic.* i. 19.]

All the glory that I pretend to derive from my life is that I have lived it in quiet; in quiet, not according to Metrodorus, or Arcesilaus, or Aristippus, but according to myself. For seeing philosophy has not been able to find out any way to tranquillity that is good in common, let every one seek it in particular.

To what do Caesar and Alexander owe the infinite grandeur of their renown but to fortune? How many men has she extinguished in the beginning of their progress, of whom we have no knowledge, who brought as much courage to the work as they, if their adverse hap had not cut them off in the first sally of their arms? Amongst so many and so great dangers I do not remember I have anywhere read that Caesar was ever wounded; a thousand have fallen in less dangers than the least of those he went through. An infinite number of brave actions must be performed without witness and lost, before one turns to account. A man is not always on the top of a breach, or at the head of an army, in the sight of his general, as upon a scaffold; a man is often surprised betwixt the hedge and the ditch; he must run the hazard of his life against a henroost; he must dislodge four rascally musketeers out of a barn; he must prick out single from his party, and alone make some attempts, according as necessity will have it. And whoever will observe will, I believe, find it experimentally true, that occasions of the least lustre are ever the most dangerous; and that in the wars of our own times there have more brave men been lost in occasions of little moment, and in the dispute about some little paltry fort, than in places of greatest importance, and where their valour might have been more honourably employed.

Who thinks his death achieved to ill purpose if he do not fall on some signal occasion, instead of illustrating his death, wilfully obscures his life, suffering in the meantime many very just occasions of hazarding himself to slip out of his hands; and every just one is illustrious enough, every man's conscience being a sufficient trumpet to him.

“Gloria nostra est testimonium conscientiae nostrae.”

["For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience."  
—Corinthians, i. 1.]

He who is only a good man that men may know it, and that he may be the better esteemed when 'tis known; who will not do well but upon condition that his virtue may be known to men: is one from whom much service is not to be expected:

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“Credo ch 'el reste di quel verno, cose  
Facesse degne di tener ne conto;  
Ma fur fin' a quel tempo si nascose,  
Che non a colpa mia s' hor 'non le conto  
Perche Orlando a far l'opre virtuose  
Piu ch'a narrar le poi sempre era pronto;  
Ne mai fu alcun' de'suoi fatti espresso,  
Se non quando ebbe i testimonii appresso.”

[“The rest of the winter, I believe, was spent in actions worthy of narration, but they were done so secretly that if I do not tell them I am not to blame, for Orlando was more bent to do great acts than to boast of them, so that no deeds of his were ever known but those that had witnesses.”—Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, xi. 81.]

A man must go to the war upon the account of duty, and expect the recompense that never fails brave and worthy actions, how private soever, or even virtuous thoughts—the satisfaction that a well-disposed conscience receives in itself in doing well. A man must be valiant for himself, and upon account of the advantage it is to him to have his courage seated in a firm and secure place against the assaults of fortune:

“Virtus, repulsaa nescia sordidx  
Intaminatis fulget honoribus  
Nec sumit, aut ponit secures  
Arbitrio popularis aura.”

[“Virtue, repudiating all base repulse, shines in taintless honours, nor takes nor leaves dignity at the mere will of the vulgar.”—Horace, *Od.*, iii. 2, 17.]

It is not for outward show that the soul is to play its part, but for ourselves within, where no eyes can pierce but our own; there she defends us from the fear of death, of pain, of shame itself: there she arms us against the loss of our children, friends, and fortunes: and when opportunity presents itself, she leads us on to the hazards of war:

“Non emolumento aliquo, sed ipsius honestatis decore.”

[“Not for any profit, but for the honour of honesty itself.”  
—Cicero, *De Finib.*, i. 10.]

This profit is of much greater advantage, and more worthy to be coveted and hoped for, than, honour and glory, which are no other than a favourable judgment given of us.

A dozen men must be called out of a whole nation to judge about an acre of land; and the judgment of our inclinations and actions, the most difficult and most important matter



that is, we refer to the voice and determination of the rabble, the mother of ignorance, injustice, and inconstancy. Is it reasonable that the life of a wise man should depend upon the judgment of fools?

“An quidquam stultius, quam, quos singulos contemnas,  
eos aliquid putare esse universes?”

["Can anything be more foolish than to think that those you despise  
singly, can be anything else in general.”

—Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., v. 36.]

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He that makes it his business to please them, will have enough to do and never have done; 'tis a mark that can never be aimed at or hit:

“Nil tam inaestimabile est, quam animi multitudinis.”

["Nothing is to be so little understood as the minds of the multitude."—Livy, xxxi. 34.]

Demetrius pleasantly said of the voice of the people, that he made no more account of that which came from above than of that which came from below. He [Cicero] says more:

“Ego hoc judico, si quando turpe non sit, tamen non esse non turpe, quum id a multitudine laudatur.”

["I am of opinion, that though a thing be not foul in itself, yet it cannot but become so when commended by the multitude."—Cicero, De Finib., ii. 15.]

No art, no activity of wit, could conduct our steps so as to follow so wandering and so irregular a guide; in this windy confusion of the noise of vulgar reports and opinions that drive us on, no way worth anything can be chosen. Let us not propose to ourselves so floating and wavering an end; let us follow constantly after reason; let the public approbation follow us there, if it will; and as it wholly depends upon fortune, we have no reason sooner to expect it by any other way than that. Even though I would not follow the right way because it is right, I should, however, follow it as having experimentally found that, at the end of the reckoning, 'tis commonly the most happy and of greatest utility.

“Dedit hoc providentia hominibus munus,  
ut honesta magis juvarent.”

["This gift Providence has given to men, that honest things should be the most agreeable."—Quintilian, Inst. Orat., i. 12.]

The mariner of old said thus to Neptune, in a great tempest: “O God, thou wilt save me if thou wilt, and if thou chooseth, thou wilt destroy me; but, however, I will hold my rudder straight.”—[Seneca, Ep., 85.]— I have seen in my time a thousand men supple, halfbred, ambiguous, whom no one doubted to be more worldly-wise than I, lose themselves, where I have saved myself:

“Risi successus posse carere dolos.”

["I have laughed to see cunning fail of success."—Ovid, Heroid, i. 18.]



Paulus AEmilius, going on the glorious expedition of Macedonia, above all things charged the people of Rome not to speak of his actions during his absence. Oh, the license of judgments is a great disturbance to great affairs! forasmuch as every one has not the firmness of Fabius against common, adverse, and injurious tongues, who rather suffered his authority to be dissected by the vain fancies of men, than to do less well in his charge with a favourable reputation and the popular applause.

There is I know not what natural sweetness in hearing one's self commended; but we are a great deal too fond of it:

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“Laudari metuam, neque enim mihi cornea fibra est  
Sed recti finemque extremumque esse recuso  
Euge tuum, et belle.”

[“I should fear to be praised, for my heart is not made of horn;  
but I deny that ‘excellent—admirably done,’ are the terms and  
final aim of virtue.”—Persius, i. 47.]

I care not so much what I am in the opinions of others, as what I am in my own; I would be rich of myself, and not by borrowing. Strangers see nothing but events and outward appearances; everybody can set a good face on the matter, when they have trembling and terror within: they do not see my heart, they see but my countenance. One is right in decrying the hypocrisy that is in war; for what is more easy to an old soldier than to shift in a time of danger, and to counterfeit the brave when he has no more heart than a chicken? There are so many ways to avoid hazarding a man’s own person, that we have deceived the world a thousand times before we come to be engaged in a real danger: and even then, finding ourselves in an inevitable necessity of doing something, we can make shift for that time to conceal our apprehensions by setting a good face on the business, though the heart beats within; and whoever had the use of the Platonic ring, which renders those invisible that wear it, if turned inward towards the palm of the hand, a great many would very often hide themselves when they ought most to appear, and would repent being placed in so honourable a post, where necessity must make them bold.

“Falsus honor juvat, et mendax infamia terret  
Quem nisi mendosum et mendacem?”

[“False honour pleases, and calumny affrights, the guilty  
and the sick.”—Horace, Ep., i. 16, 89.]

Thus we see how all the judgments that are founded upon external appearances, are marvellously uncertain and doubtful; and that there is no so certain testimony as every one is to himself. In these, how many soldiers’ boys are companions of our glory? he who stands firm in an open trench, what does he in that more than fifty poor pioneers who open to him the way and cover it with their own bodies for fivepence a day pay, do before him?

“Non quicquid turbida Roma  
Elevet, accedas; examenque improbum in illa  
Castiges trutina: nec to quaesiveris extra.”

[“Do not, if turbulent Rome disparage anything, accede; nor correct  
a false balance by that scale; nor seek anything beyond thyself.”  
—Persius, Sat., i. 5.]

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The dispersing and scattering our names into many mouths, we call making them more great; we will have them there well received, and that this increase turn to their advantage, which is all that can be excusable in this design. But the excess of this disease proceeds so far that many covet to have a name, be it what it will. Trogus Pompeius says of Herostratus, and Titus Livius of Manlius Capitolinus, that they were more ambitious of a great reputation than of a good one. This is very common; we are more solicitous that men speak of us, than how they speak; and it is enough for us that our names are often mentioned, be it after what manner it will. It should seem that to be known, is in some sort to have a man's life and its duration in others' keeping. I, for my part, hold that I am not, but in myself; and of that other life of mine which lies in the knowledge of my friends, to consider it naked and simply in itself, I know very well that I am sensible of no fruit nor enjoyment from it but by the vanity of a fantastic opinion; and when I shall be dead, I shall be still and much less sensible of it; and shall, withal, absolutely lose the use of those real advantages that sometimes accidentally follow it.

I shall have no more handle whereby to take hold of reputation, neither shall it have any whereby to take hold of or to cleave to me; for to expect that my name should be advanced by it, in the first place, I have no name that is enough my own; of two that I have, one is common to all my race, and indeed to others also; there are two families at Paris and Montpellier, whose surname is Montaigne, another in Brittany, and one in Xaintonge, De La Montaigne. The transposition of one syllable only would suffice so to ravel our affairs, that I shall share in their glory, and they peradventure will partake of my discredit; and, moreover, my ancestors have formerly been surnamed, Eyquem,—[Eyquem was the patronymic.]—a name wherein a family well known in England is at this day concerned. As to my other name, every one may take it that will, and so, perhaps, I may honour a porter in my own stead. And besides, though I had a particular distinction by myself, what can it distinguish, when I am no more? Can it point out and favour inanity?

“Non levior cippus nunc imprimit ossa?  
Laudat posteritas! Nunc non e manibus illis,  
Nunc non a tumulo fortunataque favilla,  
Nascentur violae?”

[“Does the tomb press with less weight upon my bones? Do comrades praise? Not from my manes, not from the tomb, not from the ashes will violets grow.”—Persius, Sat., i. 37.]

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but of this I have spoken elsewhere. As to what remains, in a great battle where ten thousand men are maimed or killed, there are not fifteen who are taken notice of; it must be some very eminent greatness, or some consequence of great importance that fortune has added to it, that signalises a private action, not of a harquebuser only, but of a great captain; for to kill a man, or two, or ten: to expose a man's self bravely to the utmost peril of death, is indeed something in every one of us, because we there hazard all; but for the world's concern, they are things so ordinary, and so many of them are every day seen, and there must of necessity be so many of the same kind to produce any notable effect, that we cannot expect any particular renown from it:

“Casus multis hic cognitus, ac jam  
Tritus, et a medio fortunae ductus acervo.”

[“The accident is known to many, and now trite; and drawn from the midst of Fortune's heap.”—Juvenal, Sat., xiii. 9.]

Of so many thousands of valiant men who have died within these fifteen hundred years in France with their swords in their hands, not a hundred have come to our knowledge. The memory, not of the commanders only, but of battles and victories, is buried and gone; the fortunes of above half of the world, for want of a record, stir not from their place, and vanish without duration. If I had unknown events in my possession, I should think with great ease to out-do those that are recorded, in all sorts of examples. Is it not strange that even of the Greeks and Romans, with so many writers and witnesses, and so many rare and noble exploits, so few are arrived at our knowledge:

“Ad nos vix tenuis famx perlabitur aura.”

[“An obscure rumour scarce is hither come.”—Aeneid, vii. 646.]

It will be much if, a hundred years hence, it be remembered in general that in our times there were civil wars in France. The Lacedaemonians, entering into battle, sacrificed to the Muses, to the end that their actions might be well and worthily written, looking upon it as a divine and no common favour, that brave acts should find witnesses that could give them life and memory. Do we expect that at every musket-shot we receive, and at every hazard we run, there must be a register ready to record it? and, besides, a hundred registers may enrol them whose commentaries will not last above three days, and will never come to the sight of any one. We have not the thousandth part of ancient writings; 'tis fortune that gives them a shorter or longer life, according to her favour; and 'tis permissible to doubt whether those we have be not the worst, not having seen the rest. Men do not write histories of things of so little moment: a man must have been general in the conquest of an empire or a kingdom; he must have won two-and-fifty set battles, and always the weaker in number, as Caesar did: ten thousand brave fellows and many great captains lost their lives valiantly in his service, whose names lasted no longer than their wives and children lived:

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“Quos fama obscura recondit.”

[“Whom an obscure reputation conceals.”—Aeneid, v. 302.]

Even those whom we see behave themselves well, three months or three years after they have departed hence, are no more mentioned than if they had never been. Whoever will justly consider, and with due proportion, of what kind of men and of what sort of actions the glory sustains itself in the records of history, will find that there are very few actions and very few persons of our times who can there pretend any right. How many worthy men have we known to survive their own reputation, who have seen and suffered the honour and glory most justly acquired in their youth, extinguished in their own presence? And for three years of this fantastic and imaginary life we must go and throw away our true and essential life, and engage ourselves in a perpetual death! The sages propose to themselves a nobler and more just end in so important an enterprise:

“Recte facti, fecisse merces est: officii fructus,  
ipsum officium est.”

[“The reward of a thing well done is to have done it; the fruit of a good service is the service itself.”—Seneca, Ep., 8.]

It were, peradventure, excusable in a painter or other artisan, or in a rhetorician or a grammarian, to endeavour to raise himself a name by his works; but the actions of virtue are too noble in themselves to seek any other reward than from their own value, and especially to seek it in the vanity of human judgments.

If this false opinion, nevertheless, be of such use to the public as to keep men in their duty; if the people are thereby stirred up to virtue; if princes are touched to see the world bless the memory of Trajan, and abominate that of Nero; if it moves them to see the name of that great beast, once so terrible and feared, so freely cursed and reviled by every schoolboy, let it by all means increase, and be as much as possible nursed up and cherished amongst us; and Plato, bending his whole endeavour to make his citizens virtuous, also advises them not to despise the good repute and esteem of the people; and says it falls out, by a certain Divine inspiration, that even the wicked themselves oft-times, as well by word as opinion, can rightly distinguish the virtuous from the wicked. This person and his tutor are both marvellous and bold artificers everywhere to add divine operations and revelations where human force is wanting:

“Ut tragici poetae confugiunt ad deum,  
cum explicare argumenti exitum non possunt.”

[“As tragic poets fly to some god when they cannot explain the issue of their argument.”—Cicero, De Nat. Deor., i. 20.]

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and peradventure, for this reason it was that Timon, railing at him, called him the great forger of miracles. Seeing that men, by their insufficiency, cannot pay themselves well enough with current money, let the counterfeit be superadded. 'Tis a way that has been practised by all the legislators: and there is no government that has not some mixture either of ceremonial vanity or of false opinion, that serves for a curb to keep the people in their duty. 'Tis for this that most of them have their originals and beginnings fabulous, and enriched with supernatural mysteries; 'tis this that has given credit to bastard religions, and caused them to be countenanced by men of understanding; and for this, that Numa and Sertorius, to possess their men with a better opinion of them, fed them with this foppery; one, that the nymph Egeria, the other that his white hind, brought them all their counsels from the gods. And the authority that Numa gave to his laws, under the title of the patronage of this goddess, Zoroaster, legislator of the Bactrians and Persians, gave to his under the name of the God Oromazis: Trismegistus, legislator of the Egyptians, under that of Mercury; Xamolxis, legislator of the Scythians, under that of Vesta; Charondas, legislator of the Chalcidians, under that of Saturn; Minos, legislator of the Candiots, under that of Jupiter; Lycurgus, legislator of the Lacedaemonians, under that of Apollo; and Draco and Solon, legislators of the Athenians, under that of Minerva. And every government has a god at the head of it; the others falsely, that truly, which Moses set over the Jews at their departure out of Egypt. The religion of the Bedouins, as the Sire de Joinville reports, amongst other things, enjoined a belief that the soul of him amongst them who died for his prince, went into another body more happy, more beautiful, and more robust than the former; by which means they much more willingly ventured their lives:

*"In ferrum mens prona viris, animaeque capaces  
Mortis, et ignavum est rediturae parcere vitae."*

["Men's minds are prone to the sword, and their souls able to bear death; and it is base to spare a life that will be renewed."  
—Lucan, i. 461.]

This is a very comfortable belief, however erroneous. Every nation has many such examples of its own; but this subject would require a treatise by itself.

To add one word more to my former discourse, I would advise the ladies no longer to call that honour which is but their duty:

*"Ut enim consuetudo loquitur, id solum dicitur  
honestum, quod est populari fama gloriosum;"*

["As custom puts it, that only is called honest which is glorious by the public voice."—Cicero, De Finibus, ii. 15.]

their duty is the mark, their honour but the outward rind. Neither would I advise them to give this excuse for payment of their denial: for I presuppose that their intentions, their desire, and will, which are things wherein their honour is not at all concerned, forasmuch as nothing thereof appears without, are much better regulated than the effects:

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“Qux quia non liceat, non facit, illa facit.”

["She who only refuses, because 'tis forbidden, consents."  
—Ovid, *Amor.*, ii. 4, 4.]

The offence, both towards God and in the conscience, would be as great to desire as to do it; and, besides, they are actions so private and secret of themselves, as would be easily enough kept from the knowledge of others, wherein the honour consists, if they had not another respect to their duty, and the affection they bear to chastity, for itself. Every woman of honour will much rather choose to lose her honour than to hurt her conscience.

## CHAPTER XVII

### OF PRESUMPTION

There is another sort of glory, which is the having too good an opinion of our own worth. 'Tis an inconsiderate affection with which we flatter ourselves, and that represents us to ourselves other than we truly are: like the passion of love, that lends beauties and graces to the object, and makes those who are caught by it, with a depraved and corrupt judgment, consider the thing which they love other and more perfect than it is.

I would not, nevertheless, for fear of failing on this side, that a man should not know himself aright, or think himself less than he is; the judgment ought in all things to maintain its rights; 'tis all the reason in the world he should discern in himself, as well as in others, what truth sets before him; if it be Caesar, let him boldly think himself the greatest captain in the world. We are nothing but ceremony: ceremony carries us away, and we leave the substance of things: we hold by the branches, and quit the trunk and the body; we have taught the ladies to blush when they hear that but named which they are not at all afraid to do: we dare not call our members by their right names, yet are not afraid to employ them in all sorts of debauchery: ceremony forbids us to express by words things that are lawful and natural, and we obey it: reason forbids us to do things unlawful and ill, and nobody obeys it. I find myself here fettered by the laws of ceremony; for it neither permits a man to speak well of himself, nor ill: we will leave her there for this time.

They whom fortune (call it good or ill) has made to, pass their lives in some eminent degree, may by their public actions manifest what they are; but they whom she has only employed in the crowd, and of whom nobody will say a word unless they speak themselves, are to be excused if they take the boldness to speak of themselves to such as are interested to know them; by the example of Lucilius:



“Ille velut fidis arcana sodalibus olim  
Credebat libris, neque si male cesserat, usquam  
Decurrens alio, neque si bene: quo fit, ut omnis,  
Votiva pateat veluri descripta tabella  
Vita senis;”

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["He formerly confided his secret thoughts to his books, as to tried friends, and for good and evil, resorted not elsewhere: hence it came to pass, that the old man's life is there all seen as on a votive tablet."—Horace, Sat., ii. 1, 30.]

he always committed to paper his actions and thoughts, and there portrayed himself such as he found himself to be:

"Nec id Rutilio et Scauro citra fidem; aut obtrectationi fuit."

["Nor was this considered a breach of good faith or a disparagement to Rutilius or Scaurus."—Tacitus, Agricola, c. 1.]

I remember, then, that from my infancy there was observed in me I know not what kind of carriage and behaviour, that seemed to relish of pride and arrogance. I will say this, by the way, that it is not unreasonable to suppose that we have qualities and inclinations so much our own, and so incorporate in us, that we have not the means to feel and recognise them: and of such natural inclinations the body will retain a certain bent, without our knowledge or consent. It was an affectation conformable with his beauty that made Alexander carry his head on one side, and caused Alcibiades to lisp; Julius Caesar scratched his head with one finger, which is the fashion of a man full of troublesome thoughts; and Cicero, as I remember, was wont to pucker up his nose, a sign of a man given to scoffing; such motions as these may imperceptibly happen in us. There are other artificial ones which I meddle not with, as salutations and congees, by which men acquire, for the most part unjustly, the reputation of being humble and courteous: one may be humble out of pride. I am prodigal enough of my hat, especially in summer, and never am so saluted but that I pay it again from persons of what quality soever, unless they be in my own service. I should make it my request to some princes whom I know, that they would be more sparing of that ceremony, and bestow that courtesy where it is more due; for being so indiscreetly and indifferently conferred on all, it is thrown away to no purpose; if it be without respect of persons, it loses its effect. Amongst irregular deportment, let us not forget that haughty one of the Emperor Constantius, who always in public held his head upright and stiff, without bending or turning on either side, not so much as to look upon those who saluted him on one side, planting his body in a rigid immovable posture, without suffering it to yield to the motion of his coach, not daring so much as to spit, blow his nose, or wipe his face before people. I know not whether the gestures that were observed in me were of this first quality, and whether I had really any occult proneness to this vice, as it might well be; and I cannot be responsible for the motions of the body; but as to the motions of the soul, I must here confess what I think of the matter.

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This glory consists of two parts; the one in setting too great a value upon ourselves, and the other in setting too little a value upon others. As to the one, methinks these considerations ought, in the first place, to be of some force: I feel myself importuned by an error of the soul that displeases me, both as it is unjust, and still more as it is troublesome; I attempt to correct it, but I cannot root it out; and this is, that I lessen the just value of things that I possess, and overvalue things, because they are foreign, absent, and none of mine; this humour spreads very far. As the prerogative of the authority makes husbands look upon their own wives with a vicious disdain, and many fathers their children; so I, betwixt two equal merits, should always be swayed against my own; not so much that the jealousy of my advancement and bettering troubles my judgment, and hinders me from satisfying myself, as that of itself possession begets a contempt of what it holds and rules. Foreign governments, manners, and languages insinuate themselves into my esteem; and I am sensible that Latin allures me by the favour of its dignity to value it above its due, as it does with children, and the common sort of people: the domestic government, house, horse, of my neighbour, though no better than my own, I prize above my own, because they are not mine. Besides that I am very ignorant in my own affairs, I am struck by the assurance that every one has of himself: whereas there is scarcely anything that I am sure I know, or that I dare be responsible to myself that I can do: I have not my means of doing anything in condition and ready, and am only instructed therein after the effect; as doubtful of my own force as I am of another's. Whence it comes to pass that if I happen to do anything commendable, I attribute it more to my fortune than industry, forasmuch as I design everything by chance and in fear. I have this, also, in general, that of all the opinions antiquity has held of men in gross, I most willingly embrace and adhere to those that most condemn and undervalue us, and most push us to naught; methinks, philosophy has never so fair a game to play as when it falls upon our vanity and presumption; when it most lays open our irresolution, weakness, and ignorance. I look upon the too good opinion that man has of himself to be the nursing mother of all the most false opinions, both public and private. Those people who ride astride upon the epicycle of Mercury, who see so far into the heavens, are worse to me than a tooth-drawer that comes to draw my teeth; for in my study, the subject of which is man, finding so great a variety of judgments, so profound a labyrinth of difficulties, one upon another, so great diversity and uncertainty, even in the school of wisdom itself, you may judge, seeing these people could not resolve upon the knowledge of themselves and their own condition, which is continually before their eyes, and within them, seeing they do not know how that moves which they themselves move, nor how to give us a description of the springs they themselves govern and make use of, how can I believe them about the ebbing and flowing of the Nile? The curiosity of knowing things has been given to man for a scourge, says the Holy Scripture.

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But to return to what concerns myself; I think it would be very difficult for any other man to have a meaner opinion of himself; nay, for any other to have a meaner opinion of me than of myself: I look upon myself as one of the common sort, saving in this, that I have no better an opinion of myself; guilty of the meanest and most popular defects, but not disowning or excusing them; and I do not value myself upon any other account than because I know my own value. If there be any vanity in the case, 'tis superficially infused into me by the treachery of my complexion, and has no body that my judgment can discern: I am sprinkled, but not dyed. For in truth, as to the effects of the mind, there is no part of me, be it what it will, with which I am satisfied; and the approbation of others makes me not think the better of myself. My judgment is tender and nice, especially in things that concern myself.

I ever repudiate myself, and feel myself float and waver by reason of my weakness. I have nothing of my own that satisfies my judgment. My sight is clear and regular enough, but, at working, it is apt to dazzle; as I most manifestly find in poetry: I love it infinitely, and am able to give a tolerable judgment of other men's works; but, in good earnest, when I apply myself to it, I play the child, and am not able to endure myself. A man may play the fool in everything else, but not in poetry;

“Mediocribus esse poetis  
Non dii, non homines, non concessere columnae.”

["Neither men, nor gods, nor the pillars (on which the poets offered their writings) permit mediocrity in poets."  
—Horace, *De Arte Poet.*, 372.]

I would to God this sentence was written over the doors of all our printers, to forbid the entrance of so many rhymesters!

“Verum  
Nihil securius est malo poetae.”

["The truth is, that nothing is more confident than a bad poet."  
—Martial, xii. 63, 13.]

Why have not we such people?—[As those about to be mentioned.]—Dionysius the father valued himself upon nothing so much as his poetry; at the Olympic games, with chariots surpassing all the others in magnificence, he sent also poets and musicians to present his verses, with tent and pavilions royally gilt and hung with tapestry. When his verses came to be recited, the excellence of the delivery at first attracted the attention of the people; but when they afterwards came to poise the meanness of the composition, they first entered into disdain, and continuing to nettle their judgments, presently proceeded to fury, and ran to pull down and tear to pieces all his pavilions: and, that his chariots neither performed anything to purpose in the race, and that the ship which

brought back his people failed of making Sicily, and was by the tempest driven and wrecked upon the coast of Tarentum, they certainly

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believed was through the anger of the gods, incensed, as they themselves were, against the paltry Poem; and even the mariners who escaped from the wreck seconded this opinion of the people: to which also the oracle that foretold his death seemed to subscribe; which was, "that Dionysius should be near his end, when he should have overcome those who were better than himself," which he interpreted of the Carthaginians, who surpassed him in power; and having war with them, often declined the victory, not to incur the sense of this prediction; but he understood it ill; for the god indicated the time of the advantage, that by favour and injustice he obtained at Athens over the tragic poets, better than himself, having caused his own play called the Leneians to be acted in emulation; presently after which victory he died, and partly of the excessive joy he conceived at the success.

[Diodorus Siculus, xv. 7.—The play, however, was called the "Ransom of Hector." It was the games at which it was acted that were called Leneian; they were one of the four Dionysiac festivals.]

What I find tolerable of mine, is not so really and in itself, but in comparison of other worse things, that I see well enough received. I envy the happiness of those who can please and hug themselves in what they do; for 'tis an easy thing to be so pleased, because a man extracts that pleasure from himself, especially if he be constant in his self-conceit. I know a poet, against whom the intelligent and the ignorant, abroad and at home, both heaven and earth exclaim that he has but very little notion of it; and yet, for all that, he has never a whit the worse opinion of himself; but is always falling upon some new piece, always contriving some new invention, and still persists in his opinion, by so much the more obstinately, as it only concerns him to maintain it.

My works are so far from pleasing me, that as often as I review them, they disgust me:

"Cum relego, scripsisse pudet; quia plurima cerno,  
Me quoque, qui feci, judice, digna lini."

["When I reperuse, I blush at what I have written; I ever see one passage after another that I, the author, being the judge, consider should be erased."—Ovid, De Ponto, i. 5, 15.]

I have always an idea in my soul, and a sort of disturbed image which presents me as in a dream with a better form than that I have made use of; but I cannot catch it nor fit it to my purpose; and even that idea is but of the meaner sort. Hence I conclude that the productions of those great and rich souls of former times are very much beyond the utmost stretch of my imagination or my wish; their writings do not only satisfy and fill me, but they astound me, and ravish me with admiration; I judge of their beauty; I see it, if not to the utmost, yet so far at least as 'tis possible for me to aspire. Whatever I

undertake, I owe a sacrifice to the Graces, as Plutarch says of some one, to conciliate their favour:

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“Si quid enim placet,  
Si quid dulce hominum sensibus influit,  
Debentur lepidis omnia Gratiis.”

[“If anything please that I write, if it infuse delight into men’s minds, all is due to the charming Graces.” The verses are probably by some modern poet.]

They abandon me throughout; all I write is rude; polish and beauty are wanting: I cannot set things off to any advantage; my handling adds nothing to the matter; for which reason I must have it forcible, very full, and that has lustre of its own. If I pitch upon subjects that are popular and gay, ’tis to follow my own inclination, who do not affect a grave and ceremonious wisdom, as the world does; and to make myself more sprightly, but not my style more wanton, which would rather have them grave and severe; at least if I may call that a style which is an inform and irregular way of speaking, a popular jargon, a proceeding without definition, division, conclusion, perplexed like that Amafanius and Rabirius.—[Cicero, Acad., i. 2.]—I can neither please nor delight, nor even tickle my readers: the best story in the world is spoiled by my handling, and becomes flat; I cannot speak but in rough earnest, and am totally unprovided of that facility which I observe in many of my acquaintance, of entertaining the first comers and keeping a whole company in breath, or taking up the ear of a prince with all sorts of discourse without wearying themselves: they never want matter by reason of the faculty and grace they have in taking hold of the first thing that starts up, and accommodating it to the humour and capacity of those with whom they have to do. Princes do not much affect solid discourses, nor I to tell stories. The first and easiest reasons, which are commonly the best taken, I know not how to employ: I am an ill orator to the common sort. I am apt of everything to say the extremest that I know. Cicero is of opinion that in treatises of philosophy the exordium is the hardest part; if this be true, I am wise in sticking to the conclusion. And yet we are to know how to wind the string to all notes, and the sharpest is that which is the most seldom touched. There is at least as much perfection in elevating an empty as in supporting a weighty thing. A man must sometimes superficially handle things, and sometimes push them home. I know very well that most men keep themselves in this lower form from not conceiving things otherwise than by this outward bark; but I likewise know that the greatest masters, and Xenophon and Plato are often seen to stoop to this low and popular manner of speaking and treating of things, but supporting it with graces which never fail them.

Farther, my language has nothing in it that is facile and polished; ’tis rough, free, and irregular, and as such pleases, if not my judgment, at all events my inclination, but I very well perceive that I sometimes give myself too much rein, and that by endeavouring to avoid art and affectation I fall into the other inconvenience:



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“Brevis esse laboro,  
Obscurus fio.”

[ Endeavouring to be brief, I become obscure.”  
—Hor., Art. Poet., 25.]

Plato says, that the long or the short are not properties, that either take away or give value to language. Should I attempt to follow the other more moderate, united, and regular style, I should never attain to it; and though the short round periods of Sallust best suit with my humour, yet I find Caesar much grander and harder to imitate; and though my inclination would rather prompt me to imitate Seneca’s way of writing, yet I do nevertheless more esteem that of Plutarch. Both in doing and speaking I simply follow my own natural way; whence, peradventure, it falls out that I am better at speaking than writing. Motion and action animate words, especially in those who lay about them briskly, as I do, and grow hot. The comportment, the countenance; the voice, the robe, the place, will set off some things that of themselves would appear no better than prating. Messalla complains in Tacitus of the straitness of some garments in his time, and of the fashion of the benches where the orators were to declaim, that were a disadvantage to their eloquence.

My French tongue is corrupted, both in the pronunciation and otherwise, by the barbarism of my country. I never saw a man who was a native of any of the provinces on this side of the kingdom who had not a twang of his place of birth, and that was not offensive to ears that were purely French. And yet it is not that I am so perfect in my Perigordin: for I can no more speak it than High Dutch, nor do I much care. ’Tis a language (as the rest about me on every side, of Poitou, Xaintonge, Angoumoulin, Limousin, Auvergne), a poor, drawling, scurvy language. There is, indeed, above us towards the mountains a sort of Gascon spoken, that I am mightily taken with: blunt, brief, significant, and in truth a more manly and military language than any other I am acquainted with, as sinewy, powerful, and pertinent as the French is graceful, neat, and luxuriant.

As to the Latin, which was given me for my mother tongue, I have by discontinuance lost the use of speaking it, and, indeed, of writing it too, wherein I formerly had a particular reputation, by which you may see how inconsiderable I am on that side.

Beauty is a thing of great recommendation in the correspondence amongst men; ’tis the first means of acquiring the favour and good liking of one another, and no man is so barbarous and morose as not to perceive himself in some sort struck with its attraction. The body has a great share in our being, has an eminent place there, and therefore its structure and composition are of very just consideration. They who go about to disunite and separate our two principal parts from one another are to blame; we must, on the contrary, reunite and rejoin them. We must command the

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soul not to withdraw and entertain itself apart, not to despise and abandon the body (neither can she do it but by some apish counterfeit), but to unite herself close to it, to embrace, cherish, assist, govern, and advise it, and to bring it back and set it into the true way when it wanders; in sum, to espouse and be a husband to it, so that their effects may not appear to be diverse and contrary, but uniform and concurring. Christians have a particular instruction concerning this connection, for they know that the Divine justice embraces this society and juncture of body and soul, even to the making the body capable of eternal rewards; and that God has an eye to the whole man's ways, and wills that he receive entire chastisement or reward according to his demerits or merits. The sect of the Peripatetics, of all sects the most sociable, attribute to wisdom this sole care equally to provide for the good of these two associate parts: and the other sects, in not sufficiently applying themselves to the consideration of this mixture, show themselves to be divided, one for the body and the other for the soul, with equal error, and to have lost sight of their subject, which is Man, and their guide, which they generally confess to be Nature. The first distinction that ever was amongst men, and the first consideration that gave some pre-eminence over others, 'tis likely was the advantage of beauty:

“Agros divisere atque dedere  
Pro facie cujusque, et viribus ingenioque;  
Nam facies multum valuit, viresque vigeant.”

[“They distributed and conferred the lands to every man according to his beauty and strength and understanding, for beauty was much esteemed and strength was in favour.”—Lucretius, V. 1109.]

Now I am of something lower than the middle stature, a defect that not only borders upon deformity, but carries withal a great deal of inconvenience along with it, especially for those who are in office and command; for the authority which a graceful presence and a majestic mien beget is wanting. C. Marius did not willingly enlist any soldiers who were not six feet high. The Courtier has, indeed, reason to desire a moderate stature in the gentlemen he is setting forth, rather than any other, and to reject all strangeness that should make him be pointed at. But if I were to choose whether this medium must be rather below than above the common standard, I would not have it so in a soldier. Little men, says Aristotle, are pretty, but not handsome; and greatness of soul is discovered in a great body, as beauty is in a conspicuous stature: the Ethiopians and Indians, says he, in choosing their kings and magistrates, had regard to the beauty and stature of their persons. They had reason; for it creates respect in those who follow them, and is a terror to the enemy, to see a leader of a brave and goodly stature march at the head of a battalion:

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“Ipse inter primos praestanti corpore Turnus  
Vertitur arma, tenens, et toto vertice supra est.”

[“In the first rank marches Turnus, brandishing his weapon,  
taller by a head than all the rest.”—Virgil, *Aeneid*, vii. 783.]

Our holy and heavenly king, of whom every circumstance is most carefully and with the greatest religion and reverence to be observed, has not himself rejected bodily recommendation,

“Speciosus forma prae filiis hominum.”

[“He is fairer than the children of men.”—Psalm xiv. 3.]

And Plato, together with temperance and fortitude, requires beauty in the conservators of his republic. It would vex you that a man should apply himself to you amongst your servants to inquire where Monsieur is, and that you should only have the remainder of the compliment of the hat that is made to your barber or your secretary; as it happened to poor Philopoemen, who arriving the first of all his company at an inn where he was expected, the hostess, who knew him not, and saw him an unsightly fellow, employed him to go help her maids a little to draw water, and make a fire against Philopoemen’s coming; the gentlemen of his train arriving presently after, and surprised to see him busy in this fine employment, for he failed not to obey his landlady’s command, asked him what he was doing there: “I am,” said he, “paying the penalty of my ugliness.” The other beauties belong to women; the beauty of stature is the only beauty of men. Where there is a contemptible stature, neither the largeness and roundness of the forehead, nor the whiteness and sweetness of the eyes, nor the moderate proportion of the nose, nor the littleness of the ears and mouth, nor the evenness and whiteness of the teeth, nor the thickness of a well-set brown beard, shining like the husk of a chestnut, nor curled hair, nor the just proportion of the head, nor a fresh complexion, nor a pleasing air of a face, nor a body without any offensive scent, nor the just proportion of limbs, can make a handsome man. I am, as to the rest, strong and well knit; my face is not puffed, but full, and my complexion betwixt jovial and melancholic, moderately sanguine and hot,

“Unde rigent setis mihi crura, et pectora villis;”

[“Whence ’tis my legs and breast bristle with hair.”  
—Martial, ii. 36, 5.]

my health vigorous and sprightly, even to a well advanced age, and rarely troubled with sickness. Such I was, for I do not now make any account of myself, now that I am engaged in the avenues of old age, being already past forty:

“Minutatim vires et robur adultum  
Frangit, et in partem pejorem liquitur aetas.”

["Time by degrees breaks our strength and makes us grow feeble.  
—“Lucretius, ii. 1131.]

what shall be from this time forward, will be but a half-being, and no more me: I every  
day escape and steal away from myself:

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“Singula de nobis anni praedantur euntes.”

["Of the fleeting years each steals something from me."  
—Horace, Ep., ii. 2.]

Agility and address I never had, and yet am the son of a very active and sprightly father, who continued to be so to an extreme old age. I have scarce known any man of his condition, his equal in all bodily exercises, as I have seldom met with any who have not excelled me, except in running, at which I was pretty good. In music or singing, for which I have a very unfit voice, or to play on any sort of instrument, they could never teach me anything. In dancing, tennis, or wrestling, I could never arrive to more than an ordinary pitch; in swimming, fencing, vaulting, and leaping, to none at all. My hands are so clumsy that I cannot even write so as to read it myself, so that I had rather do what I have scribbled over again, than take upon me the trouble to make it out. I do not read much better than I write, and feel that I weary my auditors otherwise (I am) not a bad clerk. I cannot decently fold up a letter, nor could ever make a pen, or carve at table worth a pin, nor saddle a horse, nor carry a hawk and fly her, nor hunt the dogs, nor lure a hawk, nor speak to a horse. In fine, my bodily qualities are very well suited to those of my soul; there is nothing sprightly, only a full and firm vigour: I am patient enough of labour and pains, but it is only when I go voluntary to work, and only so long as my own desire prompts me to it:

“Molliter austerum studio fallente laborem.”

["Study softly beguiling severe labour."  
—Horace, Sat., ii. 2, 12.]

otherwise, if I am not allured with some pleasure, or have other guide than my own pure and free inclination, I am good for nothing: for I am of a humour that, life and health excepted, there is nothing for which I will bite my nails, and that I will purchase at the price of torment of mind and constraint:

“Tanti mihi non sit opaci  
Omnis arena Tagi, quodque in mare volvitur aurum.”

["I would not buy rich Tagus sands so dear, nor all the gold that  
lies in the sea."—Juvenal, Sat., iii. 54.]

Extremely idle, extremely given up to my own inclination both by nature and art, I would as willingly lend a man my blood as my pains. I have a soul free and entirely its own, and accustomed to guide itself after its own fashion; having hitherto never had either master or governor imposed upon me: I have walked as far as I would, and at the pace that best pleased myself; this is it that has rendered me unfit for the service of others, and has made me of no use to any one but myself.

Nor was there any need of forcing my heavy and lazy disposition; for being born to such a fortune as I had reason to be contented with (a reason, nevertheless, that a thousand others of my acquaintance would have rather made use of for a plank upon which to pass over in search of higher fortune, to tumult and disquiet), and with as much intelligence as I required, I sought for no more, and also got no more:

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“Non agimur tumidis velis Aquilone secundo,  
Non tamen adversis aetatem ducimus Austris  
Viribus, ingenio, specie, virtute, loco, re,  
Extremi primorum, extremis usque priores.”

[“The northern wind does not agitate our sails; nor Auster trouble our course with storms. In strength, talent, figure, virtue, honour, wealth, we are short of the foremost, but before the last.” —Horace, Ep., ii. 2, 201.]

I had only need of what was sufficient to content me: which nevertheless is a government of soul, to take it right, equally difficult in all sorts of conditions, and that, of custom, we see more easily found in want than in abundance: forasmuch, peradventure, as according to the course of our other passions, the desire of riches is more sharpened by their use than by the need of them: and the virtue of moderation more rare than that of patience; and I never had anything to desire, but happily to enjoy the estate that God by His bounty had put into my hands. I have never known anything of trouble, and have had little to do in anything but the management of my own affairs: or, if I have, it has been upon condition to do it at my own leisure and after my own method; committed to my trust by such as had a confidence in me, who did not importune me, and who knew my humour; for good horsemen will make shift to get service out of a rusty and broken-winded jade.

Even my infancy was trained up after a gentle and free manner, and exempt from any rigorous subjection. All this has helped me to a complexion delicate and incapable of solicitude, even to that degree that I love to have my losses and the disorders wherein I am concerned, concealed from me. In the account of my expenses, I put down what my negligence costs me in feeding and maintaining it;

“Haec nempe supersunt,  
Quae dominum fallunt, quae prosunt furibus.”

[“That overplus, which the owner knows not of,  
but which benefits the thieves”—Horace, Ep., i. 645]

I love not to know what I have, that I may be less sensible of my loss; I entreat those who serve me, where affection and integrity are absent, to deceive me with something like a decent appearance. For want of constancy enough to support the shock of adverse accidents to which we are subject, and of patience seriously to apply myself to the management of my affairs, I nourish as much as I can this in myself, wholly leaving all to fortune “to take all things at the worst, and to resolve to bear that worst with temper and patience”; that is the only thing I aim at, and to which I apply my whole meditation. In a danger, I do not so much consider how I shall escape it, as of how little importance it is, whether I escape it or no: should I be left dead upon the place, what matter? Not being able to govern

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events, I govern myself, and apply myself to them, if they will not apply themselves to me. I have no great art to evade, escape from or force fortune, and by prudence to guide and incline things to my own bias. I have still less patience to undergo the troublesome and painful care therein required; and the most uneasy condition for me is to be suspended on urgent occasions, and to be agitated betwixt hope and fear.

Deliberation, even in things of lightest moment, is very troublesome to me; and I find my mind more put to it to undergo the various tumblings and tossings of doubt and consultation, than to set up its rest and to acquiesce in whatever shall happen after the die is thrown. Few passions break my sleep, but of deliberations, the least will do it. As in roads, I preferably avoid those that are sloping and slippery, and put myself into the beaten track how dirty or deep soever, where I can fall no lower, and there seek my safety: so I love misfortunes that are purely so, that do not torment and tease me with the uncertainty of their growing better; but that at the first push plunge me directly into the worst that can be expected

“Dubia plus torquent mala.”

["Doubtful ills plague us worst."  
—Seneca, *Agamemnon*, iii. 1, 29.]

In events I carry myself like a man; in conduct, like a child. The fear of the fall more fevers me than the fall itself. The game is not worth the candle. The covetous man fares worse with his passion than the poor, and the jealous man than the cuckold; and a man oftentimes loses more by defending his vineyard than if he gave it up. The lowest walk is the safest; 'tis the seat of constancy; you have there need of no one but yourself; 'tis there founded and wholly stands upon its own basis. Has not this example of a gentleman very well known, some air of philosophy in it? He married, being well advanced in years, having spent his youth in good fellowship, a great talker and a great jeerer, calling to mind how much the subject of cuckoldry had given him occasion to talk and scoff at others. To prevent them from paying him in his own coin, he married a wife from a place where any one finds what he wants for his money: “Good morrow, strumpet”; “Good morrow, cuckold”; and there was not anything wherewith he more commonly and openly entertained those who came to see him than with this design of his, by which he stopped the private chattering of mockers, and blunted all the point from this reproach.

As to ambition, which is neighbour, or rather daughter, to presumption, fortune, to advance me, must have come and taken me by the hand; for to trouble myself for an uncertain hope, and to have submitted myself to all the difficulties that accompany those who endeavour to bring themselves into credit in the beginning of their progress, I could never have done it:





“Spem pretio non emo.”

[“I will not purchase hope with ready money,” (or),

“I do not purchase hope at a price.”

—Terence, *Adelphi*, ii. 3, 11.]

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I apply myself to what I see and to what I have in my hand, and go not very far from the shore,

“Alter remus aquas, alter tibi radat arenas:”

[“One oar plunging into the sea, the other raking the sands.”  
—Propertius, iii. 3, 23.]

and besides, a man rarely arrives at these advancements but in first hazarding what he has of his own; and I am of opinion that if a man have sufficient to maintain him in the condition wherein he was born and brought up, 'tis a great folly to hazard that upon the uncertainty of augmenting it. He to whom fortune has denied whereon to set his foot, and to settle a quiet and composed way of living, is to be excused if he venture what he has, because, happen what will, necessity puts him upon shifting for himself:

“Capienda rebus in malis praecepta via est:”

[“A course is to be taken in bad cases.” (or),  
“A desperate case must have a desperate course.”  
—Seneca, Agamemnon, ii. 1, 47.]

and I rather excuse a younger brother for exposing what his friends have left him to the courtesy of fortune, than him with whom the honour of his family is entrusted, who cannot be necessitous but by his own fault. I have found a much shorter and more easy way, by the advice of the good friends I had in my younger days, to free myself from any such ambition, and to sit still:

“Cui sit conditio dulcis sine pulvere palmae:”

[“What condition can compare with that where one has gained the palm without the dust of the course.”—Horace, Ep., i. 1, 51.]

judging rightly enough of my own strength, that it was not capable of any great matters; and calling to mind the saying of the late Chancellor Olivier, that the French were like monkeys that swarm up a tree from branch to branch, and never stop till they come to the highest, and there shew their breech.

“Turpe est, quod nequeas, capiti committere pondus,  
Et pressum inflexo mox dare terga genu.”

[“It is a shame to load the head so that it cannot bear the burthen, and the knees give way.”—Propertius, iii. 9, 5.]

I should find the best qualities I have useless in this age; the facility of my manners would have been called weakness and negligence; my faith and conscience,



scrupulosity and superstition; my liberty and freedom would have been reputed troublesome, inconsiderate, and rash. Ill luck is good for something. It is good to be born in a very depraved age; for so, in comparison of others, you shall be reputed virtuous good cheap; he who in our days is but a parricide and a sacrilegious person is an honest man and a man of honour:

“Nunc, si depositum non inficiatur amicus,  
Si reddat veterem cum tota aerugine follem,  
Prodigiosa fides, et Tuscis digna libellis,  
Quaeque coronata lustrari debeat agna.”

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["Now, if a friend does not deny his trust, but restores the old purse with all its rust; 'tis a prodigious faith, worthy to be enrolled in amongst the Tuscan annals, and a crowned lamb should be sacrificed to such exemplary integrity."—Juvenal, Sat., xiii. 611.]

and never was time or place wherein princes might propose to themselves more assured or greater rewards for virtue and justice. The first who shall make it his business to get himself into favour and esteem by those ways, I am much deceived if he do not and by the best title outstrip his competitors: force and violence can do something, but not always all. We see merchants, country justices, and artisans go cheek by jowl with the best gentry in valour and military knowledge: they perform honourable actions, both in public engagements and private quarrels; they fight duels, they defend towns in our present wars; a prince stifles his special recommendation, renown, in this crowd; let him shine bright in humanity, truth, loyalty, temperance, and especially injustice; marks rare, unknown, and exiled; 'tis by no other means but by the sole goodwill of the people that he can do his business; and no other qualities can attract their goodwill like those, as being of the greatest utility to them:

"Nil est tam popolare, quam bonitas."

["Nothing is so popular as an agreeable manner (goodness)."  
—Cicero, Pro Ligar., c. 12.]

By this standard I had been great and rare, just as I find myself now pigmy and vulgar by the standard of some past ages, wherein, if no other better qualities concurred, it was ordinary and common to see a man moderate in his revenges, gentle in resenting injuries, religious of his word, neither double nor supple, nor accommodating his faith to the will of others, or the turns of the times: I would rather see all affairs go to wreck and ruin than falsify my faith to secure them. For as to this new virtue of feigning and dissimulation, which is now in so great credit, I mortally hate it; and of all vices find none that evidences so much baseness and meanness of spirit. 'Tis a cowardly and servile humour to hide and disguise a man's self under a visor, and not to dare to show himself what he is; 'tis by this our servants are trained up to treachery; being brought up to speak what is not true, they make no conscience of a lie. A generous heart ought not to belie its own thoughts; it will make itself seen within; all there is good, or at least human. Aristotle reputes it the office of magnanimity openly and professedly to love and hate; to judge and speak with all freedom; and not to value the approbation or dislike of others in comparison of truth. Apollonius said it was for slaves to lie, and for freemen to speak truth: 'tis the chief and fundamental part of virtue; we must love it for itself. He who speaks truth because he is obliged so to do, and because it serves him, and who is not afraid to

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lie when it signifies nothing to anybody, is not sufficiently true. My soul naturally abominates lying, and hates the very thought of it. I have an inward shame and a sharp remorse, if sometimes a lie escapes me: as sometimes it does, being surprised by occasions that allow me no premeditation. A man must not always tell all, for that were folly: but what a man says should be what he thinks, otherwise 'tis knavery. I do not know what advantage men pretend to by eternally counterfeiting and dissembling, if not never to be believed when they speak the truth; it may once or twice pass with men; but to profess the concealing their thought, and to brag, as some of our princes have done, that they would burn their shirts if they knew their true intentions, which was a saying of the ancient Metellius of Macedon; and that they who know not how to dissemble know not how to rule, is to give warning to all who have anything to do with them, that all they say is nothing but lying and deceit:

“Quo quis versutior et callidior est, hoc invisior et suspectior, detracto opinione probitatis:”

["By how much any one is more subtle and cunning, by so much is he hated and suspected, the opinion of his integrity being withdrawn."  
—Cicero, *De Off.*, ii. 9.]

it were a great simplicity in any one to lay any stress either on the countenance or word of a man who has put on a resolution to be always another thing without than he is within, as Tiberius did; and I cannot conceive what part such persons can have in conversation with men, seeing they produce nothing that is received as true: whoever is disloyal to truth is the same to falsehood also.

Those of our time who have considered in the establishment of the duty of a prince the good of his affairs only, and have preferred that to the care of his faith and conscience, might have something to say to a prince whose affairs fortune had put into such a posture that he might for ever establish them by only once breaking his word: but it will not go so; they often buy in the same market; they make more than one peace and enter into more than one treaty in their lives. Gain tempts to the first breach of faith, and almost always presents itself, as in all other ill acts, sacrileges, murders, rebellions, treasons, as being undertaken for some kind of advantage; but this first gain has infinite mischievous consequences, throwing this prince out of all correspondence and negotiation, by this example of infidelity. Soliman, of the Ottoman race, a race not very solicitous of keeping their words or compacts, when, in my infancy, he made his army land at Otranto, being informed that Mercurino de' Gratinare and the inhabitants of Castro were detained prisoners, after having surrendered the place, contrary to the articles of their capitulation, sent orders to have them set at liberty, saying, that having other great enterprises in hand in those parts, the disloyalty, though it carried a show of

present utility, would for the future bring on him a disrepute and distrust of infinite prejudice.

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Now, for my part, I had rather be troublesome and indiscreet than a flatterer and a dissembler. I confess that there may be some mixture of pride and obstinacy in keeping myself so upright and open as I do, without any consideration of others; and methinks I am a little too free, where I ought least to be so, and that I grow hot by the opposition of respect; and it may be also, that I suffer myself to follow the propension of my own nature for want of art; using the same liberty, speech, and countenance towards great persons, that I bring with me from my own house: I am sensible how much it declines towards incivility and indiscretion but, besides that I am so bred, I have not a wit supple enough to evade a sudden question, and to escape by some evasion, nor to feign a truth, nor memory enough to retain it so feigned; nor, truly, assurance enough to maintain it, and so play the brave out of weakness. And therefore it is that I abandon myself to candour, always to speak as I think, both by complexion and design, leaving the event to fortune. Aristippus was wont to say, that the principal benefit he had extracted from philosophy was that he spoke freely and openly to all.

Memory is a faculty of wonderful use, and without which the judgment can very hardly perform its office: for my part I have none at all. What any one will propound to me, he must do it piecemeal, for to answer a speech consisting of several heads I am not able. I could not receive a commission by word of mouth without a note-book. And when I have a speech of consequence to make, if it be long, I am reduced to the miserable necessity of getting by heart word for word, what I am to say; I should otherwise have neither method nor assurance, being in fear that my memory would play me a slippery trick. But this way is no less difficult to me than the other; I must have three hours to learn three verses. And besides, in a work of a man's own, the liberty and authority of altering the order, of changing a word, incessantly varying the matter, makes it harder to stick in the memory of the author. The more I mistrust it the worse it is; it serves me best by chance; I must solicit it negligently; for if I press it, 'tis confused, and after it once begins to stagger, the more I sound it, the more it is perplexed; it serves me at its own hour, not at mine.

And the same defect I find in my memory, I find also in several other parts. I fly command, obligation, and constraint; that which I can otherwise naturally and easily do, if I impose it upon myself by an express and strict injunction, I cannot do it. Even the members of my body, which have a more particular jurisdiction of their own, sometimes refuse to obey me, if I enjoin them a necessary service at a certain hour. This tyrannical and compulsive appointment baffles them; they shrink up either through fear or spite, and fall into a trance. Being once in a place where it is looked upon as barbarous discourtesy not

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to pledge those who drink to you, though I had there all liberty allowed me, I tried to play the good fellow, out of respect to the ladies who were there, according to the custom of the country; but there was sport enough for this pressure and preparation, to force myself contrary to my custom and inclination, so stopped my throat that I could not swallow one drop, and was deprived of drinking so much as with my meat; I found myself gorged, and my thirst quenched by the quantity of drink that my imagination had swallowed. This effect is most manifest in such as have the most vehement and powerful imagination: but it is natural, notwithstanding, and there is no one who does not in some measure feel it. They offered an excellent archer, condemned to die, to save his life, if he would show some notable proof of his art, but he refused to try, fearing lest the too great contention of his will should make him shoot wide, and that instead of saving his life, he should also lose the reputation he had got of being a good marksman. A man who thinks of something else, will not fail to take over and over again the same number and measure of steps, even to an inch, in the place where he walks; but if he made it his business to measure and count them, he will find that what he did by nature and accident, he cannot so exactly do by design.

My library, which is a fine one among those of the village type, is situated in a corner of my house; if anything comes into my head that I have a mind to search or to write, lest I should forget it in but going across the court, I am fain to commit it to the memory of some other. If I venture in speaking to digress never so little from my subject, I am infallibly lost, which is the reason that I keep myself, in discourse, strictly close. I am forced to call the men who serve me either by the names of their offices or their country; for names are very hard for me to remember. I can tell indeed that there are three syllables, that it has a harsh sound, and that it begins or ends with such a letter; but that's all; and if I should live long, I do not doubt but I should forget my own name, as some others have done. Messala Corvinus was two years without any trace of memory, which is also said of Georgius Trapezuntius. For my own interest, I often meditate what a kind of life theirs was, and if, without this faculty, I should have enough left to support me with any manner of ease; and prying narrowly into it, I fear that this privation, if absolute, destroys all the other functions of the soul:

“Plenus rimarum sum, hac atque iliac perfluo.”

["I'm full of chinks, and leak out every way."  
—Ter., Eunuchus, ii. 2, 23.]

It has befallen me more than once to forget the watchword I had three hours before given or received, and to forget where I had hidden my purse; whatever Cicero is pleased to say, I help myself to lose what I have a particular care to lock safe up:



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“Memoria certe non modo Philosophiam sed omnis  
vitae usum, omnesque artes, una maxime continet.”

["It is certain that memory contains not only philosophy,  
but all the arts and all that appertain to the use of life."  
—Cicero, Acad., ii. 7.]

Memory is the receptacle and case of science: and therefore mine being so treacherous, if I know little, I cannot much complain. I know, in general, the names of the arts, and of what they treat, but nothing more. I turn over books; I do not study them. What I retain I no longer recognise as another's; 'tis only what my judgment has made its advantage of, the discourses and imaginations in which it has been instructed: the author, place, words, and other circumstances, I immediately forget; and I am so excellent at forgetting, that I no less forget my own writings and compositions than the rest. I am very often quoted to myself, and am not aware of it. Whoever should inquire of me where I had the verses and examples, that I have here huddled together, would puzzle me to tell him, and yet I have not borrowed them but from famous and known authors, not contenting myself that they were rich, if I, moreover, had them not from rich and honourable hands, where there is a concurrence of authority with reason. It is no great wonder if my book run the same fortune that other books do, if my memory lose what I have written as well as what I have read, and what I give, as well as what I receive.

Besides the defect of memory, I have others which very much contribute to my ignorance; I have a slow and heavy wit, the least cloud stops its progress, so that, for example, I never propose to it any never so easy a riddle that it could find out; there is not the least idle subtlety that will not gravel me; in games, where wit is required, as chess, draughts, and the like, I understand no more than the common movements. I have a slow and perplexed apprehension, but what it once apprehends, it apprehends well, for the time it retains it. My sight is perfect, entire, and discovers at a very great distance, but is soon weary and heavy at work, which occasions that I cannot read long, but am forced to have one to read to me. The younger Pliny can inform such as have not experimented it themselves, how important an impediment this is to those who devote themselves to this employment.

There is no so wretched and coarse a soul, wherein some particular faculty is not seen to shine; no soul so buried in sloth and ignorance, but it will sally at one end or another; and how it comes to pass that a man blind and asleep to everything else, shall be found sprightly, clear, and excellent in some one particular effect, we are to inquire of our masters: but the beautiful souls are they that are universal, open, and ready for all things; if not instructed, at least capable of being so; which I say to accuse my own; for whether it be through infirmity or negligence (and to neglect that which lies at our feet, which we have in our hands, and what nearest concerns the use of life, is far from my doctrine) there is not a soul in the world so awkward as mine, and so ignorant of many

common things, and such as a man cannot without shame fail to know. I must give some examples.

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I was born and bred up in the country, and amongst husbandmen; I have had business and husbandry in my own hands ever since my predecessors, who were lords of the estate I now enjoy, left me to succeed them; and yet I can neither cast accounts, nor reckon my counters: most of our current money I do not know, nor the difference betwixt one grain and another, either growing or in the barn, if it be not too apparent, and scarcely can distinguish between the cabbage and lettuce in my garden. I do not so much as understand the names of the chief instruments of husbandry, nor the most ordinary elements of agriculture, which the very children know: much less the mechanic arts, traffic, merchandise, the variety and nature of fruits, wines, and viands, nor how to make a hawk fly, nor to physic a horse or a dog. And, since I must publish my whole shame, 'tis not above a month ago, that I was trapped in my ignorance of the use of leaven to make bread, or to what end it was to keep wine in the vat. They conjectured of old at Athens, an aptitude for the mathematics in him they saw ingeniously bavin up a burthen of brushwood. In earnest, they would draw a quite contrary conclusion from me, for give me the whole provision and necessaries of a kitchen, I should starve. By these features of my confession men may imagine others to my prejudice: but whatever I deliver myself to be, provided it be such as I really am, I have my end; neither will I make any excuse for committing to paper such mean and frivolous things as these: the meanness of the subject compells me to it. They may, if they please, accuse my project, but not my progress: so it is, that without anybody's needing to tell me, I sufficiently see of how little weight and value all this is, and the folly of my design: 'tis enough that my judgment does not contradict itself, of which these are the essays.

“Nasutus sis usque licet, sis denique nasus,  
Quantum noluerit ferre rogatus Atlas;  
Et possis ipsum to deridere Latinum,  
Non potes in nugas dicere plura mess,  
Ipse ego quam dixi: quid dentem dente juvabit  
Rodere? carne opus est, si satur esse velis.  
Ne perdas operam; qui se mirantur, in illos  
Virus habe; nos haec novimus esse nihil.”

["Let your nose be as keen as it will, be all nose, and even a nose so great that Atlas will refuse to bear it: if asked, Could you even excel Latinus in scoffing; against my trifles you could say no more than I myself have said: then to what end contend tooth against tooth? You must have flesh, if you want to be full; lose not your labour then; cast your venom upon those that admire themselves; I know already that these things are worthless."—Mart., xiii. 2.]

I am not obliged not to utter absurdities, provided I am not deceived in them and know them to be such: and to trip knowingly, is so ordinary with me, that I seldom do it otherwise, and rarely trip by chance. 'Tis no great matter to add ridiculous actions to the temerity of my humour, since I cannot ordinarily help supplying it with those that are vicious.

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I was present one day at Barleduc, when King Francis *ii.*, for a memorial of Rene, king of Sicily, was presented with a portrait he had drawn of himself: why is it not in like manner lawful for every one to draw himself with a pen, as he did with a crayon? I will not, therefore, omit this blemish though very unfit to be published, which is irresolution; a very great effect and very incommodious in the negotiations of the affairs of the world; in doubtful enterprises, I know not which to choose:

“Ne si, ne no, nel cor mi suona intero.”

[“My heart does not tell me either yes or no.”—Petrarch.]

I can maintain an opinion, but I cannot choose one. By reason that in human things, to what sect soever we incline, many appearances present themselves that confirm us in it; and the philosopher Chrysippus said, that he would of Zeno and Cleanthes, his masters, learn their doctrines only; for, as to proofs and reasons, he should find enough of his own. Which way soever I turn, I still furnish myself with causes, and likelihood enough to fix me there; which makes me detain doubt and the liberty of choosing, till occasion presses; and then, to confess the truth, I, for the most part, throw the feather into the wind, as the saying is, and commit myself to the mercy of fortune; a very light inclination and circumstance carries me along with it.

“Dum in dubio est animus, paulo momento huc atque  
Illuc impellitur.”

[“While the mind is in doubt, in a short time it is impelled this way and that.”—Terence, *Andr.*, i. 6, 32.]

The uncertainty of my judgment is so equally balanced in most occurrences, that I could willingly refer it to be decided by the chance of a die: and I observe, with great consideration of our human infirmity, the examples that the divine history itself has left us of this custom of referring to fortune and chance the determination of election in doubtful things:

“Sors cecidit super Matthiam.”

[“The lot fell upon Matthew.”—Acts i. 26.]

Human reason is a two-edged and dangerous sword: observe in the hands of Socrates, her most intimate and familiar friend, how many several points it has. I am thus good for nothing but to follow and suffer myself to be easily carried away with the crowd; I have not confidence enough in my own strength to take upon me to command and lead; I am very glad to find the way beaten before me by others. If I must run the hazard of an uncertain choice, I am rather willing to have it under such a one as is more confident

in his opinions than I am in mine, whose ground and foundation I find to be very slippery and unsure.

Yet I do not easily change, by reason that I discern the same weakness in contrary opinions:

“Ipsa consuetudo assentiendi periculosa  
esse videtur, et lubrica;”

[“The very custom of assenting seems to be dangerous  
and slippery.”—Cicero, Acad., ii. 21.]

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especially in political affairs, there is a large field open for changes and contestation:

“Justa pari premitur veluti cum pondere libra,  
Prona, nec hac plus pane sedet, nec surgit ab illa.”

[“As a just balance, pressed with equal weight, neither dips  
nor rises on either side.”—Tibullus, iv. 41.]

Machiavelli’s writings, for example, were solid enough for the subject, yet were they easy enough to be controverted; and they who have done so, have left as great a facility of controverting theirs; there was never wanting in that kind of argument replies and replies upon replies, and as infinite a contexture of debates as our wrangling lawyers have extended in favour of long suits:

“Caedimur et totidem plagis consumimus hostem;”

[“We are slain, and with as many blows kill the enemy” (or),  
“It is a fight wherein we exhaust each other by mutual wounds.”  
—Horace, Epist., ii. 2, 97.]

the reasons have little other foundation than experience, and the variety of human events presenting us with infinite examples of all sorts of forms. An understanding person of our times says: That whoever would, in contradiction to our almanacs, write cold where they say hot, and wet where they say dry, and always put the contrary to what they foretell; if he were to lay a wager, he would not care which side he took, excepting where no uncertainty could fall out, as to promise excessive heats at Christmas, or extremity of cold at Midsummer. I have the same opinion of these political controversies; be on which side you will, you have as fair a game to play as your adversary, provided you do not proceed so far as to shock principles that are broad and manifest. And yet, in my conceit, in public affairs, there is no government so ill, provided it be ancient and has been constant, that is not better than change and alteration.

Our manners are infinitely corrupt, and wonderfully incline to the worse; of our laws and customs there are many that are barbarous and monstrous nevertheless, by reason of the difficulty of reformation, and the danger of stirring things, if I could put something under to stop the wheel, and keep it where it is, I would do it with all my heart:

“Numquam adeo foedis, adeoque pudendis  
Utimur exemplis, ut non pejora supersint.”

[“The examples we use are not so shameful and foul  
but that worse remain behind.”—Juvenal, viii. 183.]

The worst thing I find in our state is instability, and that our laws, no more than our clothes, cannot settle in any certain form. It is very easy to accuse a government of imperfection, for all mortal things are full of it: it is very easy to beget in a people a contempt of ancient observances; never any man undertook it but he did it; but to establish a better regimen in the stead of that which a man has overthrown, many who have attempted it have foundered. I very little consult my prudence in my conduct; I am willing to let it be guided by the public rule. Happy the people who do what they are commanded, better than they who command, without tormenting themselves as to the causes; who suffer themselves gently to roll after the celestial revolution! Obedience is never pure nor calm in him who reasons and disputes.

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In fine, to return to myself: the only thing by which I something esteem myself, is that wherein never any man thought himself to be defective; my recommendation is vulgar, common, and popular; for who ever thought he wanted sense? It would be a proposition that would imply a contradiction in itself; 'tis a disease that never is where it is discerned; 'tis tenacious and strong, but what the first ray of the patient's sight nevertheless pierces through and disperses, as the beams of the sun do thick and obscure mists; to accuse one's self would be to excuse in this case, and to condemn, to absolve. There never was porter or the silliest girl, that did not think they had sense enough to do their business. We easily enough confess in others an advantage of courage, strength, experience, activity, and beauty, but an advantage in judgment we yield to none; and the reasons that proceed simply from the natural conclusions of others, we think, if we had but turned our thoughts that way, we should ourselves have found out as well as they. Knowledge, style, and such parts as we see in others' works, we are soon aware of, if they excel our own: but for the simple products of the understanding, every one thinks he could have found out the like in himself, and is hardly sensible of the weight and difficulty, if not (and then with much ado) in an extreme and incomparable distance. And whoever should be able clearly to discern the height of another's judgment, would be also able to raise his own to the same pitch. So that it is a sort of exercise, from which a man is to expect very little praise; a kind of composition of small repute. And, besides, for whom do you write? The learned, to whom the authority appertains of judging books, know no other value but that of learning, and allow of no other proceeding of wit but that of erudition and art: if you have mistaken one of the Scipios for another, what is all the rest you have to say worth? Whoever is ignorant of Aristotle, according to their rule, is in some sort ignorant of himself; vulgar souls cannot discern the grace and force of a lofty and delicate style. Now these two sorts of men take up the world. The third sort into whose hands you fall, of souls that are regular and strong of themselves, is so rare, that it justly has neither name nor place amongst us; and 'tis so much time lost to aspire unto it, or to endeavour to please it.

'Tis commonly said that the justest portion Nature has given us of her favours is that of sense; for there is no one who is not contented with his share: is it not reason? whoever should see beyond that, would see beyond his sight. I think my opinions are good and sound, but who does not think the same of his own? One of the best proofs I have that mine are so is the small esteem I have of myself; for had they not been very well assured, they would easily have suffered themselves to have been deceived by the peculiar affection I have to myself, as one that places it almost wholly in myself, and do not let much run out. All that others distribute amongst an infinite number of friends and acquaintance, to their glory and grandeur, I dedicate to the repose of my own mind and to myself; that which escapes thence is not properly by my direction:



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“Mihi nempe valere et vivere doctus.”

["To live and to do well for myself."  
—Lucretius, v. 959.]

Now I find my opinions very bold and constant in condemning my own imperfection. And, to say the truth, 'tis a subject upon which I exercise my judgment as much as upon any other. The world looks always opposite; I turn my sight inwards, and there fix and employ it. I have no other business but myself, I am eternally meditating upon myself, considering and tasting myself. Other men's thoughts are ever wandering abroad, if they will but see it; they are still going forward:

“Nemo in sese tentat descendere;”

["No one thinks of descending into himself."  
—Persius, iv. 23.]

for my part, I circulate in myself. This capacity of trying the truth, whatever it be, in myself, and this free humour of not over easily subjecting my belief, I owe principally to myself; for the strongest and most general imaginations I have are those that, as a man may say, were born with me; they are natural and entirely my own. I produced them crude and simple, with a strong and bold production, but a little troubled and imperfect; I have since established and fortified them with the authority of others and the sound examples of the ancients, whom I have found of the same judgment: they have given me faster hold, and a more manifest fruition and possession of that I had before embraced. The reputation that every one pretends to of vivacity and promptness of wit, I seek in regularity; the glory they pretend to from a striking and signal action, or some particular excellence, I claim from order, correspondence, and tranquillity of opinions and manners:

“Omnino si quidquam est decorum, nihil est profecto magis, quam  
aequabilitas universae vitae, tum singularum actionum, quam  
conservare non possis, si, aliorum naturam imitans, omittas tuam.”

["If anything be entirely decorous, nothing certainly can be more so than an equability alike in the whole life and in every particular action; which thou canst not possibly observe if, imitating other men's natures, thou layest aside thy own."—Cicero, De Of., i. 31.]

Here, then, you see to what degree I find myself guilty of this first part, that I said was the vice of presumption. As to the second, which consists in not having a sufficient esteem for others, I know not whether or no I can so well excuse myself; but whatever comes on't I am resolved to speak the truth. And whether, peradventure, it be that the continual frequentation I have had with the humours of the ancients, and the idea of



those great souls of past ages, put me out of taste both with others and myself, or that, in truth, the age we live in produces but very indifferent things, yet so it is that I see nothing worthy of any great admiration. Neither, indeed, have I so great an intimacy with many men as is requisite to make a right judgment of them; and those with whom my condition makes me the most frequent, are, for the most part, men who have little care of the culture of the soul, but that look upon honour as the sum of all blessings, and valour as the height of all perfection.

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What I see that is fine in others I very readily commend and esteem: nay, I often say more in their commendation than I think they really deserve, and give myself so far leave to lie, for I cannot invent a false subject: my testimony is never wanting to my friends in what I conceive deserves praise, and where a foot is due I am willing to give them a foot and a half; but to attribute to them qualities that they have not, I cannot do it, nor openly defend their imperfections. Nay, I frankly give my very enemies their due testimony of honour; my affection alters, my judgment does not, and I never confound my animosity with other circumstances that are foreign to it; and I am so jealous of the liberty of my judgment that I can very hardly part with it for any passion whatever. I do myself a greater injury in lying than I do him of whom I tell a lie. This commendable and generous custom is observed of the Persian nation, that they spoke of their mortal enemies and with whom they were at deadly war, as honourably and justly as their virtues deserved.

I know men enough that have several fine parts; one wit, another courage, another address, another conscience, another language: one science, another, another; but a generally great man, and who has all these brave parts together, or any one of them to such a degree of excellence that we should admire him or compare him with those we honour of times past, my fortune never brought me acquainted with; and the greatest I ever knew, I mean for the natural parts of the soul, was Etienne De la Boetie; his was a full soul indeed, and that had every way a beautiful aspect: a soul of the old stamp, and that had produced great effects had his fortune been so pleased, having added much to those great natural parts by learning and study.

But how it comes to pass I know not, and yet it is certainly so, there is as much vanity and weakness of judgment in those who profess the greatest abilities, who take upon them learned callings and bookish employments as in any other sort of men whatever; either because more is required and expected from them, and that common defects are excusable in them, or because the opinion they have of their own learning makes them more bold to expose and lay themselves too open, by which they lose and betray themselves. As an artificer more manifests his want of skill in a rich matter he has in hand, if he disgrace the work by ill handling and contrary to the rules required, than in a matter of less value; and men are more displeased at a disproportion in a statue of gold than in one of plaster; so do these when they advance things that in themselves and in their place would be good; for they make use of them without discretion, honouring their memories at the expense of their understandings, and making themselves ridiculous by honouring Cicero, Galen, Ulpian, and St. Jerome alike.

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I willingly fall again into the discourse of the vanity of our education, the end of which is not to render us good and wise, but learned, and she has obtained it. She has not taught us to follow and embrace virtue and prudence, but she has imprinted in us their derivation and etymology; we know how to decline Virtue, if we know not how to love it; if we do not know what prudence is really and in effect, and by experience, we have it however by jargon and heart: we are not content to know the extraction, kindred, and alliances of our neighbours; we desire, moreover, to have them our friends and to establish a correspondence and intelligence with them; but this education of ours has taught us definitions, divisions, and partitions of virtue, as so many surnames and branches of a genealogy, without any further care of establishing any familiarity or intimacy betwixt her and us. It has culled out for our initiatory instruction not such books as contain the soundest and truest opinions, but those that speak the best Greek and Latin, and by their fine words has instilled into our fancy the vainest humours of antiquity.

A good education alters the judgment and manners; as it happened to Polemon, a lewd and debauched young Greek, who going by chance to hear one of Xenocrates' lectures, did not only observe the eloquence and learning of the reader, and not only brought away, the knowledge of some fine matter, but a more manifest and more solid profit, which was the sudden change and reformation of his former life. Whoever found such an effect of our discipline?

"Faciasne, quod olim  
Mutatus Polemon? ponas insignia morbi  
Fasciolas, cubital, focalia; potus ut ille  
Dicitur ex collo furtim carpsisse coronas,  
Postquam est impransi correptus voce magistri?"

["Will you do what reformed Polemon did of old? will you lay aside the joys of your disease, your garters, capuchin, muffler, as he in his cups is said to have secretly torn off his garlands from his neck when he heard what that temperate teacher said?" — Horace, Sat., ii. 3, 253]

That seems to me to be the least contemptible condition of men, which by its plainness and simplicity is seated in the lowest degree, and invites us to a more regular course. I find the rude manners and language of country people commonly better suited to the rule and prescription of true philosophy, than those of our philosophers themselves:

"Plus sapit vulgus, quia tantum, quantum opus est, sapit."

["The vulgar are so much the wiser, because they only know what is needful for them to know."—Lactantius, Instit. Div., iii. 5.]

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The most remarkable men, as I have judged by outward appearance (for to judge of them according to my own method, I must penetrate a great deal deeper), for soldiers and military conduct, were the Duc de Guise, who died at Orleans, and the late Marshal Strozzi; and for men of great ability and no common virtue, Olivier and De l'Hospital, Chancellors of France. Poetry, too, in my opinion, has flourished in this age of ours; we have abundance of very good artificers in the trade: D'Aurat, Beza, Buchanan, L'Hospital, Montdore, Turnebus; as to the French poets, I believe they raised their art to the highest pitch to which it can ever arrive; and in those parts of it wherein Ronsard and Du Bellay excel, I find them little inferior to the ancient perfection. Adrian Turnebus knew more, and what he did know, better than any man of his time, or long before him. The lives of the last Duke of Alva, and of our Constable de Montmorency, were both of them great and noble, and that had many rare resemblances of fortune; but the beauty and glory of the death of the last, in the sight of Paris and of his king, in their service, against his nearest relations, at the head of an army through his conduct victorious, and by a sudden stroke, in so extreme old age, merits methinks to be recorded amongst the most remarkable events of our times. As also the constant goodness, sweetness of manners, and conscientious facility of Monsieur de la Noue, in so great an injustice of armed parties (the true school of treason, inhumanity, and robbery), wherein he always kept up the reputation of a great and experienced captain.

I have taken a delight to publish in several places the hopes I have of Marie de Gournay le Jars,

[She was adopted by him in 1588. See Leon Feugere's *Mademoiselle de Gournay: 'Etude sur sa Vie et ses Ouvrages'*.]

my adopted daughter; and certainly beloved by me more than paternally, and enveloped in my retirement and solitude as one of the best parts of my own being: I have no longer regard to anything in this world but her. And if a man may presage from her youth, her soul will one day be capable of very great things; and amongst others, of the perfection of that sacred friendship, to which we do not read that any of her sex could ever yet arrive; the sincerity and solidity of her manners are already sufficient for it, and her affection towards me more than superabundant, and such, in short, as that there is nothing more to be wished, if not that the apprehension she has of my end, being now five-and-fifty years old, might not so much afflict her. The judgment she made of my first Essays, being a woman, so young, and in this age, and alone in her own country; and the famous vehemence wherewith she loved me, and desired my acquaintance solely from the esteem she had thence of me, before she ever saw my face, is an incident very worthy of consideration.

Other virtues have had little or no credit in this age; but valour is become popular by our civil wars; and in this, we have souls brave even to perfection, and in so great number that the choice is impossible to make.

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This is all of extraordinary and uncommon grandeur that has hitherto arrived at my knowledge.

*ETEXT editor's bookmarks:*

A generous heart ought not to belie its own thoughts  
A man may play the fool in everything else, but not in poetry  
Against my trifles you could say no more than I myself have said  
Agitated betwixt hope and fear  
All defence shows a face of war  
Almanacs  
An advantage in judgment we yield to none  
Any old government better than change and alteration  
Anything becomes foul when commended by the multitude  
Appetite runs after that it has not  
Armed parties (the true school of treason, inhumanity, robbery)  
Authority to be dissected by the vain fancies of men  
Authority which a graceful presence and a majestic mien beget  
Be on which side you will, you have as fair a game to play  
Beauty of stature is the only beauty of men  
Believing Heaven concerned at our ordinary actions  
Better at speaking than writing. Motion and action animate word  
Caesar's choice of death: "the shortest"  
Ceremony forbids us to express by words things that are lawful  
Content: more easily found in want than in abundance  
Curiosity of knowing things has been given to man for a scourge  
Defence allures attempt, and defiance provokes an enemy  
Desire of riches is more sharpened by their use than by the need  
Difficulty gives all things their estimation  
Doubt whether those (old writings) we have be not the worst  
Doubtful ills plague us worst  
Endeavouring to be brief, I become obscure  
Engaged in the avenues of old age, being already past forty  
Every government has a god at the head of it  
Executions rather whet than dull the edge of vices  
Fear of the fall more fevers me than the fall itself  
Folly to hazard that upon the uncertainty of augmenting it.  
For who ever thought he wanted sense?  
Fortune rules in all things  
Gentleman would play the fool to make a show of defence  
Happen to do anything commendable, I attribute it to fortune  
Having too good an opinion of our own worth  
He should discern in himself, as well as in others  
He who is only a good man that men may know it



How many worthy men have we known to survive their reputation  
Humble out of pride  
I am very glad to find the way beaten before me by others  
I find myself here fettered by the laws of ceremony  
I have no mind to die, but I have no objection to be dead  
I have not a wit supple enough to evade a sudden question  
I have nothing of my own that satisfies my judgment  
I would be rich of myself, and not by borrowing  
Ill luck is good for something  
Imitating other men's

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natures, thou layest aside thy own  
Immoderate either seeking or evading glory or reputation  
Impunity pass with us for justice  
It is not for outward show that the soul is to play its part  
Knowledge of others, wherein the honour consists  
Lessen the just value of things that I possess  
License of judgments is a great disturbance to great affairs  
Lose what I have a particular care to lock safe up  
Loses more by defending his vineyard than if he gave it up.  
More brave men been lost in occasions of little moment  
More solicitous that men speak of us, than how they speak  
My affection alters, my judgment does not  
No way found to tranquillity that is good in common  
Not being able to govern events, I govern myself  
Not conceiving things otherwise than by this outward bark  
Not for any profit, but for the honour of honesty itself  
Nothing is more confident than a bad poet  
Nothing that so poisons as flattery  
Obedience is never pure nor calm in him who reasons and disputes  
Occasions of the least lustre are ever the most dangerous  
Of the fleeting years each steals something from me  
Office of magnanimity openly and professedly to love and hate  
Old age: applaud the past and condemn the present  
One may be humble out of pride  
Our will is more obstinate by being opposed  
Overvalue things, because they are foreign, absent  
Philopoemen: paying the penalty of my ugliness.  
Pleasing all: a mark that can never be aimed at or hit  
Poets  
Possession begets a contempt of what it holds and rules  
Prolong his life also prolonged and augmented his pain  
Regret so honourable a post, where necessity must make them bold  
Sense: no one who is not contented with his share  
Setting too great a value upon ourselves  
Setting too little a value upon others  
She who only refuses, because 'tis forbidden, consents  
Short of the foremost, but before the last  
Souls that are regular and strong of themselves are rare  
Suicide: a morsel that is to be swallowed without chewing  
Take all things at the worst, and to resolve to bear that worst  
The age we live in produces but very indifferent things  
The reward of a thing well done is to have done it





The satiety of living, inclines a man to desire to die  
There is no reason that has not its contrary  
They do not see my heart, they see but my countenance  
Those who can please and hug themselves in what they do  
Tis far beyond not fearing death to taste and relish it  
To forbid us anything is to make us have a mind to't  
Voice and determination of the rabble, the mother of ignorance  
Vulgar reports and opinions that drive us on  
We believe we do not

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believe

We consider our death as a very great thing  
We have not the thousandth part of ancient writings  
We have taught the ladies to blush  
We set too much value upon ourselves  
Were more ambitious of a great reputation than of a good one  
What a man says should be what he thinks  
What he did by nature and accident, he cannot do by design  
What is more accidental than reputation?  
What, shall so much knowledge be lost  
Wiser who only know what is needful for them to know