

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS

Book 2 · Chapter 30



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Of a monstrous Childe

THIS DISCOURSE shall passe single, for I leave it to Phisicians to treat of. I sawe two daies since a childe, whom two men and a nurce (which named themselves to be his father, his Unckle, and his Aunt) carried about with intent to get some money with the sight of him, by reason of his strangenes. In all the rest, he was as other children are. He stooode upon his feete, went and pratled in a manner as all others of his age: Hee would never take nourishment, but by his nurces breast; and what in my presence was offred to be put in his mouth, he chewed a little, and put it all out againe. His puling differed somewhat from others. He was just fourteene moneths old. Under his paps he was fastned and joyned to an other childe, but had no head, and who had the conduite of his body' stopped, the rest whole. One of his armes was shorter then the other, and was by accident broken at their birth. They were joyned face to face, and as if a litle child would embrace another somewhat bigger. The joyning and space whereat they were closed together, was but foure inches broade, or thereabouts; in such sort that if you thrust up the imperfect childe, you might see under the others navill: And the seame was betweene the paps and his navill. The navill of the imperfect one could not be seene, but all the rest of his belly might, Thus, what of the imperfect one was not joyned, as armes, buttocks, thighes and legges did hang and shake upon the other, whose length reached to the middle-leg of the other perfect. His Nurce tolde me, he made water by both privities. The members of the little one were nourished, living, and in the same state as the others, except only, they were lesse and thinner. This double body, and these different members, having reference to one onely head, might serve for a favorable prognostication to our King, to maintaine the factions and differing parties of this our kingdome under an unitie of the lawes. But least the successe should prove it contrarie, it is not amisse to let him runne his course: For in things already past their neede no divination. *Vt quum facta sunt, tum ad coniecturam aliqua interpretatione reuocantur: So as when they are done, they then by some construction should be revoked to conjecture:* As it is reported of *Epimenides*, who ever devined contrarie. I come now from seeing of a shepheard at *Medoc*, of thirtie yeares of age, or thereabouts, who had no signe at all of genitorie parts: But where they should be, are

three little holes, by which his water doth continually trill from him. *Those which we call monsters are not so with God, who in the immensitie of his worke seeth the infinitie of formes therein contained.* This poore man hath a beard, and desireth still to be fumbling of women.² And it may be thought, that any figure doth amaze us, hath relation unto some other figure of the same kinde, although unknowne unto man. *From out his all-seeing wisdom proceedeth nothing but good, common, regular and orderly; but we neither see the sorting, nor conceive the relation. Quod crebrò uidet, non miratur, etiam si, our fiat nescit. Quod antè non uidet, id, si euenerit, ostentum esse censet. That which he often seeth, he doth not wonder at, though he know not why it is done; But if that happen, which he never saw before, he thinkes it some portentuous wonder.* We call that against nature, which commeth against custome. There is nothing, whatsoever it be, that is not according to hir. Let therefore this universall and naturall reason, chase from us the error, and expell the astonishment, which noveltie breedeth, and strangenes causeth in us.

NOTES

- 1 Subsequent editions have the more correct *back*.
- 2 This sentence comes before the previous one in Montaigne's text.