Michel de Montaigne

Essays

Book 1 · Chapter 33

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That fortune is often times met withall in pursuite of reason

The inconstancie of Fortunes diverse wavering, is the cause she should present-us with all sortes of visages. Is there any action of justice more manifest then this? *Cæsar Borgia* Duke of *Valentinois,* having resolved to poison *Adrian* Cardinall of *Cornetto,* with whom Pope *Alexander* the sixt, his father and he were to sup that night in *Vaticane,* sent certaine bottles of empoysoned wine before, and gave his Butler great charge to have especiall care of-it. The Pope comming thither before his sonne, and calling for some drinke; the butler supposing the wine had beene so carefully commended unto him for the goodnesse of-it, imediately presented some unto the Pope, who whilst he was drinking, his sonne came in, and never imagining his bottles had beene toucht, tooke the cup and pledged his father, so that the Pope died presently; and the son, after he had long time bin tormented with sicknesse, recovered to another worse fortune. It sometimes seemeth, that when we least thinke on her, she is pleased to sporte with-us. The Lord of *Estree,* the guidon to the Lord of *Vandosme,* and the Lord of *Liques,* Lieutenant to the Duke of *Ascot,* both servants to the Lord of *Founguesselles* sister, albeit of contrary factions (as it hapneth among neighboring bordurers) the Lord of *Liques* got her to wife: But even upon his wedding day, and which is worse, before his going to bed, the bridegroome desiring to breake a staffe in favour of his new Bride and Mistris, went out to skirmish neere to saint *Omer,* where the Lord of *Estree* being the stronger, tooke him prisoner, and to endeare his advantage, the Lady her selfe was faine,

Coniugis ante coacta novi dimittere collum,
Quàm ueniens una atque altera rursus hyems
Noctibus in longis auidum saturasset amorem,

Her new feeres necke for'st was she to forgoe,
Ere winters one and two returning sloe,
In long nights had ful-fil'd
Her love so eager wil'd.

in courtesie, to sue unto him for the delivery of his prisoner, which he granted; the French Nobilitie never refusing Ladies any kindenesse. Seemeth she not to be a right artist? *Constantine* the sonne of *Helen*

founded the Empire of *Constantinople*, and so, many ages after, *Constantine* the sonne of *Helen* ended the same. She is sometimes pleased to envie our miracles: we hold an opinion, that *Clovis* besieging *Angoulesme*, the walles by a divine favour fell of themselves. And *Bouchet* borroweth of some author, that King *Robert* beleagring a Cittie, and having secretly stolne away from the siege to *Orleans*, there to solemnize the feasts of Saint *Aignan*, as he was in his earnest devotion, upon a certaine passage of the Masse, the walles of the towne besieged, without any battery, fell flat to the ground. She did altogether contrary in our warres of *Millane:* For, Captaine *Rense*, beleagring the Cittie of *Eronna* for-us, and having caused a forcible mine to be wrought under a great curtine of the walles, by force whereof, it being violently flowne-up from out the ground, did notwithstanding, whole and unbroken, fall so right into his foundation againe, that the besieged found no inconvenience at all by it. She sometimes playeth the Phisitian. *Jason Phereus* being utterly forsaken of all Physitians, by reason of an impostume he had in his breast, and desirous to be rid of it, though it were by death, as one of the forlorne hope, rusht into a battel amongst the thickest throng of his enemies, where he was so rightly wounded acrosse the bodie, that his impostume brake, and he was cured. Did she not exceede the painter *Protogenes* in the skill of his trade? who having perfected the image of a wearie and panting dog, and in all parts over-tired, to his content, but being unable, as he desired, lively to represent the drivel or slaver of his mouth, vexed against his owne worke, took his spunge, and moyst as it was with diverse colours, threw-it at the picture, with purpose to blot and deface all he had done: fortune did so fitly and rightly carry the same toward the dogges chaps, that there it perfectly finished, what his arte could never attaine unto. Doth she not sometimes addresse and correct our counsells? *Isabell* Queene of *England*, being to repasse from *Zeland* into her kingdome with an armie, in favour of her sonne against her husband, had utterly beene cast away, had shee come unto the Port intended, being there expected by her enemies: But fortune, against her will, brought her to another place, where she safely landed. And that ancient fellow, who hurling a stone at a dog, misst him, and there-withall hit and slew his stepdame, had she not reason to pronounce this verse,

Ταντόματον ἡμῶν καλλίω βουλεύεται.

Fate of it selfe, than wee,
Doth better say and see?

Fortune hath better advise then wee. *Icetes* had practised and suborned two souldiers to kill *Timoleon*, then residing at *Adrane* in *Sicily*. They appointed a time to doe-it, as he should be assisting at some sacrifice; and scattering themselves amongst the multitude, as they were winking one upon another, to shewe how they had a verie fit opportunitie to doe the deede: Loe heere a third man, that with a huge blow of a sword, striketh one of them over the head and fells him dead to the ground, and so runnes away. His fellow supposing himselfe discovered, and undone, runs to the altare, suing for sanctuarie, with promise to confesse the truth; Even as he was declaring the conspiracie, beholde the third man, who had likewise beene taken, whome as a murtherer the people tugged and haled through the throng toward *Timoleon* and the chiefest of the assemblie, where he humbly calleth for mercie, alleadging that hee had

justlie murthered the murtherer of his father, whom his good chaunce was to finde there, averring by good witnesses, before them all, that in the Cittie of the Leontines, his father had bin proditoriouslie slaine by him, on whome hee had now revenged him-selfe. In meede whereof, because he had bin so fortunate (in seeking to right his fathers untimely death) to save the common-father of the Sicilians from so imminent a danger, he had tenne Attike mines awarded him. This fortune in hir directions exceedeth all the rules of humane wisedome. But to conclude, is not an expresse application of hir favour, goodnesse, and singular pietie manifestly discovered in this action? *Ignatius* the Father and the Sonne, both bannished by proscription by the Triumvirs of *Rome* resolved on this generous act, to yeeld their lives one into anothers hands, and thereby disannull the Tyrants cruelty. They furiously with their keen Rapiers drawne, ranne one against another: Fortune so directed their points, that each received his mortall stroke; adding to the honour of so seld-seene an amity, that they had just so much strength left them, to drawe their armed and bloody hands from-out their goared woundes, in that plight, so fast to embrace, and so hard to claspe one another, that the hangmen were forced, at one stroke, and togither, to cut-off both their heads; leaving their bodies for ever tied in so honourable a knot, and their wounds so joyned, that they lovingly drew and suckt each others blood, breath, and life.