

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS

Book 2 · Chapter 25

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How a man should not counterfeit to be sicke

THERE IS an epigram in *Martiall*, that may passe for a good one (for there are of all sortes in him) wherein he pleasantly relateth the storie of *Cælius*, who to avoide the courting of certaine great men in *Rome*, to give attendance at their rising, and to waite, assist and follow them, fained to be troubled with the goute; and to make his excuse more likely, hee caused his legges to bee ointed and swathed, and lively counteirfeted the behaviour and countenance of a goutie man. In the end fortune did him the favour to make him goutie indeede.

*Tantum cura potest & ars doloris,
Desiit fingere Cælius podagram.*

*So much the care and cunning can of paine:
Cælius (growne gowty) leaves the gowt to faine.*

As farre as I remember I have read a like Historie in some place of *Appian*, of one who purposing to escape the proscriptions of the *Triumiurat* of *Rome*, and to conceale himselfe from the knowledge of those who pursued him, kept himselfe close and disguised, adding this other invention to it, which was to counterfet blindnes in one eye, who when he came somewhat to recover his libertie, and would have left-off the plaister he had long time worne over his eye, he found that under that maske he had altogether lost the sight of it. It may be the action of his sight was weakned, having so long continued without exercise, and the visuall vertue was wholly converted into the other eie: For, we may plainely perceive, that holding one eye shut, it convaieth some part of it's effect into his fellow; in such sort as it will swell and growe bigger. As also the idlenes, together with the warmth of the medicaments and swathing, might very well drawe some goutie humor into the legge of *Martials* goutie fellow. Reading in *Froisart*, the vowe which a gallant troupe of yong English-men had made, to weare their left eyes hoodwink't, untill such time as they should passe into *France*, and there performe some notable exploit of armes upon us, I have often laughed with my selfe to think what they would have imagined, if as to the fore-aledged, it had hapned to them, and had all beene blinde of the left eye,

at what time they returned to looke upon their mistresses, for whose sake they had made their vowe and undertaken such an enterprise. Mothers have great reason to chide their children when they counterset to be blind with one eye, crompt-backt, squint'eyed, or lame, and such other deformities of the body; for, besides that the body thus tender may easily receive some ill custome, I knowe not how, it seemeth that fortune is glad to take us at our word; And I have heard divers examples of some, who have fallne sicke in very deede, because they had purposed to faine sickenes. I have at all times enured my selfe, whether I be on horsebacke or a foote, to carrie a good heavie wand or cudgell in my hand; yea I have endeavored to doe it handsomely, and with an affected kinde of countenance to continue so. Many have threatned me, that fortune will one time or other turne this my wantonnes into necessitie. I presume upon this, that I should be the first of my race, that ever was troubled with the gowt. But let us somewhat amplifie this chapter, and patch it up with another piece concerning blindnes. *Plinie* reports of one, who dreaming in his sleepe, that he was blinde, awaking the next morning, was found to be starke blinde, having never had any precedent sickenes. The power of imagination may very well further such things, as elsewhere I have shewed; And *Plinie* seemeth to be of this opinion; but it is more likely, that the motions, which the body felt inwardly (whereof Phisicians, may if they please, finde out the cause) and which tooke away his sight, and were the occasion of his dreame. Let us also adde another storie, concerning this purpose, which *Seneca* reporteth in his Epistles. *Thou knowest* (saith he writing unto *Lucilius*) *that Harpaste my wives foole, is left upon me as an hereditarie charge; for by mine owne nature, I am an enemie unto such monsters, and if I have a desire to laugh at a foole, I neede not seeke one farre; I laugh at my selfe. This foolish woman hath sodainly lost hir sight. I report a sirange thing, but yet very true: She will not beleeve she is blind, and urgeth hir keeper uncessantly to leade hir, saying still, my house is very darke. What we laugh at hir, I entreate thee to beleeve, that the same hapneth to each for us. No man knoweth himselfe to be covetous, no man confesseth to be a niggard. The blind require a guide, but we stray from our selves. I am not ambitious, say we, but no man can live otherwise at Rome: I am not sumptuous, but the Cittie requireth great charges: It is not my fault, if I be collerike; If I have not yet set downe a sure course of my life, the fault is in youth. Let us not seeke our evell out of us; it is within us, it is rooted in our entrailles. And onely because we perceive not that we are sicke, makes our recoverie to prove more difficult. If we beginne not betimes to cure our selves, when shall we provide for so many sores, for so many evils? Yet have we a most-sweete and gentle medicine of Philosophie; for of others, no man feeles the pleasure of them, but after his recoverie, where as she pleaseth, easeth, and cureth all at once.* Lo here what *Seneca* saith, who hath somewhat diverted me from my purpose: But there is profit in the exchange.