

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE  
**ESSAYS**

**Book 3 · Chapter 2**



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## Of Repenting

OTHERS fashion man, I repeate him; and represent a particulare one, but ill made; and whom were I to forme a new, he should be farre other then he is; but he is now made. And though the lines of my picture change and varie, yet loose they not themselves. The world runnes all on wheelles: All things therein moove without entermission; yea the earth, the rockes of *Caucasus*, and the Pyramides of *Ægipt*, both with the publike and their owne motion. *Constancie it selfe is nothing but a languishing and wavering dance.* I cannot settle my object; it goeth so unquietly and staggering, with a naturall drunkennesse. I take it in this plight, as it is at th'instant I ammuse my selfe about it. I describe not the essence, but the passage; not a passage from age to age, or as the people reckon, from seaven yeares to seaven, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My historie must be fitted to the present. I may soone change, not onelie fortune, but intention. It is a counter-roule of divers and variable accidents, and irresolute imaginations, and sometimes contrarie: whether it be that my selfe am other, or that I apprehend subjects, by other circumstances and considerations. Howsoever, I may perhaps gaine-say my selfe, but truth (as *Demades* saide) I never gaine-say: Were my minde settled, I would not essaye, but resolve my selfe. It is still a prentise and a probacioner. I propose a meane life, and without luster: T'is all one. They fasten all morall Philosophie as well to a popular and private life, as to one of ritcher stuffe. *Every man beareth the whole stampe of humane condition.* Authors communicate themselves unto the world by some speciall and strange marke; I the first, by my generall disposition; as *Michell de Montaigne*; not as a Grammarian, or a Poet, or a Lawyer. If the world complaine, I speake too much of my selfe, I complaine, it thinkes no more of it selfe. But is it reason, that being so private in use, I should pretend to make my selfe publike in knowledge? Or is it reason, I should produce into the world, where fashion and arte have such swaye and command, the rawe and simple effects of nature; and of a nature as yet exceeding weake? *To write bookes without learning, is it not to make a wall without stone or such like thing?* Conceites of musicke are directed by arte; mine by hap. Yet have I this according to learning, that never man handled subject, he understood or

knew, better then I doe this I have undertaken; being therein the cunningst man alive.

Secondly, that never man waded further into his matter, nor more distinctlie sifted the partes and dependences of it, nor arrived more exactlie and fully to the end he proposed unto it.<sup>1</sup> To finish the same, I have neede of naught but faithfulness: which is therein as sincere and pure as may be found. I speake truth, not my belly-full, but as much as I dare; and I dare the more, the more I growe into yeares: for it seemeth, custome alloweth olde age more libertie to babbell, and indiscretion to talke of it selfe. It cannot herein be, as in trades; where the crafts-man and his worke doe often differ. Being a man of so sound and honest conversation, writ he so foolishly? Are such learned writings come from a man of so weake a conversation? who hath but an ordinary conceite, and writeth excellently, one may say his capacitie is borrowed, not of himselfe. A skilful man, is not skilfull in all things: But a sufficient man, is sufficient every where, even unto ignorance. Heere my booke and my selfe march together, and keepe one pace. Elsewhere one may commend or condemne the worke, without the worke-man; here not: who toucheth one, toucheth the other. He who shall judge of it without knowing him, shal wrong himselfe more thē me: he that knowes it, hath wholly satisfied me. Happie beyond my merite, If I get this onely portion of publike approbation, as I may cause men of understanding to thinke, I had beene able to make use and benefit of learning, had I beene endowed with any: and deserved better helpe of memorie. Excuse we here what I often say, that I seldome repent my selfe, and that my conscience is contented with it selfe; not of an Angels or a horse consciences, but as of a mans conscience. Adding ever this clause, not of ceremonie, but of true and essentiall submission; that *I speake enquiring and doubting, meerely and simply referring my selfe, from resolution, unto common and lawfull oppinions*. I teach not; I report: No vice is absolutely vice, which offendeth not, and a sound judgement accuseth not: For, the deformitie and incommoditie thereof is so palpable, as peradventure they have reason, who say, it is chiefly produced by sottishnesse and brought forth by ignorance; so hard is it, to imagine one should know it without hating it. *Malice sucks up the greatest part of her owne venome, and therewith impoisoneth herselfe. Vice, leaveth, as an ulcer in the flesh, a repentance in the soule, which still scratcheth, and bloodieth it selfe*. For reason effaceth other griefes and sorrowes, but engendereth those of repentance: the more yerksome, because inwardes: As the colde and heate of agues is more offensive thē that which comes outward. I account vice (but each according to their measure) not onely those which reason disalowes, and nature condemnes but such as mans opinion hath forged as falce and erronious, if lawes and custome authorize the same. In like maner, there is not goodnes but gladdeth an honest disposition. There is truely I wot not what kinde or congratulation, of well doing, which rejoyceth us in our selves, and a generous jollitie, that accompanieth a good conscience. A minde courageously vicious, may happily arme it selfe with security, but she shall never munite her selfe, with this selfe-joyning delight and satisfaction. It is no smale pleasure, for one to feele himselfe preserved from the contagion of an age so infected as ours, and to say to himselfe; could a man enter and see even into my soule, yet should he not finde me guilty, either of the affliction or ruine of any body, nor culpable of envie or revenge, nor

of publike offence against the lawes, nor tainted with innovation, trouble or sedition; nor spotted with falsifying of my worde; and although the libertie of times allowed and taught it every man, yet could I never be induced to touch the goods or dive into the purse of any *French* man; and have always lived upon mine own, as wel in time of war, as of peace: nor did I ever make use of any poore mans labour, without reward. These testimonies of an unspotted conscience are very pleasing, which naturall joy is a great benefit unto us; and the onely payment never faileth us. To ground the recompence of vertuous actions, upon the approbation of others, is to undertake a most uncertaine or troubled foundation, namely in an age so corrupt and times so ignorant, as this is: *the vulgar peoples good opinion is injurious*. Whom trust you in seeing what is commendable? God keepe me from beeing an honest man, according to the description I dayly see made of honour, each one by himselfe. *Quæ fuerant uitia, mores sunt. What earst were vices, are now growne fashions*. Some of my friendes, have sometimes attempted to schoole me roundly, and sift me plainely, either of their owne motion, or envited by me, as to an office, which to a wel composed minde, both in profit and lovingnesse, exceedeth all the duties of sincere amity. Such have I ever entertained with open armes of curtesie, and kinde acknowledgement. But now to speake from my conscience, I often found so much false measure in their reproches and praises, that I had not greatly erred if I had rather erred, then done well after their fashion. Such as we especially, who live a private life, not exposed to any gaze but our owne, ought in our hartes establish a touchstone, and thereto touch our deedes and try our actions; and accordingly, now cherish, and now chastise our selves. I have my owne lawes and tribunall, to judge of me, whether I adresse my selfe more, then any where els. I restraine my actions according to other, but extend them according to my selfe. None but your self knowes rightly whether you be demisse and cruel, or loyall and devout. Others see you not, but ghesse you by uncertaine conjectures: They see not so much your nature, as your art. Adhere not then to their opinion, but hold unto your owne. *Tuo tibi iudicio est utendum. Virtutis et uiciorum graue ipsius conscientiae pondus est: qua sublata, iacent omnia; You must use your owne judgement: The weight of the very conscience of vice and vertues is heavy: take that away, and all is downe*. But where as it is said, that repentance nearely followeth sinne, seemeth not to imply sinne placed in his rich aray, which lodgeth in us as in his proper mansion. One may disavow and disclaime vices, that surprise us, and whereto our passions transport us: but those, which by long habite are rooted in a strong, and ankred in a powerfull will, are not subject to contradiction. *Repentance is but a denying of our will, and an opposition of our fantasies* which diverts us here and there. It makes some disavow his former vertue and continencie.

*Quæ mens est hodie, cur eadem non puero fuit,  
Uel cur his animis incolumes non redeunt genæ?*

*Why was not in a youth same minde as now?  
Or why beares not this minde a youthfull brow?*

*That is an exquisite life, which even in his owne private keepeth it selfe in awe and order. Every one may play the jugler, and represent an honest man upon the stage; but within, and in his bosome, where all things are lawfull, where all*

is concealed; to keepe a due rule or formale decorum, that's the point. The next degree, is to bee so in ones owne home, and in his ordinary actions, whereof we are to give account to no body: wherin is no study, nor art. And therefore *Byas* describing the perfect state of a family, whereof (saith he) the maister, be such inwardly by himselfe, as he is outwardly, for feare of the lawes, and respect of mens speaches. And it was a worthy saying of *Julius Drusus*, to those worke-men, which for three thousand crownes, offered so to reforme his house, that his neighbours should no more over looke into it: I will give you sixe thousand (said he) and contrive it so, that on all sides every man may looke into it. The custome of *Agesilaus* is remembred with honour, who in his travaile was wont to take up his lodging in churches, that the people, and Gods themselves might pry into his private actions. Some have beene admirable to the world, in whom nor his wife, nor his servant ever noted any thing remarkeable. *Few men have beene admired of their familiars. No man hath beene a Prophet, not onely in his house, but in his owne country*, saith the experience of histories. Even so in things of nought. And in this base example, is the image of greatnesse discerned. In my climate of *Gascoigne* they deeme it a jest to see me in print. The further the knowledge which is taken of me is from my home, of so much more worth am I. In *Guienne* I pay Printers; in other places they pay me. Upon this accident they ground, who living and present keepe close-lurking, to purchase credit when they shall be dead and absent. I had rather have lesse. And I cast not my selfe into the world, but for the portion I draw from it. That donne, I quit it. The people attend on such a man with wonderment, from a publike act, unto his owne doores: togeather with his roabes he leaves-of his part; falling so much the lower, by how much higher hee was mounted. View him within, there all is turbulent, disordered and vile. And were order and formality found in him, a lively, impartiall and well sorted judgement is required, to perceive and fully to discerne him in these base and private actions. Considering that order is but a dumpish and drowsie vertue: To gaine a Battaile, performe an Ambassage, and governe a People, are noble and worthy actions; to chide, laugh, sell, pay, love, hate, and myldely and justly to converse both with his owne and with himselfe; not to relent, and not gaine say himselfe, are things more rare, more difficult and lesse remarkeable.

Retired lives sustaine that way, what ever some say, offices as much more crabbed, and extended, then other lives doe. And private men (saith *Aristotle*) serve vertue more hardly, and more highly attend her, then those which are magistrates or placed in authority. We prepare our selves unto eminent occasions, more for glory then for conscience. *The nearest waye to come unto glory, were to doe that for conscience, which wee doe for glorye*. And me seemeth the vertue of *Alexander* representeth much lesse vigor in her large Theater, then that of *Socrates*, in his base and obscure excercitation. I easilye conceive *Socrates*, in the roome of *Alexander*; *Alexander* in that of *Socrates* I cannot. If any aske the one, what hee can doe, hee will answer, *Conquer the worlde*; let the same question bee demaunded of the other, hee will say, *leade my life conformably to it's naturall condition*; A science much more generous, more important, and more lawfull.

*The worth of the minde consisteth not in going high, but in marching orderly*. Her greatnesse is not excercised in greatnesse; in mediocritye it is. As those,

which judge and touch us inwardely, make no great accoumpt of the brightnesse of our publike actions; and see they are but streakes and poyntes of cleare Water, surging from a bottome, otherwise slimie and full of mud: So those who judge us by this gay outward apparance, conclude the same of our inward constitution, and cannot couple popular faculties as theirs are, unto these other faculties, which amaze them so farre from their levell. So doe we attribute savage shapes and oughly formes unto divels. As who doeth not ascribe high-raised eye-browes, open nostrils, a sterne frightfull visage, and a huge-body unto *Tamburlane*, as is the forme or shape of the imagination we have fore-conceived by the bruite of his name? Had any heretofore showed me *Erasmus*, I could hardly have bin induced to think, but whatsoever he had said to his boy or hostes, had bin Adages and Apothegmes. We imagine much more fitly an Artificer upon his close stoole or on his wife, then a great judge, reverend for his carriage and regardfull for his sufficiencie; we thinke, that from those high thrones they should not abase themselves so low, as to live. As vitious mindes are often encited to do well by some strange impulsion, so are vertuous spirits mooved to do ill. They must then be judged by their settled estate, when they are neare themselves, and as we say, at home, if at any time they be so; or when they are nearest unto rest, and in their naturall seate. Naturall inclinations are by institution helped and strengthned, but they neither change nor exceed. A thousand natures in my time, have a thwart, a contrarie discipline, escaped toward vertue or toward vice.

*Sic ubi desuetæ siluis in carcere clausæ,  
Mansueuere feræ, et uultus posuere minaces,  
Atque hominem didicere pati, si torrida paruus  
Uenit in ora cruor, redeunt rabiésque furorque,  
Admonitæque tument gustato sanguine fauces,  
Feruet, et à trepido uix abstinere a magistro.*

*So when wilde beasts, disused from the wood,  
Fierce lookes laide-downe, growe tame, closde in a cage,  
Taught to beare man, if then a little blood  
Touch their hot lips, furie returnes and rage;  
Their jawes by taste admonisht swell with vaines,  
Rage boyles, and from fainte keeper scarce abstaines.*

These originall qualities are not grubd out, they are but covered, and hidden: The Latine tongue is to me in a manner naturall; I understand it better then French; but it is now fortie yeares, I have not made use of it to speake, nor much to write: yet in some extreame emotions and suddaine passions, wherein I have twice or thrice falen, since my yeares of discretion; and namely one, when my father, being in perfect health, fell all along upon me in a swoune, I have ever, even from my very hart uttered my first wordes in latine: Nature rushing and by force expressing it selfe, against so long a custome; the like example is alleaged of divers others. *Those which in my time, have attempted to correct the fashions in the world, by new opinions, reforme the vices of aparance; those of essence they leave untouched, if they encrease them not:* And their encrease is much to be feared. We willinglie protract all other well-doing, upon these externall reformatiions, of lesse cost, and of greater merit; whereby we satisfie good-cheape, other naturall consubstantiall and

intestine vices. Looke a little into the course of our experience. There is no man (if he listen to himselfe) that doth not discover in himselfe a peculiar forme of his, a swaieng forme, which wrestleth against the institution, and against the tempests of passions, which are contrarie unto him. As for me, I feele not my selfe much agitated by a shock; I commonly finde my selfe in mine owne place, as are sluggish and lumpish bodies. If I am not close and neare unto my selfe, I am never farre-off: My debauches or excesses transport me not much. There is nothing extreame and strange: yet have I sound fits and vigorous lusts. The true condemnation, and which toucheth the common fashion of our men, is, that their verie retreat is full of corruption and filth: The Idea of their amendment blurred and deformed; their repentance crazed and faultie, very neere as much as their sinne. Some, either because they are so fast and naturally joyned unto vice, or through long custome, have lost all sence of it's ugliness. To others (of whose ranck I am) vice is burthenous, but they counter-balance it with pleasure, or other occasions: and suffer it, and at a certaine rate lend themselves unto it; though basely and viciouslie. Yet might happily so remote a disproportion of measure be imagined, where with justice, the pleasure might excuse the offence, as we say of profit: Not onely being accidental, and out of sinne, as in thefts, but even in the very exercise of it, as in the acquaintance, or copulation with women; where the provocation is so violent, and as they say, sometime unresistable. In a towne of a kinsman of mine; the other day, beeing in *Armignac*, I sawe a country man, commonly sir-named the Theefe: who himselfe reported his life to have beene thus. Being borne a begger, and perceiving, that to get his bread by the sweate of his brow and labour of his handes, would never sufficiently arme him agaynst penury, he resolved to become a Theefe; and that trade had employed all his youth safely, by meanes of his bodily strength: for he ever made uppe Harvest and Vintage in other mens groundes; but so farre off, and in so great heapes, that it was beyond imagination, one man should in one night carry away so much upon his shoulders: and was so carefull to equall the pray, and disperse the mischief he did, that the spoyle was of lesse import to every particular man.

He is now in olde yeares indifferently ritch; for a man of his condition (Godamercy his trade) which he is not ashamed to confesse openly. And to reconcile himselfe with God, he affirmeth, to be dayly ready, with his gettings, and other good turnes, to satisfie the posterity of those he hath heeretofore wronged or robbed; which if himselfe be not of ability to performe (for he cannot doe all at once) he will charge his heires withall, according to the knowledge he hath, of the wrongs by him done to every man. By this description, be it true or false, he respecteth theaft, as a dishonest and unlawfull action, and hateth the same: yet lesse then pinching want: He repents but simpley; for in regarde it was so counterballanced and recompenced, he repenteth not. That is not that habit which incorporates us unto vice, and confirmeth our understanding in it; nor is it that boysterous winde, which by violent blastes dazeleth and troubleth our mindes, and at that tyme confoundes, and overwhelmes both us, our judgement, and all, into the power of vice. What I doe, is ordinarily full and compleate, and I march (as we say) all in one piece: I have not many motions, that hide themselves and slinke away from my reason, or which very neare are not guided by the consent of all my partes,

without division, or intestine sedition: my judgement hath the whole blame, or commendation; and the blame it hath once, it hath ever: for, almost from it's birth, it hath bene one, of the same inclination, course and force. And in matters of generall opinions, even from my infancy, I ranged my selfe to the point I was to hold. Some sinnes there are outrageous, violent and suddaine; leave we them.

But those other sinnes, so often reasumed, determined and advised upon, whether they be of complexion, or of profession and calling, I cannot conceive how they should so long be setled in one same courage, unlesse the reason and conscience of the sinner were thereunto inwardly privie and constantly willing. And how to imagyne or fashion the repentance thereof, which he vanteth, doeth sometimes visite him, seemeth somewhat hard unto me. I am not of *Phythagoras* Sect, that men take a new soule, when to receive Oracles, they approach the images of Gods; unlesse he would say with all, that it must be a strange one, new and lent him for the time: our owne, giving so little signe of purification, and cleannesse worthy of that office. They doe altogether agaynst the Stoicall precepts, which appoint us to correct the imperfections and vices we finde in our selves, but withall forbid us to disturbe the quiet of our mynde. They make us beleeve, they feele great remorse, and are inwardly much displeased with sinne; but of amendment, correction, or intermission, they shew us none. *Surely there can bee no perfect health; Where the disease is not perfectlye remooved.* Were repentance put in the scale of the ballance, it woulde way downe<sup>2</sup> sinne. *I finde no humour so easie to bee counterfeited as Devotion:* If one conforme not his life and conditions to it, her essence is abstruse and concealed, her apparance gentle and stately.

For my part, I may in generall wish to be other then I am; I may condemne and mislike my universall forme; I may beseech God to grant mee an undefiled reformation, and excuse my naturall weaknesse; but me seemeth I ought not to tearme this repentance, no more then the displeasure of being neyther Angel nor *Cato*. My actions are squared to what I am and conformed to my condition. I cannot doe better: And *repentance dooth not properly concerne what is not in our power; sorrow dooth.* I may imagine infinite dispositions of a higher pitch, and better governed then myne, yet doe I nothing better my faculties; noe more then myne arme becommeth stronger, or my wit more excellent, by conceiving some others to be so. If to suppose and wish a nobler working then ours, might produce the repentance of our owne, we should then repent us of our innocent actions: forsomuch as we judge that in a more excellent nature, they had bene directed with greater perfection and dignity; and our selves would doe the like. When I consult with my age of my youthes proceedings, I finde that commonly, (according to my opinion) I managed them in order. This is all my resistance is able to performe. I flatter not my selfe: in like circumstances, I should ever be the same. It is not a spot, but a whole dye, that staynes me. I acknowledge noe repentance, that is superficial, meane and cerimonious. It must touch me on all sides, before I can terme it repentance. It must pinch my entrailes, and afflict them as deeply and throughly, as God himselfe beholdes me. When in negotiating, many good fortunes have slipt me for want of good discretion, yet did my projects make good choice, according to the

occurrences presented unto them. Their manner is ever to take the easier and surer side. I finde that in my former deliberations, I proceeded, after my rules, discretely, for the subjects state propounded to me; and in like occasions, would proceede a like, a hundred yeares hence. I respect not what now it is, but what it was, when I consulted of it. *The consequence of all designs consists in the seasons; occasions passe, and matters change uncessantly.* I have in my time runne into some grosse, absurde and important errors; not for want of good advise, but of good hap. There are secret and indivinable partes in the objects men doe handle; especiallye in the nature of men; and mute conditions, without show, and sometimes unknowne of the very possessors, produced and stirred up by suddaine occasions. If my wit could neyther finde nor presage them, I am not offended with it; the functiō thereof is contained within it's owne limets. If the successe beate me, and favour the side I refused; there is noe remedy; I fall not out with my selfe; I accuse my fortune, not my endeavour: that's not called repentance. *Phocion* had given the Athenians some counsell, which was not followed; the matter, against his opinion, succeeding happily; How now *Phocion*, (quoth one) art thou pleased the matter hath thrived so well? yea (saide he) and I am glad of it, yet repent not the advise I gave.

When any of my friends come to mee for counsell, I bestowe it francklie and clearelie, not (as well nigh all the worlde doth) wavering at the hazard of the matter, whereby the contrary of my meaning may happen, that so they may justly finde fault with my advise: for which I care not greatly. For they shall doe me wrong, and it became not me to refuse them that dutie. I have no body to blame for my faultes or misfortunes, but my selfe. For in effect I seldome use the advise of others, unlesse it be for complements sake, and where I have neede of instruction or knowledge of the fact. Marrie in things wherein nought but judgment is to bee employed; strange reasons may serve to sustaine, but not to divert me. I lende a favourable and curteous eare unto them all. But (to my remembrance) I never beleevd any but mine owne. With mee they are but Flyes and Moathes, which distract my will. I little regarde mine owne opinions, other mens I esteeme as little: Fortune payes mee accordinglye. If I take no counsell, I give as little. I am not much sought after for it, and lesse credited when I give it: Neither knowe I any enterprise, eyther private or publike, that my advise hath directed and brought to conclusion. Even those whome fortune had some-way tyde thereunto, have more willinglie admitted the direction of others conceites, then mine. As one that am a jealous of the rights of my quiet, as of those of my auctoritie; I would rather have it thus.

Where leaving me, they jumpe with my profession, which is, wholie to settle and containe mee in my selfe. It is a pleasure unto mee, to be disinterested of other mens affayres, and disingaged from their contentions. When sutes or businesses bee over-past, how-so-ever it bee, I greeve little at them. For, the imagination that they must necessarilye happen-so, puts mee out of paine: behould them in the course of the Universe, and enchained in Stoycall causes. Your fantzie cannot by wishe or imagination, remoove one point of them, but the whole order of things must reverse both what is past, and what is to come. More-over, I hate that accidentall repentance which olde age brings with it.

He that in ancient times said, he was beholden to yeares, because they had ridde him of voluptuousnesse, was not of mine opinion. I shall never give impuissance thanks, for any good it can doe mee. *Nec tam auersa unquam uidebitur ab opere suo prouidentia, ut debilitas inter optima inuenta sit.* Nor shall fore-sight ever bee seene so averse from hir owne worke, that weakenesse bee found to bee one of the best thing. Our appetites are rare in olde-age: the blowe over-passed, a deepe sacietie seazeth upon us: Therein I see no conscience. Fretting care and weakenesse, imprint in us an effeminate and drowzie vertue.

Wee must not suffer our-selves so fully to be carryed into naturall alterations, as to corrupt or adulterate our judgement by them. Youth and pleasure have not heretofore prevailed so much over me, but I could ever (even in the midst of sensualities) discern the ugly face of sinne: nor can the distaste which yeares bring on me, at this instant, keepe me from discerning that of voluptuousnesse in vice. Now I am no longer in it, I judge of it as if I were still there. I who livelie and attentively examine my reason, finde it to be the same that possessed me in my most dissolute and licencious age; unlesse perhaps, they being enfeebled and empayred by yeares, doe make some difference: And finde, that what delight it refuseth to affoorde me in regarde of my bodilie health, it would no more denie mee, then in times past, for the health of my soule. To see it out of combate, I holde it not the more couragious. My temptations are so mortifide and crazed, as they are not worthy of it's oppositions; holding but my hand before me, I be-calme them. Should one present that former concupiscence unto it, I feare it would be of lesse power to sustaine it then heretofore it hath beene. I see in it, by it selfe no encrease of judgement, nor accesse of brightnesse, what it now judgeth, it did then. Wherefore if there be any amendment, t'is but diseased. *Oh miserable kinde of remedie, to be behoulden unto sicknesse for our health.* It is not for our mishap, but for the good successe of our judgement to performe this office. Crosses and afflictions, make me doe nothing but cursse them. They are for people, that cannot be awaked but by the whip. The course of my reason is the nimbler in prosperitie; It is much more distracted and busied in the digesting of mischiefes, then of delights. I see much clearer in faire weather. Health forewarneth me, as with more pleasure, so to better purpose then sicknesse. I approached the nearest I could unto amendment and regularitie, when I should have enjoyed the same; I should be ashamed and vexed, that the miserie and mishap of my olde age could exceede the health, attention and vigor of my youth: and that I should be esteemed, not for what I have beene, but for what I am leaft to be. The happy life (in my opinion) not (as said *Antisthines*) the happy death, is it that makes mans happinesse in this world.

I have not preposterouslie busied my selfe to tye the taile of a Philosopher, unto the head and bodye of a varlet: nor that this paultrie ende, should disavowe and be-lye the fayrest, soundest, and longest parte of my life. I will present my selfe, and make a generall muster of my whole, every where uniformallie. Were I to live againe, it should be as I have already lived. I neither deplore what is past, nor dread what is to come: and if I be not deceived, the inwarde partes have neerely resembled the outwarde. It is one of the chiefest pointes wherein I am behoulden to fortune, that in

the course of my bodies-estate, each thing hath beene carried in season. I have seene the leaves, the blossomes, and the fruite; and now see the drooping and withering of it. Happilie, because naturallie. I beare present miseries the more gentlye, because they are in their prime, and with greater favour make mee remember the long happinesse of my former life. In like manner, my discretion may well bee of like proportion in the one and the other time: but sure it was of much more performance, and had a better grace, being fresh, jolly and full of spirite, then now that it is worne, decrepite and toylesome.

I therefore renounce these casuall and dolourous reformations. *God must touche our heartes; our conscience must amende of it selfe*, and not by reinforcement of our reason, nor by the enfeebling of our appetites. Voluptuousnesse is neyther pale nor discoloured, to be discerned by bleare and troubled eyes. We should affect temperance and chastitie for it selfe, and for Gods cause, who hath ordained them unto us: that which Catars<sup>3</sup> bestowe upon us, and which I am beholden to my chollike for, is neither temperance nor chastitie. A man cannot boast of contemning or combating sensualitie, if hee see hir not, or know not hir grace, hir force and most attractive beauties. I know them both, and therefore may speake it. But me thinkes our soules in age, are subject unto more importunate diseases and imperfections, then they are in youth. I said so being yong, when my beardlesse chinne was upbraided me; and I say it againe, now that my gray beard gives me authoritie. We entitle wisdomes, the frowardnesse of our humours, and the distaste of present things; but in truth we abandon not vices, so much as we change them; and in mine opinion for the worse. Besides a sillie and ruinous pride, combersome tattle, wayward and unsociable humours, superstition and a ridiculous carking for wealth, when the use of it is well nigh lost, I finde the more envie, injustice and lewdnesse in it. It sets more wrinckles in our mindes, then on our foreheads: nor are there any spirits, or very rare ones, which in growing olde taste not sowrelie and mustilie. Man martcheth entirelie towards his encrease and decrease. View but the wisdomes of *Socrates*, and divers circumstances of his condemnation, I dare say he something lent himselfe unto it by prevarication of purpose: being so neare, and at the age of seaventie, to endure the benumbing of his spirites richest pace, and the dimming of his accustomed brightnesse. What *Metamorphoses* have I seene it dailie make in diverse of mine acquaintances? It is a powerfull maladie, which naturallie and imperceptible glideth into us: There is required great provision of studie, heede and precaution, to avoid the imperfections wherewith it chargeth us; or at least to weaken their further progresse. I finde that notwithstanding all my entrenchings, by little and little it getteth ground upon me: I hold out as long as I can, but know not whither at length it will bring me. Hap what hap will, I am pleased the world knowe from what height I tumbled.

**NOTES**

1 Montaigne wrote *unto himselfe*. Florio later corrected his translation.

2 *weigh down*

3 *catarrhs*