

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 37

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On the Resemblance of Children to Their Fathers

This faggoting up of so many divers pieces is so done that I never set pen to paper but when I have too much idle time, and never anywhere but at home; so that it is compiled after divers interruptions and intervals, occasions keeping me sometimes many months elsewhere. As to the rest, I never correct my first by any second conceptions; I, peradventure, may alter a word or so, but 'tis only to vary the phrase, and not to destroy my former meaning. I have a mind to represent the progress of my humors, and that every one may see each piece as it came from the forge. I could wish I had begun sooner, and had taken more notice of the course of my mutations. A servant of mine whom I employed to transcribe for me, thought he had got a prize by stealing several pieces from me, wherewith he was best pleased; but it is my comfort that he will be no greater a gainer than I shall be a loser by the theft.

I am grown older by seven or eight years since I began; nor has it been without same new acquisition: I have, in that time, by the liberality of years, been acquainted with the stone: their commerce and long converse do not well pass away without some such inconvenience. I could have been glad that of other infirmities age has to present long-lived men withal, it had chosen some one that would have been more welcome to me, for it could not possibly have laid upon me a disease for which, even from my infancy, I have had so great a horror; and it is, in truth, of all the accidents of old age, that of which I have ever been most afraid. I have often thought with myself that I went on too far, and that in so long a voyage I should at last run myself into some disadvantage; I perceived, and have often enough declared, that it was time to depart, and that life should be cut off in the sound and living part, according to the surgeon's rule in amputations; and that nature made him pay very strict usury who did not in due time pay the principal. And yet I was so far from being ready, that in the eighteen months' time or thereabout that I have been in this uneasy condition, I have so inured myself to it as to be content to live on in it; and have found wherein to comfort myself, and to hope: so much are men enslaved to their miserable being, that there is no condition so wretched they will not accept, provided they may live!

Hear Maecenas:

*Debilem facito manu,
Debilem pede, coxo,
Lubricos quate dentes;
Vita dum superest, bene est.*

Cripple my hand, foot, hip; shake out
my loose teeth: while there's life, 'tis
well. • SEN., EP., 101.11

And Tamerlane, with a foolish humanity, palliated the fantastic cruelty he exercised upon lepers, when he put all he could hear of to death, to deliver them, as he pretended, from the painful life they lived. For there was not one of them who would not rather have been thrice a leper than be not.

And Antisthenes the Stoic, being very sick, and crying out, "Who will deliver me from these evils?" Diogenes, who had come to visit him, "This," said he, presenting him a knife, "soon enough, if thou wilt." — "I do not mean from my life," he replied, "but from my sufferings."

The sufferings that only attack the mind, I am not so sensible of as most other men; and this partly out of judgment, for the world looks upon several things as dreadful or to be avoided at the expense of life, that are almost indifferent to me: partly, through a dull and insensible complexion I have in accidents which do not point-blank hit me; and that insensibility I look upon as one of the best parts of my natural condition; but essential and corporeal pains I am very sensible of. And yet, having long since foreseen them, though with a sight weak and delicate and softened with the long and happy health and quiet that God has been pleased to give me the greatest part of my time, I had in my imagination fancied them so insupportable, that, in truth, I was more afraid than I have since found I had cause: by which I am still more fortified in this belief, that most of the faculties of the soul, as we employ them, more trouble the repose of life than they are any way useful to it.

I am in conflict with the worst, the most sudden, the most painful, the most mortal, and the most irremediable of all diseases; I have already had the trial of five or six very long and very painful fits; and yet I either flatter myself, or there is even in this state what is very well to be endured by a man who has his soul free from the fear of death, and of the menaces, conclusions, and consequences which physic is ever thundering in our ears; but the effect even of pain itself is not so sharp and intolerable as to put a man of understanding into rage and despair. I have at least this advantage by my stone, that what I could not hitherto prevail upon myself to resolve upon, as to reconciling and acquainting myself with death, it will perfect; for the more it presses upon and importunes me, I shall be so much the less afraid to die. I had already gone so far as only to love life for life's sake, but my pain will dissolve this intelligence; and God grant that in the end, should the sharpness of it be once greater than I shall be able to bear, it does not throw me into the other no less vicious extreme to desire and wish to die!

Summum nec metuas diem, nec optes.

Neither to wish, nor fear to die. •
MART., 10.7

they are two passions to be feared; but the one has its remedy much nearer at hand than the other.

As to the rest, I have always found the precept that so rigorously enjoins a resolute countenance and disdainful and indifferent comportment in the toleration of infirmities to be ceremonial. Why should philosophy, which only has respect to life and effects, trouble itself about these external appearances? Let us leave that care to actors and masters of rhetoric, who set so great a value upon our gestures. Let her allow this vocal frailty to disease, if it be neither cordial nor stomachic, and permit the ordinary ways of expressing grief by sighs, sobs, palpitations, and turning pale, that nature has put out of our power; provided the courage be undaunted, and the tones not expressive of despair, let her be satisfied. What matter the wringing of our hands, if we do not wring our thoughts? She forms us for ourselves, not for others; to be, not to seem; let her be satisfied with governing our understanding, which she has taken upon her the care of instructing; that, in the fury of the colic, she maintain the soul in a condition to know itself, and to follow its accustomed way, contending with, and enduring, not meanly truckling under pain; moved and heated, not subdued and conquered, in the contention; capable of discourse and other things, to a certain degree.

In such extreme accidents, 'tis cruelty to require so exact a composedness. 'Tis no great matter that we make a wry face, if the mind plays its part well: if the body find itself relieved by complaining let it complain: if agitation ease it, let it tumble and toss at pleasure; if it seem to find the disease evaporate (as some physicians hold that it helps women in delivery) in making loud outcries, or if this do but divert its torments, let it roar as it will. Let us not command this voice to sally, but stop it not. Epicurus, not only forgives his sage for crying out in torments, but advises him to it. *Pugiles etiam, quum feriant, in iactandis cæstibus ingemiscunt, quia profundenda voce omne corpus intenditur, venitque plaga vehementior.* We have enough to do to deal with the disease, without troubling ourselves with these superfluous rules. Which I say in excuse of those whom we ordinarily see impatient in the assaults of this malady; for as to what concerns myself, I have passed it over hitherto with a little better countenance, and contented myself with groaning without roaring out; not, nevertheless, that I put any great constraint upon myself to maintain this exterior decorum, for I make little account of such an advantage: I allow herein as much as the pain requires; but either my pains are not so excessive, or I have more than ordinary patience. I complain, I confess, and am a little impatient in a very sharp fit, but I do not arrive to such a degree of despair as he who with,

*Eiulatu, questu, gemitu, fremitibus
Resonando, multum flebiles voces refert.*

I try myself in the depth of my suffering, and have always found that I was in a capacity to speak, think, and give a rational answer as well as at any other time, but not so firmly, being troubled and interrupted by the pain. When I am looked upon by my visitors to be in the greatest torment, and that they therefore forbear to trouble me, I often essay my own strength, and myself set some discourse on foot, the most remote I can contrive

Boxers also, when they strike, groan in the act, because with the strength of voice the whole body is carried, and the blow comes with the greater vehemence. • CIC., TUSC., 2.23

Howling, roaring, groaning with a thousand noises, expressing his torment in a dismal voice. • CIC., FIN., 2.29

from my present condition. I can do anything upon a sudden endeavor, but it must not continue long.

Oh, what pity 'tis I have not the faculty of that dreamer in Cicero, who dreaming he was lying with a wench, found he had discharged his stone in the sheets. My pains strangely deaden my appetite that way.

In the intervals from this excessive torment, when my ureters only languish without any great dolor, I presently feel myself in my wonted state, forasmuch as my soul takes no other alarm but what is sensible and corporal, which I certainly owe to the care I have had of preparing myself by meditation against such accidents,

*laborum,
Nulla mihi nova nunc facies inopinave surgit;
Omnia præcepi, atque animo mecum ante peregi.*

I am, however, a little roughly handled for an apprentice, and with a sudden and sharp alteration, being fallen in an instant from a very easy and happy condition of life into the most uneasy and painful that can be imagined. For besides that it is a disease very much to be feared in itself, it begins with me after a more sharp and severe manner than it is used to do with other men. My fits come so thick upon me that I am scarcely ever at ease; yet I have hitherto kept my mind so upright that, provided I can still continue it, I find myself in a much better condition of life than a thousand others, who have no fewer nor other disease but what they create to themselves for want of meditation.

There is a certain sort of crafty humility that springs from presumption, as this, for example, that we confess our ignorance in many things, and are so courteous as to acknowledge that there are in the works of nature some qualities and conditions that are imperceptible to us, and of which our understanding cannot discover the means and causes; by this so honest and conscientious declaration we hope to obtain that people shall also believe us as to those that we say we do understand. We need not trouble ourselves to seek out foreign miracles and difficulties; methinks, among the things that we ordinarily see, there are such incomprehensible wonders as surpass all difficulties of miracles. What a wonderful thing it is that the drop of seed from which we are produced should carry in itself the impression not only of the bodily form, but even of the thoughts and inclinations of our fathers! Where can that drop of fluid matter contain that infinite number of forms?

And how can they carry on these resemblances with so precarious and irregular a process that the son shall be like his great-grandfather, the nephew like his uncle? In the family of Lepidus at Rome there were three, not successively but by intervals, who were born with the same eye covered with a cartilage. At Thebes there was a race that carried from their mother's womb the form of the head of a lance, and he who was not born so was looked upon as illegitimate. And Aristotle says that in a certain nation, where the women were in common, they assigned the children to their fathers by their resemblance.

No new shape of suffering can arise new or unexpected; I have anticipated all, and acted them over beforehand in my mind. • VERG.,
AEN., 6.103

'Tis to be believed that I derive this infirmity from my father, for he died wonderfully tormented with a great stone in his bladder; he was never sensible of his disease till the sixty-seventh year of his age; and before that had never felt any menace or symptoms of it, either in his reins, sides, or any other part, and had lived, till then, in a happy, vigorous state of health, little subject to infirmities, and he continued seven years after in this disease, dragging on a very painful end of life. I was born about five-and-twenty years before his disease seized him, and in the time of his most flourishing and healthful state of body, his third child in order of birth: where could his propension to this malady lie lurking all that while? And he being then so far from the infirmity, how could that small part of his substance wherewith he made me, carry away so great an impression for its share? and how so concealed, that till five-and-forty years after, I did not begin to be sensible of it? being the only one to this hour, among so many brothers and sisters, and all by one mother, that was ever troubled with it. He that can satisfy me in this point, I will believe him in as many other miracles as he pleases; always provided that, as their manner is, he do not give me a doctrine much more intricate and fantastic than the thing itself for current pay.

Let the physicians a little excuse the liberty I take, for by this same infusion and fatal insinuation it is that I have received a hatred and contempt of their doctrine; the antipathy I have against their art is hereditary. My father lived three-score and fourteen years, my grandfather sixty-nine, my great-grandfather almost fourscore years, without ever tasting any sort of physic; and, with them, whatever was not ordinary diet, was instead of a drug. Physic is grounded upon experience and examples: so is my opinion. And is not this an express and very advantageous experience. I do not know that they can find me in all their records three that were born, bred, and died under the same roof, who have lived so long by their conduct. They must here of necessity confess, that if reason be not, fortune at least is on my side, and with physicians fortune goes a great deal further than reason. Let them not take me now at a disadvantage; let them not threaten me in the subdued condition wherein I now am; that were treachery. In truth, I have enough the better of them by these domestic examples, that they should rest satisfied. Human things are not usually so constant; it has been two hundred years, save eighteen, that this trial has lasted, for the first of them was born in the year 1402: 'tis now, indeed, very good reason that this experience should begin to fail us. Let them not, therefore, reproach me with the infirmities under which I now suffer; is it not enough that I for my part have lived seven-and-forty years in good health? though it should be the end of my career; 'tis of the longer sort.

My ancestors had an aversion to physic by some occult and natural instinct; for the very sight of drugs was loathsome to my father. The Seigneur de Gaujac, my uncle by the father's side, a churchman, and a valetudinary from his birth, and yet who made that crazy life hold out to sixty-seven years, being once fallen into a furious fever, it was ordered by the physicians he should be plainly told that if he would not make use of help (for so they call that which is very often an obstacle), he would infallibly be a dead man. That good man, though terrified with this

dreadful sentence, yet replied, "I am then a dead man." But God soon after made the prognostic false.

The last of the brothers — there were four of them — and by many years the last, the Sieur de Bussaguet, was the only one of the family who made use of medicine, by reason, I suppose, of the concern he had with the other arts, for he was a councillor in the court of Parliament, and it succeeded so ill with him, that being in outward appearance of the strongest constitution, he yet died long before any of the rest, save the Sieur de Saint Michel.

'Tis possible I may have derived this natural antipathy to physic from them; but had there been no other consideration in the case, I would have endeavored to have overcome it; for all these conditions that spring in us without reason, are vicious; 'tis a kind of disease that we should wrestle with. It may be I had naturally this propension; but I have supported and fortified it by arguments and reasons which have established in me the opinion I am of. For I also hate the consideration of refusing physic for the nauseous taste. I should hardly be of that humor who hold health to be worth purchasing by all the most painful cauteries and incisions that can be applied.

And, with Epicurus, I conceive that pleasures are to be avoided, if greater pains be the consequence, and pains to be coveted, that will terminate in greater pleasures.

Health is a precious thing, and the only one, in truth, meriting that a man should lay out, not only his time, sweat, labor, and goods, but also his life itself to obtain it; forasmuch as, without it, life is wearisome and injurious to us: pleasure, wisdom, learning, and virtue, without it, wither away and vanish; and to the most labored and solid discourses that philosophy would imprint in us to the contrary, we need no more but oppose the image of Plato being struck with an epilepsy or apoplexy; and, in this presupposition, to defy him to call the rich faculties of his soul to his assistance. All means that conduce to health can neither be too painful nor too dear to me. But I have some other appearances that make me strangely suspect all this merchandise. I do not deny but that there may be some art in it, that there are not among so many works of Nature, things proper for the conservation of health: that is most certain.

I very well know there are some simples that moisten, and others that dry; I experimentally know that radishes are windy, and senna-leaves purging; and several other such experiences I have, as that mutton nourishes me, and wine warms me: and Solon said "that eating was physic against the malady hunger." I do not disapprove the use we make of things the earth produces, nor doubt, in the least, of the power and fertility of Nature, and of its application to our necessities: I very well see that pikes and swallows live by her laws; but I mistrust the inventions of our mind, our knowledge and art, to countenance which, we have abandoned Nature and her rules, and wherein we keep no bounds nor moderation.

As we call the piling up of the first laws that fall into our hands justice, and their practice and dispensation very often foolish and very unjust; and as

those who scoff at and accuse it, do not, nevertheless, blame that noble virtue itself, but only condemn the abuse and profanation of that sacred title; so in physic I very much honor that glorious name, its propositions, its promises, so useful for the service of mankind; but the ordinances it foists upon us, betwixt ourselves, I neither honor nor esteem.

In the first place, experience makes me dread it; for among all my acquaintance, I see no people so soon sick, and so long before they are well, as those who take much physic; their very health is altered and corrupted by their frequent prescriptions. Physicians are not content to deal only with the sick, but they will moreover corrupt health itself, for fear men should at any time escape their authority. Do they not, from a continual and perfect health, draw the argument of some great sickness to ensue? I have been sick often enough, and have always found my sicknesses easy enough to be supported (though I have made trial of almost all sorts), and as short as those of any other, without their help, or without swallowing their ill-tasting doses. The health I have is full and free, without other rule or discipline than my own custom and pleasure. Every place serves me well enough to stay in, for I need no other conveniences, when I am sick, than what I must have when I am well. I never disturb myself that I have no physician, no apothecary, nor any other assistance, which I see most other sick men more afflicted at than they are with their disease. What! Do the doctors themselves show us more felicity and duration in their own lives, that may manifest to us some apparent effect of their skill?

There is not a nation in the world that has not been many ages without physic; and these the first ages, that is to say, the best and most happy; and the tenth part of the world knows nothing of it yet; many nations are ignorant of it to this day, where men live more healthful and longer than we do here, and even among us the common people live well enough without it. The Romans were six hundred years before they received it; and after having made trial of it, banished it from the city at the instance of Cato the Censor, who made it appear how easy it was to live without it, having himself lived fourscore and five years, and kept his wife alive to an extreme old age, not without physic, but without a physician: for everything that we find to be healthful to life may be called physic. He kept his family in health, as Plutarch says if I mistake not, with hare's milk; as Pliny reports, that the Arcadians cured all manner of diseases with that of a cow; and Herodotus says, the Lybians generally enjoy rare health, by a custom they have, after their children are arrived to four years of age, to burn and cauterize the veins of their head and temples, by which means they cut off all defluxions of rheum for their whole lives. And the country people of our province make use of nothing, in all sorts of distempers, but the strongest wine they can get, mixed with a great deal of saffron and spice, and always with the same success.

And to say the truth, of all this diversity and confusion of prescriptions, what other end and effect is there after all, but to purge the belly? which a thousand ordinary simples will do as well.

And I do not know whether such evacuations be so much to our advantage as they pretend, and whether nature does not require a residence of her excrements to a certain proportion, as wine does of its lees to keep it alive: you often see healthful men fall into vomitings and fluxes of the belly by some extrinsic accident, and make a great evacuation of excrements, without any preceding need, or any following benefit, but rather with hurt to their constitution.

'Tis from the great Plato, that I lately learned, that of three sorts of motions which are natural to us, purging is the worst, and that no man, unless he be a fool, ought to take anything to that purpose but in the extremest necessity. Men disturb and irritate the disease by contrary oppositions; it must be the way of living that must gently dissolve, and bring it to its end. The violent gripings and contest betwixt the drug and the disease are ever to our loss, since the combat is fought within ourselves, and that the drug is an assistant not to be trusted, being in its own nature an enemy to our health, and by trouble having only access into our condition. Let it alone a little; the general order of things that takes care of fleas and moles, also takes care of men, if they will have the same patience that fleas and moles have, to leave it to itself. 'Tis to much purpose we cry out *bihore*,¹ 'tis a way to make us hoarse, but not to hasten the matter. 'Tis a proud and uncompassionate order: our fears, our despair displease and stop it from, instead of inviting it to, our relief; it owes its course to the disease, as well as to health; and will not suffer itself to be corrupted in favor of the one to the prejudice of the other's right, for it would then fall into disorder. Let us, in God's name, follow it; it leads those that follow, and those who will not follow, it drags along, both their fury and physic together. Order a purge for your brain, it will there be much better employed than upon your stomach.

One asking a Lacedaemonian what had made him live so long, he made answer, "the ignorance of physic"; and the Emperor Hadrian continually exclaimed as he was dying, that the crowd of physicians had killed him.

A bad wrestler turned physician: "Courage," says Diogenes to him; "thou hast done well, for now thou will throw those who have formerly thrown thee."

But they have this advantage, according to Nicocles, that the sun gives light to their success and the earth covers their failures. And, besides, they have a very advantageous way of making use of all sorts of events: for what fortune, nature, or any other cause (of which the number is infinite), products of good and healthful in us, it is the privilege of physic to attribute to itself; all the happy successes that happen to the patient, must be thence derived; the accidents that have cured me, and a thousand others, who do not employ physicians, physicians usurp to themselves: and as to ill accidents, they either absolutely disown them, in laying the fault upon the patient, by such frivolous reasons as they are never at a loss for; as "he lay with his arms out of bed," or "he was disturbed with the rattling of a coach;"

*rhedarum transitus arcto
Vicorum inflexu;*

The passage of the wheels in the
narrow turning of the street. • JUV.,

or “somebody had set open the casement,” or “he had lain upon his left side,” or “he had some disagreeable fancies in his head”: in sum, a word, a dream, or a look, seems to them excuse sufficient wherewith to palliate their own errors: or, if they so please, they even make use of our growing worse, and do their business in this way which can never fail them: which is by buzzing us in the ear, when the disease is more inflamed by their medicaments, that it had been much worse but for those remedies; he, whom from an ordinary cold they have thrown into a double tertian-ague, had but for them been in a continued fever. They do not much care what mischief they do, since it turns to their own profit. In earnest, they have reason to require a very favorable belief from their patients; and, indeed, it ought to be a very easy one, to swallow things so hard to be believed.

3.236

Plato said very well, that physicians were the only men who might lie at pleasure, since our health depends upon the vanity and falsity of their promises.

Aesop, a most excellent author, and of whom few men discover all the graces, pleasantly represents to us the tyrannical authority physicians usurp over poor creatures, weakened and subdued by sickness and fear, when he tells us, that a sick person, being asked by his physician what operation he found of the potion he had given him: “I have sweated very much,” says the sick man. “That’s good,” says the physician. Another time, having asked how he felt himself after his physic: “I have been very cold, and have had a great shivering upon me,” said he. “That is good,” replied the physician. After the third potion, he asked him again how he did: “Why, I find myself swollen and puffed up,” said he, “as if I had a dropsy.” — “That is very well,” said the physician. One of his servants coming presently after to inquire how he felt himself, “Truly, friend,” said he, “with being too well I am about to die.”

There was a more just law in Egypt, by which the physician, for the three first days, was to take charge of his patient at the patient’s own risk and cost; but, those three days being past, it was to be at his own. For what reason is it that their patron, Aesculapius, should be struck with thunder for restoring Hippolitus from death to life,

*Nam Pater omnipotens, aliquem indignatus ab umbris
Mortalem infernis ad lumina surgere vitæ,
Ipse repertorem medicinæ talis, et artis
Fulmine Phæbigenam stygias detrusit ad undas;*

Then the Almighty Father, offended
that any mortal should rise to the
light of life from the infernal shades,
struck the son of Phoebus with his
forked lightning to the Stygian lake; •
VERG., AEN., 7.770

and his followers be pardoned, who send so many souls from life to death?

A physician, boasting to Nicocles that his art was of great authority: “It is so, indeed,” said Nicocles, “that can with impunity kill so many people.”

As to what remains, had I been of their counsel, I would have rendered my discipline more sacred and mysterious; they begun well, but they have not ended so. It was a good beginning to make gods and daemons the authors of their science, and to have used a peculiar way of speaking and writing,

notwithstanding that philosophy concludes it folly to persuade a man to his own good by an unintelligible way:

*Ut si quis medicus imperet, ut sumat:
Terrigenam, herbigradam, domiportam, sanguine cassam.*

As if a doctor prescribed to take a
grass walking, house carrying, blood
lacking, ground creature.² • CIC.,
DIV., 2.133

It was a good rule in their art, and that accompanies all other vain, fantastic, and supernatural arts, that the patient's belief should prepossess them with good hope and assurance of their effects and operation: a rule they hold to that degree, as to maintain that the most inexpert and ignorant physician is more proper for a patient who has confidence in him, than the most learned and experienced whom he is not so acquainted with. Nay, even the very choice of most of their drugs is in some sort mysterious and divine; the left foot of a tortoise, the urine of a lizard, the dung of an elephant, the liver of a mole, blood drawn from under the right wing of a white pigeon; and for us who have the stone (so scornfully they use us in our miseries) the excrement of rats beaten to powder, and such like trash and fooleries which rather carry a face of magical enchantment than of any solid science. I omit the odd number of their pills, the destination of certain days and feasts of the year, the superstition of gathering their simples at certain hours, and that so austere and very wise countenance and carriage which Pliny himself so much derides. But they have, as I said, failed in that they have not added to this fine beginning the making their meetings and consultations more religious and secret, where no profane person should have admission, no more than in the secret ceremonies of Aesculapius; for by the reason of this it falls out that their irresolution, the weakness of their arguments, divinations and foundations, the sharpness of their disputes, full of hatred, jealousy, and self-consideration, coming to be discovered by every one, a man must be marvellously blind not to see that he runs a very great hazard in their hands. Who ever saw one physician approve of another's prescription, without taking something away, or adding something to it? by which they sufficiently betray their tricks, and make it manifest to us that they therein more consider their own reputation, and consequently their profit, than their patient's interest. He was a much wiser man of their tribe, who of old gave it as a rule, that only one physician should undertake a sick person; for if he do nothing to purpose, one single man's default can bring no great scandal upon the art of medicine; and, on the contrary, the glory will be great if he happen to have success; whereas, when there are many, they at every turn bring a disrepute upon their calling, forasmuch as they oftener do hurt than good. They ought to be satisfied with the perpetual disagreement which is found in the opinions of the principal masters and ancient authors of this science, which is only known to men well read, without discovering to the vulgar the controversies and various judgments which they still nourish and continue among themselves.

Will you have one example of the ancient controversy in physic? Herophilus lodges the original cause of all diseases in the humors; Erasistratus, in the blood of the arteries; Asclepiades, in the invisible atoms of the pores; Alcmaeon, in the exuberance or defect of our bodily strength; Diocles, in the inequality of the elements of which the body is composed, and in the quality of the air we breathe; Strato, in the

abundance, crudity, and corruption of the nourishment we take; and Hippocrates lodges it in the spirits. There is a certain friend of theirs, whom they know better than I, who declares upon this subject, "that the most important science in practice among us, as that which is intrusted with our health and conservation, is, by ill luck, the most uncertain, the most perplexed, and agitated with the greatest mutations." There is no great danger in our mistaking the height of the sun, or the fraction of some astronomical supputation; but here, where our whole being is concerned, 'tis not wisdom to abandon ourselves to the mercy of the agitation of so many contrary winds.

Before the Peloponnesian war there was no great talk of this science. Hippocrates brought it into repute; whatever he established, Chrysippus overthrew; after that, Erasistratus, Aristotle's grandson, overthrew what Chrysippus had written; after these, the Empirics started up, who took a quite contrary way to the ancients in the management of this art; when the credit of these began a little to decay, Herophilus set another sort of practice on foot, which Asclepiades in turn stood up against, and overthrew; then, in their turn, the opinions first of Themiso, and then of Musa, and after that those of Vectius Valens, a physician famous through the intelligence he had with Messalina, came in vogue; the empire of physic in Nero's time was established in Thessalus, who abolished and condemned all that had been held till his time; this man's doctrine was refuted by Crinas of Marseille, who first brought all medicinal operations under the Ephemerides and motions of the stars, and reduced eating, sleeping, and drinking to hours that were most pleasing to Mercury and the moon; his authority was soon after supplanted by Charinus, a physician of the same city of Marseille, a man who not only controverted all the ancient methods of physic, but moreover the usage of hot baths, that had been generally and for so many ages in common use; he made men bathe in cold water, even in winter, and plunged his sick patients in the natural waters of streams. No Roman till Pliny's time had ever vouchsafed to practise physic; that office was only performed by Greeks and foreigners, as 'tis now among us French, by those who sputter Latin; for, as a very great physician says, we do not easily accept the medicine we understand, no more than we do the drugs we ourselves gather. If the nations whence we fetch our guaiacum, sarsaparilla, and China wood, have physicians, how great a value must we imagine, by the same recommendation of strangeness, rarity, and dear purchase, do they set upon our cabbage and parsley? for who would dare to contemn things so far fetched, and sought out at the hazard of so long and dangerous a voyage? Since these ancient mutations in physic, there have been infinite others down to our own times, and, for the most part, mutations entire and universal, as those, for example, produced by Paracelsus, Fioravanti, and Argentier; for they, as I am told, not only alter one recipe, but the whole contexture and rules of the body of physic, accusing all others of ignorance and imposition who have practised before them. At this rate, in what a condition the poor patient must be, I leave you to judge.

If we were even assured that, when they make a mistake, that mistake of theirs would do us no harm, though it did us no good, it were a reasonable

bargain to venture the making ourselves better without any danger of being made worse.

Aesop tells a story, that one who had bought a Morisco slave, believing that his black complexion had arrived by accident and the ill usage of his former master, caused him to enter with great care into a course of baths and potions: it happened that the Moor was nothing amended in his tawny complexion, but he wholly lost his former health.

How often do we see physicians impute the death of their patients to one another? I remember that some years ago there was an epidemical disease, very dangerous and for the most part mortal, that raged in the towns about us: the storm being over which had swept away an infinite number of men, one of the most famous physicians of all the country, presently after published a book upon that subject, wherein, upon better thoughts, he confesses that the letting blood in that disease was the principal cause of so many mishaps. Moreover, their authors hold that there is no physic that has not something hurtful in it. And if even those of the best operation in some measure offend us, what must those do that are totally misapplied?

For my own part, though there were nothing else in the case, I am of opinion, that to those who loathe the taste of physic, it must needs be a dangerous and prejudicial endeavor to force it down at so incommodious a time, and with so much aversion, and believe that it marvellously distempers a sick person at a time when he has so much need of repose. And more over, if we but consider the occasions upon which they usually ground the cause of our diseases, they are so light and nice, that I thence conclude a very little error in the dispensation of their drugs may do a great deal of mischief.

Now, if the mistake of a physician be so dangerous, we are in but a scurvy condition; for it is almost impossible but he must often fall into those mistakes: he had need of too many parts, considerations, and circumstances, rightly to level his design: he must know the sick person's complexion, his temperament, his humors, inclinations, actions, nay, his very thoughts and imaginations; he must be assured of the external circumstances, of the nature of the place, the quality of the air and season, the situation of the planets, and their influences: he must know in the disease, the causes, prognostics, affections, and critical days; in the drugs, the weight, the power of working, the country, figure, age, and dispensation, and he must know how rightly to proportion and mix them together, to beget a just and perfect symmetry; wherein if there be the least error, if among so many springs there be but any one out of order, 'tis enough to destroy us. God knows with how great difficulty most of these things are to be understood: for (for example) how shall the physician find out the true sign of the disease, every disease being capable of an infinite number of indications? How many doubts and controversies have they among themselves upon the interpretation of urines? otherwise, whence should the continual debates we see among them about the knowledge of the disease proceed? how could we excuse the error they so oft fall into, of taking fox for marten? In the diseases I have had, though there were ever so little difficulty in the case, I never found three of one opinion: which I

instance, because I love to introduce examples wherein I am myself concerned. A gentleman at Paris was lately cut for the stone by order of the physicians, in whose bladder, being accordingly so cut, there was found no more stone than in the palm of his hand; and in the same place a bishop, who was my particular friend, having been earnestly pressed by the majority of the physicians whom he consulted, to suffer himself to be cut, to which also, upon their word, I used my interest to persuade him, when he was dead and opened, it appeared that he had no malady but in the kidneys. They are least excusable for any error in this disease, by reason that it is in some sort palpable; and 'tis thence that I conclude surgery to be much more certain, by reason that it sees and feels what it does, and so goes less upon conjecture; whereas the physicians have no *speculum matricis*, by which to examine our brains, lungs, and liver.

Even the very promises of physic are incredible in themselves; for, having to provide against divers and contrary accidents that often afflict us at one and the same time, and that have almost a necessary relation, as the heat of the liver and the coldness of the stomach, they will needs persuade us, that of their ingredients one will heat the stomach and the other will cool the liver: one has its commission to go directly to the kidneys, nay, even to the bladder, without scattering its operations by the way, and is to retain its power and virtue through all those turns and meanders, even to the place to the service of which it is designed, by its own occult property this will dry the brain; that will moisten the lungs. Of all this bundle of things having mixed up a potion, is it not a kind of madness to imagine or to hope that these differing virtues should separate themselves from one another in this mixture and confusion, to perform so many various errands? I should very much fear that they would either lose or change their tickets, and disturb one another's quarters. And who can imagine but that, in this liquid confusion, these faculties must corrupt, confound, and spoil one another? And is not the danger still more when the making up of this medicine is entrusted to the skill and fidelity of still another, to whose mercy we again abandon our lives?

As we have doublet and breeches-makers, distinct trades, to clothe us, and are so much the better fitted, seeing that each of them meddles only with his own business, and has less to trouble his head with than the tailor who undertakes all; and as in matter of diet, great persons, for their better convenience, and to the end they may be better served, have cooks for the different offices, this for soups and potages, that for roasting, instead of which if one cook should undertake the whole service, he could not so well perform it; so also as to the cure of our maladies. The Egyptians had reason to reject this general trade of physician, and to divide the profession: to each disease, to each part of the body, its particular workman; for that part was more properly and with less confusion cared for, seeing the person looked to nothing else. Ours are not aware that he who provides for all, provides for nothing; and that the entire government of this microcosm is more than they are able to undertake. Whilst they were afraid of stopping a dysentery, lest they should put the patient into a fever, they killed me a friend, who was worth more than the whole of them. They counterpoise their own divinations with the present evils; and because they will not cure

the brain to the prejudice of the stomach, they injure both with their dissident and tumultuary drugs.

As to the variety and weakness of the rationale of this art, they are more manifest in it than in any other art; aperitive medicines are proper for a man subject to the stone, by reason that opening and dilating the passages they help forward the slimy matter whereof gravel and stone are engendered, and convey that downward which begins to harden and gather in the reins; aperitive things are dangerous for a man subject to the stone, by reason that, opening and dilating the passages, they help forward the matter proper to create the gravel toward the reins, which by their own propension being apt to seize it, 'tis not to be imagined but that a great deal of what has been conveyed thither must remain behind; moreover, if the medicine happen to meet with anything too large to be carried through all the narrow passages it must pass to be expelled, that obstruction, whatever it is, being stirred by these aperitive things and thrown into those narrow passages, coming to stop them, will occasion a certain and most painful death.

They have the like uniformity in the counsels they give us for the regimen of life: it is good to make water often; for we experimentally see that, in letting it lie long in the bladder, we give it time to settle the sediment, which will concreate into a stone; it is good not to make water often, for the heavy excrements it carries along with it will not be voided without violence, as we see by experience that a torrent that runs with force washes the ground it rolls over much cleaner than the course of a slow and tardy stream; so, it is good to have often to do with women, for that opens the passages and helps to evacuate gravel; it is also very ill to have often to do with women, because it heats, tires, and weakens the reins. It is good to bathe frequently in hot water, forasmuch as that relaxes and mollifies the places where the gravel and stone lie; it is also ill by reason that this application of external heat helps the reins to bake, harden, and petrify the matter so disposed. For those who are taking baths it is most healthful. To eat little at night, to the end that the waters they are to drink the next morning may have a better operation upon an empty stomach; on the other hand, it is better to eat little at dinner, that it hinder not the operation of the waters, while it is not yet perfect, and not to oppress the stomach so soon after the other labor, but leave the office of digestion to the night, which will much better perform it than the day, when the body and soul are in perpetual moving and action.

Thus do they juggle and trifle in all their discourses at our expense; and they could not give me one proposition against which I should not know how to raise a contrary of equal force.

Let them, then, no longer exclaim against those who in this trouble of sickness suffer themselves to be gently guided by their own appetite and the advice of nature, and commit themselves to the common fortune.

I have seen in my travels almost all the famous baths of Christendom, and for some years past have begun to make use of them myself: for I look upon bathing as generally wholesome, and believe that we suffer no little

inconveniences in our health by having left off the custom that was generally observed, in former times, almost by all nations, and is yet in many, of bathing every day; and I cannot imagine but that we are much the worse by, having our limbs crusted and our pores stopped with dirt. And as to the drinking of them, fortune has in the first place rendered them not at all unacceptable to my taste; and secondly, they are natural and simple, which at least carry no danger with them, though they may do us no good, of which the infinite crowd of people of all sorts and complexions who repair thither I take to be a sufficient warranty; and although I have not there observed any extraordinary and miraculous effects, but that on the contrary, having more narrowly than ordinary inquired into it, I have found all the reports of such operations that have been spread abroad in those places ill-grounded and false, and those that believe them (as people are willing to be gulled in what they desire) deceived in them, yet I have seldom known any who have been made worse by those waters, and a man cannot honestly deny but that they beget a better appetite, help digestion, and do in some sort revive us, if we do not go too late and in too weak a condition, which I would dissuade every one from doing. They have not the virtue to raise men from desperate and inveterate diseases, but they may help some light indisposition, or prevent some threatening alteration. He who does not bring along with him so much cheerfulness as to enjoy the pleasure of the company he will there meet, and of the walks and exercises to which the amenity of those places invite us, will doubtless lose the best and surest part of their effect. For this reason I have hitherto chosen to go to those of the most pleasant situation, where there was the best conveniency of lodging, provision, and company, as the baths of Bagneres in France, those of Plombieres on the frontiers of Germany and Lorraine, those of Baden in Switzerland, those of Lucca in Tuscany, and especially those of Della Villa, which I have the most and at various seasons frequented.

Every nation has particular opinions touching their use, and particular rules and methods in using them; and all of them, according to what I have seen, almost with like effect. Drinking them is not at all received in Germany; the Germans bathe for all diseases, and will lie dabbling in the water almost from sun to sun; in Italy, where they drink nine days, they bathe at least thirty, and commonly drink the water mixed with some other drugs to make it work the better. Here we are ordered to walk to digest it; there we are kept in bed after taking it till it be wrought off, our stomachs and feet having continually hot cloths applied to them all the while; and as the Germans have a particular practice generally to use cupping and scarification in the bath, so the Italians have their *doccie*, which are certain little streams of this hot water brought through pipes, and with these bathe an hour in the morning, and as much in the afternoon, for a month together, either the head, stomach, or any other part where the evil lies. There are infinite other varieties of customs in every country, or rather there is no manner of resemblance to one another. By this you may see that this little part of physic to which I have only submitted, though the least depending upon art of all others, has yet a great share of the confusion and uncertainty everywhere else manifest in the profession.

The poets put what they would say with greater emphasis and grace; witness these two epigrams:

*Alcon hesterno signum Iovis attigit. Ille,
Quamvis marmoreus, vim patitur medici.
Ecce hodie, iussus transferri ex æde vetusta,
Effertur, quamvis sit Deus atque lapis.*

and the other:

*Lotus nobiscum est, hilaris cœnavit; et idem
Inventus mane est mortuus Andragoras.
Tam subitæ mortis causam, Faustine, requiris?
In somnis medicum viderat Hermocratem.*

upon which I will relate two stories.

The Baron de Caupene in Chalosse and I have betwixt us the advowson of a benefice of great extent, at the foot of our mountains, called Lahontan. It is with the inhabitants of this angle, as 'tis said of those of the Val d'Angrougne; they lived a peculiar sort of life, their fashions, clothes, and manners distinct from other people; ruled and governed by certain particular laws and usages, received from father to son, to which they submitted, without other constraint than the reverence to custom. This little state had continued from all antiquity in so happy a condition, that no neighboring judge was ever put to the trouble of inquiring into their doings; no advocate was ever retained to give them counsel, no stranger ever called in to compose their differences; nor was ever any of them seen to go a-begging. They avoided all alliances and traffic with the outer world, that they might not corrupt the purity of their own government; till, as they say, one of them, in the memory of man, having a mind spurred on with a noble ambition, took it into his head, to bring his name into credit and reputation, to make one of his sons something more than ordinary, and having put him to learn to write in a neighboring town, made him at last a brave village notary. This fellow, having acquired such dignity, began to disdain their ancient customs, and to buzz into the people's ears the pomp of the other parts of the nation; the first prank he played was to advise a friend of his, whom somebody had offended by sawing off the horns of one of his goats, to make his complaint to the royal judges thereabout, and so he went on from one to another, till he had spoiled and confounded all.

In the tail of this corruption, they say, there happened another, and of worse consequence, by means of a physician, who, falling in love with one of their daughters, had a mind to marry her and to live among them. This man first of all began to teach them the names of fevers, colds, and imposthumes; the seat of the heart, liver, and intestines, a science till then utterly unknown to them; and instead of garlic, with which they were wont to cure all manner of diseases, how painful or extreme soever, he taught them, though it were but for a cough or any little cold, to take strange mixtures, and began to make a trade not only of their health, but of their lives. They swear till then they never perceived the evening air to be offensive to the head; that to

Alcon yesterday touched Jove's statue; he, although marble, suffers the force of the physician: to-day ordered to be transferred from the old temple, where it stood, it is carried out, although it be a god and a stone. • AUS., EP., 74

Andragoras bathed with us, supped gaily, and in the morning the same was found dead. Dost thou ask, Faustinus, the cause of this so sudden death? In his dreams he had seen the physician Hermocrates. •

MART., 6.53

drink when they were hot was hurtful, and that the winds of autumn were more unwholesome than those of spring; that, since this use of physic, they find themselves oppressed with a legion of unaccustomed diseases, and that they perceive a general decay in their ancient vigor, and their lives are cut shorter by the half. This is the first of my stories.

The other is, that before I was afflicted with the stone, hearing that the blood of a he-goat was with many in very great esteem, and looked upon as a celestial manna rained down upon these latter ages for the good and preservation of the lives of men, and having heard it spoken of by men of understanding for an admirable drug, and of infallible operation; I, who have ever thought myself subject to all the accidents that can befall other men, had a mind, in my perfect health, to furnish myself with this miracle, and therefore gave order to have a goat fed at home according to the recipe: for he must be taken in the hottest month of all summer, and must only have aperitive herbs given him to eat, and white wine to drink. I came home by chance the very day he was to be killed; and some one came and told me that the cook had found two or three great balls in his paunch, that rattled against one another among what he had eaten. I was curious to have all his entrails brought before me, where, having caused the skin that enclosed them to be cut, there tumbled out three great lumps, as light as sponges, so that they appeared to be hollow, but as to the rest, hard and firm without, and spotted and mixed all over with various dead colors; one was perfectly round, and of the bigness of an ordinary ball; the other two something less, of an imperfect roundness, as seeming not to be arrived at their, full growth. I find, by inquiry of people accustomed to open these animals, that it is a rare and unusual accident. 'Tis likely these are stones of the same nature with ours and if so, it must needs be a very vain hope in those who have the stone, to extract their cure from the blood of a beast that was himself about to die of the same disease. For to say that the blood does not participate of this contagion, and does not thence alter its wonted virtue, it is rather to be believed that nothing is engendered in a body but by the conspiracy and communication of all the parts: the whole mass works together, though one part contributes more to the work than another, according to the diversity of operations; wherefore it is very likely that there was some petrifying quality in all the parts of this goat. It was not so much for fear of the future, and for myself, that I was curious in this experiment, but because it falls out in mine, as it does in many other families, that the women store up such little trumperies for the service of the people, using the same recipe in fifty several diseases, and such a recipe as they will not take themselves, and yet triumph when they happen to be successful.

As to what remains, I honor physicians, not according to the precept for their necessity (for to this passage may be opposed another of the prophet reproving King Asa for having recourse to a physician), but for themselves, having known many very good men of that profession, and most worthy to be beloved. I do not attack them; 'tis their art I inveigh against, and do not much blame them for making their advantage of our folly, for most men do the same. Many callings, both of greater and of less dignity than theirs, have no other foundation or support than public abuse. When I am sick I send for them if they be near, only to have their company, and pay them as

others do. I give them leave to command me to keep myself warm, because I naturally love to do it, and to appoint leeks or lettuce for my broth; to order me white wine or claret; and so as to all other things, which are indifferent to my palate and custom.

I know very well that I do nothing for them in so doing, because sharpness and strangeness are incidents of the very essence of physic. Lyscurgus ordered wine for the sick Spartans. Why? because they abominated the drinking it when they were well; as a gentleman, a neighbor of mine, takes it as an excellent medicine in his fever, because naturally he mortally hates the taste of it.

How many do we see among them of my humor, who despise taking physic themselves, are men of a liberal diet, and live a quite contrary sort of life to what they prescribe others? What is this but flatly to abuse our simplicity? for their own lives and health are no less dear to them than ours are to us, and consequently they would accommodate their practice to their rules, if they did not themselves know how false these are.

'Tis the fear of death and of pain, impatience of disease, and a violent and indiscreet desire of a present cure, that so blind us: 'tis pure cowardice that makes our belief so pliable and easy to be imposed upon.

And yet most men do not so much believe as they acquiesce and permit; for I hear them find fault and complain as well as we; but they resolve at last, "What should I do then?" As if impatience were of itself a better remedy than patience.

Is there any one of those who have suffered themselves to be persuaded into this miserable subjection, who does not equally surrender himself to all sorts of impostures? who does not give up himself to the mercy of whoever has the impudence to promise him a cure?

The Babylonians carried their sick into the public square; the physician was the people: every one who passed by being in humanity and civility obliged to inquire of their condition, gave some advice according to his own experience. We do little better.

There is not so simple a woman, whose gossips and drenches we do not make use of: and according to my humor, if I were to take physic, I would sooner choose to take theirs than any other, because at least, if they do no good, they will do no harm.

What Homer and Plato said of the Egyptians, that they were all physicians, may be said of all nations; there is not a man among any of them who does not boast of some rare recipe, and who will not venture it upon his neighbor, if he will let him.

I was the other day in a company where one, I know not who, of my fraternity brought us intelligence of a new sort of pills made up of a hundred and odd ingredients: it made us very merry, and was a singular consolation, for what rock could withstand so great a battery? And yet I

hear from those who have made trial of it, that the least atom of gravel deigned not to stir fort.

I cannot take my hand from the paper before I have added a word concerning the assurance they give us of the certainty of their drugs, from the experiments they have made. The greatest part, I should say above two-thirds of the medicinal virtues, consist in the quintessence or occult property of simples, of which we can have no other instruction than use and custom; for quintessence is no other than a quality of which we cannot by our reason find out the cause. In such proofs, those they pretend to have acquired by the inspiration of some daemon, I am content to receive (for I meddle not with miracles); and also the proofs which are drawn from things that, upon some other account, often fall into use among us; as if in the wool, wherewith we are wont to clothe ourselves, there has accidentally some occult desiccative property been found out of curing kibed heels, or as if in the radish we eat for food there has been found out some aperitive operation. Galen reports, that a man happened to be cured of a leprosy by drinking wine out of a vessel into which a viper had crept by chance. In this example we find the means and a very likely guide and conduct to this experience, as we also do in those that physicians pretend to have been directed to by the example of some beasts.

But in most of their other experiments wherein they affirm they have been conducted by fortune, and to have had no other guide than chance, I find the progress of this information incredible. Suppose man looking round about him upon the infinite number of things, plants, animals, metals; I do not know where he would begin his trial; and though his first fancy should fix him upon an elk's horn, wherein there must be a very pliant and easy belief, he will yet find himself as perplexed in his second operation. There are so many maladies and so many circumstances presented to him, that before he can attain the certainty of the point to which the perfection of his experience should arrive, human sense will be at the end of its lesson: and before he can, among this infinity of things, find out what this horn is; among so many diseases, what is epilepsy; the many complexions in a melancholy person; the many seasons in winter; the many nations in the French; the many ages in age; the many celestial mutations in the conjunction of Venus and Saturn; the many parts in man's body, nay, in a finger; and being, in all this, directed neither by argument, conjecture, example, nor divine inspirations, but merely by the sole motion of fortune, it must be by a perfectly artificial, regular and methodical fortune. And after the cure is performed, how can he assure himself that it was not because the disease had arrived at its period or an effect of chance? or the operation of something else that he had eaten, drunk, or touched that day? or by virtue of his grandmother's prayers? And, moreover, had this experiment been perfect, how many times was it repeated, and this long bead-roll of haps, and concurrences strung anew by chance to conclude a certain rule?

And when the rule is concluded, by whom, I pray you? Of so many millions, there are but three men who take upon them to record their experiments: must fortune needs just hit one of these? What if another, and a hundred others, have made contrary experiments? We might,

peradventure, have some light in this, were all the judgments and arguments of men known to us; but that three witnesses, three doctors, should lord it over all mankind, is against reason: it were necessary that human nature should have deputed and chosen them out, and that they were declared our comptrollers by express procuration.

TO MADAME DE DURAS

Madam, the last time you honored me with a visit, you found me at work upon this chapter, and as these trifles may one day fall into your hands, I would also that they testify in how great honor the author will take any favor you shall please to show them. You will there find the same air and mien you have observed in his conversation; and though I could have borrowed some better or more favorable garb than my own, I would not have done it: for I require nothing more of these writings, but to present me to your memory such as I naturally am. The same conditions and faculties you have been pleased to frequent and receive with much more honor and courtesy than they deserve, I would put together (but without alteration or change) in one solid body, that may peradventure continue some years, or some days, after I am gone; where you may find them again when you shall please to refresh your memory, without putting you to any greater trouble; neither are they worth it. I desire you should continue the favor of your friendship to me, by the same qualities by which it was acquired. I am not at all ambitious that any one should love and esteem me more dead than living.

The humor of Tiberius is ridiculous, but yet common, who was more solicitous to extend his renown to posterity than to render himself acceptable to men of his own time.

If I were one of those to whom the world could owe commendation, I would give out of it one-half to have the other in hand; let their praises come quick and crowding about me, more thick than long, more full than durable; and let them cease, in God's name, with my own knowledge of them, and when the sweet sound can no longer pierce my ears.

It were an idle humor to essay, now that I am about to forsake the commerce of men, to offer myself to them by a new recommendation. I make no account of the goods I could not employ in the service of my life. Such as I am, I will be elsewhere than in paper: my art and industry have been ever directed to render myself good for something; my studies, to teach me to do, and not to write. I have made it my whole business to frame my life: this has been my trade and my work; I am less a writer of books than anything else. I have coveted understanding for the service of my present and real conveniences, and not to lay up a stock for my posterity.

He who has anything of value in him, let him make it appear in his conduct, in his ordinary discourses, in his courtships, and his quarrels: in play, in bed, at table, in the management of his affairs, in his economics. Those whom I see make good books in ill breeches, should first have mended their breeches, if they would have been ruled by me. Ask a Spartan whether he had rather be a good orator or a good soldier: and if I was

asked the same question, I would rather choose to be a good cook, had I not one already to serve me.

My God! Madam, how should I hate such a recommendation of being a clever fellow at writing, and an ass and an inanity in everything else! Yet I had rather be a fool both here and there than to have made so ill a choice wherein to employ my talent. And I am so far from expecting to gain any new reputation by these follies, that I shall think I come off pretty well if I lose nothing by them of that little I had before. For besides that this dead and mute painting will take from my natural being, it has no resemblance to my better condition, but is much lapsed from my former vigor and cheerfulness, growing faded and withered: I am toward the bottom of the barrel, which begins to taste of the lees.

As to the rest, Madam, I should not have dared to make so bold with the mysteries of physic, considering the esteem that you and so many others have of it, had I not had encouragement from their own authors. I think there are of these among the old Latin writers but two, Pliny and Celsus if these ever fall into your hands, you will find that they speak much more rudely of their art than I do; I but pinch it, they cut its throat. Pliny, among other things, twits them with this, that when they are at the end of their rope, they have a pretty device to save themselves, by recommending their patients, whom they have teased and tormented with their drugs and diets to no purpose, some to vows and miracles, others to the hot baths. (Be not angry, Madam; he speaks not of those in our parts, which are under the protection of your house, and all Gramontins.) They have a third way of saving their own credit, of ridding their hands of us and securing themselves from the reproaches we might cast in their teeth of our little amendment, when they have had us so long in their hands that they have not one more invention left wherewith to amuse us, which is to send us to the better air of some other country. This, Madam, is enough; I hope you will give me leave to return to my discourse, from which I have so far digressed, the better to divert you.

It was, I think, Pericles, who being asked how he did: "You may judge," says he, "by these," showing some little scrolls of parchment he had tied about his neck and arms. By which he would infer that he must needs be very sick when he was reduced to a necessity of having recourse to such idle and vain fopperies, and of suffering himself to be so equipped. I dare not promise but that I may one day be so much a fool as to commit my life and death to the mercy and government of physicians; I may fall into such a frenzy; I dare not be responsible for my future constancy: but then, if any one ask me how I do, I may also answer, as Pericles did, "You may judge by this," shewing my hand clutching six drachms of opium. It will be a very evident sign of a violent sickness: my judgment will be very much out of order; if once fear and impatience get such an advantage over me, it may very well be concluded that there is a dreadful fever in my mind.

I have taken the pains to plead this cause, which I understand indifferently, a little to back and support the natural aversion to drugs and the practice of physic I have derived from my ancestors, to the end it may not be a mere stupid and inconsiderate aversion, but have a little more

form; and also, that they who shall see me so obstinate in my resolution against all exhortations and menaces that shall be given me, when my infirmity shall press hardest upon me, may not think 'tis mere obstinacy in me; or any one so ill-natured as to judge it to be any motive of glory: for it would be a strange ambition to seek to gain honor by an action my gardener or my groom can perform as well as I. Certainly, I have not a heart so tumorous and windy, that I should exchange so solid a pleasure as health for an airy and imaginary pleasure: glory, even that of the Four Sons of Aymon, is too dear bought by a man of my humor, if it cost him three swinging fits of the stone. Give me health, in God's name! Such as love physic, may also have good, great, and convincing considerations; I do not hate opinions contrary to my own: I am so, far from being angry to see a discrepancy betwixt mine and other men's judgments, and from rendering myself unfit for the society of men, from being of another sense and party than mine, that on the contrary (the most general way that nature has followed being variety, and more in souls than bodies, forasmuch as they are of a more supple substance, and more susceptible of forms) I find it much more rare to see our humors and designs jump and agree. And there never were, in the world, two opinions alike, no more than two hairs, or two grains: their most universal quality is diversity.

NOTES

- 1 In the Late Middle Ages, in Gascony, *bihore* (or *biafore*, from the Occitan *via hòra* or *via fòra*) was a legal injunction spoken by someone wishing to accuse someone else of a crime.
- 2 i.e., a snail.

MONTAIGNE'S SOURCES

Aus., Ep.	Ausonius, <i>Epigrammata</i>
Cic., Div.	Cicero, <i>On Divination</i>
Cic., Fin.	Cicero, <i>On Ends</i>
Cic., Tusc.	Cicero, <i>Tusculan Disputations</i>
Juv.	Juvenal, <i>Satires</i>
Mart.	Martial, <i>Epigrams</i>
Sen., Ep.	Seneca, <i>Epistles</i>

Verg., Aen.

Virgil, *Aeneid*