

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS



Front Matter

Translation by W. Carew Hazlitt (1842, Public domain) · Last updated on April 11, 2022

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COTTON-O-1-20240215-143426

The Author to the Reader

READER,¹ thou hast here an honest book; it doth at the outset forewarn thee that, in contriving the same, I have proposed to myself no other than a domestic and private end: I have had no consideration at all either to thy service or to my glory. My powers are not capable of any such design. I have dedicated it to the particular commodity of my kinsfolk and friends, so that, having lost me (which they must do shortly), they may therein recover some traits of my conditions and humours, and by that means preserve more whole, and more life-like, the knowledge they had of me. Had my intention been to seek the world's favour, I should surely have adorned myself with borrowed beauties: I desire therein to be viewed as I appear in mine own genuine, simple, and ordinary manner, without study and artifice: for it is myself I paint. My defects are therein to be read to the life, and any imperfections and my natural form, so far as public reverence hath permitted me. If I had lived among those nations, which (they say) yet dwell under the sweet liberty of nature's primitive laws, I assure thee I would most willingly have painted myself quite fully and quite naked. Thus, reader, myself am the matter of my book: there's no reason thou shouldst employ thy leisure about so frivolous and vain a subject. Therefore farewell.

From Montaigne, the 1st March 1580.

NOTES

- 1 Charles Cotton did not include Montaigne's address *To the Reader* in his edition of the *Essays*. This translation is W. Carew Hazlitt's, from his 1877 edition of Cotton's translation.