

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS

Book 2 · Chapter 28



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All things have their season

THOSE WHO compare *Cato* the Censor, to *Cato* the yonger that killed himselfe, compare two notable natures, and in forme neare one unto another. The first exploited his, sundrie waies, and excelleth in militarie exploites, and utilitie of his publike vacations. But the yongers vertue (besides that it were blasphemie, in vigor to compare any unto him) was much more sincere and unspotted. For, who will discharge the Censores of envie and ambition, that durst counter-checke the honor of *Scipio*, in goodnes and all other parts of excellencie, farre greater and better than him or any other man living in his age? Amongst other things reported of him, this is one, that in his eldest yeares he gave himselfe, with so earnest a longing to learne the Greek tong, as if it had bin to quench a long burning thirst: A thing in mine opinion not very honorable in him. It is properly that which we call doting or to become a childe againe. All things have their season, yea the good and all. And I may say my *pater noster* out of season. As *T. Quintius Flaminius* was accused, forasmuch as being Generall of an armie, even in the houre of the conflict, he was seene to withdrawe himselfe apart, ammusng himselfe to pray God, although he gained the battle.

Imponit finem sapiens & rebus honestis.

*A wise-man will use moderation,
Even in things of commendation.*

Eudemoidas seeing *Xenocrates* very olde, laboriously apply himselfe in his schoole-lectures, said, when will this man know something, since he is yet learning? And *Philopæmen*, to those who highly extolled King *Ptolomey*, because he daily hardned his body to the exercise of armes: It is not (said he) a matter commendable in a King of his age, in them to exercise himselfe, he should now really and substancially imploy them. Wise men say, that *yong men should make their preparations, and old men enjoy them*. And the greatest vice they note in us, is, that our desires doe uncessantly growe yonger and yonger. We are ever beginning a newe to live. Our studies and our desires should sometimes have a feeling of age. We have a foote in the grave, and our appetites and pursuities are but new-borne.

*Tu secunda marmora
Locas sub ipsum funus, & sepulcri
Immemor, struis domos.*

*You, when you should be going to your grave,
Put marble out to worke, build houses brave,
Unmindfull of the buriall you must have.*

The longest of my desseignes doth not extend to a whole yeare; now I onely apply my selfe to make an end: I shake off all my newe hopes and enterprises: I bid my last farewell to all the places I leave, and daily dispossesse my selfe of what I have. *Olim iam nec perit quicquam mihi, nec acquiritur. Plus superest uiatici quàm uiæ.* It is a good while since I neither loose nor get any thing; I have more to beare my charges then way to goe.

Vixi, & quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi.

*I have liv'd, and the race have past,
Wherein my fortune had me plast.*

To conclude, it is all the ease I finde in my age, and that it suppresseth many cares and desires in me, wherewith life is much disquieted. The care of the worlds-course, the care of riches, of greatnes, of knowledge, of health and of my selfe. This man learneth to speake, when he should rather learne to hold his peace for ever. A man may alwaies continue his studie, but not schooling. O fond-foolish for an old man to be ever an *Abcedariane*.

*Diuersos diuersa iuuant, non omnibus annis.
Omnia conueniunt.*

*Diverse delights to diverse, nor to all
Do all things at all yeares convenient fall.*

If we must needes studie let us studie something sorteable to our condition, that we may answer, as he did, who being demanded what his studies would steade him in his decrepitie, answered; *that he might the better, and with more ease leave this world.* Such a studie was yong *Catoes*, in fore-feeling his approaching end, who lighting upon *Platoes* discourse of the soules immortalitie. Not, as it may be supposed, that long before he had not stored himselfe with all sorts of munition for such a dislodging. Of assurance, of constancie and instruction, he had more then *Plato* hath in all his writings: His Science, and his courage, were in this respect above all Philosophie. Hee undertooke this occupation, not for the service of his death, but as one, who did not so much as interrupt his sleepe, in a deliberation of such consequence, whoever without choise or change continued his wonted studies, and all other accustomed actions of his life. The same night, wherein the Pretorship was refused him, he passed over in play. That, wherein he must die, he spent in reading. The losse of life or office was all one to him.