

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 roots of wilde and unprofitable weeds, and that to keep them in use we must subject and imploy them with certain seeds 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 seed; so is it of mindes, 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 vast field of imaginations.

*Sicut aquæ tremulum labris ubi lumen ahenis
Sole repercwsum, aut radiantis imagine Lunæ,
Omnia pervolitat late loca jamque 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 folly, or extravagant raving, they produce not in that agitation.

*velut ægri somnia, vanæ
Finguntur species.*

*Like sicke mens dreames, that feigne
Inaginations vaine.*

The minde that hath no fixed bound, will easily loose itselſe: For, as we say,
To be everiewhere, is to be nowhere.

Quisquis 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 myselfe unto mine owne house, with full purpose, as much as lay in me, not to trouble myselfe with any businesse, but solitarily and quietly to weare out the remainder of my well-nighspent life; where me thought I could doe my spirit no greater favour, than to give him the full scope of idlenesse, and entertaine him as he best pleased, and withall, to settle himselfe as he best liked: which I hoped he might now, being by time become more setled and ripe, accomplish very easily: but I finde,

Variam semper dant otia mentem.

*Evermore idlenesse,
Doth wavering mindes adresse.*

That contrariwise playing the skittish and loosebroken jade, he takes a hundred times more carriere and libertie unto himselfe, than hee did for others, and begets in me so many extravagant *Chimeræ*, and fantasticall monsters, so orderlesse, and without any reason, one hudling upon another, that at leisure to view the foolishnesse and monstrous strangenesse of them, I have begun to keepe a register of them, hoping, if I live, one day to make him ashamed, and blush at himselfe.