

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 35



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Of the use of Apparell

WHATSOEVER I ayme-at, I must needes force some of customes contradictions, so carefully hath she barred all our entrances. I was divising in this chil-cold season, whether the fashion of these late discovered Nations to goe naked, be a custome forced by the hote temperature of the ayre, as we say of the Indians and Moores, or whether it be an originall manner of mankinde. Men of understanding, forasmuch as whatsoever is contained under heaven (as saith the holie Writ) is subject to the same lawes, are wont in such-like considerations, where naturall lawes are to be distinguished from those invented by man, to have recourse to the generall policie of the worlde, where nothing that is counterfet can be admitted. Now all things being exactly furnished elsewhere with all necessaries to maintaine this being, it is not to be imagined that wee alone should be produced in a defective and indigent estate, yea, and in such a one, as cannot be maintained without forraine help. My opinion is, that even as all plants, trees, living creatures, and whatsoever hath life, is naturally seene furnished with sufficient furniture to defend it selfe from the injurie of all wethers:

*Propterea que ferè res omnes, aut corio sunt,
Aut seta, aut conchis, aut callo, aut cortice tectæ.*

Therefore all things almost we cover'd marke,
With hide, or haire, or shelles, or brawne, or barke.

Even so were wee: But as those who by an artificiall light extinguish the brightnes of the day, we have quenched our proper meanes, by such as wee have borrowed. And wee may easily discern, that onely custome makes that seeme impossible unto us, which is not so: For, of those Nations that have no knowledge of clothes, some are found situated under the same heaven, and climate, or paralell, that we are-in, and more colde and sharper then ours. Moreover, the tenderest parts of us are ever bare and naked, as our eyes, face, mouth, nose, and eares; and our countrie-swaines (as our forefathers wont) most of them at this day goe bare-breasted downe to the navill. Had wee beene borne needing petti-coats and

breeches, there is no doubt, but nature would have armed that which shee hath left to the batterie of seasons and fury of wethers with some thicker skinne or hide, as shee hath done our fingers endes, and the soales of our feete. Why seemes this hard to be believed? Betweene my fashion of apparell, and that of one of my country-clowns, I find much more difference between him and mee, then betweene his fashion, and that of a man who is clothed but with his bare skinne. How many men (especially in *Turkie*;) go ever naked for devotions sake? A certaine man demaunded of one of our loytring rogues, whome in the deepe of frosty Winter, hee sawe wandering up and downe with nothing but his shirt about-him, and yet as blithe and lusty as another that keepe himselfe muffled and wrapt in warme furies up to the eares; how he could have patience to goe so. *And have not you, good sir,* (answered he) *your face all bare? Imagine I am all face.* The Italians reporte (as farre as I remember) of the Duke of *Florence* his foole, who when his Lord asked him, how beeing so ill cladde, he could endure the colde, which hee hardly was able to doe himselfe; To whome the foole replied; *Maister, use but my receipt, and put all the cloathes you have upon you, as I doe all mine; you shall feele no more cold then I doe.* King *Massinissa*, even in his oldest dayes, were-it never so colde, so frosty, so stormy, or sharpe wether, could never bee induced, to put something on his head, but went alwayes bare-headed. The like is reported of the Emperour *Severus*. In the battels that pass betweene the *Ægyptians* and the *Persians*, *Herodotus* saith, that both himselfe and divers others tooke speciall notice, that of such as lay slaine on the ground, the *Ægyptians* sculs were without comparison much harder then the *Persians*: by reason that these goe ever with their heads covered with coifs and turbants, and those from their infancie ever shaven and bare-headed. And King *Agésilau*s, even in his decrepite age, was ever wont to weare his clothes both winter and summer alike. *Suetonius* affirmeth, that *Cæsar* did ever march formost before his troupes, and most commonly bare-headed, and on foote, whether the sunne shone, or it rained. The like is reported of *Hanniball*,

*tum vertice nudo,
Excipere insanos imbres, cœlique ruinam.*

Bare-headed then he did endure,
Heav'ns ruine and madde-raging showre.

A Venetian that hath long dwelt amongst them, and who is but lately returned thence, writeth, that in the Kingdome of *Pegu*, both men and women, having all other partes clad, goe ever bare-footed, yea, and on horse-backe also. And *Plato* for the better health and preservation of the body doth earnestly perswade, that no man should ever give the feet and the head other cover, then Nature hath allotted them. He whom the *Polonians* chose for their king next to ours, who may worthily be esteemed one of the greatest Princes of our age, doth never weare gloves, nor what wether soever it bee, winter or summer, other bonnet abroad than in the warme house. As I cannot endure to goe unbuttoned or untrussed, so the husband-men neighbouring about me, would be, and feele themselves as fettred or hand-bound, with going so. *Varro* is of opinion, that when we were appointed to stand bare-headed before the Gods, or in presence of the Magistrates, it was rather done for our health, and to enure and arme-

us against injuries of the wether, than in respect of reverence. And since wee are speaking of colde, and are French-men, accustomed so strangely to array our selves in party-coloured sutes (not I, because I seldome weare any other then blacke or white, in imitation of my father) let-us adde this one thing more, which Captaine *Martyn du Bellay* relateth in the voyage of *Luxemburg*, where hee sayeth to have seene so hard frosts, that their munition-wines were faine to be cut and broken with hatchets and wedges, and shared unto the Souldiers by weight, which they carried away in baskets; and *Ovid*.

*Nudáque consistunt formam servantia testæ
Vina, nec hausta meri, sed data frustra bibunt.*

Bare wines, still keeping forme of caske, stand fast,
Not gulpes, but gobbets of their wine they taste.

The frosts are so hard and sharpe in the emboguing of the Meotis fennes, that in the very place where *Mithridates* his Lieutenant had delivered a battle to his enemies, on hard ground, and drie-footed, and there defeated them; the next summer, he there obtained another sea-battle against them. The Romanes suffered a great disadvantage in the fight they had with the Carthaginians neere vnto *Placentia*, forsomuch as they went to their charge with their blood congealed, and limbes benumbed, through extreame colde: whereas *Hanniball*, had caused many fires to be made through-out his campe, to warme his souldiers-by, and a quantity of oile to be distributed amongst them, that therewith annointing themselves, they might make their sinewes more supple and nimble, and harden their pores against the bitter blasts of the colde winde, which then blewe, and nipping piercing of the ayre. The Græcians retreat from *Babilon* into their countrie, is renoumed, by reason of the many difficulties and encombrances they encountred withall, and were to surmount: whereof this was one, that in the mountaines of *Armenia*, being surprised and encircled with so horrible, and great quantitie of snow, that they lost both the knowledge of the country, and the wayes: wherewith they were so straitly beset, that they continued a day and a night without eating or drinking; and most of their horses and cattell died: of their men a great number also deceased; many with the glittering and whitenesse of the snow, were stricken blinde: diverse through the extremitie were lamed, and their limbes shrunken-up, many starke stiff, and frozen with colde, although their senses were yet whole. *Alexander* saw a nation, where in winter they bury their fruite-bearing trees under the ground, to defend them from the frost: a thing also used amongst some of our neighbours. Touching the subject of apparell: the King of *Mexico* was wont to change and shift his clothes foure times a day, and never wore them againe, employing his leavings and cast-sutes for his continuall liberalities and rewardes; as also neither pot nor dish, nor any implement of his kitchin or table were twice brought before him.