Michel de Montaigne

Essays

Book 3 · Chapter 12

Translation by Charles Cotton (1685, Public domain) · Last updated on February 26, 2024

HyperEssays is a project to create a modern and accessible online edition of the *Essays* of Michel de Montaigne. More information at www.hyperessays.net

ESSAYS-3-12-20250106-191353

On Physiognomy

Almost all the opinions we have are taken on authority and trust; and 'tis not amiss; we could not choose worse than by ourselves in so weak an age. That image of Socrates's discourses, which his friends have transmitted to us, we approve upon no other account than a reverence to public sanction: 'tis not according to our own knowledge; they are not after our way; if anything of the kind should spring up now, few men would value them. We discern no graces that are not pointed and puffed out and inflated by art; such as glide on in their own purity and simplicity easily escape so gross a sight as ours; they have a delicate and concealed beauty, such as requires a clear and purified sight to discover its secret light. Is not simplicity, as we take it, cousin-german to folly, and a quality of reproach? Socrates makes his soul move a natural and common motion: a peasant said this; a woman said that; he has never anybody in his mouth but carters, joiners, cobblers, and masons; his are inductions and similitudes drawn from the most common and known actions of men; every one understands him. We should never have recognized the nobility and splendor of his admirable conceptions under so mean a form; we, who think all things low and flat, that are not elevated by learned doctrine, and who discern no riches but in pomp and show. This world of ours is only formed for ostentation: men are only puffed up with wind, and are bandied to and fro like tennis-balls. He proposed to himself no vain and idle fancies; his design was to furnish us with precepts and things that more really and fitly serve to the use of life;

> *Servare modum, finemque tenere,*
> *Naturamque sequi.*

To keep a just mean, to observe a just limit, and to follow Nature. • Luc., 2.381

He was also always one and the same, and raised himself, not by starts but by complexion, to the highest pitch of vigor; or, to say better, mounted not at all, but rather brought down, reduced and subjected all asperities and difficulties to his original and natural condition; for, in Cato 'tis most manifest, that 'tis a procedure extended far beyond the common ways of men: in the brave exploits of his life, and in his death, we find him always mounted upon the great horse; whereas the other ever creeps upon the ground, and with a gentle and ordinary pace, treats of the most useful matters, and bears himself, both at his death and in

the rudest difficulties that could present themselves, in the ordinary way of human life.

It has fallen out well, that the man most worthy to be known and to be presented to the world for example, should be he of whom we have the most certain knowledge; he has been pried into by the most clear-sighted men that ever were; the testimonies we have of him are admirable both in fidelity and fullness.

'Tis a great thing that he was able so to order the pure imaginations of a child, that, without altering or wresting them, he thereby produced the most beautiful effects of our soul: he presents it neither elevated nor rich; he only represents it sound, but assuredly with a brisk and full health. By these common and natural springs, by these ordinary and popular fancies, without being moved or put out, he set up not only the most regular, but the most high and vigorous beliefs, actions, and manners that ever were. 'Tis he who brought again from heaven, where she lost her time, human wisdom, to restore her to man, with whom her most just and greatest business lies. See him plead before his judges; observe by what reasons he rouses his courage to the hazards of war; with what arguments he fortifies his patience against calumny, tyranny, death, and the perverseness of his wife: you will find nothing in all this borrowed from arts and sciences: the simplest may there discover their own means and strength; 'tis not possible more to retire or to creep more low. He has done human nature a great kindness, in showing it how much it can do of itself.

We are all of us richer than we think we are; but we are taught to borrow and to beg, and brought up more to make use of what is another's than of our own. Man can in nothing fix himself to his actual necessity: of pleasure, wealth, and power, he grasps at more than he can hold; his greediness is incapable of moderation. And I find that in curiosity of knowing he is the same; he cuts himself out more work than he can do, and more than he needs to do: extending the utility of knowledge, to the full of its matter: *Ut omnium rerum, sic literarum quoque, intemperantia laboramus.* And Tacitus had reason to commend the mother of Agricola, for having restrained her son in his too violent appetite for learning. 'Tis a good, if duly considered, which has in it, as the other goods of men have, a great deal of vanity and weakness, proper and natural to itself, and that costs very dear.

We carry intemperance into the study of literature, as well as into everything else. • Sen., Ep., 106

Its acquisition is far more hazardous than that of all other meat or drink; for, as to other things, what we have bought we carry home in some vessel, and there have full leisure to examine our purchase, how much we shall eat or drink of it, and when: but sciences we can, at the very first, stow into no other vessel than the soul; we swallow them in buying, and return from the market, either already infected or amended: there are some that only burden and overcharge the stomach, instead of nourishing; and, moreover, some, that under color of curing, poison us.

I have been pleased, in places where I have been, to see men in devotion vow ignorance as well as chastity, poverty, and penitence: 'tis also a gelding of our unruly appetites, to blunt this cupidity that spurs us on to the study of books, and to deprive the soul of this voluptuous complacency that tickles us with the opinion of knowledge: and 'tis

plenarily to accomplish the vow of poverty, to add unto it that of the mind. We need little doctrine to live at our ease; and Socrates teaches us, that this is in us, and the way how to find it, and the manner how to use it. All our sufficiency which exceeds the natural is well-nigh superfluous and vain: 'tis much if it does not rather burden and cumber us than do us good. *Paucis opus est literis ad mentem bonam*. 'tis a feverish excess of the mind; a tempestuous and unquiet instrument. Do but recollect yourself, and you will find in yourself natural arguments against death, true, and the fittest to serve you in time of necessity: 'tis they that make a peasant, and whole nations, die with as much firmness as a philosopher. Should I have died less cheerfully before I had read Cicero's Tusculans? I believe not; and when I find myself at the best, I perceive that my tongue is enriched indeed, but my courage little or nothing elevated by them; that is just as nature framed it at first, and defends itself against the conflict, only after a natural and ordinary way. Books have not so much served me for instruction as exercise. What if knowledge, trying to arm us with new defenses against natural inconveniences, has more imprinted in our fancies their weight and greatness, than her reasons and subtleties to secure us from them? They are subtleties, indeed, with which she often alarms us to little purpose. Do but observe how many slight and frivolous, and, if nearly examined, incorporeal arguments, the closest and wisest authors scatter about one good one: they are but verbal quirks and fallacies to amuse and gull us: but forasmuch as it may be with some profit, I will sift them no further; many of that sort are here and there dispersed up and down this book, either borrowed or by imitation. Therefore one ought to take a little heed not to call that force which is only a pretty knack of writing, and that solid which is only sharp, or that good which is only fine: *Quæ magis gustata quam potata, delectant:* everything that pleases, does not nourish: *Ubi non ingenii, Sed animi negotium agitur.*

Very little learning is needed to form a sound mind. • Sen., Ep., 106

Which more delight in the tasting, than in being drunk off: • Cic., Tusc., 5.5

Where the question is not about the wit, but about the soul. • Sen., Ep., 75

To see the trouble that Seneca gives himself to fortify himself against death; to see him so sweat and pant to harden and encourage himself, and bustle so long upon this perch, would have lessened his reputation with me, had he not very bravely held himself at the last. His so ardent and frequent agitations discover that he was in himself impetuous and passionate. (*Magnus animus remissius loquitur, et securius… non est alius ingenio, alius ammo color*); he must be convinced at his own expense; and he in some sort discovers that he was hard pressed by his enemy. Plutarch's way, by how much it is more disdainful and farther stretched, is, in my opinion, so much more manly and persuasive: and I am apt to believe that his soul had more assured and more regular motions. The one more sharp, pricks and makes us start, and more touches the soul; the other more constantly solid, forms, establishes, and supports us, and more touches the understanding. That ravishes the judgment, this wins it.

A great courage speaks more calmly and securely… • Sen., Ep., 115

The mind and the soul wear the same livery • Sen., Ep., 114

I have likewise seen other writings, yet more reverenced than these, that in the representation of the conflict they maintain against the temptations of the flesh, paint them so sharp, so powerful and invincible, that we ourselves, who are of the common herd, are as much to wonder at the strangeness and unknown force of their temptation, as at the resisting it.

To what end do we so arm ourselves with this harness of science? Let us look down upon the poor people that we see scattered upon the face of

the earth, prone and intent upon their business, that neither know Aristotle nor Cato, example nor precept; from these nature every day extracts effects of constancy and patience, more pure and manly than those we so inquisitively study in the schools: how many do I ordinarily see who slight poverty? how many who desire to die, or who die without alarm or regret? He who is now digging in my garden, has this morning buried his father or his son. The very names by which they call diseases, sweeten and mollify the sharpness of them: the phthisic is with them no more than a cough, dysentery but a looseness, the pleurisy but a stitch; and, as they gently name them, so they patiently endure them; they are very great and grievous indeed, when they hinder their ordinary labor; they never keep their beds but to die. *Simplex illa et aperta virtus in obscuram et solertem scientiam versa est.*

That plain and simple virtue is converted into an obscure and subtle knowledge. • Sen., Ep., 95

I was writing this about a time when a great load of our intestine troubles for several months lay with all its weight upon me; I had the enemy at my door on one side, and the free-booters, worse enemies than they, on the other, *Non armis, Sed vitiis, certatur;* and underwent all sorts of military injuries at once:

The fight is not with arms, but with vices; • Sen., Ep., 95

Hostis adest dextra lævaque a parte timendus.
Vicinoque malo terret utrumque latus.

Right and left a formidable enemy presses on me, and threatens me on both sides with present danger. • Ov., Pont., 1.3.57

A monstrous war! Other wars are bent against strangers, this against itself, destroying itself with its own poison. It is of so malignant and ruinous a nature, that it ruins itself with the rest: and with its own rage mangles and tears itself to pieces. We more often see it dissolve of itself, than through scarcity of any necessary thing, or by force of the enemy. All discipline evades it: it comes to compose sedition, and is itself full of it; would chastise disobedience, and itself is the example; and, employed for the defense of the laws, rebels against its own. What a condition are we in! Our physic makes us sick!

Nostre mal s'empoisonne
Du secours qu'on luy donne.

Our disease is poisoned with its very remedies.

Exuperat magis, ægrescitque medendo.[1]

• Verg., Aen., 12.46

Omnia fanda, nefanda, malo permista furore,
Justificam nobis mentem avertere deorum.

Right and wrong, all shuffled together in this wicked fury, have deprived us of the gods'protection. • Catull., 64.405

In the beginning of these popular maladies, one may distinguish the sound from the sick; but when they come to continue, as ours have done, the whole body is then infected from head to foot; no part is free from corruption, for there is no air that men so greedily draw in, that diffuses itself so soon and that penetrates so deep, as that of licence. Our armies only subsist and are kept together by the cement of foreigners; for of Frenchmen there is now no constant and regular army to be made. What a shame it is! there is no longer any discipline but what we see in the borrowed soldiers. As to ourselves, our conduct is at discretion, and that not of the chief, but every one at his own. The General has a harder game to play within, than he has without; he it is who has to follow, to court the soldiers, to give way to them; he alone has to obey: all the rest if disolution and free licence. It pleases me to observe how much

pusillanimity and cowardice there is in ambition; by how abject and servile ways it must arrive at its end; but it displeases me to see good and generous natures, and that are capable of justice, every day corrupted in the management and command of this confusion. Long toleration begets habit; habit, consent and imitation. We had ill-formed souls enough, without spoiling those that were generous and good; so that, if we hold on, there will scarcely remain any with whom to intrust the health of this State of ours, in case fortune chance to restore it:

Hunc saltem everso juvenem succurrere seclo,
Ne prohibete.

Forbid not, at least, that this young man repair this ruined age. • Verg., G., 1.500

What is become of the old precept, "That soldiers ought more to fear their chief than the enemy?" and of that wonderful example, that an orchard being enclosed within the precincts of a camp of the Roman army, was seen at their dislodgment the next day in the same condition, not an apple, though ripe and delicious, being pulled off, but all left to the possessor? I could wish that our youth, instead of the time they spend in less fruitful travels, and less honorable employments, would bestow one half of that time in being an eye-witness of naval exploits, under some good captain of Rhodes, and the other half in observing the discipline of the Turkish armies; for they have many differences and advantages over ours; one of these is, that our soldiers become more licentious in expeditions, theirs more temperate and circumspect; for the thefts and insolences committed upon the common people, which are only punished with a cudgel in peace, are capital in war; for an egg taken by a Turkish soldier without paying for it, fifty blows with a stick is the fixed rate; for anything else, of what sort or how trivial soever, not necessary to nourishment, they are presently impaled or beheaded without mercy. I am astonished, in the history of Selim, the most cruel conqueror that ever was, to see that when he subdued Egypt, the beautiful gardens about Damascus being all open, and in a conquered land, and his army encamped upon the very place, should be left untouched by the hands of the soldiers, by reason they had not received the signal of pillage.

But is there any disease in a government, that it is worth while to physic with such a mortal drug? No, said Favonius, not even the tyrannical usurpation of a Commonwealth. Plato, likewise, will not consent that a man should violate the peace of his country in order to cure it, and by no means approves of a reformation that disturbs and hazards all, and that is to be purchased at the price of the citizens' blood and ruin; determining it to be the duty of a good patriot in such a case to let it alone, and only to pray to God for his extraordinary assistance: and he seems to be angry with his great friend Dion, for having proceeded somewhat after another manner.

I was a Platonist in this point, before I knew there had ever been such a man as Plato in the world. And if this person ought absolutely to be rejected from our society (he who by the sincerity of his conscience, merited from the divine favor to penetrate so far into the Christian light, through the universal darkness wherein the world was involved in his time), I do not think it becomes us to suffer ourselves to be instructed by a heathen, how great an impiety it is not to expect from God any relief simply his own and without our cooperation. I often doubt, whether

among so many men as meddle in such affairs, there is not to be found some one of so weak understanding as to have been really persuaded that he went toward reformation by the worst of deformations; and advanced toward salvation by the most express causes that we have of most assured damnation; that by overthrowing government, the magistracy, and the laws, in whose protection God has placed him, by dismembering his good mother, and giving her limbs to be mangled by her old enemies, filling fraternal hearts with parricidal hatreds, calling devils and furies to his aid, he can assist the most holy sweetness and justice of the divine law. Ambition, avarice, cruelty, and revenge, have not sufficient natural impetuosity of their own; let us bait them with the glorious titles of justice and devotion. There cannot a worse state of things be imagined, than where wickedness comes to be legitimate, and assumes with the magistrates' permission, the cloak of virtue. *Nihil in speciem fallacius, quam prava religio, ubi deorum numen prætenditur sceleribus.* The extremest sort of injustice, according to Plato, is where that which is unjust, should be reputed for just.

Nothing has a more deceiving face than false religion, where devotion is pretended by wicked men. • Livy, 34.16

The common people then suffered very much, and not present damage only.

Undique totis
Usque adeo turbatur agris,

Such great disorders overtake our fields on every side. • Verg., Ecl., 1.2

but future too; the living were to suffer, and so were they who were yet unborn; they stripped them, and consequently myself, even of hope, taking from them all they had laid up in store to live on for many years:

Quæ nequeunt secum ferre aut abducere, perdunt;
Et cremat insontes turba scelesta casas…

Muris nulla fides, squalent populatibus agri.

What they cannot bear away, they spoil; and the wretches burn harmless houses. • Ov., Tri., 3.10.65

Walls cannot secure their masters, and the fields are wasted and spoiled. • Claud., Eu., 1.244

Besides this shock, I suffered others: I underwent the inconveniences that moderation brings along with it in such a disease: I was robbed on all hands; to the Ghibelin I was a Welf, and to the Welf a Ghibelin; one of my poets expresses this very well, but I know not where it is. The situation of my house, and my friendliness with my neighbors, presented me with one face; my life and my actions with another. They did not lay formal accusations to my charge, for they had no foundation for so doing; I never hide my head from the laws, and whoever would have questioned me, would have done himself a greater prejudice than me; they were only mute suspicions that were whispered about, which never want appearance in so confused a mixture, no more than envious or idle heads. I commonly myself lend a hand to injurious presumptions that fortune scatters abroad against me, by a way I have ever had of evading to justify, excuse, or explain myself; conceiving that it were to compromise my conscience to plead in its behalf. *Perspicuitas enim argumentatione elevatur;* and, as if every one saw as clearly into me as I do myself, instead of retiring from an accusation, I step up to meet it, and rather give it some kind of color by an ironical and scoffing confession, if I do not sit totally mute, as of a thing not worth my answer. But such as look upon this kind of behavior of mine as too haughty a confidence, have as little kindness for me as they who interpret the weakness of an indefensible cause; namely, the great folks, toward whom want of submission is the great fault, harsh toward all

The clearness of a cause is clouded by argumentation; • Cic., Nat. D., 3.4

justice that knows and feels itself, and is not submissive, humble, and suppliant; I have often knocked my head against this pillar. So it is, that at what then befell me, an ambitious man would have hanged himself, and a covetous man would have done the same.

I have no manner of care of getting:

> *Si mihi, quod nunc est, etiam minus; et mihi vivam*
> *Quod superest ævi, si quid superesse volent dii:*

May I keep what I have, or even less; and live for myself what of life remains, if the gods grant me remaining years. • Hor., Epist., 1.18.107

but the losses that befall me by the injury of others, whether by theft or violence, go almost as near my heart, as they would do to that of the most avaricious man. The offense troubles me, without comparison, more than the loss. A thousand several sorts of mischiefs fell upon me in the neck of one another; I could more cheerfully have borne them all at once.

I was already considering to whom, among my friends, I might commit a helpless and decrepit age; and having turned my eyes quite round, I found myself bare. To let one's self fall plump down, and from so great a height, it ought to be in the arms of a solid, vigorous, and fortunate friendship: these are very rare, if there be any. At last, I saw that it was safest for me to trust to myself in my necessity; and if it should so fall out, that I should be but upon cold terms in Fortune's favor, I should so much the more pressingly recommend me to my own, and attach myself and look to myself all the more closely. Men on all occasions throw themselves upon foreign assistance to spare their own, which is alone certain and sufficient, to him who knows how therewith to arm himself. Every one runs elsewhere, and to the future, forasmuch as no one is arrived at himself. And I was satisfied that they were profitable inconveniences.

Forasmuch as, first, ill scholars are to be admonished with the rod, when reason will not do, as a crooked piece of wood is by fire and straining reduced to straightness. I have a great while preached to myself to stick close to my own concerns, and separate myself from the affairs of others; yet I am still turning my eyes aside. A bow, a kind word or look from a great person tempts me; of which God knows how little scarcity there is in these days, and how little they signify. I, moreover, without wrinkling my forehead, hearken to the persuasions offered me, to draw me into the open market-place, and so gently refuse, as if I were half willing to be overcome. Now for so indocile a spirit blows are required; this vessel which thus chops and cleaves, and is ready to fall one piece from another, must have the hoops forced down with good sound strokes of a mallet.

Secondly, that this accident served me for exercise to prepare me for worse, if I, who both by the benefit of fortune, and by the condition of my manners, hoped to be among the last, should happen to be one of the first assailed by this storm; instructing myself betimes to constrain my life, and fit it for a new state. The true liberty is to be able to do what a man will with himself. *Potentissimus est, qui se habet in potestate.*

He is most potent, who is master of himself. • Sen., Ep., 94

In an ordinary and quiet time, a man prepares himself for moderate and common accidents; but in the confusion wherein we have been for these thirty years, every Frenchman, whether in particular or in general, sees himself every hour upon the point of the total ruin and overthrow of his

fortune: by so much the more ought he to have his courage supplied with the strongest and most vigorous provisions. Let us thank fortune, that has not made us live in an effeminate, idle, and languishing age; some who could never have been so by other means, will be made famous by their misfortunes.

As I seldom read in histories the confusions of other states without regret that I was not present, the better to consider them, so does my curiosity make me in some sort please myself in seeing with my own eyes this notable spectacle of our public death, its form and symptoms; and since I cannot hinder it, I am content to have been destined to be present therein, and thereby to instruct myself.

So do we eagerly covet to see, though but in shadow and the fables of theaters, the pomp of tragic representations of human fortune.

'Tis not without compassion at what we hear, but we please ourselves in rousing our displeasure, by the rarity of these pitiable events. Nothing tickles that does not pinch. And good historians skip over, as stagnant water and dead sea, calm narrations, to occupy themselves with wars and seditions, which they know are most acceptable to the readers. I question whether I can decently confess with how small a sacrifice of its repose and tranquillity, I have passed over above the one half of my life amid the ruin of my country. I make my patience somewhat too cheap, in accidents that do not absolutely assail myself; and do not so much regard what they take from me, as what remains safe, both within and without. There is comfort in evading, one while this, another while that, of the evils that are levelled, at ourselves too, at last, but at present hurt others only about us; as also, that in matters of public interest, the more universally my affection is dispersed, the weaker it is: to which may be added, that it is half true: *Tantum ex publicis malis sentimus, quantum ad privatas res pertinet;* and that the health from which we fell was so ill, that itself relieves the regret we should have for it. It was health, but only in comparison with the sickness that has succeeded it: we are not fallen from any great height; the corruption and brigandage which are in dignity and office, seem to me the most insupportable: we are less injuriously rifled in a wood, than in a place of security. It was an universal juncture of particular members, each rotten in emulation of the others: and most of them with inveterate ulcers, that neither admitted nor required any cure.

We are only so far sensible of public evils, as they respect our private affairs; • Livy, 30.44

This convulsion, therefore, really more animated than pressed me, by the assistance of my conscience, which was not only at peace within itself, but elevated, and I did not find any reason to complain of myself. Also, as God never sends evils, any more than goods, absolutely pure to men, my health continued at that time more than usually good; and, as I can do nothing without it, there are few things that I cannot do with it. It afforded me means to rouse up all my faculties, and to lay my hand before the wound that would else, peradventure, have gone farther; and I experienced, in my patience, that I had some stand against fortune; and that it must be a great shock could throw me out of the saddle. I do not say this to provoke her to give me a more vigorous charge: I am her humble servant, and submit to her pleasure: let her be content, in God's name. Do you ask if I am sensible of her assaults? Yes, certainly. But, as

those who are possessed and oppressed with sorrow, sometimes suffer themselves, nevertheless, by intervals to taste a little pleasure, and are sometimes surprised with a smile, so have I so much power over myself, as to make my ordinary condition quiet and free from disturbing thoughts; yet I suffer myself, withal, by fits to be surprised with the stings of those unpleasing imaginations that assault me, whilst I am arming myself to drive them away, or at least to wrestle with them.

But behold another aggravation of the evil which befell me in the tail of the rest! both without doors and within I was assailed with a most violent plague, violent in comparison of all others: for as sound bodies are subject to more grievous maladies, forasmuch as they are not to be forced but by such, so my very healthful air, where no contagion, however near, in the memory of man, ever took footing, coming to be corrupted, produced strange effects:

Mista senum et juvenum densantur funera; nullum
Sæva caput Proserpina fugit;

Old and young were buried in mixed heaps. No one escaped cruel Proserpine. • Hor., Carm., 1.28.19

I had to suffer this pleasant condition, that the sight of my house was frightful to me; whatever I had there was without guard, and left to the mercy of any one who wished to take it. I myself, who am so hospitable, was in very great distress for a retreat for my family; a distracted family, frightful both to its friends and itself, and filling every place with horror where it attempted to settle, having to shift its abode so soon as anyone's finger began but to ache; all diseases are then concluded to be the plague, and people do not stay to examine whether they are so or no. And the mischief on it is that, according to the rules of art, in every danger that a man comes near, he must undergo a quarantine in fear of the evil, your imagination all the while tormenting you at pleasure, and turning even your health itself into a fever.

Yet all this would have much less affected me, had I not withal been compelled to be sensible of the sufferings of others, and miserably to serve six months together for a guide to this caravan; for I carry my own antidotes within myself, which are resolution and patience. Apprehension, which is particularly feared in this disease, does not much trouble me; and, if being alone, I should have been taken, it had been a less cheerless and more remote departure; 'tis a kind of death that I do not think of the worst sort; 'tis commonly short, stupid, without pain, and consoled by the public condition; without ceremony, without mourning, without a crowd. But as to the people about us, the hundredth part of them could not be saved:

Videas desertaque regna
Pastorum, et longe saltus lateque vacantes.

You would have seen the fields a desert, and everywhere forsaken groves. • Verg., G., 3.476

In this place my largest revenue is pure manual labor: what an hundred men plowed for me, lay a long time fallow.

But then, what example of resolution did we not see in the simplicity of all this people? Generally, every one renounced all care of life; the grapes, the principal wealth of the country, remained untouched upon the vines; every man indifferently prepared for and expected death, either to-night

or to-morrow, with a countenance and voice so far from fear, as if they had come to terms with this necessity, and that it was an universal and inevitable sentence. 'Tis always such; but how slender hold has the resolution of dying? The distance and difference of a few hours, the sole consideration of company, renders its apprehension various to us. Observe these people: by reason that they die in the same month, children, young people, and old, they are no longer astonished at it: they no longer lament. I saw some who were afraid of staying behind, as in a dreadful solitude; and I did not commonly observe any other solicitude among them, than that of sepulture; they were troubled to see the dead bodies scattered about the fields, at the mercy of the wild beasts, that presently flocked thither. How differing are the fancies of men! the Neorites, a nation subjected by Alexander, threw the bodies of their dead into the deepest and less frequented part of their woods, on purpose to have them there eaten; the only sepulture reputed happy among them. Some, who were yet in health, dug their own graves; others laid themselves down in them whilst alive; and a laborer of mine, in dying, with his hands and feet pulled the earth upon him. Was not this to nestle and settle himself to sleep at greater ease? A bravery in some sort like that of the Roman soldiers, who, after the battle of Cannae, were found with their heads thrust into holes in the earth, which they had made, and in suffocating themselves, with their own hands pulled the earth about their ears. In short, a whole province was, by the common usage, at once brought to a course, nothing inferior in undauntedness to the most studied and premeditated resolution.

Most of the instructions of science to encourage us herein have in them more of show than of force, and more of ornament than of effect. We have abandoned Nature, and will teach her what to do; teach her who so happily and so securely conducted us; and in the meantime, from the footsteps of her instruction, and that little which, by the benefit of ignorance, remains of her image imprinted in the life of this rustic rout of unpolished men, science is constrained every day to borrow patterns for her disciples of constancy, tranquillity and innocence. It is pretty to see, that these persons, full of so much fine knowledge, have to imitate this foolish simplicity, and this in the primary actions of virtue; and that our wisdom must learn even from beasts, the most profitable instructions in the greatest and most necessary concerns of our life; as, how we are to live and die, manage our property, love and bring up our children, maintain justice: a singular testimony of human infirmity; and that this reason we so handle at our pleasure, finding evermore some diversity and novelty, leaves in us no apparent trace of nature. Men have done with nature as perfumers with oils; they have sophisticated her with so many argumentations and far-fetched discourses, that she is become variable and particular to each, and has lost her proper, constant, and universal face; so that we must seek testimony from beasts, not subject to favor, corruption, or diversity of opinions. It is, indeed, true that even these themselves do not always go exactly in the path of nature, but wherein they swerve, it is so little that you may always see the track; as horses that are led, make many bounds and curvets, but'tis always at the length of the halter, and they still follow him that leads them; and as a young hawk takes its flight, but still under the restraint of its tether.

Exsilia, tormenta, bella, morbos, naufragia meditare, … ut nullo sis malo tiro. What good will this curiosity do us, to anticipate all the inconveniences of human nature, and to prepare ourselves with so much trouble against things which, peradventure, will never befall us? *Parem passis tristitiam facit, pati posse;* not only the blow, but the wind of the blow strikes us: or, like phrenetic people — for certainly it is a frenzy — to go immediately and whip yourself, because it may so fall out that Fortune may one day make you undergo it; and to put on your furred gown at Midsummer, because you will stand in need of it at Christmas! Throw yourselves, say they, into the experience of all the evils, the most extreme evils that can possibly befall you, and so be assured of them. On the contrary, the most easy and most natural way, would be to banish even the thoughts of them; they will not come soon enough; their true being will not continue with us long enough; our mind must lengthen and extend them; we must incorporate them in us beforehand, and there entertain them, as if they would not otherwise sufficiently press upon our senses. "We shall find them heavy enough when they come," says one of our masters, of none of the tender sects, but of the most severe; "in the meantime, favor thyself; believe what pleases thee best: what good will it do thee to anticipate thy ill fortune, to lose the present for fear of the future; and to make thyself miserable now, because thou art to be so in time?" These are his words. Science, indeed, does us one good office in instructing us exactly as to the dimensions of evils,

Meditate upon banishments, tortures, wars, diseases, and shipwrecks, that thou mayest not be a novice in any disaster. • Sen., Ep., 91 and 107

It troubles men as much that they may possibly suffer, as if they really did suffer; • Sen., Ep., 74

Curis acuens mortalia corda!

Sharpening mortals by care. • Verg., G., 1.23

'Twere pity that any part of their greatness should escape our sense and knowledge.

'Tis certain that, for the most part, the preparation for death has administered more torment than the thing itself. It was of old truly said, and by a very judicious author, *Minus afficit sensus fatigatio, quam cogitatio.*

Suffering itself less afflicts the senses than the apprehension of suffering. • Quint., Inst., 1.12

The sentiment of present death sometimes, of itself, animates us with a prompt resolution not to avoid a thing that is utterly inevitable: many gladiators have been seen in the olden time, who, after having fought timorously and ill, have courageously entertained death, offering their throats to the enemies' sword and bidding them despatch. The sight of future death requires a courage that is slow, and consequently hard to be got. If you know not how to die, never trouble yourself; nature will, at the time, fully and sufficiently instruct you: she will exactly do that business for you; take you no care—

Incertam frustra, mortales, funeris horam
Quæritis et qua sit mors aditura via. …

Mortals, in vain you seek to know the hour of death, and how it will come upon you. • Prop., 2.27.1

Pœna minor, certam subito perferre ruinam;
Quod timeas, gravius sustinuisse diu.

'Tis less painful to undergo sudden destruction: 'tis hard to bear that which you long fear. • Max., El., 1.277

We trouble life by the care of death, and death by the care of life: the one torments, the other frights us. It is not against death that we prepare, that is too momentary a thing; a quarter of an hour's suffering, without consequence, and without damage, does not deserve especial precepts: to say the truth, we prepare ourselves against the preparations of death.

Philosophy ordains that we should always have death before our eyes, to see and consider it before the time, and then gives us rules and precautions to provide that this foresight and thought do us no harm: just so do physicians, who throw us into diseases, to the end they may have whereon to employ their drugs and their art. If we have not known how to live, 'tis injustice to teach us how to die, and make the end difform from all the rest: if we have known how to live firmly and quietly, we shall know how to die so too. They may boast as much as they please, *Tota philosophorum vita, commentatio mortis est;* but I fancy that, though it be the end, it is not the aim of life; 'Tis its end, its extremity, but not nevertheless its object; it ought itself to be its own aim and design; its true study is to order, govern, and suffer itself. In the number of several other offices, that the general and principal chapter of Knowing how to live comprehends, is this article of Knowing how to die; and, did not our fears give it weight, one of the lightest too.

That the whole life of a philosopher is the meditation of his death; • Cic., Tusc., 2.30

To judge of them by utility and by the naked truth, the lessons of simplicity are not much inferior to those which learning teaches us: nay, quite the contrary. Men differ in sentiment and force; we must lead them to their own good according to their capacities and by various ways: *Quo me cumque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes*. I never saw any peasant among my neighbors cogitate with what countenance and assurance he should pass over his last hour; nature teaches him not to think of death till he is dying; and then he does it with a better grace than Aristotle, upon whom death presses with a double weight, both of itself and of so long a premeditation; and, therefore, it was the opinion of Caesar, that the least premeditated death was the easiest and the most happy. *Plus dolet quam necesse est, qui ante dolet, quam necesse est.* The sharpness of this imagination springs from our curiosity: 'tis thus we ever impede ourselves, desiring to anticipate and regulate natural prescripts. It is only for the doctors to dine worse for it, when in the best health, and to frown at the image of death; the common sort stand in need of no remedy or consolation, but just in the shock, and when the blow comes; and consider on it no more than just what they endure. Is it not then, as we say, that the stolidity and want of apprehension in the vulgar give them that patience in present evils, and that profound carelessness of future sinister accidents? That their souls, in being more gross and dull, are less penetrable and not so easily moved? If it be so, let us henceforth, in God's name, teach nothing but ignorance: 'tis the utmost fruit the sciences promise us, to which this stolidity so gently leads its disciples.

We have no want of good masters, interpreters of natural simplicity. Socrates shall be one; for, as I remember, he speaks something to this purpose to the judges who sat upon his life and death. "I am afraid, my masters, that if I entreat you not to put me to death, I shall confirm the charge of my accusers, which is, that I pretend to be wiser than others, as having some more secret knowledge of things that are above and below us. I have neither frequented nor known death, nor have ever seen any person that has tried its qualities, from whom to inform myself. Such as fear it, presuppose they know it; as for my part, I neither know what it is, nor what they do in the other world. Death is, peradventure, an indifferent thing; peradventure, a thing to be desired. 'Tis nevertheless to be believed, if it be a transmigration from one place to another, that it is a bettering of one's condition to go and live with so many great persons

deceased, and to be exempt from having any more to do with unjust and corrupt judges; if it be an annihilation of our being, 'tis yet a bettering of one's condition to enter into a long and peaceable night; we find nothing more sweet in life than quiet repose and a profound sleep, without dreams. The things that I know to be evil, as to injure one's neighbor, and to disobey one's superior, whether it be God or man, I carefully avoid: such as I do not know whether they be good or evil, I cannot fear them. If I am to die and leave you alive, the gods alone only know whether it will go better with you or with me. Wherefore, as to what concerns me, you may do as you shall think fit. But according to my method of advising just and profitable things, I say that you will do your consciences more right to set me at liberty, unless you see further into my cause than I do; and, judging according to my past actions, both public and private, according to my intentions, and according to the profit that so many of our citizens, both young and old, daily extract from my conversation, and the fruit that you all reap from me, you cannot more duly acquit yourselves toward my merit, than in ordering that, my poverty considered, I should be maintained at the Prytaneum, at the public expense, a thing that I have often known you, with less reason, grant to others. Do not impute it to obstinacy or disdain, that I do not, according to the custom, supplicate and go about to move you to commiseration. I have both friends and kindred, not being, as Homer says, begotten of wood or of stone, no more than others, who might well present themselves before you with tears and mourning, and I have three desolate children with whom to move you to compassion; but I should do a shame to our city at the age I am, and in the reputation of wisdom which is now charged against me, to appear in such an abject form. What would men say of the other Athenians? I have always admonished those who have frequented my lectures, not to redeem their lives by an unbecoming action; and in the wars of my country, at Amphipolis, Potidea, Delia, and other expeditions where I have been, I have effectually manifested how far I was from securing my safety by my shame. I should, moreover, compromise your duty, and should invite you to unbecoming things; for'tis not for my prayers to persuade you, but for the pure and solid reasons of justice. You have sworn to the gods to keep yourselves upright; and it would seem as if I suspected you, or would recriminate upon you that I do not believe that you are so; and I should testify against myself, not to believe them as I ought, mistrusting their conduct, and not purely committing my affair into their hands. I wholly rely upon them; and hold myself assured they will do in this what shall be most fit both for you and for me: good men, whether living or dead, have no reason to fear the gods."

Is not this an innocent child's pleading of an unimaginable loftiness, true, frank, and just, unexampled; and in what a necessity employed? Truly, he had very good reason to prefer it before that which the great orator Lysias had penned for him: admirably couched, indeed, in the judiciary style, but unworthy of so noble a criminal. Had a suppliant voice been heard out of the mouth of Socrates, that lofty virtue had struck sail in the height of its glory; and ought his rich and powerful nature to have committed her defense to art, and, in her highest proof, have renounced truth and simplicity, the ornaments of his speaking, to adorn and deck herself with the embellishments of figures, and the flourishes of a premeditated speech? He did very wisely, and like himself, not to corrupt the tenor of an incorrupt life, and so sacred an image of

Wherever the tempest drives me, there I abside as a guest. • Hor., Epist., 1.1.15

He grieves more than is necessary, who grieves before it is necessary. • Sen., Ep., 98

the human form, to spin out his decrepitude another year, and to betray the immortal memory of that glorious end. He owed his life not to himself, but to the example of the world; had it not been a public damage, that he should have concluded it after a lazy and obscure manner?

Assuredly, that careless and indifferent consideration of his death deserved that posterity should consider it so much the more, as indeed they did; and there is nothing so just in justice than that which fortune ordained for his recommendation; for the Athenians abominated all those who had been causers of his death to such a degree, that they avoided them as excommunicated persons, and looked upon everything as polluted that had been touched by them; no one would wash with them in the public baths, none would salute or own acquaintance with them: so that, at last, unable longer to support this public hatred, they hanged themselves.

If any one shall think that, among so many other examples that I had to choose out of in the sayings of Socrates for my present purpose, I have made an ill choice of this, and shall judge this discourse of his elevated above common conceptions, I must tell them that I have properly selected it; for I am of another opinion, and hold it to be a discourse, in rank and simplicity, much below and behind common conceptions. He represents, in an inartificial boldness and infantine security, the pure and first impression and ignorance of nature; for it is to be believed that we have naturally a fear of pain, but not of death, by reason of itself; 'tis a part of our being, and no less essential than living. To what end should nature have begotten in us a hatred to it and a horror of it, considering that it is of so great utility to her in maintaining the succession and vicissitude of her works? and that in this universal republic, it conduces more to birth and augmentation, than to loss or ruin?

Sic rerum summa novatur.

Thus all things are renewed. • Lucr., 2.74

Mille animas una necata dedit.

One death turns into a thousand lives. • Ov., Fast., 1.380

"The failing of one life is the passage to a thousand other lives." Nature has imprinted in beasts the care of themselves and of their conservation; they proceed so far as to be timorous of being worse, of hitting or hurting themselves, of our haltering and beating them, accidents subject to their sense and experience; but that we should kill them, they cannot fear, nor have they the faculty to imagine and conclude such a thing as death; it is said, indeed, that we see them not only cheerfully undergo it, horses for the most part neighing and swans singing when they die, but, moreover, seek it at need, of which elephants have given many examples.

But besides, is not the way of arguing which Socrates here makes use of, equally admirable both in simplicity and vehemence? Truly, it is much more easy to speak like Aristotle, and to live like Caesar, than to speak and live as Socrates did; there lies the extreme degree of perfection and difficulty; art cannot reach it. Now, our faculties are not so trained up; we do not try, we do not know them; we invest ourselves with those of others, and let our own lie idle.

As some one may say of me, that I have here only made a nosegay of foreign flowers, and have brought nothing of my own but the thread that ties them. In earnest, I have so far yielded to the public opinion, that those borrowed ornaments accompany me, but I would not have them totally cover and hide me; that is quite contrary to my design, who desire to make a show of nothing but what is my own, and what is my own by nature; and had I taken my own advice, I had at all hazards spoken purely alone. I more and more load myself every day, beyond my purpose and first method, upon the account of idleness and the humor of the age. If it misbecome me, as I believe it does, 'tis no matter; it may be of use to some others. Such there are who quote Plato and Homer, who never saw either of them; and I also have taken things out of places far enough distant from their source. Without pains and without learning, having a thousand volumes about me in the place where I write, I can presently borrow, if I please, from a dozen such scrap-gatherers, people about whom I do not much trouble myself, wherewith to trick up this treatise of Physiognomy; there needs no more but a preliminary epistle of the German cut to stuff me with illustrations. And so 'tis we go a begging for a ticklish glory, cheating the sottish world.

These lumber pies of commonplaces, wherewith so many furnish their studies, are of little use but to common subjects, and serve but to show us, and not to direct us: a ridiculous fruit of learning that Socrates so pleasantly discusses against Euthydemus. I have seen books made of things that were never either studied or understood; the author committing to several of his learned friends the examination of this and the other matter to compile it, contenting himself, for his share, with having projected the design, and by his industry to have tied together this faggot of unknown provisions; the ink and paper, at least, are his. This is to buy or borrow a book, and not to make one; 'tis to show men not that he can make a book, but that, whereof they may be in doubt, he cannot make one. A president, in my hearing, boasted that he had cluttered together two hundred and odd commonplaces in one of his judgments; in telling which, he deprived himself of the glory he had got by it: in my opinion, a pusillanimous and absurd vanity for such a subject and such a person. I do quite contrary; and among so many borrowed things, am glad if I can steal one, disguising and altering it for some new service; at the hazard of having it said that 'tis for want of understanding its natural use; I give it some particular address of my own hand, to the end it may not be so absolutely foreign. These set their thefts in show, and value themselves upon them, and so have more credit with the laws than I have: we naturalists think that there is a great and incomparable preference in the honor of invention over that of quotation.

If I would have spoken by learning, I had spoken sooner; I had written in a time nearer to my studies, when I had more wit and better memory; and should sooner have trusted to the vigor of that age than of this, would I have professed writing. And what if this gracious favor which Fortune has lately offered me upon the account of this work, had befallen me in that time of my life, instead of this, wherein 'tis equally desirable to possess, soon to be lost! Two of my acquaintance, great men in this faculty, have, in my opinion, lost half, in refusing to publish at forty years old, that they might stay till threescore. Maturity has its defects as well as green years, and worse; and old age is as unfit for this kind of business as

any other. He who commits his decrepitude to the press, plays the fool if he think to squeeze anything out thence, that does not relish of dreaming, dotage and drivelling; the mind grows costive and thick in growing old. I deliver my ignorance in pomp and state, and my learning meagrely and poorly; this accidentally and accessorily, that principally and expressly; and write specifically of nothing, but nothing, nor of any science but of that inscience. I have chosen a time when my life, which I am to give an account of, lies wholly before me; what remains has more to do with death; and of my death itself, should I find it a prating death, as others do, I would willingly give an account at my departure.

Socrates was a perfect exemplar in all great qualities, and I am vexed that he had so deformed a face and body as is said, and so unsuitable to the beauty of his soul, himself being so amorous and such an admirer of beauty: Nature did him wrong. There is nothing more probable than the conformity and relation of the body to the soul: *Ipsi animi magni refert, quali in corpore locati sint: multa enim é corpore existunt, quæ acuant mentem: multa quæ obtundant;* this refers to an unnatural ugliness and deformity of limbs; but we call ugliness also an unseemliness at first sight, which is principally lodged in the face, and disgusts us on very slight grounds, by the complexion, a spot, a rugged countenance, for some reasons often wholly inexplicable, in members nevertheless of good symmetry and perfect. The deformity, that clothed a very beautiful soul in La Boétie, was of this predicament: that superficial ugliness, which nevertheless is always the most imperious, is of least prejudice to the state of the mind, and of little certainty in the opinion of men. The other, which by a more proper name, is called deformity, more substantial, strikes deeper in. Not every shoe of smooth shining leather, but every well made, shows the shape of the foot within.

It is of great consequence in what bodies souls are placed, for many things spring from the body that may sharpen the mind, and many that may blunt and dull it; • Cic., Tusc., 1.33

As Socrates said of his, it betrayed equal ugliness in his soul, had he not corrected it by education; but in saying so, I hold he did but scoff, as his custom was; never so excellent a soul made itself.

I cannot often enough repeat how great an esteem I have for beauty, that potent and advantageous quality: he called it "a short tyranny," and Plato, "the privilege of nature." We have nothing that excels it in reputation; it has the first place in the commerce of men; it presents itself in the front; seduces and prepossesses our judgments with great authority and wonderful impression. Phryne had lost her cause in the hands of an excellent advocate, if, opening her robe, she had not corrupted her judges by the lustre of her beauty. And I find that Cyrus, Alexander, and Caesar, the three masters of the world, never neglected beauty in their greatest affairs; no more did the first Scipio. The same word in Greek signifies both fair and good; and the Holy Word often says good, when it means fair: I should willingly maintain the priority in good things, according to the song that Plato calls an idle thing, taken out of some ancient poet: "health, beauty, riches." Aristotle says that the right of command appertains to the beautiful; and that, when there is a person whose beauty comes near the images of the gods, veneration is equally due to him. To him who asked why people oftener and longer frequent the company of handsome persons: "That question," said he, "is only to be asked by the blind." Most of the philosophers, and the greatest, paid for their schooling, and acquired wisdom by the favor and mediation of their beauty.

Not only in the men that serve me, but also in the beasts, I consider it within two fingers'breadth of goodness. And yet I fancy that those features and moulds of face, and those lineaments, by which men guess at our internal complexions and our fortunes to come, is a thing that does not very directly and simply lie under the chapter of beauty and deformity, no more than every good odor and serenity of air promises health, nor all fog and stink, infection in a time of pestilence. Such as accuse ladies of contradicting their beauty by their manners, do not always hit right; for, in a face which is none of the best, there may dwell some air of probity and trust: as on the contrary, I have read, betwixt two beautiful eyes, menaces of a dangerous and malignant nature. There are favorable physiognomies, so that in a crowd of victorious enemies, you shall presently choose, among men you never saw before, one rather than another, to whom to surrender, and with whom to intrust your life; and yet not properly upon the consideration of beauty.

A person's look is but a feeble warranty; and yet it is something considerable too; and if I had to lash them, I would most severely scourge the wicked ones who belie and betray the promises that nature has planted in their foreheads; I should with greater severity punish malice under a mild and gentle aspect. It seems as if there were some lucky and some unlucky faces; and I believe there is some art in distinguishing affable from merely simple faces, severe from rugged, malicious from pensive, scornful from melancholic, and such other bordering qualities. There are beauties which are not only haughty, but sour, and others that are not only gentle but more than that, insipid; to prognosticate from them future events, is a matter that I shall leave undecided.

I have, as I have said elsewhere, as to my own concern, simply and implicitly embraced this ancient rule, "That we cannot fail in following Nature," and that the sovereign precept is to "conform ourselves to her." I have not, as Socrates did, corrected my natural composition by the force of reason, and have not in the least disturbed my inclination by art; I have let myself go as I came: I contend not; my two principal parts live, of their own accord, in peace and good intelligence, but my nurse's milk, thank God, was tolerably wholesome and good.

Shall I say this by the way? that I see, in greater esteem than'tis worth, and in use solely among ourselves, a certain image of scholastic probity, a slave to precepts, and fettered with hope and fear. I would have it such as that laws and religions should not make, but perfect and authorize it; that finds it has wherewithal to support itself without help, born and rooted in us from the seed of universal reason, imprinted in every man by nature. That reason which straightens Socrates from his vicious bend, renders him obedient to the gods and men of authority in his city; courageous in death, not because his soul is immortal, but because he is mortal. 'Tis a doctrine ruinous to all government, and much more hurtful than ingenious and subtle, which persuades the people that a religious belief is alone sufficient, and without conduct, to satisfy the divine justice. Use demonstrates to us a vast distinction betwixt devotion and conscience.

I have a favorable aspect, both in form and in interpretation;

Quid dixi, habere me? imo habui, Chreme. What did I say? that I have? No,

Heu! tantum attriti corporis ossa vides;

Chremes, I had. • Ter., Haut., 1.2.42

Alas! of a worn body thou but seest the bones. • Max., El., 1.238

and that makes a quite contrary show to that of Socrates. It has often befallen me, that upon the mere credit of my presence and air, persons who had no manner of knowledge of me, have put a very great confidence in me, whether in their own affairs or mine; and I have in foreign parts thence obtained singular and rare favors. But the two following examples are, peradventure, worth particular relation.

A certain person planned to surprise my house and me in it; his scheme was to come to my gates alone, and to be importunate to be let in. I knew him by name, and had fair reason to repose confidence in him, as being my neighbor and something related to me. I caused the gates to be opened to him, as I do to every one. There I found him, with every appearance of alarm, his horse panting, and all in a foam. He presently popped in my ears this flim-flam: "That, about half a league off, he had met with a certain enemy of his, whom I also knew, and had heard of their quarrel; that his enemy had given him a very brisk chase, and that having been surprised in disorder, and his party being too weak, he had fled to my gates for refuge; and that he was in great trouble for his followers, whom (he said) he concluded to be all either dead or taken." I innocently did my best to comfort, assure, and refresh him. Shortly after came four or five of his soldiers, who presented themselves in the same countenance and affright, to get in too; and after them more, and still more, very well mounted and armed, to the number of five and twenty or thirty, pretending that they had the enemy at their heels. This mystery began a little to awaken my suspicion; I was not ignorant what an age I lived in, how much my house might be envied, and I had several examples of others of my acquaintance to whom a mishap of this sort had happened. But, thinking there was nothing to be got by having begun to do a courtesy, unless I went through with it, and that I could not disengage myself from them without spoiling all, I let myself go the most natural and simple way, as I always do, and invited them all to come in. And in truth I am naturally very little inclined to suspicion and distrust; I willingly incline toward excuse and the gentlest interpretation; I take men according to the common order, and do not more believe in those perverse and unnatural inclinations, unless convinced by manifest evidence, than I do in monsters and miracles; and I am, moreover, a man who willingly commit myself to Fortune, and throw myself headlong into her arms; and I have hitherto found more reason to applaud than to blame myself for so doing, having ever found her more discreet about, and a greater friend to my affairs, than I am myself. There are some actions in my life whereof the conduct may justly be called difficult, or, if you please, prudent; of these, supposing the third part to have been my own, doubtless the other two-thirds were absolutely hers. We make, methinks, a mistake, in that we do not enough trust heaven with our affairs, and pretend to more from our own conduct than appertains to us; and therefore it is that our designs so often miscarry. Heaven is jealous of the extent that we attribute to the right of human prudence above its own, and cuts it all the shorter by how much the more we amplify it.

The last comers remained on horseback in my courtyard, whilst their leader, who was with me in the parlor, would not have his horse put up in the stable, saying he should immediately retire, so soon as he had news of

his men. He saw himself master of his enterprise, and nothing now remained but its execution. He has since several times said (for he was not ashamed to tell the story himself) that my countenance and frankness had snatched the treachery out of his hands. He again mounted his horse; his followers, who had their eyes intent upon him, to see when he would give the signal, being very much astonished to find him come away and leave his prey behind him.

Another time, relying upon some truce, just published in the army, I took a journey through a very ticklish country. I had not ridden far, but I was discovered, and two or three parties of horse, from various places, were sent out to seize me; one of them overtook me on the third day, and I was attacked by fifteen or twenty gentlemen in visors, followed at a distance by a band of foot soldiers. I was taken, withdrawn into the thick of a neighboring forest, dismounted, robbed, my trunks rifled, my money-box taken, and my horses and equipage divided among new masters. We had, in this copse, a very long contest about my ransom, which they set so high, that it was manifest I was not known to them. They were, moreover, in a very great debate about my life; and, in truth, there were various circumstances that clearly showed the danger I was in.

Tunc animis opus, Ænea, tunc pectore firmo.

Then, Aeneas, there was needed an undaunted courage. • Verg., Aen., 6.261

I still insisted upon the truce, too willing they should have the gain of what they had already taken from me, which was not to be despised, without promise of any other ransom. After two or three hours that we had been in this place, and that they had mounted me upon a pitiful jade that was not likely to run from them, and committed me to the guard of fifteen or twenty harquebusiers, and dispersed my servants to others, having given order that they should carry us away prisoners several ways, and I being already got some two or three musket-shots from the place,

Jam prece Pollucis, jam Castoris, implorata,

Having prayed for the aid of Castor and Pollux. • Catull., 66.65

behold a sudden and unexpected alteration; I saw the chief return to me with gentler language, making search among the troopers for my scattered property, and causing as much as could be recovered, to be restored to me, even to my money-box; but the best present they made was my liberty, for the rest did not much concern me at that time. The true cause of so sudden a change, and of this reconsideration, without any apparent impulse, and of so miraculous a repentance, in such a time, in a planned and deliberate enterprise, and become just by usage (for, at the first dash, I plainly confessed to them of what party I was, and whither I was going), truly, I do not yet rightly understand. The most prominent among them, who pulled off his visor and told me his name, repeatedly told me at the time, over and over again, that I owed my deliverance to my countenance, and the liberty and boldness of my speech, that rendered me unworthy of such a misadventure, and should secure me from its repetition. 'Tis possible that the Divine goodness willed to make use of this vain instrument for my preservation; and it, moreover, defended me the next day from other and worse ambushes, of which these my assailants had given me warning. The last of these two gentlemen is yet living, himself to tell the story; the first was killed not long ago.

If my face did not answer for me, if men did not read in my eyes and in my voice the innocence of intention, I had not lived so long without quarrels and without giving offense, seeing the indiscreet liberty I take to say, right or wrong, whatever comes into my head, and to judge so rashly of things. This way may, with reason, appear uncivil, and ill adapted to our way of conversation; but I have never met with any who judged it outrageous or malicious, or that took offense at my liberty, if he had it from my own mouth; words repeated have another kind of sound and sense. Nor do I hate any person; and I am so slow to offend, that I cannot do it, even upon the account of reason itself; and when occasion has required me to sentence criminals, I have rather chosen to fail in point of justice than to do it: *Ut magis peccari nolim, quam satis animi ad vindicanda peccata habeam*. Aristotle, 'tis said, was reproached for having been too merciful to a wicked man: "I was indeed," said he, "merciful to the man, but not to his wickedness." Ordinary judgments exasperate themselves to punishment by the horror of the fact: but it cools mine; the horror of the first murder makes me fear a second; and the deformity of the first cruelty makes me abhor all imitation of it. That may be applied to me, who am but a Knave of Clubs, which was said of Charillus, king of Sparta: "He cannot be good, seeing he is not evil even to the wicked." Or thus — for Plutarch delivers it both these ways, as he does a thousand other things, variously and contradictorily — "He must needs be good, because he is so even to the wicked." Even as in lawful actions, I dislike to employ myself, when for such as are displeased at it; so, to say the truth, in unlawful things, I do not make conscience enough of employing myself, when for such as are willing.

So that I had rather men should not commit faults, than that I should have the heart to condemn them. • Livy, 39.21

Notes

1 Montaigne provided his own translation above.

Montaigne's Sources

Catull.	Catullus, *Poems*
Cic., Nat. D.	Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*
Cic., Tusc.	Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*
Claud., Eu.	Claudian, *Against Eutropius*
Hor., Carm.	Horace, *Odes*
Hor., Epist.	Horace, *Epistles*
Livy	Livy, *History of Rome*
Luc.	Lucan, *Civil War*

Lucr.	Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*
Max., El.	Maximianus, *Elegies*
Ov., Fast.	Ovid, *Fasti*
Ov., Pont.	Ovid, *Ex Ponto*
Ov., Tri.	Ovid, *Tristia*
Prop.	Propertius, *Elegies*
Quint., Inst.	Quintilian, *Orator's Education*
Sen., Ep.	Seneca, *Epistles*
Ter., Haut.	Terence, *Heautontimorumenos*
Verg., Aen.	Virgil, *Æneid*
Verg., Ecl.	Virgil, *Eclogues*
Verg., G.	Virgil, *Georgics*