

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 22

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Of running Posts, or Curriers

I HAVE BEENE none of the weakest in this exercise, which is proper unto men of my stature, well-trust, short and tough, but now I have given it over: It toyles us over-much, to holde out long. I was even-now reading, how King *Cyrus*, that he might more speedily receive newes from all parts of his Empire, (which was of exceeding great length) would needs have it tried, how farre a horse could in a day goe out-right, without baiting, at which distance hee caused Stations to be set, and men to have fresh horses ready, for al such as came to him. And some report, this swift kinde of running, answereth the flight of Cranes. *Cæsar* saith, that *Lucius Vibulus Rufus*, making haste to bring *Pompey* an advertisement, rode day and night, and to make more speed shifted many horses. And himselfe (as *Suetonius* writeth) would upon an hyred coache runne a hundred miles a day. And sure he was a rancke-runner: for where any river hindred his way, he swamme it over, and never went out of his way to fetch for a bridge or ferry. *Tiberius Nero* going to visite his brother *Drusus*, who lay sicke in *Germanie*, having three coaches in his companie, ranne two hundred miles in foure and twenty hours. In the Romane warres against King *Antiochus*, *Titus Sempronius Gracchus* (saieth *Titus Livius*) *Per dispositos equos propè incredibili celeritate ab Amphisa tertio die Pellam peruenit*: By horse laide poste, with incredible speede within three dayes he past from *Amphisa* to *Pella*. And viewing the place, it seemeth, they were set Stations for Postes, and not newly appointed for that race. The invention of *Cecinna* in sending newes to those of his house had much more speede; he carried certaine swallowes with him, and having occasion to send newes home, he let them flie toward their nests, first marking them with some colour, proper to signifie what he meant, as before he had agreed upon with his friends. In the Theatres of *Rome*, the houshold Maisters, carried Pigeons in their bosomes, under whose wings they fastened letters, when they would send any word home, which were also taught to bring back an answer. *D. Brutus*, used some being besieged in *Mutina*, and others elfewhere. In *Peru* they went poste upon mens backs, who tooke their Maisters upon their shoulders, sitting upon certaine beares or chaires, with such agilitie, that in full running speede the first porters without any stay, cast their loade upon others who upon the way waited for them, and so they to others. I understand that the *Valachians*, which are messengers unto the

great Turk, use extreame diligence in their businesse, forsomuch as they have authoritie to dis-mount the first passenger they meete upon the highway, and give him their tyred Horse. And bicause they shall not be weary, they are wont to swathe themselves hard about the bodie with a broade Swathe or Seare-cloath, as diverse others doe with us: I could never finde ease or good by it.