

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 27



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Of Friendship

Considering the proceeding of a Painters worke I have; a desire hath possessed mee to imitate him: Hee maketh chiose of the most convenient place and middle of every wall, there to place a picture, laboured with all his skill and sufficiencie; and all voyde places about-it he filleth-up with antike Boscage or Crotesco works; which are fantastical pictures, having no grace, but in the varietie and strangenes of them. And what are these my compositions in truth, other then antique workes, and monstrous bodies, patched and huddled-together of divers members, without any certaine or well ordered figure, having neither order, dependencie, or proportion, but casuall and framed by chaunce?

Desinit in piscem mulier formosa supernè.

*A woman faire for parts superior,
Endes in a fish for parts inferior.*

Touching this second point I go as farre as my Painter, but for the other and better part I am farre behinde: for my sufficiency reacheth not so farre, as that I dare undertake, a rich, a pollished, and according to true skill, and arte-like table. I have advised my selfe to borrow one of *Steven de la Boitie*, who with this kinde of worke shall honour all the worlde. It is a discourse he entitled, *Voluntary Servitude*, but those who have not knownen him, have since very properly rebaptized the same. *The Against one*. In his first youth he writ, by way of *Essaie*, in honour of liberty against Tyrants. It hath long since beeene dispersed amongst men of understanding, not without great and well deserved commendations: for it is full of witte, and containeth as much learning as may be: yet doth it differ much from the best he can do. And if in the age I knew-him-in, he would have undergone my dessigne, to set his fantasies downe in writing, we should doubtlesse see many rare things, and which would very neerely approch the honour of antiquity: for especially touching that parte of natures gifts, I know none may be compared to him. But it was not long of him, that ever this Treatize, came to mans viewe, and I believe he never sawe it since it first escaped his handes: with certaine other notes concerning the edict of Ianuarie, famous by reason of our intestine warres, which haply may in other places finde their deserved praise. It is all I could ever

recover of his reliques (whom when death seized, he by his last will and testament, left with so kinde remembrance, heire and executor of his librarie and writings) besides the little booke, I since caused to be published: To which his pamphlet I am particularly most bounden, forsomuch as it was the instrumentall meane of our first acquaintance. For, it was shewed me long time before I sawe him; and gave me the first knowledge of his name, addressing, and thus nourishing that unspotted friendship, which we (so long as it pleased God) have so sincerely, so entire and inviolably maintained betweene us, that truely a man shall not commonly heare of the like; and amongst our moderne men no signe of any such is seene. So many partes are required to the erecting of such a one, that it may be counted a wonder, if fortune once in three ages contract the like. There is nothing to which Nature hath more addressed us than to societie. And Aristotle saith, *that perfect Law givers have had more regardfull care of friend shippe then of justice.* And the utmost drift of it's perfection is this. For generally, all those amities which are forged and nourished by voluptuousnes or profit, publike or private neede, are thereby so much the lesse faire and generous, and so much the lesse true amities, in that they intermeddle other causes, scope, and fruite with friendship, then it selfe alone: Nor doe those foure ancient kindes of naturall friendships; *Naturall, sociall, hospitable, and venerian,* either particularly or conjointly beseeme the same. That from children to parents may rather be termed respect: Friendship is nourished by communication, which by reason of the over-great disparitie cannot bee found in them, and would happily offend the duties of nature: for neither all the secret thoughts of parents can be communicated unto children, lest it might engender an unbeseeming familiaritie betweene them, nor the admonitions and corrections (which are the chiefest offices of friendship) could be exercised from children to parents. There have nations beene found, where, by custome, children killed their parents, and others, where parents slew their children, thereby to avoyde the hindrance of enter-bearing one another in after-times: for naturally one dependeth from the ruine of another. There have Philosophers beene found disdaining this naturall conjunction, witnesse *Aristippus*, who being urged with the affection he ought his children, as proceeding from his loynes, began to spit, saying, *That also that excrement proceeded from him, and that also we engendred wormes and lice.* And that other man, whom Plutarke would have perswaded to agree with his brother, answered, *I care not a strawe the more for him, though he came out of the same wombe I did.* Verily the name of Brother is a glorious name, and ful of loving kindnes, and therefore did he and I terme one another sworne brother: but this commixture, dividence, and sharing of goods, this joyning wealth to wealth, and that the riches of one shall be the povertie of another, doth exceedingly distemper and distract all brotherly alliance, and lovely conjunction: If brothers should conduct the progresse of their advancement and thrift in one same path and course, they must necessarily oftentimes hinder and crosse one another. Moreover, the correspondencie and relation that begetteth these true and mutually-perfect amities, why shall it be found in these? The father and the sonne may very well be of a farre-differing complexion, and so many brothers: He is my sonne, he is my kinsman; but hee may be a foole, a bad, or a peevish-minded man. And then according as they are friendships, which the law and dutie of nature doth commande-us, so much the lesse of our owne voluntarie choice and libertie is there required unto it: And our

genuine libertie hath no production more properly hir owne, then that of affection and amitie. Sure I am, that concerning the same I have assayed all that might be, having had the best and most indulgent father that ever was, even unto his extreamest age, and who from father to sonne was descended of a famous house, and touching this rare-seene vertue of brotherly concord very exemplare:

*& ipse
Notus in fratres animi paterni,*

*To his brothers knowne so kinde,
As to beare a fathers minde.*

To compare the affection toward women unto it, although it proceede from our owne free choise, a man cannot, nor may-it be placed in this ranke: Hir fire, I confesse it

*(neque enim est dea nescia nostri
Quæ dulcem curis miscet amaritiem.)*

*(Nor is that Goddesse ignorant of me,
Whose bitter sweetes with my cares mixed be.)*

to be more active, more fervent, and more sharpe. But it is a rash and wavering fire, waving and diverse: the fire of an ague subject to fittes and stints, and that hath but slender hold-fast of us. In true friendship, it is a generall and universall heate, and equally tempered, a constant and setled heate, all pleasure and smoothnes, that hath no pricking or stinging in it, which the more it is in lustfull love, the more is-it but a ranging and mad desire in following that which flies-us,

*Come segue la lepre il cacciatore
Al freddo, al caldo, alla montagna, al lito,
Ne piu l'estima poi che presa vede,
E sol dietro a chi fugge affretta il piede.*

*Ev'n as the huntsman doth the hare pursue,
In cold, in heate, on mountaines, on the shore,
But cares no more, when he hir tan'e espies,
Speeding his pace, onely at that which flies.*

As soone as it creepeth into the termes of friendship, that is to say, in the agreement of wills, it languisheth and vanisheth away: enjoying doth loose-it, as having a corporall end, and subject to societie. On the other side, friendshippes enjoyed according as it is desired, it is neither bredde, nor nourished, nor encreaseth but in jouissance, as being spirituall, and the mind being refined by use and custome. Under this chiefe amitie, these fading affections have sometimes found place in me, lest I should speake of him, who in his verses speaks but too much of-it. So are these two passions entred into mee in knowledge one of another, but in comparison never: the first flying a high, and keeping a pownde pitch, disdainfully beholding the other to passe hir points farre under-it. Concerning marriage, besides that it is a covenant which hath nothing free but the entrance, the continuance beeing forced and constrained,

depending else-where then from our will, and a match ordinarily concluded to other ends: A thousand strange knotts are therein commonly to be unknit, able to breake the web, and trouble the whole course of a lively affection; whereas in friendship, there is no commerce or busines depending on the same, but it selfe. Seeing (to speake truely) that the ordinary sufficiencie of women, cannot answer this conference and communication, the nurse of this sacred bond: nor seeme their mindes strong enough to endure the pulling of a knot so hard, so fast, and durable. And truely, if without that, such a genuine and voluntarie acquaintance might be contracted, where not onely mindes had this entire jouissance, but also bodies, a share of the aliance, and where man might wholy be engaged: It is certaine, that friendship would thereby be more compleate and full: But this sexe could never yet by any example attaine unto it, and is by ancient schooles rejected thence. And this other Greeke licence is justly abhorred by our customes, which notwithstanding, because according to use it had so necessarie a disparitie of ages, and difference of offices betweene lovers, did no more sufficiently answere the perfect union and agreement, which heere we require: *Quis est enim iste amor amicitiae? cur neque deformem adolescentem quisquam amat, neque formosum senem?* For, what love is this offriendship? why doth no man loue either a deformed yong man, or a beautifull old man? For even, the picture, the Academie makes of it, will not, (as I suppose) disavoweme, to say thus in hir behalf: That this first furie, enspired by the sonne of *Venus* in the lovers hart, upon the object of tender youths-flower, to which they allow all insolent and passionate violences, an immoderate heate may produce, was simply grounded upon an externall beauty; a false image of corporall imagination: for in the spirit it had no power, the sight whereof was yet concealed, which was but in his infancie, and before the age of budding. For, if this fury did seaze upon a base-minded courage, the meanes of it's pursuite, were riches, gifts, favour to the advancement of dignities, and such-like vile marchandize, which they reprove. If it fell into a more generous minde, the enterpositions were likewise generous: Philosophicall instructions, documents to reverence religion, to obey the lawes, to die for the good of his countrie: examples of valour, wisedome and justice. The lover endevoring and studying to make himselfe acceptable by the good grace and beautie of his mind (that of his bodie being long since decayed) hoping by this mentall societie to establish a more firme and permanent bargaine. When this pursuite attained the effect in due season, (for by not requiring in a lover, he should bring leasure and discretion in his enterprise, they require-it exactly in the beloved; forasmuch as he was to judge of an internal beautie, of a difficle knowledge, and abstruse discoverie) then by the interposition of a spirituall beauty was the desire of a spirituall conception engendred in the beloved. The latter was heere chiefest; the corporall, accidentall and second: altogether contrary to the lover. And therefore doe they preferre the beloved, and verifie that the Gods likewise preferre the same: and greatly blame the Poet *Æschylus*, who in the love between *Achilles* and *Patroclus* ascribeth the lovers part unto *Achilles*, who was in the first and beardless youth of his adolescencie, and the fairest of the Græcians. After this generall communite, the mistris and worthiest part of it, predominant and exercising hir offices (they say the most availeful commoditie did thereby redound both to the private and publike.) That it was the force of countries received the use of it, and the principall defence of equitie and libertie: witnesse the

comfortable loves of *Hermodion* and *Aristogiton*. Therefore name they it, sacred and divine, and it concerns not them whether the violence of tyrants, or the demisnesse of the people be against them: To conclude, all can be alleadged in favour of the Academie, is to say, that it was a love ending in friendship, a thing which hath no bad reference unto the Stoicall definition of love: *Amorem conatum esse amicitiae facienda ex pulchritudinis specie. That love is an endevor of making friendship by the shew of beautie.* I returne to my description in a more equitable and equall maner. *Omnino amicitiae corroboratis iam confirmatisque ingenij & aetatis sunt. Clearely friendships are to be judged by wits, and ages already strengthened and confirmed.* As for the rest, those wee ordinarily call friendes and amities, are but acquaintances and familiarities, tied together by some occasion or commodities, by meanes whereof our mindes are entertained. In the amitie I speake of, they entermixe and confound themselves one in the other, with so universall a commixture, that they weare-out, and can no more finde the seame that hath conjoyned them together. If a man urge me to tell wherfore I loved him, I feele it can not be expressed, but by answering; Because it was he, because it was my selfe. There is beyond all my discourse, and besides what I can particularly reporte of it, I know not what inexplicable and fatall power, a meane and Mediatrix of this indissoluble union. Wee sought one another, before ever we had seene one another, and by the reportes we heard one of another; which wrought a greater violence in us, then the reason of reportes may well bear: I thinke by some secret ordinance of the heavens, we embraced one another by our names. And at our first meeting, which was by chance at a great feast, and solemne meeting of a whole towneship, we found ourselves so surprized, so knowne, so acquainted, and so combinedly-bound together, that from thence-forward, nothing was so neere unto us, as one unto an other. He writ an excellent Latine Satyre; since published; by which he excuseth and expoundeth the precipitation of our acquaintance, so sodainely come to her perfection; Sithence it must continue so short a time, and begunne so late (for we were both growne men, and he some yeares older then my selfe) there was no time to be lost. And it was not to bee modelled or directed by the patterne of regular and remisse friendship, wherein so many precautions of a long and preallable conversation, are required. This hath no other *Idea* than of it selfe, and can have no reference but to it selfe. It is not one especiall consideration, nor two, nor three, nor foure, nor a thousand: It is I wot not what kinde of quintessence of all this commixture, which having seized all my will, induced the same to plunge and loose it selfe in his, which likewise having seized all his will, brought it to loose and plunge it selfe in mine, with a mutuall greedinesse, and with a semblable concurrence. I may truely say, loose, reserving nothing unto us, that might properly be called our owne, nor that was either his, or mine. When *Lelius* in the presence of the Romane Consuls, who after the condemnation of *Tiberius Gracchus*, pursued all those that had beene of his acquaintance, came to enquire of *Caius Blosius* (who was one of his chiefest friendes) what he would have done for him, and that he answered: *All things. What? All things?* replied he: *And what if hee had willed thee to burne our Temples?* *Blosius* answered, *He would never have commanded such a thing. But what if hee had done it?* replied *Lelius*: The other answered, *I would have obeyed him:* If he were so perfect a friend to *Gracchus*, as Histories report, he needed not offend the Consuls with this last and bolde confession, and should not have departed from

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In this noble commerce, offices and benefits (nurses of other amities) deserve not so much as to be accompted-of: this confusion so full of our willes is cause of it: for, even as the friendship I beare unto my selfe, admits no accresce, by any succour I give my selfe in any time of neede, whatsoever the Stoickes alleadge; and as I acknowledge no thanks unto my selfe for any service I doe unto my selfe, so the union of such friends, being truely perfect, makes them loose the feeling of such duties, and hate, and expell from one another these words of division, and difference, benefite, good deede, dutie, obligation, acknowledgement, prayer, thanks, and such their like. All things being by effect common betweene them; wills, thoughts, judgements, goods, wives, children, honour, and life; and their mutuall agreement, being no other then one soule in two bodies, according to the fit definition of Aristotle, they can neither lend or give ought to each other. See here the reason why Law-makers, to honour marriage with some imaginary resemblance of this divine bond, inhibite donations betweene husband and wife; meaning

thereby to inferre, that all things should peculiarly be proper to each of them, and that they have nothing to divide and share together. If in the friendship whereof I speake, one might give unto another, the receiver of the benefit should binde his fellow. For, each seeking, more then any other thing, to doe each other good, he who yeelds both matter and occasion, is the man sheweth himselfe liberall, giving his friend that contentment, to effect towards him what he desireth most. When the Philosopher *Diogenes* wanted monie, he was wont to say; *That he redemanded the same of his friends, and not that he demanded it:* And to shew how that is practised by effect, I will relate an ancient singular example. *Eudamidas* the Corinthian had two friends. *Charixenus* a Sycionian, and *Aretheus* a Corinthian; being upon his death-bed, and very poore, and his two friends very rich, thus made his last will and testament. To *Aretheus*, *I bequeath the keeping of my mother, and to maintaine her when she shall be olde: To Charixenus the marying of my daughter, and to give hir as great a dowrie as he may: and in case one of them shall chance to die before, I appoint the surviver to substitute his charge, and supply his place.* Those that first sawe this testament, laughed and mocked at the same; but his heires being advertised thereof, were very well pleased, and received it with singular contentment. And *Charixenus* one of them, dying five daies after *Eudamidas*, the substitution being declared in favor of *Aretheus*, he carefully and very kindly kept and maintained his mother, and of five talents that he was worth, he gave two and a halfe in mariage to one only daughter he had, and the other two and a halfe to the daughter of *Eudamidas*, whom he married both in one day. This example is very ample, if one thing were not, which is the multitude of friends: For, this perfect amity I speake-of, is indivisible; each man doth so wholy give himselfe unto his friend, that he hath nothing left-him to divide elsewhere: moreover he is grieved that he is double, triple, or quadruple, and hath not many soules, or sundry wils, that he might conferre them all upon this subject. Common friendships may bee divided; a man may love beauty in one, facilitie of customes in another, liberality in one, and wisedome in another, paternitie in this, fraternity in that man, and so forth: but this amitie which possesseth the soule, and swayes-it in all soveraigntie, it is impossible it should be double. If two at one instant should require help, to which would you runne? Should they crave contrary offices of you, what order would you followe? Should one commit a matter to your silence, which if the other knew would greatly profite him, what course would you take? Or how would you discharge your selfe? A singular and principall friendship dissolveth all other duties, and freeth all other obligations. The secret I have sworne not to reveale to another, I may without perjurie imparte-it unto him, who is no other but my selfe. It is a great and strange woonder for a man to double himselfe; and those that talke of tripling, know not, nor cannot reach unto the height of it. *Nothing is extreame, that hath his like.* And he who shall presuppose, that of two I love the one as well as the other, and that they enter-love one another, and love me as much as I love them: he multiplieth in brother-hood, a thing most singular, and aloneyn one, and then which one alone is also the rarest to be found in the world. The remainder of this History agreeth very wel with what I said; for, *Eudamidas* giveth as a grace and favor to his friends to employ them in his neede: he leaveth them as his heires of his liberality, which consisteth in putting the meanes into their handes, to doe him good. And doubtlesse, the force of friendship is much more richly shewen in his deed, then in

Aretheus. To conclude, they are inimaginable effects, to him that hath not tasted them; and which makes me wonderfullie to honor the answere of that yong Souldier to *Cyrus*, who enquiring of him, what he would take for a horse, with which he had lately gained the prize of a race, and whether hee would change him for a Kingdome? *No surelie, my Liege* (said he) *yet would I willingly forgoe-him to gaine a true friend, could I but finde a man worthy of so precious an alliance.* He saide not ill, in saying, *coulde I but finde.* For, a man shall easily finde men fit for a superficiall acquaintance; but in this, wherein men negotiate from the very centre of their hearts, and make no spare of any thing, it is most requisite, all the wardes and springs be sincerely wrought, and perfectly true. In confederacies, which holde but by one end, men have nothing to provide-for, but for the imperfections, which particularly doe interest and concerne that ende and respect. It is no great matter what religion my Physician and Lawyer is of: this consideration hath nothing common with the offices of that friendship they owe-mee. So doe I in the familiar acquaintances, that those who serve-mee contract with mee. I am nothing inquisitive whether a Lackey be chaste or no, but whether hee be diligent: I feare not a gaming Muletier, so much as if he be weake; nor a hot swearing Cooke, as one that is ignorant and unskilfull; I never meddle with saying what a man should do in the world; there are over many others that do-it; but what my selfe doe in the world.

Mihi sic usus est: Tibi, ut opus est facto, face.

*So is it requisite for me;
Doe thou as needfull is for thee.*

Concerning familiar table-talke, I rather acquaint my selfe with, and follow a merry conceited humour, then a wise man: And in bed I rather prefer beauty, then goodnesse; and in society or conversation of familiar discourse, I respect rather sufficiency, though without *Preud'hommie*, and so of all things-else. Even as he that was found riding upon an hobbyhorse, playing with his children, besought him, who thus surprized him, not to speake of-it, until he were a father himself, supposing, the tender fondnesse, and fatherly passion, which then would possesse his minde, should make-him an impartiall judge of such an action. So would I wish to speak to such as had tried what I speake of: but knowing how farre such an amitie is from the common use, and how sold-seene and rarely-found, I look not to find a competent judge. For, even the discourses, which sterne antiquitie hath left us concerning this subject, seeme to me but faint and forcelesse in respect of the feeling I have of-it: And in that point the effects exceede the very precepts of Philosophie.

Nil ego contulerim iucundo sanus amico.

*For mee, be I well in my wit,
Nought, as a merry friend, so fit.*

Auncient Menander accompted him happy, that had but mette the shadowe of a true friend: verilie he had reason to say so, especially if he had tasted of any: For truly, if I compare all the rest of my fore-passed life, which although I have by the meere mercie of God, past at rest and ease, and except the losse of so deare a friend, free from all grievous

affliction, with an ever-quietnes of mind, as one that have taken my naturall and originall commodities in good payment, without searching any others: if, as I say, I compare-it all unto the foure yeares, I so happily enjoyed the sweet company, and deare-deare society of that worthy man, it is nought but a vapour, nought but a darke and yrkesome light. Since the time I lost him,

*quem semper acerbum,
Semper honoratum (sic Dij uolunistis) habeo,*

*Which I shall ever hold a bitter day,
Yet ever honor'd (so my God t'obey)*

I doe but languish, I doe but sorrow: and even those pleasures, all things present-me with, in stead of yeelding me comfort, doe but redouble the grieve of his losse. Wee were copartners in all things. All things were with us at halfe; mee thinkes I have stolne his parte from him.

*Nec fas esse ulla me loluptate hīc frui
Decrevi, tantisper dum ille abest meus particeps.*

*I have set downe, no joy enjoy I may,
As long as he my partner is away.*

I was so accustomed to be ever two, and so enured to be never single, that mee thinkes I am but halfe my selfe.

*Illam meæ si partem animæ tilit,
Maturior uis, quid moror altera,
Nec charus æquè nec superstes,
Integer? Ille dies utramque
Duxit ruinam.*

*Since that parte of my soule riper fate reft me.
Why stay I heere the other parte he left me?
Nor so deere, nor entire, while heere I rest:
That day hath in one ruine both opprest.*

There is no action can betide me, or imagination possesse me, but I heare him saying, as indeede he would have done to mee: for even as he did excell me by an infinite distance in all other sufficiencies and vertues, so did he in all offices and duties of friendship.

*Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus,
Tam chari capitisi?*

*What modesty or measure may I beare,
In want and wish of him that was so deare?*

*O misero frater adempte mihi!
Omnia tecum unà perierunt gaudia nostra,
Quæ tuus in uita dulcis alebat amor.
Tu mea, tu moriens fregisti commoda frater,
Tecum una tota est nostra sepulta anima,*

*Cuius ego interitu tota de mente fugaui
Hæc studia, atque omnes delicias animi.
Alloquar? audiero nunquam tua uerba loquentem?
Nunquam ego te uita frater amabilior,
Aspiciam posthac? at certè semper amabo.*

*O brother reft from miserable me,
All our delight's are perished with thee,
Which thy sweete love did nourish in my breath:
Thou all my good hast spoiled in thy death:
With thee my soule is all and whole enshrinde,
At whose death I have cast out of minde
All my mindes sweete meates, studies of this kinde;
Never shall I heare thee speake, speake with thee?
Thee brother then life dearer never see?
Yet shalt thou ever be belov'd of mee.*

but let-us a little heare this yong man speake, being but sixteene
yeares of age.

Because I have found this worke to have since bin published (and to an ill end) by such as seek to trouble and subvert the state of our commonwealth, nor caring whether they shal reforme it or no; which they have fondly inserted among other writings of their invention, I have revoked my intent which was to place-it here. And lest the Authors memory should any way be interessed with those that could not thoroughly knowe his opinions and actions, they shall understand, that this subject was by him treated of in his infancie, onely by way of exercise, as a subject, common, bare-worne, and wyer-drawne in a thousand booke. I will never doubt but he believed what he writ, and writ as he thought: for hee was so conscientious, that no lie did ever passe his lippes, yea were-it but in matters of sport or play: and I know, that had it bin in his choyce, he would rather have bin borne at *Venice*, then at *Sarlac*; and good reason why: But he had an other Maxime deeply imprinted in his minde, which was, carefully to obey, and religiously to submit himselfe to the lawes, under which he was borne. There was never a better Cittizen, nor more affected to the welfare and quietnesse of his countrie, nor a sharper enemie of the changes, innovations, newfangles, and hurly-burlies of his time: He would more willingly have employed the utmost of his endevours to extinguish and suppresse, then to favour or further them: His minde was modelled to the patterne of other best ages. But yet in exchange of his serious treatise, I will here set you downe another, more pithie, materiall, and of more consequence, by him likewise produced in that tender age.