

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

# ESSAYS

**Book 2 · Chapter 17**

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## Of Presumption

THERE IS another kinde of glorie, which is an over-good opinion we conceive of our worth. It is an inconsiderate affection, wherewith wee cherish our selves, which presents-us unto our selves other then wee are. As an amorous passion addeth beauties, and lendeth graces to the subject it embraceth, and maketh such as are therewith possessed, with a troubled conceite, and distracted Judgement, to deeme what they love, and finde what they affect, to bee other, and seeme more perfect, then in trueth it is. Yet would I not have a man, for feare of offending in that point, to misacknowledge himselfe, nor thinke to bee lesse then hee is: A true Judgement should wholly and in every respect maintaine his right. It is reason, that as in other things, so in this subject hee see what truth presenteh unto him. If hee be *Cæsar*, let him hardly deeme himselfe the greatest Captaine of the world. We are nought but ceremonie; ceremonie doth transport-us, and we leave the substance of things; wee hold-fast by the boughs, and leave the trunke or body. We have taught Ladies to blush, onely by hearing that named, which they nothing feare to doe. Wee dare not call our members by their proper names, and feare not to employ them in all kinde of dissolutenesse. Ceremonie forbids us by words to expresse lawfull and naturall things; and we believe it. Reason willeth us to doe no bad or unlawfull things, and no man giveth credite unto it. Here I find my selfe entangled in the lawes of Ceremonie, for it neither allowes a man to speake ill or good of himselfe. Therefore will wee leave her at this time. Those whom Fortune (whether wee shall name her good or bad) hath made to passe their life in some eminent or conspicuous degree, may by their publike actions witnes what they are; but those whome shee never employed, but in base things, and of whom no man shall ever speake, except themselves doe it, they are excusable, if they dare speake of themselves to such as have interest in their acquaintance, after the example of *Lucilius*:

*Ille uelut fidiſ arcana ſodalibus olim  
Credebat libris, neque ſi malè: ceſſerat uſquam  
Decurrens alio, neque ſi benè: quo fit, ut omnis*

*Ille uelut fidis arcana sodalibus olim  
Credebat libris, neque si malè: cesserat usquam*

*He trusted to his booke, as to his trusty friend  
His secrets, nor did hee to other refuge bend,  
How ever well, or ill, with him his fortune went.  
Hence is it, all the life is seene the old man spent.  
As it were in a Table noted,  
Which were unto some God devoted.*

This man committed his actions and imaginations to his paper, and as he felt, so he pourtrayed himselfe. *Nec id Rutilio & Scauro citra fidem, aut obtreptioni fuit.* Nor was that without credit, or any imputation to Rutilius or Scaurus. I remember then, that even from my tenderest fancie, some noted in me a kind of I know not what fashion in carrying of my bodie, and gestures, witnessing a certain vaine and foolish fiercenes. This I will first say of it, that it is not inconvenient to have conditions so peculiar, and propensions so incorporated in us, that we have no meane to feele, or way to know them. And of such naturall inclinations, unknowne to us, and without our consent, the body doth easily retaine some signe or impression. It was an affectation witting of his beauty, which made *Alexander* to bend his head a little on one side, and *Alcibiades*, his speach somewhat effeminate and lispig: *Julius Cæsar* was wont to scrath his head with one finger, which is the countenance of a man surcharged with painefull imaginations: And *Cicero* (as I remember) had gotten a custome to wrythe his Nose, which signifieth a naturall scoffer. Such motions may unawares and imperceptibly possesse-us. Others there be, which are artificiall, whereof I will not speake. As salutations, reverences, or conges, by which some doe often purchase the honor, (but wrongfully) to be humble, lowly, and courteous: A man may be humble through glory. I am very prodigall of cappings, namely in Summer, and I never receive any from what quality of men soever, but I give them as good and as many as they bring, except he be some servant of mine. I wish that some Princes whom I know, would be more sparing, and impartial dispensers of them; for, being so indiscreetly employed, they have no force at all: If they be without regard, then are they without effect. Amongest disordered countenances, let us not forget the sterne looke of *Constantius* the Emperour, who in publike held ever his head bolt-upright, without turning or bending the same on any side, no not so much as to look on them that saluted him sideling, holding his body so fixt and unmooveable, that let his Coche shake never so much, he kept still up-right: he durst never spit nor wipe his Nose, nor dry his face before the people. I wot not whether those gestures, which were noted in me were of this first condition, and whether in truth I had any secret propension to this fault, as it may well be: and I cannot answere for the motions of my body. But concerning those of the soule, I will heere ingeniously confesse what I thinke of them. There are two parts in this glory: Which is to say, for a man to esteeme himselfe overmuch, the other, not sufficiently to esteeme of others. For the one, first me thinkes, these considerations ought somewhat to be accompted-of. I feele my selfe surcharged with one errour of the minde, which both as bad, and much more as importunate, I utterly dislike. I endeavour to correct it; but I cannot displace it. It is, because I

abate the just value of those things, which I possesse; and enhance the worth of things, by how much they are more strange, absent and not mine owne. This humour extends it selfe very farre, as doth the prerogative of the authoritie, wherewith husbands looke upon their owne wives with a vicious disdain, and many fathers upon their children: So doe I, and betweene two like workes would I ever weigh against mine. Not so much that the jealousie of my preferment, and amendment troubleth my judgement, and hindereth me from pleasing my selfe, as that maisterie herselfe begets a contempt of that which a man possesseth and oweth. Policies, farre-customes and tongues flatter me; and I perceive the Latine tongue by the favour of hir dignitie to deceive me, beyond what belongs unto her, as children and the vulgar sorte. My neighbours œconomie; his house, and his horse, though but of equall value, is more worth then mine, by how much more it is not mine owne. Besides, because I am most ignorant in mine owne matters: I admire the assurance, and wonder at the promise, that every man hath of himselfe: whereas there is almost nothing, that I wot I know, nor that I dare warrant my selfe to be able to do. I have not my faculties in proposition, or by estate, and am not instructed in them but after the effect: As doubtfull of mine owne strength, as uncertaine of anothers force. Whence it followeth, if commendably I chance upon any one piece of worke, I rather impute it to my fortune, then ascribe it to mine industrie; forasmuch as I desseigne them all to hazard, and in feare. Likewise I have this in generall, that of all the opinions, which Antiquitie hath had of man in grose, those which I most willingly embrace, and whereon I take most hold, are such as most vilifie, contemne, and anihilate-us. Me thinkes Philosophie hath never better cardes to shew, then when she checketh our presumption, and crosseth our vanitie; when in good sooth she acknowledgeth her irresolution, her weakenesse and her ignorance. Me seemeth the overgood conceit, and selfe-weening opinion man hath of himselfe, is the nurce-mother of the falsest opinions, both publike and particular. Those which acocke-horse will perch themselves upon the *Epicicle of Mercurie*, and see so farre into heaven, they even pull out my teeth. For in the studie which I professe, the subject whereof is Man, finding so extreame a varietie of judgements, so inextricable a laborinth of difficulties one upon the necke of another, so great diversitie, and so much uncertaintie, yea even in the schoole of wisdom it selfe: you may imagine since those men could never be resolved of the knowledge of themselves, and of their owne condition, which is continually before their eyes, which is ever within them; since they know not how that mooveth, which themselves cause to moove, nor how to set forth the springs, and descipher the wardes, which themselves hold and handle, how should I thinke of the true cause of the flux and reflux of the river *Nilus*? The curiositie to know things hath beene given to men (as saith the holy scripture) for a scourge. But to come to my particular, it is very hard (me seemeth) that some other regardeth himselfe lesse, yea and some other esteemeth me lesse then I esteeme my selfe. I accompt my selfe of the common sort, except in that I deeme my selfe guiltie of the basest, and culpable of the most popular defects: but not disavowed nor excused. And I only prise my selfe, wherein I know my worth. If any glorie be in me, it is but superficially infused into me; by the treason of my complexion: and hath no solide body appearing to the sight of my judgement. I am but sprinckled over, but not throughly dyed. For in

trueth, touching the effects of the spirite, in what manner soever, there never came any thing from me, that contented me. And others approbation is no currant payment for me. My judgement is tender and hard, especially in mine owne behalfe. I feele my selfe to waver and bend through weakenesse: I have nothing of mine owne to satisfie my judgement. My sight is indifferently cleare and regular; but if I take any serious worke in hand, it is troubled and dimmed: as I perceive most evidently in Poesie: I love it exceedingly: I have some insight or knowledge in other mens Labours, but in trueth I play the Novice when I set my hand unto it: Then can I not abide my selfe. A man may play the foole every where else, but not in Poesie.

*mediocribus esse poetis  
Non dii, non homines, non concessere columnæ.*

*Nor Gods, nor men, nor pillars gave the graunt,  
That Poets in a meane, should meanely chaunt.*

I would to God this sentence were found in the front of our Printers or Stationers shops, to hinder the entrance of so many bald-rimers.

*uerùm  
Nil securius est malo Poeta.*

*Nothing securer may be had,  
Then is a Poet bolde and bad.*

Why have we no such people? *Dionisius* the father esteemed nothing in himselfe so much as his poesie. In the times of the Olimpike games, with chariots exceeding all other in magnificence, he also sent Poets and Musicians to present his verses, with tents and pavilions gilt and most sumtuously tapistred. When they first beganne to reherse them, the favour and excellencie of the pronuntiation did greatly allure the peoples attention: but when they beganne to consider the fondnesse of the composition, they fell as soone to contemne them: and being more and more exasperated fell furiously into an uprore, and headlong ranne in most spitefull maner to teare and cast downe all his pavillions. And forasmuch as his rich chariots did no good at all in their course, and the ship which carried his men, returning homeward missed the shore of *Sicilie*, and was by violent stormes driven and spilt upon the coast of *Tarentum*, they certainly believed, the wrath of the Gods to have beene the cause of it, as being greatly offended, both against him, and his vile and wicked Poeme: yea and the Mariners themselves that escaped the shipwracke did much second the peoples opinion: to which the Oracle that foretold his death seemed in some sorte to subscribe: which implied, that *Dionisius* should be neere his end, at what time he had vanquished those that should be of more worth than himselfe: Which he interpreted to be the Carthaginians, who exceeded him in might. And having at any time occasion to fight or grapple with them, that he might not incurre the meaning of this prediction, he would often temper and avoyde the victory. But he mis-understoode the matter, for the God observed the time of advantage, when as through partiall favour and injustice he obtained the

victory over the tragicall Poets at *Athens*, who were much better than he was, where he caused in contention of them, his Tragedie, entitled the *Leneiens*, to be publikely acted. After which usurped victorie, he presently deceased: And partly through the excessive joy, hee thereby conceived. What I finde excusable in mine, is not of it selfe, and according to truth: but in comparison of other compositions, worse than mine, to which I see some credite given. I envie the good happe of those, which can applaude and gratifie themselves by their owne labours; for it is an easie matter for one to please himselfe, since he drawes his pleasure from him selfe: Especially if one bee somewhat constant in his owne wilfulnesse. I knowe a Poetaster, gainst whome both weake and strong, in company and at home, both heaven and earth, affirme and say, he hath no skill or judgement in Poesie, who for all that is nothing dismaied, nor will not abate one jote of that measure whereunto he hath fitted himselfe; but is ever beginning againe, ever consulting anew, and alwayes persisting; by so much the more fixed in his opinion, by how much the more it concerneth him alone, and he onely is to maintaine it. My compositions are so farre from applauding mee, that as many times as I looke them over, so often am I vexed at them.

*Cùm relego, scripsisse pudet, quia plurima cerno,  
Me quoque qui feci, iudice digna lini.*

*When I re-reafe, I shame I write for much I see,  
My selfe, who made them, being judge, blotted to be.*

I have ever an Idea in my mind, which presents me with a better forme, then that I have alreadie framed, but I can neither lay holde on it, nor effect it. Yet is that Idea but of the meaner stamp. I thereby conclude, that the productions of those rich and great mindes of former ages, are farre beyond the extreame extention of my wish and imagination. Their compositions doe not onely satisfie and fille me, but they astonish and wrap me into admiration. I judge of their beautie, I see it, if not to the end, at least so farre as it is imposible for me to aspire unto it. Whatsoever I undertake (as *Plutarke* saith of one) I owe a sacrifice to the Graces, hoping thereby to gaine their favour.

*si quid enim placet,  
Si quid dulce hominum, sensibus influit,  
Debentur lepidis omnia Gratiis.*

*If fought doe please, if any sweete  
The sense of men with pleasures greet,  
To thanke the Graces it is meete.*

They altogether forsake mee: What I do, it is but bunglingly, and wants both polishing and beautie. I can rate them at no higher value, then they are worth. My workmanship addeth no grace unto the matter. And that's the reason I must have it strong, with good holdfast, and shining of it selfe. If I chance to seize on any popular and more gay, it is to follow me, who love not a cerimonious prudence and gloomie wisdom, as doth the world; and to glad my selfe, not my stile, who would rather have it grave and severe: If at

least I may call that a stile, which is a formelesse and abrupt speech. A popular gibbrish, and a proceeding without definition, without partition, and sans conclusion, troubled as that of *Amafanius*, and *Rabirius*. I can neither please, nor glad, nor tickle. The best tale in the world comming into my hands, becomes withered and tarnished. I can not speake but in good earnest, and am altogether barren of that facility which I see in many of my companions, to entertaine first commers, to keep a whole troupe in talke, to amuse a Princes eare with all maner of discourses and never to be weary, and never to want matter, by reason of the grace they have in applying their first approches, and fitting them to the humour and capacitie of those they have to doe withall. Princes love not greatly serious and long discourses, nor I to tell tales. The first and easiest reasons (which are commonly the best taken) I can neither employ nor make use of them. I am an ill Orator to the common sort. I speake the utmost I knowe of all matters. *Cicero* thinkes, in discourses of Philosophie, the exordium to be the hardest part: If it be so, I wisely lay holde on the conclusion. Yet should a man knowe how to tune his strings to all aires: And the sharpest comes ever last in play. There is at least as much perfection in raising up an emptie, as to uphold a waighty thing: A man must sometimes handle matters but superficially, and at other times dive into them. I wot well that most men keepe themselves on this lowe stage, because they conceive not of things but by the outward shew. I also knowe, that the greatest clarkes, yea *Xenophon* and *Plato*, are often seene to yeelde to this low and popular fashion, in speaking of matters, upholding it with those graces, which they never want. As for the rest, my language hath neither facilitie nor fluencie in it, but is harsh and sharpe, having free and unsinnowie dispositions. And so it liketh me, if not by my judgement, yet by my inclination. But yet I perceive that sometimes I wade to farre into it, and that forcing my selfe to avoide art and affectation, I fall into it another way.

*brevis esse laboro,  
Obscurus fio.*

*To be short labor I?  
I darker growe thereby.*

*Plato* saith, that either long or short, are not properties, that either diminish or give price unto speech. If I should undertake to follow this other smoothe, even and regular stile, I should never attaine unto it. And although the cadences, and breakings of *Saluste* doe best agree with my humour, yet doe I finde *Cæsar* both greater, and lesse easie to be represented. And if my inclination doth rather carrie me to the imitation of *Senecas* stile, I omit not to esteeme *Plutarke* much more. As well in silence as in speech, I am simply my naturall forme, whence happily ensueth, that I am more in speaking then in writing. The motions and actions of the body, give life unto words, namely in them that move roundly and without affectation, as I do, and that will be earnest. Behaviour, the face, the voice, the gowne, and the place, may somewhat endear those things, which in themselves are but meane, as prating. *Messala* complaineth in *Tacitus* of certaine strait garments used in his time, and discommendeth the fashion of the benches whereon the Orators were to speake, saying, they weakened their eloquence. My French tongue is corrupted both in the pronuntiation, and else where by the barbarisme of

my countrie. I never saw man of these hither-countries, that did not evidently taste of his home-speech, and who often did not wound those eares, that are purely French. Yet is it not because I am so cunning in my *Perigordin*: For I have no more use of it, then of the Dutch, nor doe I greatly care. It is a language (as are many others round about me) like to that of *Poitou*, *Xaintogne*, *Angoulesme*, *Limosin*, and *Avergne*, squattering, dragling, and filthie. There is about us, toward the mountaines a Gascoine tongue, which I much commend and like, sinnowie, pithie, short, significant, and in truth man-like and militarie, more then any other I understand. As compendious, powerfull, and pertinent as the French is gracious, delicate, and copious. As for the Latin, which was given me for my mother-tongue, by reason of discontinuance, I have so lost the promptitude of it, as I cannot well make use of it in speech, and scarsely in writing, in which I have heerctofore beene so readie, that I was called a maister in it. Loe heere my little sufficiencie in that behalfe. *Beautie is a part of great commendation in the commerce and societie of men.* It is the chiefe meane of reconciliation betweene one and other. Nor is there any man so barbarous, and so hardharted, that in some sort feeleth not himselfe strooken with hir sweetnes. The body hath a great part in our being, and therein keeps a speciall ranke: For, his structure and composition are worthie due consideration. Such as goe about to sunder our two principall parts, and separate them one from another, are much to blame: They ought rather to be coupled and joyned fast together. The soule must be enjoyned not to retire her selfe to hir quarter, nor to entertaine hir selfe apart, nor to despise and leave the body (which she cannot well doe, except it be by some counterfaieted apish tricke) but ought to combine and cling fast unto him, to embrace, to cherish, assist, correct, perswade and advise him, and if he chance to swarve or stray, then to leade and direct him: In fine, she should wed and serve him in stead of a husband, that so their effects may not seeme contrarie and divers, but agreeing and uniforme. Christians have a particular instruction concerning this bond, for they knowe that Gods justice alloweth this societie, and embraceth this conjunction of the body and soule, yea so farre as to make the body capable of everlasting rewards. And that God beholds the whole man to worke, and will have him entirely to receive either the punishment, or the recompense, according to his merits or demerits. The Peripatetike Sect (of all Sects the most sociable) attributeth this onely care unto wisdom, in common to procure and provide, the good of these two associated parts: And declareth other Sects to have partialized overmuch, because they had given themselves to the full consideration of this commixture; this one for the body, this other for the soule, with one like error and oversight, and had mistaken their subject, which is Man; and their guide, which in generall they avouched to be Nature. The first distinction, that hath beene amongst men, and the first consideration, that gave preheminences to some over others, it is very likely it was the advantage of beautie.

*agros diuisere atque dedere  
Pro facie cuiusque & uiribus ingenióque:  
Nam facies multum ualuit, uirésque uigebant.*

*They land's divided and to each man shared  
As was his face, his strength, his wit compared.*



*For face and strength were then  
Much prized amongst men.*

I am of a stature somewhat under the meane. This default hath not onely uncomlines in it, but also incommoditie: Yea even in those which have charge and commandement over others; For, the authoritie which a faire presence and corporall majestie endoweth a man withall is wanting. *Caius Marius* did not willingly admit any Souldiers in his bands, that were not sixe foote high. The Courtier hath reason to require an ordinarie stature in the Gentleman he frameth, rather, than any other; and to avoide all strangenes that may make him to be pointed-at: But if he misse of this mediocritie, to chuse that he rather offend in lownes, then in tallnes. I would not doe it in a militarie man. Little men (saith *Aristotle*) are indeede pretie, but not beauteous, nor goodly: and in greatnes, is a great soule knowne as is beautie in a great and high body. The Ethiopians and Indians (saith he) in chusing of their Kings and Magistrates, had an especiall regard to the beautie and tallnes of the persons. They had reason, for it breedeth an awefull respect in those that follow him, and a kinde of feare in his enemies, to see a goodly, tall and handsome man march as Chiefe and Generall in the head of an armie, or front of a troupe:

*Ipse inter primos præstanti corpore Turnus  
Uertitur, arma tenens, & toto uertice suprâ est.*

*Turnus, a goodly man, mongst them that led,  
Stood arm'd, then all they higher by the head.*

Our great, divine and heavenly King, all whose circumstances ought with much care, religion and reverence to be noted and observed, hath not refused the bodies commendation. *Speciosus forma præ filiis hominum. In favor beautifull above the sonnes of men.* And *Plato* wisheth beautie to be joyned unto temperance and fortitude in the preservers of his Commonwealth. Is it not a great spite, if being amongst your owne servants, a stranger commeth to your selfe to aske you where your Lord or Maister is? And that you have nothing but the remainder of a capping, which is as well put off to your Barber, or to your Secretarie? As it happened to poore *Philopæmen*, who having left his companie behind, and comming alone into a house where he was expresly looked-for, his hostesse who knew him not, and saw him to be so il-favored a fellow, employed him to helpe hir maides to drawe water, and to mend the fire for the service of *Philopæmen*. The Gentlemen of his traine being come, and finding him so busily at worke (for he failed not to fulfill his hostesses commandement) enquired of him what he did, who answered, *I pay the forfeiture of my unhandsomnesse*. Other beauties are for women. The beautie of a handsome comely tallnes is the onely beautie of men. Where lownes and littlenes is, neither the largenes or roundnes of a forehead, nor the whitenes or lovelines of the eyes, nor the prettie fashion of a nose, nor the slendernes of the eare, littlenes of the mouth, order and whitenes of teeth, smooth thicknes of a beard, browne like a chessnut, well-curved and upstanding haire, just proportion of the head, freshnes of collour, the cheerfull aspect of a pleasing face, the sweet-smelling of a body, nor the well decorated composition of all limmes, can make a handsome beauteous man. As for me, I am of a strong and well

compact stature, my face is not fat, but full, my complexion between joviall and melancholy, indifferently sanguine and hote.

*Unde rigens setis mihi crura, & pectora uillis:*

*Whereby my legges and brest,  
With rough haire are opprest.*

My health is blithe and lustie, though well-strooken in age, seldome troubled with diseases: Such I was, for I am now engaged in the aproches of age, having long since past-over fortie yeares: I doe not much heede my self.

*minutatim uires & robur adultum  
Frangit, & in partem peiorem liquitur ætas.*

*By little and a little age break's strength,  
To worse and worse declining melt's at length.*

What hereafter I shall be, will be but halfe a being. I shall be no more my selfe. I daily escape, and still steale my selfe from my selfe:

*Singula de nobis anni prædantur cuntes.*

*Yeares as they passe away,  
Of all our things make pray.*

Of addressing, dexteritie, and disposition, I never had any, yet am I the sonne of a wel disposed father, and of so blithe and mery a disposition, that it continued with him even to his extreamest age. He seldome found any man of his condition, and that could match him in all exercises of the body; As I have found few, that have not out-gon me, except it were in running, wherein I was none of the meanest.<sup>1</sup> As for musicke, were it either in voice, which I have most harsh, and very unapt, or in instruments, I could never be taught any part of it. As for dancing, playing at tennis, or wrestling, I could never attaine to any indifferent sufficiencie; but none at all in swimming, in fencing, in vaulting, or in leaping. My hands are so stiffe and nummie, that I can hardly write for my selfe, so that what I have once scribled, I had rather frame it a new, then take the paines to correct it; and I reade but little better. I perceiue how the audiorie censureth me: Otherwise I am no bad clarke. I cannot very well close up a letter; nor could I ever make a pen. I was never good carver at the table. I could never make readie nor arme a Horse: Nor handsomely carry a Hawke upon my fist, nor cast hir off or let hir flie, nor could I ever speake to Dogges, to Birds, or to Horses. The conditions of my body are in fine, very well agreeing with those of my minde, wherein is nothing lively; but onely a compleate and constant vigor. I endure labour and paine, yet not very well, unlesse I carry my selfe unto it, and no longer than my desire leadeth and directeth me.

*Molliter austerum studio fallente laborem.*

*While earnestnes for sport or gaine,  
Sweetly deceiv's the sourest paine.*

Otherwise, if by any pleasure I be not allured, & if I have other direction, then my genuine and free will, I am nothing worth, and I can never fadge well: For I am at such a stay, that except for health and life, there is nothing I will take the paines to fret my selfe about, or will purchase at so high a rate, as to trouble my wits for it, or be constrained thereunto.

*tanti mihi non sit opaci  
Omnis arena Tagi, quódque in mare uoluitur aurum:*

*So much I weigh not shadowed Tagus sande,  
Nor gold that roules into the Sea from land.*

I am extremely lazie and idle, and exceedingly free, both by nature and art. I would as willingly lend my blood as my care. I have a mind free and altogether hir owne; accustomed to follow hir owne humor. And to this day never had nor commanding nor forced maister. I have gon as farre, and kept what pace pleased me best. Which hath enfeobled and made me unprofitable to serve others, and made me fit and apt but onely for my selfe. And as for me, no man ever needed to force this heavie, lither, and idle nature of mine: For, having even from my birth found my selfe in such a degree of fortune, I have found occasion to stay there: (An occasion notwithstanding, that a thousand others of mine acquaintance would have taken as a plancke to passe over to search, to agitation, and to unquietnes.) And as I have sought for nothing, so have I taken nothing.

*Non agimur tumidis uentis Aquilone secundo,  
Non tamen aduersis tetatem ducimus austris:  
Viribus, ingenio, specie, uirtute, loco, re,  
Extremi primorum, extremis usque priores.*

*With full sailes, prosp'rous winde, we doe not drive,  
Nor yet with winde full in our teeth doe live.  
In strength, in wit, in vertue, shape, goods, place,  
Last of the first, before the last we pace.*

I have had no neede but of sufficiency to content my selfe: Which being well taken is ever a regiment for the minde, equally difficult in all sortes of condition; and which by use, we see more easily found in want, than in plenty; peradventure, because that according to the course of our other passions, the greedinesse of riches is more sharpned by their uses than by their neede: and the vertue of moderation more rare, than that of patience. And I have had no need, but to enjoy those goods quietlie, which God of his bountie had bestowed uppon me. I have tasted no kinde of tedious trouble. I have seldome mannaged other than mine owne businesse: Or if I have, it hath been upon condition, I might doe it at my leisure, and according to my will; committed unto mee, by such, as trusted mee, and knewe mee well, and would not importune mee; For, the skilfull rider, will reape some service of a restie and windbroken jade. My very Childe-hood hath beene directed by a soft, milde, gentle and free fashion and ever exempted from

rigorous subjection. All which hath endowed mee with a delicate kinde of complexion, and made me incapable of any care: So that I love, men should conceale my losses from me, & the disorders which concerne mee. In the Chapter of my charges and expences, I have set downe what my negligence or carelesnesse costs me, both to feed and entertaine my selfe.

*hec nempe supersunt,  
Quæ dominum fallunt, quæ prosint furibus.*

*This remnant of accoumpts I have,  
Which may deceive Lords, help a Knave.*

I love not to know an accoumpt of what I have, that I may lesse exactly feele my losses: I desire those that live with mee, where they want affection, or good effects, to cozen and pay me with good apparances. For want of sufficient constancy to endure the importunity of contrary or crosse accidents, wherunto we are subject; and because I cannot alwaies keep my selfe prepared to governe and order my affaires, as much as I am able, I foster this opinion in me, relying wholly upon fortune, and ready to take everie thing at the worst, and resolve to beare that worst, mildely and patiently. About that onely doe I busie my selfe, and to that end doe I direct all my discourses. In any dangerous matter, I care not so much how I may avoyde it, and how little it importeth whether I avoide it or no; And what were it if I should continue in it? Being unable to direct events, I governe my selfe; and if they apply not themselves to me, I apply my selfe to them: I have no great arte to shun fortune, and how to scape or force it, and with wisdom to addresse matters to my liking; I have also lesse sufferance to endure the sharpe and painefull care, which belongeth to that. And the most toilesome state for me, is to be doubtfull in matters of weight, and agitated betweene feare and hope. To deliberate, be it but in sleight matters, doth importune me. And I feele my spirit more perplexed to suffer the motions of doubt, and shakings of consultation, then to be settled and resolved about any accident whatsoever, after the chauce is once cast. Fewe passions have troubled my sleep; but of deliberations the leaste doth trouble it. Even as of high-wayes, I willingly seeke to avoyde the downe-hanging, and slipperie, and take the beaten-path, though myrie, and deepe, so I may goe no lower, and there seek I safety: So love I pure mishaps, and which exercise and turmoile me no more, after the uncertaintie of their mending: And which even at the first cast, drive me directly into sufferance.

*dubia plus torquent mala.*

*Evils yet in suspence,  
Doe give us more offence.*

In events, I carry my selfe man-like; in the conduct childishly. The horror of a fall doth more hurt me, than the blow. The play is not worth the candle. The covetous man hath a worse reckoning of his passion, than the poore; and the jealous man, than the cuckold. And it is often lesse harme for one to loose his farme, than pleade and wrangle for it: *The slowest march, is the safest.* It is the seate of constancie. Therein you have no need but of your

selfe. There she takes hir footing and wholly resteth upon hir selfe. This example of a Gentleman, whom many have knowen, hath it not some Philosophicall shew? This man having passed all his youth like a good fellow, a jollie companion, a great talker, and a merry ladde, being now well in yeares, would needes be married. Remembring himselfe how much the subject of cuckoldry had given him cause to speake, and scoffe at others; to put himselfe under covert-barren, he tooke him a wife from out that place, where all men may have them for mony, and with her made his aliance: Good morrow Whoore, Good morrow Cuckold. And there is nothing wherewith he oftner and more openly entertained such as came unto him, than with this tale; Whereby he brideled the secret pratlings of mockers, and blunted the point of this reproch. Concerning ambition, which is next neighbor or rather daughter to presumption, it had beene needefull (to advance me) that fortune had come to take me by the hand: For to put my selfe into any care for an uncertaine hope, and to submit my selfe to al difficulties, waiting on such as seek to thrust themselves into credite and reputation, in the beginning of their progresse, I could never have done it.

*Spem pretio non emo,*

*Expence of present pay  
For hope, I do not lay.*

I fasten my selfe on that which I see and hold and go not far from the shore:

*Alter remus aquas, alter tibi radat arenas.*

*Keepe water with one Oare,  
With th'other grate the shore.*

Besides, a man seldome comes to these preferments, but in hazarding first his own: And I am of opinion, if that which a man hath, suffizeth to maintaine the condition, wherein hee was borne and brought up, it is folly to let it go, upon the uncertainty of encreasing the same. He to whom fortune refuseth meanes to settle his estate, and establish a quiet and reposed being, is excusable if he cast what he hath at hazard, since thus as well as thus, necessitie sends him to shift and search out.

*Capienda rebus in malis preceps uia est.*

*A headlong course is best,  
When mischiefs are adrest.*

And I rather excuse a yonger brother, to make sale of his inheritance, than him, who hath the honor of his house in charge, who cannot fal into wants but through his default: I have by the counsell of my good friendes of former times, found the way shorter and easier to rid my selfe of this desire, and keep my selfe husht:

*Cut sit conditio dulcis, sine puluere palmae.*

*Who like it well to beare the prise.  
But take no toile in any wise.*

Judging also rightly of my forces, that they were not capable of great matters: And remembering the saying of Lord Oliver whilome-Chaunceler of France, who said, that *French-men might be compared to Monkies, who climbing up a tree, never cease skipping from bough to bough, till they come to the highest, where being come thence they shew their tailes.*

*Turpe est quòd nequeas capiti committere pondui,  
Et pressum inflexo mox daret erga genu.*

*T'is shame, more than it can well beare, on head to packe,  
And thereby soone oppresst with bended knee flie backe.*

Such qualities as are now in me voide of reproch, in that age I deemed unprofitable. The facilitie of my maners had beene named faintnes and weaknesse; faith and conscience would have beene thought scrupulous and superstitious: liberty and freedome, importunate, inconsiderate and rash. Misfortune serveth to some purpose. It is not amisse to bee borne in a much depraved age: for in comparison of others, you are judged vertuous, very cheape. *In our dayes, he that is but a particide, or a sacrilegious person, is a man of honesty and honor.*

*Nunc si depositum non inficiatur amicus,  
Si reddat ueterem cum tota ærugine follem,  
Prodigiosa fides, & Thuscis digna libellis,  
Quæque coronata lustrari debeat agna.*

*If now a friend deny not what was laide in trust,  
If wholly hee restore th'olde bellows with their rust:  
A wondrous trust, to be in Chronicles related,  
And should with sacrifice, as strange, be expiated.*

*And never was there time or place, wherein more assured and great reward was proposed unto Princes, for goodnesse and justice.* The first that shall be advised, by these meanes to thrust himselfe into favour and credite, I am much deceived if in part of payment, he get not the start of his fellowes. Force and violence can doe very much; but never all. Wee see Marchants, country-Justices, and Artificers to march cheeke by joll with our Nobilitie, in valour, and military discipline. They performe honourable combates, both publike and private. They batter and defend Townes and Citties in our present warres. A Prince smothereth his commendation amid this throng. *Let him shine over others with humanitie, with truth, loyaltie, temperance, and above all with justice; markes now adayes rare, unknowne and exiled.* It is onely the peoples will, wherewith he may effect what he pleaseth: And no other qualities can allure their will so much as they, as being the profitabest for them. *Nihil est tam popolare quam bonitas. Nothing is so popular as goodnesse is.* By this proportion I had beene a rare great man: As by that of certaine ages past, I am now a pigmey and popular man; In which it was common, if stronger qualities did not concurre withall, *To see a man temperate in his revenges, milde in revenging of offences, religious in keeping*

of his word; neither double, nor over tractable, nor applying his faith to others will, or to every occasion. I would rather let all affaires goe to wracke, than breake my word for their availe. For, touching this new-found vertue of faining and dissimulation, which now is so much in credite, I hate it to the death: and of all vices, I finde none that so much witnesseth demisnesse and basenesse of heart. It is a coward and servile humour, for a man to disguise and hide himselfe under a maske, and not dare to shew himselfe as he is. Thereby our men adresse themselves to trecherie: *Being trained to utter false words, they make no conscience to breake them.* A generous minde ought not to belie his thoughts, but make shew of his inmost partes: There all is good, or at least all is humane. Aristotle thinkes it *an office of magnanimitie to hate and love openly, to speake with all libertie; and never (though the prise of truth goe on it) to make esteeme either of the approbation or reprobation of others.* Apollonius saide, *it was for servants to lie, and for freemen to speake truth.* It is the chiefe and fundamentall part of vertue. She must be loved for her owne sake. *He that speaketh truth, because he is bound to doe so, and for that he serveth: and that feares not to tell a lie, when it little importeth another man, is not sufficiently true.* My mind of her owne complexion detesteth falsehood, and hateth to think on it. I feel an inward bashfulness, and a stinging remorse, if at any time it scape me; as sometimes it doth, if unpremeditated occasions surprise me. *A man must not alwayes say al he knows, for that were folie: But what a man speaks ought to be agreeing to his thoughts, otherwise it is impietie.* I know not what benefit they expect, that ever faine, and so uncessantly dissemble; except it be not to be believed, even when they speak truly. That may deceive men once or twice, but to make a profession to carry it away smoothly, and as some of our Princes have done, to boast, that if their shirt were privie to their secret and true cogitations, they would burne it: which was the saying of ancient *Metellus Macedonicus*; And that *he who cannot dissemble, cannot raigne,* serves but only to warne those who have to deale with them, that what they say is but untruth and dissimulation. *Quo quis uersutior & callidior est, hoc inuisior & suspectior, detracta opinione probitatis.* *The finer-headed, and more subtile-brained a man is, the more is he hated and suspected, if once the opinion of honestly be taken from him.* It were great simplicitie for a man to suffer himselfe to be misled either by the looks or words of him, that outwardly professeth what he is not inwardly, as did *Tiberius*. And I know not what share such people may chalenge in the commerce of men, never producing any thing, that may be taken for good paiement. *He who is disloyall to truth, is likewise false against lying.* Such as in our dayes, in the establishing of a Princes dutie, have onely considered the good and felicitie of his affaires, and preferred the same before the respect of his faith and conscience, would say something to a Prince, whose affaires fortune hath so disposed, that with once breaking and falsifying of his word he might for ever confirme and establish them. But it goeth otherwise. A man may more then once come to such a bargaine. A man during his life concludeth more then one peace or treatie. The commoditie or profit that enviteth them to the first disloyaltie (and dayly some offer themselves, as to all other trecheries) sacrileges, murthers, rebellions, treasons, are undertaken for some kinde of profit. But this first gaine brings ever infinite losses and dangers with it: casting this Prince from-out all commerce and meanes of negotiation, by the example of this infidelitie. *Solyman* of the Ottomans race (a race little regarding the keeping of promises or performance of covenants) at

what time hee caused his Armie to land at *Otranto* (I being then but a childe) having knowne that *Mercurin* of *Gratinara*, and the inhabitants of *Castro*, were detained prisoners, after the Towne was yeilded, contrary to that which by his Captaines had bene capitulated with them, he sent word they should be released, and that having other weightie enterprises in hand in that countrie, such disloyaltie, although it had apparance of great and present benefite, yet in time to come it would bring a distrust and reproch of infinite prejudice. As for me *I had rather be importunate and indiscreete, than a flatterer and a dissembler*. I allow, a man may entermingle some point of fiercenesse and wilfulnesse, to keepe himselfe so entire and open as I am, without consideration of others. And me seemeth I become a little more free, where I should be lesse, and that by the opposition of respect I grow earnest. It may also be, that for want of arte I follow mine owne nature. Presenting to the greater sorte the very same licence of speech and boldnesse of countenance, that I bring from my house: I perceiue how much it inclineth towards indiscretion and incivilitie. But although I be so fashioned, my spirit is not sufficiently yeielding to avoide a sodaine question, or to scape it by some winding, nor to dissembler a truth, nor have I memory able to continue it so fained, nor assurance sufficient to maintaine it; and I play the Braggard through feeblenesse. And therefore I apply my selfe to ingenuitie, and ever to speake truth and what I thinke, both by complexion and by intention; leaving the successe thereof unto fortune. *Aristippus* saide, that the chiefest commoditie hee reaped by Philosophie, was, that he spake freely and sincerely to all men: Memory is an instrument of great service, and without which, judgement will hardly discharge his dutie, whereof I have great want. What a man will propose unto me, he must do it by piece-meales: For, to answer to a discourse that hath many heads, lieth not in my power. I can not receive a charge, except I have my writing tables about me: and if I must remember a discourse of any consequence, be it of any length, I am driven to this vile and miserable necessitie, to learn every word I must speake, by rote; otherwise I should never do it well or assuredly, for feare my memory should in my greatest neede faile me; which is very hard unto me, for I must have three houres to learne three verses. Moreover in any long discourse, the libertie or authoritie to remove the order, to change a word, uncessantly altering the matter, makes it more difficult to bee confirmed in the authors memory. And the more I distrust it, the more it troubleth me. It serveth me better by chance, and I must carelesly sollicite her, for if I urge her, she is astonished; and if it once beginne to waver, the more I sound her, the more entangled and intricate she prooveth. She will wait upon me when she list, not when I please. And what I feele in my memory, I feele in many other parts of mine. I eschew commandement, dutie, and compulsion. What I doe easily and naturally, if I resolve to doe it by expresse and prescribed appointment, I can then doe it no more. Even in my body, those partes, that have some libertie, and more particular jurisdiction, doe sometimes refuse to obey me, if at any time I appoint and enjoyne them to doe me some necessary services. This forced and tyrannicall preordinance doth reject them; and they either for spite or feare shrink and are quailed. Being once in a place, where it is reputed a barbarous discourtesie not to pledge those that drinke to you, where although I were used with all libertie, in favour of certaine Ladies that were in companie, according to the fashion of the countrie, I would



needes play the good fellow. But it made us all mery; for the threats and preparation, that I should force my selfe beyond my naturall custome, did in such sort stop, and stuffe my throate, that I was not able to swallow one drop, and was barr'd of drinking all the repast. I found my selfe gluttid and full of drinke by the overmuch swilling that my imagination had fore-conceived. This effect is more apparant in those, whose imagination is more vehement and strong: yet it is naturall: and there is no man, but shall sometimes have a feeling of it. An excellent Archer being condemned to death, was offered to have his life saved, if he would but shew any notable triall of his profession, refused to make prooffe of it; fearing lest the contention of his will should make him to misse-direct his hand, and that in lieu of saving his life, hee might also loose the reputation, hee had gotten in shooting in a bow. A man whose thoughts are busie about other matters, shall very neere within an inch keepe and alwayes hit one selfe same number and measure of paces, in a place where he walketh; but if heedily he endeavour to measure and compt them, he shall finde that what he did by nature and chance, he cannot do it so exactly by desseigne. My Library (which for a country Librarie, may passe for a very faire one) is seated in a corner of my house, if any thing come into my minde, that either I must goe seeke or write in it, for feare I should forget it in crossing of my Court, I must desire some other body to remember the same for me. If speaking, I embolden my selfe never so little, to digresse from my Discourse, I doe ever loose it; which makes me to keepe my selfe in my speech, forced, neere and close. Those that serve mee, I must ever call them, either by their office or cuntry: for I finde it very hard to remember names. Well may I say, it hath three sillables, that it's sound is harsh, or that it beginneth or endeth with such a letter. And should I live long, I doubt not but I might forget mine owne name, as some others have done heretofore. *Messala Corvinus* lived two yeares without any memory at all, which is also reported of *George Trapezoncius*. And for mine owne interest, I doe often ruminare what manner of life theirs was, and whether wanting that part, I shall have sufficient to maintaine my selfe in any good sort: which looking neere unto, I feare that this defect, if it be perfect, shall loose all the functions of my soule.

*Plenus rimarum sum, hac atque illac perfluo.*

*I am so full of holes, I can not holde,  
I runne out ev'ry way, when tales are tolde.*

It hath often befallen me, to forget the word, which but three houres before I had either given or received of another, and to forget where I had layed my purse. Let *Cicero* say what hee list, I helpe my selfe to loose, what I perticularly locke up. *Memoria certè non modò Philosophiam, sed omnis uitæ usum, omnésque artes una maximè continet.* Assuredly memorie alone, of all other things compriseth not onely Philosophy, but the use of our whole life, and all the sciences. Memorie is the receptacle and case of knowledge. Mine being so weake, I have no great cause to complaine if I knowe but little. I know the names of Artes in Generall, and what they treat of, but nothing further. I turne and tosse over bookes, but doe not study them; what of them remaines in me, is a thing which I no longer acknowledge to be anie bodies else. Onely by that hath my judgement profited: and the discourses

and imaginations, wherewith it is instructed and trained up. The Authours, the place, the words, and other circumstances, I sodainely forget: and am so excellent in forgetting, that as much as any thing else I forget mine owne writings and compositions. Yea, mine owne sayings are every hand-while alleaged against my selfe, when God wot I perceive it not. Hee that would know of mee, whence or from whom the verses or examples, which here I have huddled up are taken, should greatly put me to my shifts, and I could hardly tel it him. Yet have I not begged them, but at famous and very-wel-knowne gates: which though they were rich in themselves, did never please me, unlesse they also came from rich and honourable handes, and that authority, concurre with reason. It is no great marvell, if my booke follow the fortune of other bookes; and my memory forgoe or forget as wel what I write, as what I reade: and what I give, as well as what I receive. Besides the defect of memory, I have others, which much further my ignorance. My wit is dull and slow, the least cloude dimmeth it, so that (for example sake) I never proposed riddle unto it (were it never so easie) that it was able to expound. There is no subtilty so vaine, but confounds me. In games, wherein wit may beare a part, as of chesse, of cards, of tables and others, I could never conceive but the common and plainest draughts. My apprehension is very sluggish and gloomie; but what it once holdeth, the same it keepeth fast: and for the time it keepes it, the same it embraceth generallie, strictly and deepely. My sight is quicke, sound, perfect and farre-seeing, but easily wearied, if much charged or emloyd. By which occasion I can have no great commerce with books but by others service which reade unto me. *Plinie* the yonger can instruct those that have tri'd it, how much this fore-slowing importeth those that give themselves to this occupation. There is no spirite so wretched or so brutish, wherein some particular facultie is not seene to shine; and none so lowe-buried, but at one hole or other it will sally out sometimes. And how it commeth to passe, that a minde blinde and slumbering in all other things, is in some particular effects, lively, cleare and excellent, a man must enquire of cunning masters. But those are the faire spirits, which are universall, open, and ready to all, if not instructed, at least to be instructed. Which I alleage to accuse mine: For, be it either through weakenesse, or retchlessnesse (and to be carelesse of that which lieth at our feete, which we have in our handes, which nearest concerneth the use of life, is a thing farre from my Dogma or Doctrine) there is none so simple or so ignorant as mine, in divers such common matters, and of which without imputation or shame a man should neuer bee ignorant; whereof I must needes tell some examples. I was borne and brought up in the Countrey, and amidst husbandrie: I have since my predecessours quit me the place and possession of the goods I enjoy, both businesse and husbandrie in hand. I cannot yet cast accoumpt either with penne or Counters. There are diverse of our French Coines, I know not: nor can I distinguish of one graine from another, be it in the field or in the barne, unlesse it be very apparant: nor do I scarsly know the difference betweene the Cabidge or Lettice in my Garden. I understand not the names of the most usuall tooles about husbandry, nor of the meanest principles of tillage, which most children know. I was never skilfull in Mechanicall artes, nor in Traffike or knowledge of Marchandize, nor in the diversitie and nature of fruites, wines, or cates, nor can I make a Hawke, phisicke a Horse, or teach a Dogge. And since I must make full shew of my shame or

ignorance, it is not yet a moneth since, that I was found to be ignorant, whereto Leven served to make bread withal; or what it was to tunne Wine. The *Athenians* were anciently wont to thinke him very apt for the *Mathematikes*, that could cunningly order or make up a faggot of brush-wood: Verily a man might draw a much contrarie conclusion from me: For let me have all that may belong to a Kitchin, yet shall I be ready to starve for hunger. By these partes of my confession, one may imagine divers others, to my cost and detriment. But howsoever I make my selfe knowen, alwayes provided it be as I am indeede, I have my purpose. And I excuse not my selfe, that I dare set downe in writing, so base and frivolous matters as these. The basenesse of the subject forceth me thereunto. Let who so list accuse my project, but not my progresse. So it is, that without being warned of others, I see very wel, how little this weigheth or is worth, and I perceiue the fondnesse of my purpose. It is sufficient that my judgement is not dismayed or distracted, whereof these be the Essayes.

*Nasutus sis usque licet, sis denique nasut,  
Quantum noluerit ferre rogatus Atlas:  
Et possis ipsum tu deridere Latinum,  
Non potes in nugas dicere plura meas,  
Ipse ego quàm dixi: quid dentem dente iuuabit  
Rodere? carne opus est, si satur esse uelis.  
Ne perdas operam, qui se mirantur, in illos  
Uirus habe, nos hæc nouimus esse nihil.*

*Suppose you were long nos'd, suppose such nose you weare  
As Atlas, if you should entreate him, would not beare,  
That you in flouting old Latinus can be fine.  
Yet can you say no more against these toys of mine,  
Then I have said; what boote, tooth with a tooth to whet?  
You must have flesh, if you to glut your selfe be set.  
Loose not your paines; gainst them who on themselves are doting  
Keepe you your sting: we know these thing of ours are nothing.*

I am not bound to utter follies, so I be not deceived to knowe them: And wittingly to erre, is so ordinarie in me, that I erre not much otherwise; and seldome erre casually. It is a small matter to yeeld the fond actions unto the rashnesse of my humours, since I cannot warrant my self ordinarily to yeeld them the vicious. Being at *Barleduc*, I saw, for the commendation of *Renate* the King of *Sicilies* memory a picture which with his owne hands hee had made of himselfe, presented unto our King *Francis* the second: why is it not as lawfull for every man else to pourtray himselfe with his pen, as it was for him to doe it with a pensell? I will not then forget this other blemish, unfit to be seene of all. That is irresolution: a most incommodious defect in the negotiation of worldly affaires: I cannot resolve in matters admitting doubtfulnessse:

*Ne si, ne nò, nel cuor mi suona intiero.*

*Nor yea, nor nay sounds clearely in my hart.*

I can maintaine an opinion, but not make choise of it: For, in humane things, what side soever a man leaneth-on, many apparances present themselves unto us, which confirme us in them: and *Chrysippus* the Philosopher was wont to say, that he would learne nothing else of his maisters *Zeno* and *Cleanthes*, but their doctrines simply: For, proofes and reasons he would finde enough of himselfe. Let me turne to what side I will, I ever finde sufficient matter, and likelyhood to keepe my selfe unto it. Thus keepe I doubt and libertie to my selfe, to chuse, untill occasion urge me, and then (to confesse the truth) as the common saying is, I cast my fether to the winde, and yeelde to fortunes mercie. A very light inclination, and a slender circumstance caries me away.

*Dum in dubio est animus, paulo momento huc atque illuc impellitur.*

*While mind is in suspence, with small a doe,  
T'is hither, thither, driven fro and to.*

The uncertaintie of my judgement, is in many occurrences so equally ballanced, as I would willingly compromise it to the deciding of chance and of the dice. And I note with great consideration of our humane imbecilitie, the examples, which the historie of God it selfe hath left us of this use, to remit the determination of elections in doubtfull matters, unto fortune and hazard: *Sors cecidit super Matthiam. The lot fell upon Mathias. Humane reason is a two-edged dangerous sword; Even in Socrates his hand, hir most inward and familiar friend, marke what a many-ended staffe it is. So am I onely fit to follow, and am easily caried away by the throng. I doe not greatly trust mine owne strength, to undertake to command, or to leade. I rejoyce to see my steps traced by others. If I must runne the hazard of an uncertaine choise, I would rather have it be under such a one, who is more assured of his opinions, and more wedded to them, than I am of mine; the foundation and platforme of which I finde to be very slippery; yet am I not very easie to change, forsomuch as I perceive a like weakenes in contrarie opinions. *Ipsa consuetudo assentiendi periculosa esse videtur, & lubrica. The very custome of assenting seemeth hazardous and slipperie: Namely in politike affaires, wherein is a large field open to all motions, and to contestation.**

*Iusta pari premitur ueluti cum pondere libra,  
Prona nec hac plus parte sedet, nec surgit ab illa.*

*As when an even skale with equall weight is peized,  
Nor falles it downe this way, or is it that way raised.*

As for example, *Machiavels* discourses, were very solid for the subject; yet hath it beene very easie to impugne them, and those that have done it, have left no lesse facilitie to impugne theirs. A man might ever finde answeres enough to such an argument, both rejoynders, double, treble, quadruple, with this infinit contexture of debates, that our pettie-foggers have wyre-drawne, and wrested as much as ever they could in favour of their pleas and processes:

*Cædimur, & totidem plagis consumimus hostem.*

*We by our foes are beaten, if not slaine,  
We with as many strokes waste them againe.*

Reasons having no other good ground then experience, and the diversitie of humane events, presenting us with infinit examples for all manner of formes. A wise man of our times, saith, that where our Almanakes say, warme or moyst, should a man say cold, and in lieu of drie, moyst; And ever set downe the contrarie of what they foretell; were he to lay a wager of one or others successe, he would not care what side he tooke, except in such things as admit no uncertaintie; as to promise extreame heate at Christmas, and exceeding cold at Midsomer. The like I thinke of these politike discourses. What part soever you are put unto, you have as good a game as your fellow: Provided you affront not the apparant and plaine principles. And therefore (according to my humor) in publike affaires, there is no course so bad (so age and constancie be joyned unto it) that is not better then change and alteration. *Our manners are exceedingly corrupted, and with a marvelous inclination bend toward worse and worse;* Of our lawes and customes many are barbarous, and diverse monstrous; notwithstanding, by reason of the difficultie to reduce us to better estate, and of the danger of this subversion, if I could fixe a pegge into our wheele, and stay it where it now is, I would willingly doe it.

*nunquam adeo fœdis adeoque pudendis  
Vtimur exemplis, ui non peiora supersint.*

*Examples of so filthy shamefull kinde  
We never use, but worse remaines behind.*

Instabilitie is the worst I find in our state, and that our lawes, no more than our garments, can take no settled forme. *It is an easie matter to accuse a state of imperfection, since all mortall things are full of it.* As easie is it to beget in a people a contempt of his ancient observances: No man ever undertooke it, but came to an end: But to establish a better state in place of that which is condemned and raced out, divers who have attempted it, have shronke under the burthen. Touching my conduct, my wisdom hath small share therein. I am very easily to be directed by the worlds publike order. Oh happie people, that doth what is commanded, better then they which command, without vexing themselves about causes; which suffer themselves gently to be rowled on, according to the heavens rowling. Obedience is never pure and quiet in him, who talketh, pleadeth and contendeth. In some, (to returne to my selfe) the onely matter, for which I make some accoumpt of my selfe, is that, wherein never man did thinke himselfe defective. My commendation is vulgar, common and popular; For, who ever thought he wanted wit? It were a proposition, which in it selfe would imply contradiction. It is an infirmity, that is never where it is seene, it is very strong and fastholding, but yet pierced and dissipated by the first beame of the patients sight, as doth the Sunnes raies scatter and dispearce a gloomie mist. For a man to accuse himselfe, were to excuse himselfe of that subject; and to condemne himselfe, an absolving of himselfe. There was never so base a porter, nor so silly a woman, but thought he had sufficient wit for his provision. We easily know in others, the advantage of courage, of bodily strength, of experience, of disposition

and of beautie, but we never yeelde the advantage of judgement to any body: And the reasons, which part from the simple naturall discourse in others, we thinke, that had we but looked that way, we had surely found them. The skill, the knowledge, the stile and such like partes, which wee see in strange workes, wee easily perceive whether they exceede ours; but the meere productions of witte and understanding, everie man deemeth it lyeth in him to meete with the very like, and doth hardly perceive the weight and difficultie of it, except (and that very scarsely) in an extreame and incomparable distance. And he that should clearely see the height of a strangers judgement, would come and bring his unto it. Thus, is it a kind of exercising, whereof a man may hope but for meane commendation and small praise, and a maner of composition, of little or no name at all. And then, for whom doe you write? The wiser sort, unto whom belongeth bookish jurisdiction, know no other price but of doctrine, and avow no other proceeding in our wits, but that of erudition and arte. If you have mistaken one *Scipio* for another, what of any worth have you left to speake of? He that is ignorant of *Aristotle* (according to them) he is therewithall ignorant of himselfe. Popular and shallow-headed mindes, cannot perceive the grace or comelinesse, nor judge of a smoothe and quaint discourse. Now these two kindes possesse the world. The third, unto whose share you fall, of regular wits, and that are strong of themselves, is so rare, that justly it hath neither name or ranke amongst us; he looseth halfe his time, that doth aspire or endeavour to please it. It is commonly said, that the justest portion, nature hath given us of the graces, is that of sense and understanding; for there is no man, but is contented with the share she hath allotted him: Is it not reason? He who should see beyond that, should see further then his sight. I perswade my selfe to have good and sound opinions; but who is not so perswaded of his owne? One of the best trialls I have of it, is the small esteeme I make of my selfe: for, had they not beene well assured, they would easily have suffered themselves to be deceived, by the affection I beare unto my selfe, singulare, as he, who brings it almost all unto my selfe, and that spill but a little besides. All that, which others distribute thereof unto an infinite number of friends and acquaintances, to their glorie and greatnes, I referre to the repose of my spirite and to my selfe. What else where escapes of it, is not properly by the appointment of my discourse:

*mihi nempe ualere & uiuere doctus.*

*Well learn'd in what concerneth me,  
To live, and how in health to be.*

*As for my opinions, I finde them infinitely bold and constant to condemne mine insufficiencie. And to say truth, it is a subject, whereabout I exercise my judgement, as much as about any other. The world lookes ever foreright, I turne my sight inward, there I fix it, there I amuse it. Every man lookes before himselfe, I looke within my selfe, I have no businesse but with my selfe. I uncessantly consider, controle and taste my selfe: other men go ever elsewhere, if they thinke well on it: they go ever foreward,*

*nemo in sese tentat descendere.*

*No man attempteth this Essay,  
Into himselfe to finde the way.*

as for me I roule me into my selfe. This capacitie of sifting out the truth, what, and howsoever it be in me, and this free humour I have, not very easily to subject my beliefe, I owe especially unto my selfe; for, the most constant, and generall imaginations I have, are those; which (as one would say) were borne with me: They are naturall unto me, and wholly mine. I produced them raw and simple, of a hardy and strong production, but somewhat troubled and unperfect: which I have since established and fortified by the authoritie of others, and by the sound examples of antients, with whom I have found my selfe conformable in judgement: Those have assured me of my hold-fast of them, and have given me both the enjoying and possession thereof more absolute and more cleare. The commendation which every man seekes after, for a vivacitie and promptitude of wit, I chalenge the same by the order of a notable and farre-sounding action, or of some particular sufficiencie; I pretend it by the order, correspondency, and tranquillitie of opinions and customes. *Omnino si quidquam est decorum, nihil est profectò magis quàm æquabilitas uniuersæ uitæ, tum singularum actionum: quàm conservare non possis, si aliorum naturam imitans, omittas tuam. Clearely if any thing be decent for a man, nothing is more than an even carriage and equabilitie of his whole life, and every action therein: which you cannot uphold, if following the nature of others, you let passe your owne.* Behold here then how farforth I finde my selfe guilty of that first part, I said to be in the vice of presumption. Concerning the second, which consisteth in not esteeming sufficiently of others, I wot not whether I can so well excuse my selfe; for, whatsoever it cost mee, I intend to speake what is of it. It may be, the continuall commerce I have with ancient humours, and the Idea of those rich mindes of former ages doth bring me out of liking and distaste both of others and of my selfe, or that in truth we live in an age, which produceth things but meane and indifferent. So it is, that I knowe nothing worthy any great admiration. Also I know not many men so familiarly as I should, to be able to judge of them: and those with whom the quality of my condition doth ordinarily make me conversant, are for the most part, such as have little care for the manuring of the soule, and to whom nothing is proposed for chiefe felicitie, but honour; and for absolute perfection, but valour. Whatsoever I see or beauteous or worthy in any other man, I willingly commend and regard; yea and I often endear my selfe with what I thinke of it, and allow my selfe to lie so farreforth: For, I cannot invent a false subject. I willingly witsse with my friends what I finde praise-worthy in them. And of an inche of valour, I willingly make an inche and a halfe; but to lend them qualities they have not, I cannot; and openly to defend their imperfections, I may not: yea be they mine enemies, I shall sincerely give them their due, in witnessing their worth or honour. My affection may change; my judgement never. And I confound not my quarrell with other circumstances, that are impertinent and belong not unto it. And I am so jealous of the libertie of my judgement, that for what passion soever I can hardly quit it. I wrong my selfe more in lying, then him of whom I lie. This commendable and generous custome of the Persian nation, is much noted; *They spake very honourably and justly of their mortall enemies, and with those with whom they were at deadly fude and warre, so farreforth as the merite of their vertue deserved.* I know diverse men who have

sundry noble and worthy partes; some wit, some courage, some dexteritie, some conscience, some a readinesse in speech, some one Science, and some another; but of a great man in generall, and that hath so many excellent parts together, or but one, in such a degree of excellencie, as he may thereby be admired, or but compared to those of former ages whom we honor, my fortune hath not permitted me to see one. And the greatest I ever knew living (I meane of naturall parts of the minde, and the best borne) was *Stefanus de la Boitie*: Verily it was a compleat minde, and who set a good face, and shewed a faire countenance upon all matters: A minde after the old stampe, and which, had fortune therewith beene pleased, would no doubt have brought forth wondrous effects; having by skill and study added very much to his rich naturall gifts. But I know not how it comes to passe, and surely it doth so, there is as much vanitie and weaknesse of understanding found in those, that professe to have most sufficiencie, that will entermeddle with learned vacations, and with the charges that depend of bookes, then in any sort of people; whether it be because there is more required, and expected at their hands, and common faults cannot be excused in them, or that the selfe-opinion of knowledge emboldeneth them the more to produce and discover themselves over-forward, whereby they loose and betray themselves. As an Artificer doeth more manifest his sottishnesse in a rich piece of worke, which he hath in hand, if foolishly and against the rules of his trade he seeke to apply it and entermeddle, then in a vile and base one; and men are more offended at a fault or oversight in a statue of gold, than in one of clay. These doe as much, when they set foorth things, which in themselves and in their place, would be good; for, they employ them without discretion, honouring their memory at the cost and charge of their understanding: and doing honour to *Cicero*, to *Galen*, to *Ulpian*, and to *Saint Jerome*, to make themselves ridiculous. I willingly returne to this discourse of the fondnesse of our institution: whose aime hath beene to make us not good and wittie, but wise and learned; She hath attained her purpose. It hath not taught us to follow vertue and embrace wisdom; but made an impression in us of it's Ethimologie and derivation. *Wee can decline vertue, yet can we not love it.* If we know not what wisdom is by effect and experience, we know it by prattling and by rote. We are not satisfied to know the race, the alliances, and the pedegrees of our neighbours, but we will have them to be our friends, and contract both conversation and inteligence with them: It hath taught us the definitions, the divisions, and distinctions of vertue, as of the surnames and branches of a genealogie, without having other care to contract practise of familiaritie or private acquaintance betweene us and it. She hath appointed us for our learning, not bookes that have sounder and truer opinions, but volumes that speake the best Greeke or Latine: and amongst her choise words, hath made the vainest humours of antiquitie to glide into our conceits. *A good institution changeth judgement and maners*, as it hapned to *Polemon*. This dissolute yong Græcian, going one day by chance to heare a Lecture of *Xenocrates*, where he not onely marked the eloquence and sufficiencie of the Reader, and brought not home the knowledge of some notable thing, but a more apparant and solide fruit, which was the sodaine change and amendment of his former life. Who ever heard such an effect of our discipline?



*faciásne quod olim  
Mutatus Polemon, ponas insignia morbi,  
Fasciolas, cubital, focalia, potus ut ille  
Dicitur ex collo furtim carpsisse coronas,  
Postquam est impransi correptus uoce magistri.*

*Can you doe as did Polemon reformed,  
Cast-off your sicknes signes, which you deformed,  
Your bolsters mufflers, swathes? As he drink-lin'de,  
His dronken garlands covertly declinde,  
By speech of fasting reader disciplinde?*

The least disdainfull condition of men, me thinkes, is that, which through simplicitie holds the last rancke, and offreth us a more regular commerce. The customes and discourses of cuntry-clownish-men, I finde them commonly to be more conformable and better disposed, according to the true discription of Philosophie, then are those of our Philosophers. *Plus sapit uulgus, quia tantum, quantum opus est, sapit. The vulgar is the wiser, because it is but as wise as it must needes.* The worthiest men, I have judged by externall apparances (for, to judge them after my fashion, they should be sifted nearer) concerning warre, and militarie sufficiencie, have beene, the Duke of *Guise*, that died before *Orleans*, and the whilom Marshall *Strozzi*: For men extraordinarily sufficient, and endowed with no vulgar vertue, *Oliver*, and *L'Hospitall*, both great Chancelors of *France*. Poesie hath likewise in mine opinion, had hir vogue and credit in our age. We have store of cunning and able men in that profession, *Aurate*, *Beza*, *Buchanan*, *L'Hospitall*, *Mont-dore*, and *Turnebus*. As for French-men, I thinke they have attained the highest degree of perfection that can or ever shall be, and in those parts wherein *Ronsart*, and excellent *Bellay* have written, I thinke they are not farre short of the ancient perfection. *Adrianus Turnebus* knew more and better, what he knewe, then any man in his age, or of many ages past. The lives of the late Duke of *Alva*, and of our Constable *Mommorancie* have beene very noble, and have had sundrie rare ressemblances of fortune. But the worthily-faire and glorious death of the last, in the full sight of *Paris*, and of his King, for their service, against his nearest friends and alliance, in the front of an armie, victorious through his conduct of it, and with an hand-stroke, in that old age of his, deserveth in mine opinion, to be placed and registred amongst the most renoumed and famous accidents of my times. As also the constant goodnes, the mildnes in behaviour, and conscionable facilitie of *Monsieur le Noüe*, in such an injustice of armed factions (a very schoole of treason, of inhumanitie and brigandage) wherein he was ever brought up, a worthie, and famous man of warre, and most experienced in his profession. I have greatly pleased my selfe in publishing in sundrie places, the good hope I have of *Marie Gournay le Jars* my daughter in alliance, and truely of me beloved with more then a fatherly love, and as one of the best parts of my being enfeoffed in my home and solitarines. There is nothing in the world I esteeme more then hir. If childehoode may presage any future successe, hir minde shall one day be capable of many notable things, and amongst other of the perfection of this thrice-sacred amitie, whereunto we reade not, hir sexe could yet attaine; the sinceritie and soliditie of hir demeanors are therein alreadie sufficient; hir kinde affection towards me is more then

superabounding and such in deede as nothing more can be wished unto it, so that the apprehension, which she hath of my aproching end, by reason of the fiftie five yeares, wherein her hap hath beene to knowe me, would somewhat lesse cruelly trouble hir. The judgement she made of my first Essayes, being a woman, of this age, so yong, alone where she dwelleth, and the exceeding vehemencie wherewith she loved me, and long time, by the onely esteeme, which before ever she sawe me, she had by them conceived of me, she desired me; is an accident most worthie consideration. Other vertues have had little or no currentnes at all in this age: But valor is become popular by reason of our civill warres, and in this part, there are mindes found amongst us very constant, even to perfection, and in great number, so that the choise is impossible to be made. Loe heere what hitherto I have knowne of any extraordinarie, and not common greatnes.

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**NOTES**

- 1 Montaigne wrote *en quoy j'estoy des mediocres*. Florio corrected his translation in subsequent editions: *wherein I was of the middle sort*.