

The Essays of Montaigne — Volume 16 eBook

The Essays of Montaigne — Volume 16 by Michel de Montaigne

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OF COACHES

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

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

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

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

I think I have seen in Plutarch' (who of all the authors I know, is he who has best mixed art with nature, and judgment with knowledge), his giving as a reason for the, rising of the stomach in those who are at sea, that it is occasioned by fear; having first found out some reason by which he proves that fear may produce such an effect. I, who am very subject to it, know well that this cause concerns not me; and I know it, not by argument, but by necessary experience. Without instancing what has been told me, that the same thing often happens in beasts, especially hogs, who are out of all apprehension of danger; and what an acquaintance of mine told me of himself, that though very subject to it, the disposition to vomit has three or four times gone off him, being very afraid in a violent storm, as it happened to that ancient:

“Pejus vexabar, quam ut periculum mihi succurreret;”

["I was too ill to think of danger." (Or the reverse:)
"I was too frightened to be ill."—Seneca, Ep., 53. 2]

I was never afraid upon the water, nor indeed in any other peril (and I have had enough before my eyes that would have sufficed, if death be one), so as to be astounded to lose my judgment. Fear springs sometimes as much from want of judgment as from want of courage. All the dangers I have been in I have looked upon without winking, with an open, sound, and entire sight; and, indeed, a man must have courage to fear. It formerly served me better than other help, so to order and regulate my retreat, that it was, if not without fear, nevertheless without affright and astonishment; it was agitated, indeed, but not amazed or stupefied. Great souls go yet much farther, and present to

us flights, not only steady and temperate, but moreover lofty. Let us make a relation of that which Alcibiades reports of Socrates,



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his fellow in arms: "I found him," says he, "after the rout of our army, him and Lachez, last among those who fled, and considered him at my leisure and in security, for I was mounted on a good horse, and he on foot, as he had fought. I took notice, in the first place, how much judgment and resolution he showed, in comparison of Lachez, and then the bravery of his march, nothing different from his ordinary gait; his sight firm and regular, considering and judging what passed about him, looking one while upon those, and then upon others, friends and enemies, after such a manner as encouraged those, and signified to the others that he would sell his life dear to any one who should attempt to take it from him, and so they came off; for people are not willing to attack such kind of men, but pursue those they see are in a fright." That is the testimony of this great captain, which teaches us, what we every day experience, that nothing so much throws us into dangers as an inconsiderate eagerness of getting ourselves clear of them:

"Quo timoris minus est, eo minus ferme periculi est."

["When there is least fear, there is for the most part least danger."—Livy, xxii. 5.]

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



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

Would my memory serve me, I should not think my time ill spent in setting down here the infinite variety that history presents us of the use of chariots in the service of war: various, according to the nations and according to the age; in my opinion, of great necessity and effect; so that it is a wonder that we have lost all knowledge of them. I will only say this, that very lately, in our fathers' time, the Hungarians made very advantageous use of them against the Turks; having in every one of them a targetter and a musketeer, and a number of harquebuses piled ready and loaded, and all covered with a pavesade like a galliot—[Canvas spread along the side of a ship of war, in action to screen the movements of those on board.]—They formed the front of their battle with three thousand such coaches, and after the cannon had played, made them all pour in their shot upon the enemy, who had to swallow that volley before they tasted of the rest, which was no little advance; and that done, these chariots charged into their squadrons to break them and open a way for the rest; besides the use they might make of them to flank the soldiers in a place of danger when marching to the field, or to cover a post, and fortify it in haste. In my time, a gentleman on one of our frontiers, unwieldy of body, and finding no horse able to carry his weight, having a quarrel, rode through the country in a chariot of this fashion, and found great convenience in it. But let us leave these chariots of war.

As if their effeminacy—[Which Cotton translates: "as if the insignificance of coaches."]—had not been sufficiently known by better proofs, the last kings of our first race travelled in a chariot drawn by four oxen. Marc Antony was the first at Rome who caused himself to be drawn in a coach by lions, and a singing wench with him.

[Cytheris, the Roman courtesan.—Plutarch's Life of Antony, c. 3.

This, was the same person who is introduced by Gallus under the name of Lycoris. Gallus doubtless knew her personally.]



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

The strangeness of these inventions puts this other fancy in my head: that it is a kind of pusillanimity in monarchs, and a testimony that they do not sufficiently understand themselves what they are, when they study to make themselves honoured and to appear great by excessive expense: it were indeed excusable in a foreign country, but amongst their own subjects, where they are in sovereign command, and may do what they please, it derogates from their dignity the most supreme degree of honour to which they can arrive: just as, methinks, it is superfluous in a private gentleman to go finely dressed at home; his house, his attendants, and his kitchen sufficiently answer for him. The advice that Isocrates gives his king seems to be grounded upon reason: that he should be splendid in plate and furniture; forasmuch as it is an expense of duration that devolves on his successors; and that he should avoid all magnificences that will in a short time be forgotten. I loved to go fine when I was a younger brother, for want of other ornament; and it became me well: there are some upon whom their rich clothes weep: We have strange stories of the frugality of our kings about their own persons and in their gifts: kings who were great in reputation, valour, and fortune. Demosthenes vehemently opposes the law of his city that assigned the public money for the pomp of their public plays and festivals: he would that their greatness should be seen in numbers of ships well equipped, and good armies well provided for; and there is good reason to condemn Theophrastus, who, in his Book on Riches, establishes a contrary opinion, and maintains that sort of expense to be the true fruit of abundance. They are delights, says Aristotle, that only please the baser sort of the people, and that vanish from the memory as soon as the people are sated with them, and for which no serious and judicious man can have any esteem. This money would, in my opinion, be much more royally, as more profitably, justly, and durably, laid out in ports, havens, walls, and fortifications; in sumptuous buildings, churches, hospitals, colleges, the reforming of streets and highways: wherein Pope Gregory XIII. will leave a laudable memory to future times: and wherein our Queen Catherine would to long posterity manifest her natural liberality and munificence, did her means supply her affection. Fortune has done me a great despite in interrupting the noble structure of the Pont-Neuf of our great city, and depriving me of the hope of seeing it finished before I die.

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

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

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

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

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



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“Quo in plures usus sis, minus in multos uti possis....
Quid autem est stultius, quam, quod libenter facias,
curare ut id diutius facere non possis;”

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

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

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

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

The example of Cyrus will not do amiss in this place, to serve the kings of these times for a touchstone to know whether their gifts are well or ill bestowed, and to see how much better that emperor conferred them than they do, by which means they are reduced to borrow of unknown subjects, and rather of them whom they have wronged than of them on whom they have conferred their benefits, and so receive aids wherein there is nothing of gratuitous but the name. Croesus reproached him with his bounty, and cast up to how much his treasure would amount if he had been a little closer-handed. He had a mind to justify his liberality, and therefore sent despatches into all parts to the grandees of his dominions whom he had particularly advanced, entreating every one of them to supply him with as much money as they could, for a pressing occasion, and to send him particulars of what each could advance. When all these answers were brought to him, every one of his friends, not thinking it enough barely

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to offer him so much as he had received from his bounty, and adding to it a great deal of his own, it appeared that the sum amounted to a great deal more than Croesus' reckoning. Whereupon Cyrus: "I am not," said he, "less in love with riches than other princes, but rather a better husband; you see with how small a venture I have acquired the inestimable treasure of so many friends, and how much more faithful treasurers they are to me than mercenary men without obligation, without affection; and my money better laid up than in chests, bringing upon me the hatred, envy, and contempt of other princes."

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

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

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

Philip, seeing that his son went about by presents to gain the affection of the Macedonians, reprimanded him in a letter after this manner: "What! hast thou a mind that thy subjects shall look upon thee as their cash-keeper and not as their king? Wilt thou tamper with them to win their affections? Do it, then, by the benefits of thy virtue, and not by those of thy chest." And yet it was, doubtless, a fine thing to bring and plant within the amphitheatre a great number of vast trees, with all their branches in their full verdure, representing a great shady forest, disposed in excellent order; and, the first day, to throw into it a thousand ostriches and a thousand stags, a thousand boars, and a thousand fallow-deer, to be killed and disposed of by the people: the next day, to cause a hundred great lions, a hundred leopards, and three hundred bears to be killed in his presence; and for the third day, to make three hundred pair of gladiators fight it out to the last, as the Emperor Probus did. It was also very fine to see those vast amphitheatres, all faced with marble without, curiously wrought with figures and statues, and within glittering with rare enrichments:

"Baltheus en! gemmis, en illita porticus auro:"



["A belt glittering with jewels, and a portico overlaid with gold."
—Calpurnius, *Eclog.*, vii. 47. A *baltheus* was a shoulder-belt or
baldric.]

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



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

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

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

“Quoties nos descendentis arenae
Vidimus in partes, ruptaque voragine terrae
Emersisse feras, et eisdem saepe latebris
Aurea cum croceo creverunt arbuta libro!....
Nec solum nobis silvestria cernere monstra
Contigit; aequoreos ego cum certantibus ursis
Spectavi vitulos, et equorum nomine dignum,
Sen deforme pecus, quod in illo nascitur amni....”

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

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

“Quamvis non modico caleant spectacula sole,
Vela reducuntur, cum venit Hermogenes.”



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

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

"Auro quoque torts refulgent
Retia."

["The woven nets are refulgent with gold."
—Calpurnius, ubi supra.]

If there be anything excusable in such excesses as these, it is where the novelty and invention create more wonder than the expense; even in these vanities we discover how fertile those ages were in other kind of wits than these of ours. It is with this sort of fertility, as with all other products of nature: not that she there and then employed her utmost force: we do not go; we rather run up and down, and whirl this way and that; we turn back the way we came. I am afraid our knowledge is weak in all senses; we neither see far forward nor far backward; our understanding comprehends little, and lives but a little while; 'tis short both in extent of time and extent of matter:

"Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona
Mufti, sed omnes illacrymabiles
Urgentur, ignotique longs
Nocte."

[Many brave men lived before Agamemnon, but all are pressed by the long night unmourned and unknown."—Horace, Od., iv. 9, 25.]

"Et supra bellum Thebanum et funera Trojae
Non alias alii quoque res cecinere poetae?"

["Why before the Theban war and the destruction of Troy, have not other poets sung other events?"—Lucretius, v. 327. Montaigne here diverts himself in giving Lucretius' words a construction directly contrary to what they bear in the poem. Lucretius puts the question, Why if the earth had existed from all eternity, there had not been poets, before the Theban war, to sing men's exploits. —Coste.]

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



“Si interminatam in omnes partes magnitudinem regionum videremus et temporum, in quam se injiciens animus et intendens, ita late longeque peregrinatur, ut nullam oram ultimi videat, in qua possit insistere: in haec immensitate . . . infinita vis innumerabilium appareret fomorum.”[“Could we see on all parts the unlimited magnitude of regions and of times, upon which the mind being intent, could wander so far and wide, that no limit is to be seen, in which it can bound

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its eye, we should, in that infinite immensity, discover an infinite force of innumerable atoms." Here also Montaigne puts a sense quite different from what the words bear in the original; but the application he makes of them is so happy that one would declare they were actually put together only to express his own sentiments. "Et temporum" is an addition by Montaigne.—Coste.]

Though all that has arrived, by report, of our knowledge of times past should be true, and known by some one person, it would be less than nothing in comparison of what is unknown. And of this same image of the world, which glides away whilst we live upon it, how wretched and limited is the knowledge of the most curious; not only of particular events, which fortune often renders exemplary and of great concern, but of the state of great governments and nations, a hundred more escape us than ever come to our knowledge. We make a mighty business of the invention of artillery and printing, which other men at the other end of the world, in China, had a thousand years ago. Did we but see as much of the world as we do not see, we should perceive, we may well believe, a perpetual multiplication and vicissitude of forms. There is nothing single and rare in respect of nature, but in respect of our knowledge, which is a wretched foundation whereon to ground our rules, and that represents to us a very false image of things. As we nowadays vainly conclude the declension and decrepitude of the world, by the arguments we extract from our own weakness and decay:

"Jamque adeo est affecta aetas effoet aque tellus;"

["Our age is feeble, and the earth less fertile."
—Lucretius, ii. 1151.]

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

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

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

Our world has lately discovered another (and who will assure us that it is the last of its brothers, since the Daemons, the Sybils, and we ourselves have been ignorant of this till now?), as large, well-peopled, and fruitful as this whereon we live and yet so raw and



childish, that we are still teaching it it's a B C: 'tis not above fifty years since it knew neither letters, weights, measures, vestments, corn, nor vines: it was then quite naked in the mother's lap, and only lived upon what she gave



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

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



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

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



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

Of the two most puissant monarchs of that world, and, peradventure, of this, kings of so many kings, and the last they turned out, he of Peru, having been taken in a battle, and put to so excessive a ransom as exceeds all belief, and it being faithfully paid, and he having, by his conversation, given manifest signs of a frank, liberal, and constant spirit, and of a clear and settled understanding, the conquerors had a mind, after having exacted one million three



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

The other king of Mexico,—[Guatimosin]—having for a long time defended his beleaguered city, and having in this siege manifested the utmost of what suffering and perseverance can do, if ever prince and people did, and his misfortune having delivered him alive into his enemies' hands, upon articles of being treated like a king, neither did he in his captivity discover anything unworthy of that title. His enemies, after their victory, not finding so much gold as they expected, when they had searched and rifled with their utmost diligence, they went about to procure discoveries by the most cruel torments they could invent upon the prisoners they had taken: but having profited nothing by these, their courage being greater than their torments, they arrived at last to such a degree of fury, as, contrary to their faith and the law of nations, to condemn the king himself, and one of the principal noblemen of his court, to the rack, in the presence of one another. This lord, finding himself overcome with pain, being environed with burning coals, pitifully turned his dying eyes towards his master, as it were to ask him pardon that he was able to endure no more; whereupon the king, darting at him a fierce and severe look, as reproaching his cowardice and pusillanimity, with a harsh and constant voice said to him thus only: "And what dost thou think I suffer? am I in a bath? am I more at ease than thou?" Whereupon the other immediately quailed under the torment and died upon the spot. The king, half roasted, was carried thence; not so much out of pity (for what compassion ever touched so barbarous souls, who, upon the doubtful information of some vessel of gold to be made a prey of, caused not only a man, but a king, so great in fortune and desert, to be broiled before their eyes), but because his constancy rendered their cruelty still more shameful. They afterwards hanged him for having nobly attempted to deliver himself by arms from so long a captivity and subjection, and he died with a courage becoming so magnanimous a prince.



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

That the revenue from these countries, though in the hands of so parsimonious and so prudent a prince,—[Phillip *ii.*]—so little answers the expectation given of it to his predecessors, and to that original abundance of riches which was found at the first landing in those new discovered countries (for though a great deal be fetched thence, yet we see 'tis nothing in comparison of that which might be expected), is that the use of coin was there utterly unknown, and that consequently their gold was found all hoarded together, being of no other use but for ornament and show, as a furniture reserved from father to son by many puissant kings, who were ever draining their mines to make this vast heap of vessels and statues for the decoration of their palaces and temples; whereas our gold is always in motion and traffic; we cut it into a thousand small pieces, and cast it into a thousand forms, and scatter and disperse it in a thousand ways. But suppose our kings should thus hoard up all the gold they could get in several ages and let it lie idle by them.

Those of the kingdom of Mexico were in some sort more civilised and more advanced in arts than the other nations about them. Therefore did they judge, as we do, that the world was near its period, and looked upon the desolation we brought amongst them as a certain sign of it. They believed that the existence of the world was divided into five ages, and in the life of five successive suns, of which four had already ended their time, and that this which gave them light was the fifth. The first perished, with all



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other creatures, by an universal inundation of water; the second by the heavens falling upon us and suffocating every living thing to which age they assigned the giants, and showed bones to the Spaniards, according to the proportion of which the stature of men amounted to twenty feet; the third by fire, which burned and consumed all; the fourth by an emotion of the air and wind, which came with such violence as to beat down even many mountains, wherein the men died not, but were turned into baboons. What impressions will not the weakness of human belief admit? After the death of this fourth sun, the world was twenty-five years in perpetual darkness: in the fifteenth of which a man and a woman were created, who restored the human race: ten years after, upon a certain day, the sun appeared newly created, and since the account of their year takes beginning from that day: the third day after its creation the ancient gods died, and the new ones were since born daily. After what manner they think this last sun shall perish, my author knows not; but their number of this fourth change agrees with the great conjunction of stars which eight hundred and odd years ago, as astrologers suppose, produced great alterations and novelties in the world.

As to pomp and magnificence, upon the account of which I engaged in this discourse, neither Greece, Rome, nor Egypt, whether for utility, difficulty, or state, can compare any of their works with the highway to be seen in Peru, made by the kings of the country, from the city of Quito to that of Cusco (three hundred leagues), straight, even, five-and-twenty paces wide, paved, and provided on both sides with high and beautiful walls; and close by them, and all along on the inside, two perennial streams, bordered with beautiful plants, which they call moly. In this work, where they met with rocks and mountains, they cut them through, and made them even, and filled up pits and valleys with lime and stone to make them level. At the end of every day's journey are beautiful palaces, furnished with provisions, vestments, and arms, as well for travellers as for the armies that are to pass that way. In the estimate of this work I have reckoned the difficulty which is especially considerable in that place; they did not build with any stones less than ten feet square, and had no other conveniency of carriage but by drawing their load themselves by force of arm, and knew not so much as the art of scaffolding, nor any other way of standing to their work, but by throwing up earth against the building as it rose higher, taking it away again when they had done.

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



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CHAPTER VII

OF THE INCONVENIENCE OF GREATNESS

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

I incite my courage to patience, but I rein it as much as I can towards desire. I have as much to wish for as another, and allow my wishes as much liberty and indiscretion; but yet it never befell me to wish for either empire or royalty, or the eminency of those high and commanding fortunes: I do not aim that way; I love myself too well. When I think to grow greater, 'tis but very moderately, and by a compelled and timorous advancement, such as is proper for me in resolution, in prudence, in health, in beauty, and even in riches too; but this supreme reputation, this mighty authority, oppress my imagination; and, quite contrary to that other,—[Julius Caesar.]—I should, peradventure, rather choose to be the second or third in Perigord than the first at Paris at least, without lying, rather the third at Paris than the first. I would neither dispute with a porter, a miserable unknown, nor make crowds open in adoration as I pass. I am trained up to a moderate condition, as well by my choice as fortune; and have made it appear, in the whole conduct of my life and enterprises, that I have rather avoided than otherwise the climbing above the degree of fortune wherein God has placed me by my birth; all natural constitution is equally just and easy. My soul is such a poltroon, that I measure not good fortune by the height, but by the facility.



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

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

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

Let us return to our temporal greatness, from which we are digressed. I disrelish all dominion, whether active or passive. Otanes, one of the seven who had right to pretend to the kingdom of Persia, did as I should willingly have done, which was, that he gave up to his competitors his right of being promoted to it, either by election or by lot, provided that he and his might live in the empire out of all authority and subjection, those of the ancient laws excepted, and might enjoy all liberty that was not prejudicial to these, being as impatient of commanding as of being commanded.

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

condition than a carter; he who writes for monarchy places him some degrees above God in power and sovereignty.



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Now, the incommmodity of greatness that I have taken to remark in this place, upon some occasion that has lately put it into my head, is this: there is not, peradventure, anything more pleasant in the commerce of many than the trials that we make against one another, out of emulation of honour and worth, whether in the exercises of the body or in those of the mind, wherein sovereign greatness can have no true part. And, in earnest, I have often thought that by force of respect itself men use princes disdainfully and injuriously in that particular; for the thing I was infinitely offended at in my childhood, that they who exercised with me forbore to do their best because they found me unworthy of their utmost endeavour, is what we see happen to them daily, every one finding himself unworthy to contend with them. If we discover that they have the least desire to get the better of us, there is no one who will not make it his business to give it them, and who will not rather betray his own glory than offend theirs; and will therein employ so much force only as is necessary to save their honour. What share have they, then, in the engagement, where every one is on their side? Methinks I see those paladins of ancient times presenting themselves to jousts and battle with enchanted arms and bodies. Brisson,

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

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

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



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Their good qualities are dead and lost; for they can only be perceived by comparison, and we put them out of this: they have little knowledge of true praise, having their ears deafened with so continual and uniform an approbation. Have they to do with the stupidest of all their subjects? they have no means to take any advantage of him; if he but say: "'Tis because he is my king," he thinks he has said enough to express that he therefore suffered himself to be overcome. This quality stifles and consumes the other true and essential qualities: they are sunk in the royalty, and leave them nothing to recommend themselves with but actions that directly concern and serve the function of their place; 'tis so much to be a king, that this alone remains to them. The outer glare that environs him conceals and shrouds him from us; our sight is there repelled and dissipated, being filled and stopped by this prevailing light. The senate awarded the prize of eloquence to Tiberius; he refused it, esteeming that though it had been just, he could derive no advantage from a judgment so partial, and that was so little free to judge.

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

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



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CHAPTER VIII

OF THE ART OF CONFERENCE

'Tis a custom of our justice to condemn some for a warning to others. To condemn them for having done amiss, were folly, as Plato says,

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

for what is done can never be undone; but 'tis to the end they may offend no more, and that others may avoid the example of their offence: we do not correct the man we hang; we correct others by him. I do the same; my errors are sometimes natural, incorrigible, and irremediable: but the good which virtuous men do to the public, in making themselves imitated, I, peradventure, may do in making my manners avoided:

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

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

publishing and accusing my own imperfections, some one will learn to be afraid of them. The parts that I most esteem in myself, derive more honour from decrying, than for commending myself which is the reason why I so often fall into, and so much insist upon that strain. But, when all is summed up, a man never speaks of himself without loss; a man's accusations of himself are always believed; his praises never: There may, peradventure, be some of my own complexion who better instruct myself by contrariety than by similitude, and by avoiding than by imitation. The elder Cato was regarding this sort of discipline, when he said, “that the wise may learn more of fools, than fools can of the wise”; and Pausanias tells us of an ancient player upon the harp, who was wont to make his scholars go to hear one who played very ill, who lived over against him, that they might learn to hate his discords and false measures. The horror of cruelty more inclines me to clemency, than any example of clemency could possibly do. A good rider does not so much mend my seat, as an awkward attorney or a Venetian, on horseback; and a clownish way of speaking more reforms mine than the most correct. The ridiculous and simple look of another always warns and advises me; that which pricks, rouses and incites much better than that which tickles. The time is now proper for us to reform backward; more by dissenting than by agreeing; by differing more than by consent. Profiting little by good examples, I make use of those that are ill, which are everywhere to be found: I endeavour to render myself as agreeable as I see others

offensive; as constant as I see others fickle; as affable as I see others rough; as good as I see others evil: but I propose to myself impracticable measures.

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

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

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

“Neque enim disputari sine reprehensione potest.”

["Neither can a man dispute, but he must contradict."
(Or:) “Nor can people dispute without reprehension.”
—Cicero, De Finib., i. 8.]

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

Nevertheless, it is hard to bring the men of my time to it: they have not the courage to correct, because they have not the courage to suffer themselves to be corrected; and speak always with dissimulation in the presence of one another: I take so great a pleasure in being judged and known, that it is almost indifferent to me in which of the two forms I am so: my imagination so often contradicts and condemns itself, that 'tis almost one to me if another do it, especially considering that I give his reprehension no greater authority than I choose; but I break with him, who carries himself so high, as I know of one who repents



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his advice, if not believed, and takes it for an affront if it be not immediately followed. That Socrates always received smilingly the contradictions offered to his arguments, a man may say arose from his strength of reason; and that, the advantage being certain to fall on his side, he accepted them as a matter of new victory. But we see, on the contrary, that nothing in argument renders our sentiment so delicate, as the opinion of pre-eminence, and disdain of the adversary; and that, in reason, 'tis rather for the weaker to take in good part the oppositions that correct him and set him right. In earnest, I rather choose the company of those who ruffle me than of those who fear me; 'tis a dull and hurtful pleasure to have to do with people who admire us and approve of all we say. Antisthenes commanded his children never to take it kindly or for a favour, when any man commended them. I find I am much prouder of the victory I obtain over myself, when, in the very ardour of dispute, I make myself submit to my adversary's force of reason, than I am pleased with the victory I obtain over him through his weakness. In fine, I receive and admit of all manner of attacks that are direct, how weak soever; but I am too impatient of those that are made out of form. I care not what the subject is, the opinions are to me all one, and I am almost indifferent whether I get the better or the worse. I can peaceably argue a whole day together, if the argument be carried on with method; I do not so much require force and subtlety as order; I mean the order which we every day observe in the wranglings of shepherds and shop-boys, but never amongst us: if they start from their subject, 'tis out of incivility, and so 'tis with us; but their tumult and impatience never put them out of their theme; their argument still continues its course; if they interrupt, and do not stay for one another, they at least understand one another. Any one answers too well for me, if he answers what I say: when the dispute is irregular and disordered, I leave the thing itself, and insist upon the form with anger and indiscretion; falling into wilful, malicious, and imperious way of disputation, of which I am afterwards ashamed. 'Tis impossible to deal fairly with a fool: my judgment is not only corrupted under the hand of so impetuous a master, but my conscience also.

Our disputes ought to be interdicted and punished as well as other verbal crimes: what vice do they not raise and heap up, being always governed and commanded by passion? We first quarrel with their reasons, and then with the men. We only learn to dispute that we may contradict; and so, every one contradicting and being contradicted, it falls out that the fruit of disputation is to lose and annihilate truth. Therefore it is that Plato in his Republic prohibits this exercise to fools and ill-bred people. To what end do you go about to inquire of him, who knows nothing to the purpose? A man does no



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injury to the subject, when he leaves it to seek how he may treat it; I do not mean by an artificial and scholastic way, but by a natural one, with a sound understanding. What will it be in the end? One flies to the east, the other to the west; they lose the principal, dispersing it in the crowd of incidents after an hour of tempest, they know not what they seek: one is low, the other high, and a third wide. One catches at a word and a simile; another is no longer sensible of what is said in opposition to him, and thinks only of going on at his own rate, not of answering you: another, finding himself too weak to make good his rest, fears all, refuses all, at the very beginning, confounds the subject; or, in the very height of the dispute, stops short and is silent, by a peevish ignorance affecting a proud contempt or a foolishly modest avoidance of further debate: provided this man strikes, he cares not how much he lays himself open; the other counts his words, and weighs them for reasons; another only brawls, and uses the advantage of his lungs. Here's one who learnedly concludes against himself, and another who deafens you with prefaces and senseless digressions: another falls into downright railing, and seeks a quarrel after the German fashion, to disengage himself from a wit that presses too hard upon him: and a last man sees nothing into the reason of the thing, but draws a line of circumvallation about you of dialectic clauses, and the formulas of his art.

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

“Nihil sanantibus litteris.”

[“Letters which cure nothing.”—Seneca, Ep., 59.]

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

“Nec ad melius vivendum, nec ad commodius disserendum.”

[“It neither makes a man live better nor talk better.”
—Cicero, De Fin., i. 19.]

Is there more noise or confusion in the scolding of herring-wives than in the public disputes of men of this profession? I had rather my son should learn in a tap-house to speak, than in the schools to prate. Take a master of arts, and confer with him: why does he not make us sensible of this artificial excellence? and why does he not captivate women and ignoramuses, as we are, with admiration at the steadiness of his reasons and the beauty of his order? why does he not sway and persuade us to what he will? why does a man, who has so much advantage in matter and treatment, mix railing, indiscretion, and fury in his disputations? Strip him of his gown, his hood, and his Latin, let him not batter our ears with Aristotle, pure and simple, you will take him for



one of us, or worse. Whilst they torment us with this complication and confusion of words, it fares with them, methinks, as with jugglers; their dexterity imposes upon our senses, but does not at all work upon our belief this legerdemain excepted, they perform nothing that is not very ordinary and mean: for being the more learned, they are none the less fools.



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

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

“Sub aliena umbra latentes,”

[“Sheltering under the shadow of others.”—Seneca, Ep., 33.]

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

But let us proceed. What greater victory do you expect than to make your enemy see and know that he is not able to encounter you? When you get the better of your argument; 'tis truth that wins; when you get the advantage of form and method, 'tis then you who win. I am of opinion that in, Plato and Xenophon Socrates disputes more in favour of the disputants than in favour of the dispute, and more to instruct Euthydemus and Protagoras in the, knowledge of their impertinence, than in the impertinence of their art. He takes hold of the first subject like one who has a more profitable end than to explain it—namely, to clear the understandings that he takes upon him to instruct and exercise. To hunt after truth is properly our business, and we are inexcusable if we carry on the chase impertinently and ill; to fail of seizing it is another thing, for we are born to inquire after truth: it belongs to a greater power to possess it. It is not, as Democritus said, hid in the bottom of the deeps, but rather elevated to an infinite height in the divine knowledge. The world is but a school of inquisition: it is not who shall enter the ring, but who shall run the best courses. He may as well play the fool who speaks true, as he who speaks false, for we are upon the manner, not the matter, of speaking. 'Tis my humour as much to regard the form as the substance, and the advocate as much as the cause, as Alcibiades ordered we should: and every day pass away my time in reading authors without any consideration of their learning; their manner is what I look after, not their subject: And just so do I hunt after the conversation of any eminent wit, not that he may teach me, but that I may know him, and that knowing

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him, if I think him worthy of imitation, I may imitate him. Every man may speak truly, but to speak methodically, prudently, and fully, is a talent that few men have. The falsity that proceeds from ignorance does not offend me, but the foppery of it. I have broken off several treaties that would have been of advantage to me, by reason of the impertinent contestations of those with whom I treated. I am not moved once in a year at the faults of those over whom I have authority, but upon the account of the ridiculous obstinacy of their allegations, denials, excuses, we are every day going together by the ears; they neither understand what is said, nor why, and answer accordingly; 'tis enough to drive a man mad. I never feel any hurt upon my head but when 'tis knocked against another, and more easily forgive the vices of my servants than their boldness, importunity, and folly; let them do less, provided they understand what they do: you live in hope to warm their affection to your service, but there is nothing to be had or to be expected from a stock.

But what, if I take things otherwise than they are? Perhaps I do; and therefore it is that I accuse my own impatience, and hold, in the first place, that it is equally vicious both in him that is in the right, and in him that is in the wrong; for 'tis always a tyrannic sourness not to endure a form contrary to one's own: and, besides, there cannot, in truth, be a greater, more constant, nor more irregular folly than to be moved and angry at the follies of the world, for it principally makes us quarrel with ourselves; and the old philosopher never wanted an occasion for his tears whilst he considered himself. Miso, one of the seven sages, of a Timonian and Democritic humour, being asked, "what he laughed at, being alone?"—"That I do laugh alone," answered he. How many ridiculous things, in my own opinion, do I say and answer every day that comes over my head? and then how many more, according to the opinion of others? If I bite my own lips, what ought others to do? In fine, we must live amongst the living, and let the river run under the bridge without our care, or, at least, without our interference. In truth, why do we meet a man with a hunch-back, or any other deformity, without being moved, and cannot endure the encounter of a deformed mind without being angry? this vicious sourness sticks more to the judge than to the crime. Let us always have this saying of Plato in our mouths: "Do not I think things unsound, because I am not sound in myself? Am I not myself in fault? may not my observations reflect upon myself?"—a wise and divine saying, that lashes the most universal and common error of mankind. Not only the reproaches that we throw in the face of one another, but our reasons also, our arguments and controversies, are reboundable upon us, and we wound ourselves with our own weapons: of which antiquity has left me enough grave examples. It was ingeniously and home-said by him, who was the inventor of this sentence:



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“Stercus cuique suum bene olet.”

[“To every man his own excrements smell well.”—Erasmus]

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

“Age, si hic non insanit satis sua sponte, instiga.”

[“Come! if of himself he is not mad enough, urge him on.”
—Terence, *And.*, iv. 2, 9.]

I do not say that no man should accuse another, who is not clean himself,—for then no one would ever accuse,—clean from the same sort of spot; but I mean that our judgment, falling upon another who is then in question, should not, at the same time, spare ourselves, but sentence us with an inward and severe authority. ’Tis an office of charity, that he who cannot reclaim himself from a vice, should, nevertheless, endeavour to remove it from another, in whom, peradventure, it may not have so deep and so malignant a root; neither do him who reproves me for my fault that he himself is guilty of the same. What of that? The reproof is, notwithstanding, true and of very good use. Had we a good nose, our own ordure would stink worse to us, forasmuch as it is our own: and Socrates is of opinion that whoever should find himself, his son, and a stranger guilty of any violence and wrong, ought to begin with himself, present himself first to the sentence of justice, and implore, to purge himself, the assistance of the hand of the executioner; in the next place, he should proceed to his son, and lastly, to the stranger. If this precept seem too severe, he ought at least to present himself the first, to the punishment of his own conscience.

The senses are our first and proper judges, which perceive not things but by external accidents; and ’tis no wonder, if in all the parts of the service of our society, there is so perpetual and universal a mixture of ceremonies and superficial appearances; insomuch that the best and most effectual part of our polities therein consist. ’Tis still man with whom we have to do, of whom the condition is wonderfully corporal. Let those who, of these late years, would erect for us such a contemplative and immaterial an exercise of religion, not wonder

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if there be some who think it had vanished and melted through their fingers had it not more upheld itself among us as a mark, title, and instrument of division and faction, than by itself. As in conference, the gravity, robe, and fortune of him who speaks, oftentimes gives reputation to vain arguments and idle words, it is not to be presumed but that a man, so attended and feared, has not in him more than ordinary sufficiency; and that he to whom the king has given so many offices and commissions and charges, he so supercilious and proud, has not a great deal more in him, than another who salutes him at so great a distance, and who has no employment at all. Not only the words, but the grimaces also of these people, are considered and put into the account; every one making it his business to give them some fine and solid interpretation. If they stoop to the common conference, and that you offer anything but approbation and reverence, they then knock you down with the authority of their experience: they have heard, they have seen, they have done so and so: you are crushed with examples. I should willingly tell them, that the fruit of a surgeon's experience, is not the history of his practice and his remembering that he has cured four people of the plague and three of the gout, unless he knows how thence to extract something whereon to form his judgment, and to make us sensible that he has thence become more skillful in his art. As in a concert of instruments, we do not hear a lute, a harpsichord, or a flute alone, but one entire harmony, the result of all together. If travel and offices have improved them, 'tis a product of their understanding to make it appear. 'Tis not enough to reckon experiences, they must weigh, sort and distil them, to extract the reasons and conclusions they carry along with them. There were never so many historians: it is, indeed, good and of use to read them, for they furnish us everywhere with excellent and laudable instructions from the magazine of their memory, which, doubtless, is of great concern to the help of life; but 'tis not that we seek for now: we examine whether these relaters and collectors of things are commendable themselves.

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

“Rarus enim ferme sensus communis in illa
Fortuna.”

["For in those high fortunes, common sense is generally rare."
—Juvenal, viii. 73.]



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

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

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

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

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

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



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“Principis est virtus maxima nosse suos;”

[“’Tis the chief virtue of a prince to know his people.”
—Martial, viii. 15.]

for nature has not given them a sight that can extend to so many people, to discern which excels the rest, nor to penetrate into our bosoms, where the knowledge of our wills and best value lies they must choose us by conjecture and by groping; by the family, wealth, learning, and the voice of the people, which are all very feeble arguments. Whoever could find out a way by which they might judge by justice, and choose men by reason, would, in this one thing, establish a perfect form of government.

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

“Fata viam inveniunt;”

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

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

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



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“Permitte divis caetera.”

[“Leave the rest to the gods.”—Horace, *Od.*, i. 9, 9.]

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

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

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

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

“Ut quisque Fortuna utitur,
Ita praecelet; atque exinde sapere illum omnes dicimus;”

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

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

Now, I was upon this point, that there needs no more but to see a man promoted to dignity; though we knew him but three days before a man of little regard, yet an image of grandeur of sufficiency insensibly steals into our opinion, and we persuade ourselves that, being augmented in reputation and train, he is also increased in merit; we judge of him, not according to his worth, but as we do by counters, according to the prerogative of his place. If it happen so that he fall again, and be mixed with the common crowd,



every one inquires with amazement into the cause of his having been raised so high. "Is this he," say they, "was he no wiser when he was there? Do princes satisfy themselves with so little? Truly, we were in good hands." This is a thing that I have often seen in my time. Nay, even the very disguise of grandeur represented



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in our comedies in some sort moves and gulls us. That which I myself adore in kings is the crowd of their adorers; all reverence and submission are due to them, except that of the understanding: my reason is not obliged to bow and bend; my knees are. Melanthius being asked what he thought of the tragedy of Dionysius, "I could not see it," said he, "it was so clouded with language"; so most of those who judge of the discourses of great men ought to say, "I did not understand his words, they were so clouded with gravity, grandeur, and majesty." Antisthenes one day tried to persuade the Athenians to give order that their asses might be employed in tilling the ground as well as the horses were; to which it was answered that that animal was not destined for such a service: "That's all one," replied he, "you have only to order it: for the most ignorant and incapable men you employ in the commands of your wars incontinently become worthy enough, because you employ them"; to which the custom of so many people, who canonise the king they have chosen out of their own body, and are not content only to honour, but must adore them, comes very near. Those of Mexico, after the ceremonies of their king's coronation are over, dare no more look him in the face; but, as if they had deified him by his royalty. Amongst the oaths they make him take to maintain their religion, their laws, and liberties, to be valiant, just, and mild, he moreover swears to make the sun run his course in his wonted light, to drain the clouds at fit seasons, to make rivers run their course, and to cause the earth to bear all things necessary for his people.

I differ from this common fashion, and am more apt to suspect the capacity when I see it accompanied with that grandeur of fortune and public applause; we are to consider of what advantage it is to speak when a man pleases, to choose his subject, to interrupt or change it, with a magisterial authority; to protect himself from the oppositions of others by a nod, a smile, or silence, in the presence of an assembly that trembles with reverence and respect. A man of a prodigious fortune coming to give his judgment upon some slight dispute that was foolishly set on foot at his table, began in these words: "It can be no other but a liar or a fool that will say otherwise than so and so." Pursue this philosophical point with a dagger in your hand.

There is another observation I have made, from which I draw great advantage; which is, that in conferences and disputes, every word that seems to be good, is not immediately to be accepted. Most men are rich in borrowed sufficiency: a man may say a good thing, give a good answer, cite a good sentence, without at all seeing the force of either the one or the other. That a man may not understand all he borrows, may perhaps be verified in myself. A man must not always presently yield, what truth or beauty soever may seem to be in the opposite argument; either he must stoutly meet it, or retire, under colour

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of not understanding it, to try, on all parts, how it is lodged in the author. It may happen that we entangle ourselves, and help to strengthen the point itself. I have sometimes, in the necessity and heat of the combat, made answers that have gone through and through, beyond my expectation or hope; I only gave them in number, they were received in weight. As, when I contend with a vigorous man, I please myself with anticipating his conclusions, I ease him of the trouble of explaining himself, I strive to forestall his imagination whilst it is yet springing and imperfect; the order and pertinency of his understanding warn and threaten me afar off: I deal quite contrary with the others; I must understand, and presuppose nothing but by them. If they determine in general words, "this is good, that is naught," and that they happen to be in the right, see if it be not fortune that hits it off for them: let them a little circumscribe and limit their judgment; why, or how, it is so. These universal judgments that I see so common, signify nothing; these are men who salute a whole people in a crowd together; they, who have a real acquaintance, take notice of and salute them individually and by name. But 'tis a hazardous attempt; and from which I have, more than every day, seen it fall out, that weak understandings, having a mind to appear ingenious, in taking notice, as they read a book, of what is best and most to be admired, fix their admiration upon some thing so very ill chosen, that instead of making us discern the excellence of the author; they make us very well see their own ignorance. This exclamation is safe, "That is fine," after having heard a whole page of Virgil; by that the cunning sort save themselves; but to undertake to follow him line by line, and, with an expert and tried judgment, to observe where a good author excels himself, weighing the words, phrases, inventions, and his various excellences, one after another; keep aloof from that:

"Videndum est, non modo quid quisque loquatur, sed etiam quid quisque sentiat, atque etiam qua de causa quisque sentiat."

["A man is not only to examine what every one says, but also what every one thinks, and from what reason every one thinks."
—Cicero, *De Offic.*, i. 41.]

I every day hear fools say things that are not foolish: they say a good thing; let us examine how far they understand it, whence they have it, and what they mean by it. We help them to make use of this fine expression, of this fine sentence, which is none of theirs; they only have it in keeping; they have bolted it out at a venture; we place it for them in credit and esteem. You lend them your hand. To what purpose? they do not think themselves obliged to you for it, and become more inept still. Don't help them; let them alone; they will handle the matter like people who are afraid of burning their fingers; they dare change neither its seat nor light,



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nor break into it; shake it never so little, it slips through their fingers; they give it up, be it never so strong or fair they are fine weapons, but ill hafted: How many times have I seen the experience of this? Now, if you come to explain anything to them, and to confirm them, they catch at it, and presently rob you of the advantage of your interpretation; "It was what I was about to say; it was just my idea; if I did not express it so, it was for want of language." Mere wind! Malice itself must be employed to correct this arrogant ignorance. The dogma of Hegesias, "that we are neither to hate nor accuse, but instruct," is correct elsewhere; but here 'tis injustice and inhumanity to relieve and set him right who stands in no need on't, and is the worse for't. I love to let them step deeper into the mire; and so deep, that, if it be possible, they may at last discern their error.

Folly and absurdity are not to be cured by bare admonition; and what Cyrus answered to him, who importuned him to harangue his army, upon the point of battle, "that men do not become valiant and warlike upon a sudden, by a fine oration, no more than a man becomes a good musician by hearing a fine song," may properly be said of such an admonition as this. These are apprenticeships that are to be served beforehand, by a long and continued education. We owe this care and this assiduity of correction and instruction to our own people; but to go preach to the first passer-by, and to become tutor to the ignorance and folly of the first we meet, is a thing that I abhor. I rarely do it, even in private conversation, and rather give up the whole thing than proceed to these initiatory and school instructions; my humour is unfit either to speak or write for beginners; but for things that are said in common discourse, or amongst other things, I never oppose them either by word or sign, how false or absurd soever.

As to the rest, nothing vexes me so much in folly as that it is more satisfied with itself than any reason can reasonably be. 'Tis unfortunate that prudence forbids us to satisfy and trust ourselves, and always dismisses us timorous and discontented; whereas obstinacy and temerity fill those who are possessed with them with joy and assurance. 'Tis for the most ignorant to look at other men over the shoulder, always returning from the combat full of joy and triumph. And moreover, for the most part, this arrogance of speech and gaiety of countenance gives them the better of it in the opinion of the audience, which is commonly weak and incapable of well judging and discerning the real advantage. Obstinacy of opinion and heat in argument are the surest proofs of folly; is there anything so assured, resolute, disdainful, contemplative, serious and grave as the ass?



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May we not include under the title of conference and communication the quick and sharp repartees which mirth and familiarity introduce amongst friends, pleasantly and wittily jesting and rallying with one another? 'Tis an exercise for which my natural gaiety renders me fit enough, and which, if it be not so tense and serious as the other I spoke of but now, is, as Lycurgus thought, no less smart and ingenious, nor of less utility. For my part, I contribute to it more liberty than wit, and have therein more of luck than invention; but I am perfect in suffering, for I endure a retaliation that is not only tart, but indiscreet to boot, without being moved at all; and whoever attacks me, if I have not a brisk answer immediately ready, I do not study to pursue the point with a tedious and impertinent contest, bordering upon obstinacy, but let it pass, and hanging down cheerfully my ears, defer my revenge to another and better time: there is no merchant that always gains: Most men change their countenance and their voice where their wits fail, and by an unseasonable anger, instead of revenging themselves, accuse at once their own folly and impatience. In this jollity, we sometimes pinch the secret strings of our imperfections which, at another and graver time, we cannot touch without offence, and so profitably give one another a hint of our defects. There are other jeux de main, —[practical jokes]—rude and indiscreet, after the French manner, that I mortally hate; my skin is very tender and sensible: I have in my time seen two princes of the blood buried upon that very account. 'Tis unhandsome to fight in play. As to the rest, when I have a mind to judge of any one, I ask him how far he is contented with himself; to what degree his speaking or his work pleases him. I will none of these fine excuses, "I did it only in sport,

'Ablatum mediis opus est incudibus istud.'

["That work was taken from the anvil half finished."
—Ovid, *Trist.*, i. 6, 29.]

I was not an hour about it: I have never looked at it since." Well, then, say I, lay these aside, and give me a perfect one, such as you would be measured by. And then, what do you think is the best thing in your work? is it this part or that? is it grace or the matter, the invention, the judgment, or the learning? For I find that men are, commonly, as wide of the mark in judging of their own works, as of those of others; not only by reason of the kindness they have for them, but for want of capacity to know and distinguish them: the work, by its own force and fortune, may second the workman, and sometimes outstrip him, beyond his invention and knowledge. For my part, I judge of the value of other men's works more obscurely than of my own; and place the *Essays*, now high, or low, with great doubt and inconstancy. There are several books that are useful upon the account of their subjects, from which the author derives no praise; and good books, as well as good works, that



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shame the workman. I may write the manner of our feasts, and the fashion of our clothes, and may write them ill; I may publish the edicts of my time, and the letters of princes that pass from hand to hand; I may make an abridgment of a good book (and every abridgment of a good book is a foolish abridgment), which book shall come to be lost; and so on: posterity will derive a singular utility from such compositions: but what honour shall I have unless by great good fortune? Most part of the famous books are of this condition.

When I read Philip de Commines, doubtless a very good author, several years ago, I there took notice of this for no vulgar saying, "That a man must have a care not to do his master so great service, that at last he will not know how to give him his just reward"; but I ought to commend the invention, not him, because I met with it in Tacitus, not long since:

"Beneficia ea usque lxta sunt, dum videntur exsolvi posse;
ubi multum antevenere, pro gratis odium redditur;"

["Benefits are so far acceptable as they appear to be capable of recompense; where they much exceed that point, hatred is returned instead of thanks."—Tacitus, *Annal.*, iv. 18.]

and Seneca vigorously says:

"Nam qui putat esse turpe non reddere,
non vult esse cui reddat."

["For he who thinks it a shame not to requite, does not wish to have the man live to whom he owes return."—Seneca, *Ep.*, 81.]

Q. Cicero says with less directness.:

"Qui se non putat satisfacere,
amicus esse nullo modo potest."

["Who thinks himself behind in obligation, can by no means be a friend."—Q. Cicero, *De Petitione Consul*, c. 9.]

The subject, according to what it is, may make a man looked upon as learned and of good memory; but to judge in him the parts that are most his own and the most worthy, the vigour and beauty of his soul, one must first know what is his own and what is not; and in that which is not his own, how much we are obliged to him for the choice, disposition, ornament, and language he has there presented us with. What if he has borrowed the matter and spoiled the form, as it often falls out? We, who are little read



in books, are in this strait, that when we meet with a high fancy in some new poet, or some strong argument in a preacher, we dare not, nevertheless, commend it till we have first informed ourselves, through some learned man, if it be the writer's wit or borrowed from some other; until that I always stand upon my guard.



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I have lately been reading the history of Tacitus quite through, without interrupting it with anything else (which but seldom happens with me, it being twenty years since I have kept to any one book an hour together), and I did it at the instance of a gentleman for whom France has a great esteem, as well for his own particular worth, as upon the account of a constant form of capacity and virtue which runs through a great many brothers of them. I do not know any author in a public narrative who mixes so much consideration of manners and particular inclinations: and I am of a quite contrary opinion to him, holding that, having especially to follow the lives of the emperors of his time, so various and extreme in all sorts of forms, so many notable actions as their cruelty especially produced in their subjects, he had a stronger and more attractive matter to treat of than if he had had to describe battles and universal commotions; so that I often find him sterile, running over those brave deaths as if he feared to trouble us with their multitude and length. This form of history is by much the most useful; public movements depend most upon the conduct of fortune, private ones upon our own. 'Tis rather a judgment than a narration of history; there are in it more precepts than stories: it is not a book to read, 'tis a book to study and learn; 'tis full of sententious opinions, right or wrong; 'tis a nursery of ethic and politic discourses, for the use and ornament of those who have any place in the government of the world. He always argues by strong and solid reasons, after a pointed and subtle manner, according to the affected style of that age, which was so in love with an inflated manner, that where point and subtlety were wanting in things it supplied these with lofty and swelling words. 'Tis not much unlike the style of Seneca: I look upon Tacitus as more sinewy, and Seneca as more sharp. His pen seems most proper for a troubled and sick state, as ours at present is; you would often say that he paints and pinches us.

They who doubt his good faith sufficiently accuse themselves of being his enemy upon some other account. His opinions are sound, and lean to the right side in the Roman affairs. And yet I am angry at him for judging more severely of Pompey than consists with the opinion of those worthy men who lived in the same time, and had dealings with him; and to have reputed him on a par with Marius and Sylla, excepting that he was more close. Other writers have not acquitted his intention in the government of affairs from ambition and revenge; and even his friends were afraid that victory would have transported him beyond the bounds of reason, but not to so immeasurable a degree as theirs; nothing in his life threatened such express cruelty and tyranny. Neither ought we to set suspicion against evidence; and therefore I do not believe Plutarch in this matter. That his narrations were genuine and straightforward may,

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perhaps, be argued from this very thing, that they do not always apply to the conclusions of his judgments, which he follows according to the bias he has taken, very often beyond the matter he presents us withal, which he has not deigned to alter in the least degree. He needs no excuse for having approved the religion of his time, according as the laws enjoined, and to have been ignorant of the true; this was his misfortune, not his fault.

I have principally considered his judgment, and am not very well satisfied therewith throughout; as these words in the letter that Tiberius, old and sick, sent to the senate. "What shall I write to you, sirs, or how should I write to you, or what should I not write to you at this time? May the gods and goddesses lay a worse punishment upon me than I am every day tormented with, if I know!" I do not see why he should so positively apply them to a sharp remorse that tormented the conscience of Tiberius; at least, when I was in the same condition, I perceived no such thing.

And this also seemed to me a little mean in him that, having to say that he had borne an honourable office in Rome, he excuses himself that he does not say it out of ostentation; this seems, I say, mean for such a soul as his; for not to speak roundly of a man's self implies some want of courage; a man of solid and lofty judgment, who judges soundly and surely, makes use of his own example upon all occasions, as well as those of others; and gives evidence as freely of himself as of a third person. We are to pass by these common rules of civility, in favour of truth and liberty. I dare not only speak of myself, but to speak only of myself: when I write of anything else, I miss my way and wander from my subject. I am not so indiscreetly enamoured of myself, so wholly mixed up with, and bound to myself, that I cannot distinguish and consider myself apart, as I do a neighbour or a tree: 'tis equally a fault not to discern how far a man's worth extends, and to say more than a man discovers in himself. We owe more love to God than to ourselves, and know Him less; and yet speak of Him as much as we will.

If the writings of Tacitus indicate anything true of his qualities, he was a great personage, upright and bold, not of a superstitious but of a philosophical and generous virtue. One may think him bold in his relations; as where he tells us, that a soldier carrying a burden of wood, his hands were so frozen and so stuck to the load that they there remained closed and dead, being severed from his arms. I always in such things bow to the authority of so great witnesses.

What also he says, that Vespasian, "by the favour of the god Serapis, cured a blind woman at Alexandria by anointing her eyes with his spittle, and I know not what other miracle," he says by the example and duty of all his good historians. They record all events of importance; and amongst public incidents are the popular rumours and opinions. 'Tis their part to relate common beliefs, not to regulate them: that part

concerns divines and philosophers, directors of consciences; and therefore it was that this companion of his, and a great man like himself, very wisely said:



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“Equidem plura transcribo, quam credo: nam nec affirmare sustineo, de quibus dubito, nec subducere quae accepi;”

[“Truly, I set down more things than I believe, for I can neither affirm things whereof I doubt, nor suppress what I have heard.”
—Quintus Curtius, ix.]

and this other:

“Haec neque affirmare neque refellere operae pretium est; famae rerum standum est.”

[“’Tis neither worth the while to affirm or to refute these things; we must stand to report”—Livy, i., Praef., and viii. 6.]

And writing in an age wherein the belief of prodigies began to decline, he says he would not, nevertheless, forbear to insert in his Annals, and to give a relation of things received by so many worthy men, and with so great reverence of antiquity; ’tis very well said. Let them deliver to us history, more as they receive it than as they believe it. I, who am monarch of the matter whereof I treat, and who am accountable to none, do not, nevertheless, always believe myself; I often hazard sallies of my own wit, wherein I very much suspect myself, and certain verbal quibbles, at which I shake my ears; but I let them go at a venture. I see that others get reputation by such things: ’tis not for me alone to judge. I present myself standing and lying, before and behind, my right side and my left, and, in all my natural postures. Wits, though equal in force, are not always equal in taste and application.

This is what my memory presents to me in gross, and with uncertainty enough; all judgments in gross are weak and imperfect.

ETEXT editor’s bookmarks:

A hundred more escape us than ever come to our knowledge
A man must have courage to fear
A man never speaks of himself without loss
A man’s accusations of himself are always believed
Agitation has usurped the place of reason
All judgments in gross are weak and imperfect
Any argument if it be carried on with method
Apprenticeships that are to be served beforehand
Arrogant ignorance
Avoid all magnificences that will in a short time be forgotten
Being as impatient of commanding as of being commanded
Defer my revenge to another and better time



Desires, that still increase as they are fulfilled
Detest in others the defects which are more manifest in us
Disdainful, contemplative, serious and grave as the ass
Do not, nevertheless, always believe myself
Events are a very poor testimony of our worth and parts.
Every abridgment of a good book is a foolish abridgment
Fault not to discern how far a man's worth extends
Folly and absurdity are not to be cured by bare admonition
Folly satisfied with itself than any reason can reasonably be

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Folly than to be moved and angry at the follies of the world
Give us history, more as they receive it than as they believe it
I every day hear fools say things that are not foolish
I hail and caress truth in what quarter soever I find it
I hate all sorts of tyranny, both in word and deed
I love stout expressions amongst gentle men
I was too frightened to be ill
If it be the writer's wit or borrowed from some other
Ignorance does not offend me, but the foppery of it.
It is not a book to read, 'tis a book to study and learn
"It was what I was about to say; it was just my idea,"
Judge by justice, and choose men by reason
Knock you down with the authority of their experience
Learning improves fortunes enough, but not minds
Liberality at the expense of others
Malice must be employed to correct this arrogant ignorance
Man must have a care not to do his master so great service
Mix railing, indiscretion, and fury in his disputations
Most men are rich in borrowed sufficiency
My humour is unfit either to speak or write for beginners
My reason is not obliged to bow and bend; my knees are
Never oppose them either by word or sign, how false or absurd
New World: sold it opinions and our arts at a very dear rate
Obstinacy and heat in argument are the surest proofs of folly
One must first know what is his own and what is not
Our knowledge, which is a wretched foundation
Passion has already confounded his judgment
Pinch the secret strings of our imperfections
Practical Jokes: 'Tis unhandsome to fight in play
Presumptive knowledge by silence
Silent mien procured the credit of prudence and capacity
Spectators can claim no interest in the honour and pleasure
Study of books is a languishing and feeble motion
The cause of truth ought to be the common cause
The event often justifies a very foolish conduct
The ignorant return from the combat full of joy and triumph
The very name Liberality sounds of Liberty.
There are some upon whom their rich clothes weep
There is no merchant that always gains
There is nothing single and rare in respect of nature



They have heard, they have seen, they have done so and so
They have not the courage to suffer themselves to be corrected
Tis impossible to deal fairly with a fool
To fret and vex at folly, as I do, is folly itself
Transferring of money from the right owners to strangers
Tutor to the ignorance and folly of the first we meet
Tyrannic sourness not to endure a form contrary to one's own
Universal judgments that I see so common, signify nothing
"What he laughed at, being alone?"—"That I do laugh alone,"

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We are not to judge of counsels by events
We do not correct the man we hang; we correct others by him
We neither see far forward nor far backward
Whilst thou wast silent, thou seemedst to be some great thing
Who has once been a very fool, will never after be very wise
Wide of the mark in judging of their own works
Wise may learn more of fools, than fools can of the wise