

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE  
**ESSAYS**

**Book 1 · Chapter 10**



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## Of ready or slowe speech

*Onc ne furent à tous toutes graces donnees.*

*All God's good graces are not gone to all, or of all anyone.*

SO DOE WE SEE that in the gift of eloquence, some have such a facility and promptitude, and that which we call utterance, so easie and at command, that at all assaies, and upon everie occasion, they are ready and provided; and others more slow, never speake anything except much laboured and premeditated, as Ladies and daintie Dames are taught rules to take recreations and bodily exercises, according to the advantage of what they have fairest about them. If I were to give the like counsel, in those two different advantages of eloquence whereof Preachers and pleading-lawyers of our age seeme to make profession; the slow speaker in mine opinion should be the better preacher, and the other the better lawier. Forsomuch as charge of the first allowes him as much leisure as he pleaseth to prepare hims elfe; moreover his carriere continueth still in one kinde without interruption: whereas the lawyers occasions urging him still upon any accident to be ready to enter the lists: and the unexpected replies and answers of his adverse parlie, do often divest him from his purpose, wher he is enforced to take a new course.

Yet is-it, that at the last enter-view which was at *Marceilles* betweene Pope *Clement* the feaventh, and *Francis* the first, our King, it hap'ned cleaned-contrarie, where Monsieur *Poyet*, a man of chiefe reputation, and all daies of his life, brought up to pleade at the bar, whose charge being to make an Oration before the Pope, and having long time before premeditated and con'd the same by roate, yea, and as some report, brought it with him ready-penned from *Paris* the verie same day it should have beene pronounced; the Pope suspecting he might happily speake something, might offend the other Prince's Ambassadors, that were about him, sent the argument, which hee at that time & place thought fittest to be treated of, to the king, and by fortune cleane-contrarie to that which *Poyet* had so much studied for: So that his Oration was altogether frustrate, and he must presently frame

another. But he perceiving himselfe unable-for-it, the Cardinall *Bellay* was faine to supply his place and take that charge upon him.

The Lawyer's charge is much harder then the preachers: (yet in mine opinion) shall we finde more passable Lawyers then commendable preachers, at least in *France*.

It seemeth to be more proper to the mind, to have hir operation ready and sodaine, and more incident to the judgment, to have it flow and considerate. But who remaineth mute, if he have no leisure to prepare himselfe, and he likewise to whome leisure giveth no advantage to say better, are both in oneselfe degree of strangenesse. It is reported that *Severus Cassius* spake better extempore, and without premeditation. That he was more beholding to fortune, than to his diligence; that to be interrupted in his speech redounded to his profit: and that his adversaries feared to urge him, lest his sudden anger should redouble his eloquence. I know this condition of nature by experience, which cannot abide a vehement and laborious premeditation: except it hold a free, a voluntarie, and selfe pleasing course, it can never come to a good end. We commonly say of some compositions, that they smell of the oile, and of the lampe, by reason of a certaine harshnesse, and rudenesse, which long plodding labour imprints in them that be much elaborated. But besides the care of well-doing, and the contention of the minde, overstretched to her enterprise, doth breake and impeach the same; even as it hapneth unto water, which being closely pent in, through its owne violence and abundance, cannot finde issue at an open gullet.

In this condition of nature, whereof I now speake, this also is joynd unto it, that it desireth not to be pricked forward by these strong passions, as the anger of *Cassius* (for that motion would be overrude) it ought not to be violently shaken, but yeeldingly solicited: it desireth to be rouzed and prickt forward by strange occasions, both present and casual. If it go alone, it doth but languish and loyteron is her life and grace.

I cannot well conataine myselfe in mine owne possession and disposition, chance hath more interest in it than myselfe; occasion, company, yea the change of my voice drawes more from my minde than I can finde therein, when by myselfe I second and endeavor to employ the same.

My words likewise are better than my writings, if choice may be had in so worthlesse things.

This also hapheth unto me, that where I seeke myselfe, I finde not myselfe: and I finde myselfe more by chance, than by the search of mine owne judgement. I shall perhaps have cast foorth some suttletie in writing, haply dull and harsh for another, but smooth and curious for myselfe. Let us leave all these complements and quaintnesse. That is spoken by everie man, according to his owne strength, I have so lost it, that I wot not what I would have said, and strangers have sometilnes found it before me. Had I alwayes a razor about me, where that hapneth, I should cleane raze myselfe out. Fortune may at some other time make the light thereof

appeare brighter unto me than that of mid-day, and will make mee wonder at mine owne faltring or sticking in the myre.