

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 4

Translation by John Florio (1603, Public domain) · Last updated on January 5, 2024

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FLORIO-2-4-20240704-155913

To morrow is a new day

I DOE with some reason, as me seemeth, give pricke and praise unto *Jaques Amiot* above all our French writers, not only for his naturall purity, and pure elegancy of the tongue, wherin he excelleth all others, nor for his indefatigable constancy of so long and toyle-some a labor, nor for the unsearchable depth of his knowledge, having so successefully-happy bin able to explaine an Authour so close and thorny, and unfold a writer so mysterious and entangled (for, let any man tell me what he list; I have no skill of the Greeke, but I see through out all his translation a sense so closely-joynted, and so pithilie-continued, that either he hath assuredly understood and inned the verie imagination, and the true conceit of the Author, or having through a long and continual conversion, lively planted in his minde a generall Idea of that of *Plutarke*, he hath at least lent him nothing that doth belie him, or mis-seem him) but above all, I kon him thanks that he hath had the hap to chuse, and knowledge to cull-out so worthy a worke, and a booke so fit to the purpose, therwith to make so unvaluable a present unto his Country. We that are in the number of the ignorant had bin utterly confounded, had not his booke raised us from out the dust of ignorance: God-a-mercy his endeavors we dare not both speak and write: Even Ladies are therwith able to confront Masters of arts: It is our breviary. If so good a man chance to live, I bequeath *Xenophon* unto him, to do as much. It is an easier piece of worke, and so much the more agreeing with his age. Moreover, I wot not how me seemeth, although he roundly and clearly disintangle himselfe from hard passages, that notwithstanding his stile is more close and neerer it selfe, when it is not laboured and wrested, and that it glideth smoothely at his pleasure. I was even now reading of that place, where *Plutarke* speaketh of himselfe, that *Rusticus* being present at a declamation of his in Rome, received a packet from the Emperour, which hee temporized to open untill he had made an end: wherein (saith he) all the assistants did singularly commend the gravity of the man. Verily being on the instance of curiosity, and on the greedy and insatiate passion of newes, which with such indiscrete impatience, and impatient indiscretion, induceth us to neglect al things, for to entertaine a new-come guest, and forget al respect and countenance, wheresoever we be, sodainely to breake-up such letters as are brought-us; he had reason to commend the gravitie of *Rusticus*: to which hee might also have added the commendation of his

civilitie and curtesie, for that he would not interrupt the course of his declamation; But I make a question, whether hee might be commended for his wisdom: for, receiving unexpected letters, and especially from an Emperour, it might very well have fortun'd, that his deferring to reade them, might have caused some notable inconvenience. *Recklesnesse is the vice contrary unto curiositie*; towards which I am naturally enclined, and wherein I have seene many men so extreemly plunged, that three or foure dayes after the receiving of letters, which hath beene sent them, they have beene found in their pockets yet unopened. I never opened any, not onely of such as had beene committed to my keeping, but of such as by any fortune came to my hands. And I make a conscience, standing neare some great person, if mine eyes chance, at unwares, to steale some knowledge of any letters of importance that hee readeth. Never was man lesse inquisitive, or pryed lesse into other mens affaires, then I. In our fathers time; the Lord of *Boutieres* was like to have lost *Turwin*, forsomuch as being one night at supper in very good company, hee deferred the reading of an advertisement, which was delivered him of the treasons that were practised and complotted against that Citty, where he commaunded. And *Plutarke* himselfe hath taught me, that *Julius Cæsar* had escaped death, if going to the Senate-house, that day wherein he was murdered by the conspiratours, hee had read a memorial which was presented unto him. Who likewise reporteth the story of *Archias*, the Tyrant of *Thebes*, how the night fore-going the execution of the enterprize that *Pelopidas* had complotted to kill him, thereby to set his country at liberty: another *Archias* of *Athens* writ him a letter wherein he particularly related unto him all that was conspired and complotted against him; which letter beeing delivered him whilst he sate at supper, he deferred the opening of it, pronouncing this by-word: *To morrow is a new day*, which afterward was turned to a Proverbe in *Greece*. A wise man may, in mine opinion, for the interest of others, as not unmannerly to breake company, like unto *Rusticus*, or not to discontinue some other affaire of importance, remit and deferre to understand such newes as are brought him: but for his owne private interest or particular pleasure, namely, if he be a man having publike charge, if hee regarde his dinner so much, that hee will not breake-it off, or his sleepe, that hee will not interrupt-it: to doe it, is inexcusable. And in former ages was the Consulare-place in *Rome*, which they named the most honourable at the table, because it was more free and more accessible for such as might casually come in, to entertaine him that should bee there placed. Witnessse, that though they were sitting at the board, they neither omitted nor gave over the managing of other affaires, and following of other accidents. But when all is said, it is very hard, chiefly in humane actions, to prescribe so exact rules by discourse of reason, that fortune doe not sway, and keepe hir right in them.