

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS

Book 1 · Chapter 8

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Of Idlennesse

AS WE SEE some idle-fallow grounds, if they be fat and fertile, to bring forth store and sundry rootes of wilde and unprofitable weeds, and that to keepe them in ure, we must subject and imploy them with certaine seedes for our use and service. And as wee see some women, though single and alone, often to bring forth lumps of shapelesse flesh, whereas to produce a perfect and naturall generation, they must be manured with another kinde of seede; so is it of minds, which except they be busied about some subject, that may bridle and keepe them under, they will here and there wildely scatter themselves through the vaste field of imaginations.

*Sicut aquæ tremulum labris ubi lumen ahenis
Sole repercussum, aut radiantis imagine Lunæ,
Omnia peruolitat latè loca, iamque sub auras
Erigitur summique ferit laquearia tecti.*

*As trembling light reflected from the Sunne,
Or radiant Moone on water-fild brasse-lavers,
Flies over all, in aire unpraised soone.
Strikes house-top beames, betwixt both strangely wavers.*

And there is no follie, or extravagant raving, they produce not in that agitation.

*velut ægri somnia, uanæ,
Finguntur species.*

*Like sicke mens dreames, that faine,
Imaginations vaine.*

The minde that hath no fixed bound, will easilie loose it selfe: For, as wee say, *To be everie where, is to be no where.*

Quisque ubique habitat, Maxime, nusquam habitat,

*Good sir, he that dwels everywhere,
No where can say, that he dwels there.*

It is not long since I retired my selfe unto mine owne house, with full purpose, as much as lay in me, not to trouble my selfe with any businesse, but solitarily, and quietly to weare out the remainder of my well-nigh-spent life; where me-thought I could do my spirite no greater favour, then to give him the full scope of idlenesse, and entertaine him as he best pleased, and withall, to settle him-selfe as he best liked: which I hoped he might now, being by time become more settled and ripe, accomplish very easily: but I finde,

Uariam semper dant otia mentem.

*Evermore idlenesse,
Doth wavering mindes adresse.*

That contrariwise playing the skittish and loose-broken jade, he takes a hundred times more carriere and libertie unto himselfe, then he did for others, and begets in me so many extravagant *Chimeraes*, and fantasticall monsters, so orderlesse, and without any reason, one hudling upon an other, that at-leasure to view the foolishnesse and monstrous strangenesse of them, I have begunne to keepe a register of them, hoping, if I live, one day to make him ashamed, and blush at himselfe.