



MICHEL de MONTAIGNE

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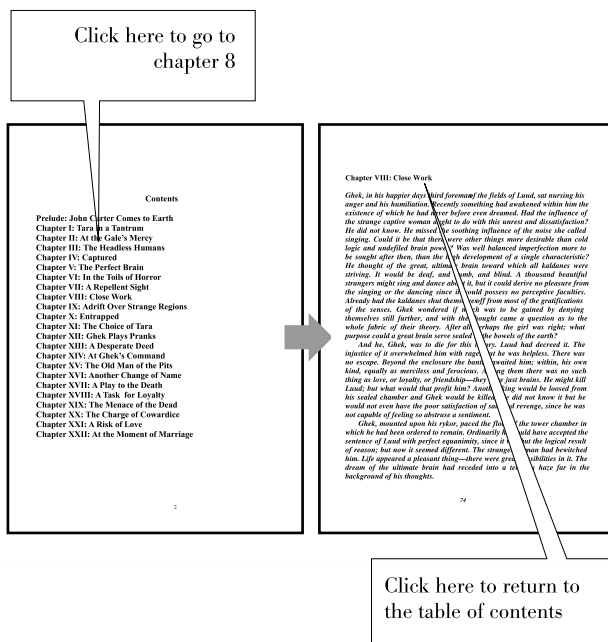
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Contents

Of Idleness

Of Liars

Of Prognostications

Of Constancy

Of the Punishment of Cowardice

Of Fear

That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die

Of the Force of Imagination

Of Custom, and That We Should Not Easily Change a Law Received

Of Pedantry

Of Friendship

That We Are to Avoid Pleasures, Even at the Expense of Life

Of the Custom of Wearing Clothes

Of Solitude

Of Sleep

Of Names

Of the Vanity of Words

Of Smells

Of Prayers

Of Age

Of Drunkenness

Of Conscience

Of Idleness

AS we see some grounds that have long lain idle and untilled, when grown rich and fertile by rest, to abound with and spend their virtue in the product of innumerable sorts of weeds and wild herbs that are unprofitable, and that to make them perform their true office, we are to cultivate and prepare them for such seeds as are proper for our service; and as we see women that, without knowledge of man, do sometimes of themselves bring forth inanimate and formless lumps of flesh, but that to cause a natural and perfect generation they are to be husbanded with another kind of seed: even so it is with minds, which if not applied to some certain study that may fix and restrain them, run into a thousand extravagances, eternally roving here and there in the vague expanse of the imagination—

“As when in brazen vats of water the trembling beams of light, reflected from the sun, or from the image of the radiant moon, swiftly float over every place around, and now are darted up on high, and strike the ceilings of the upmost roof.”

—*Æneid*, viii. 22.

—in which wild agitation there is no folly, nor idle fancy they do not light upon:—

“As a sick man’s dreams, creating vain phantasms.”

—Hor., *De Arte Poetica*, 7.

The soul that has no established aim loses itself, for, as it is said—

“He who lives everywhere, lives nowhere.”

—Martial, vii. 73.

When I lately retired to my own house, with a resolution, as much as possibly I could, to avoid all manner of concern in affairs, and to spend in privacy and repose the little remainder of time I have to live, I fancied I could not more oblige my mind than to suffer it at full leisure to

entertain and divert itself, which I now hoped it might henceforth do, as being by time become more settled and mature; but I find—

“Leisure ever creates varied thought.”

—Lucan, iv. 704.

that, quite contrary, it is like a horse that has broke from his rider, who voluntarily runs into a much more violent career than any horseman would put him to, and creates me so many chimæras and fantastic monsters, one upon another, without order or design, that, the better at leisure to contemplate their strangeness and absurdity, I have begun to commit them to writing, hoping in time to make it ashamed of itself.

Of Liars

THERE is not a man living whom it would so little become to speak from memory as myself, for I have scarcely any at all, and do not think that the world has another so marvellously treacherous as mine. My other faculties are all sufficiently ordinary and mean; but in this I think myself very rare and singular, and deserving to be thought famous. Besides the natural inconvenience I suffer by it (for, certes, the necessary use of memory considered, Plato had reason when he called it a great and powerful goddess), in my country, when they would say a man has no sense, they say, such an one has no memory; and when I complain of the defect of mine, they do not believe me, and reprove me, as though I accused myself for a fool: not discerning the difference betwixt memory and understanding, which is to make matters still worse for me. But they do me wrong; for experience, rather, daily shows us, on the contrary, that a strong memory is commonly coupled with infirm judgment. They do, me, moreover (who am so perfect in nothing as in friendship), a great wrong in this, that they make the same words which accuse my infirmity, represent me for an ungrateful person; they bring my affections into question upon the account of my memory, and from a natural imperfection, make out a defect of conscience. “He has forgot,” says one, “this request, or that promise; he no more remembers his friends; he has forgot to say or do, or conceal such and such a thing, for my sake.” And,

truly, I am apt enough to forget many things, but to neglect anything my friend has given me in charge, I never do it. And it should be enough, methinks, that I feel the misery and inconvenience of it, without branding me with malice, a vice so contrary to my humour.

However, I derive these comforts from my infirmity: first, that it is an evil from which principally I have found reason to correct a worse, that would easily enough have grown upon me, namely, ambition; the defect being intolerable in those who take upon them public affairs. That, like examples in the progress of nature demonstrate to us, she has fortified me in my other faculties proportionably as she has left me unfurnished in this; I should otherwise have been apt implicitly to have reposed my mind and judgment upon the bare report of other men, without ever setting them to work upon their own force, had the inventions and opinions of others been ever been present with me by the benefit of memory. That by this means I am not so talkative, for the magazine of the memory is ever better furnished with matter than that of the invention. Had mine been faithful to me, I had ere this deafened all my friends with my babble, the subjects themselves arousing and stirring up the little faculty I have of handling and employing them, heating and distending my discourse, which were a pity: as I have observed in several of my intimate friends, who, as their memories supply them with an entire and full view of things, begin their narrative so far back, and crowd it with so many impertinent circumstances, that though the story be good in itself, they make a shift to spoil it; and if otherwise, you are either to curse the strength of their memory or the weakness of their judgment: and it is a hard thing to close up a discourse, and to cut it short, when you have once started; there is nothing wherein the force of a horse is so much seen as in a round and sudden stop. I see even those who are pertinent enough, who would, but cannot stop short in their career; for whilst they are seeking out a handsome period to conclude with, they go on at random, straggling about upon impertinent trivialities, as men staggering upon weak legs. But, above all, old men who retain the memory of things past, and forget how often they have told them, are dangerous company; and I have known stories from the mouth of a man of very great quality, otherwise very pleasant in themselves, become very

wearisome by being repeated a hundred times over and over again to the same people.

Secondly, that, by this means, I the less remember the injuries I have received; insomuch that, as the ancient said,¹ I should have a register of injuries, or a prompter, as Darius, who, that he might not forget the offence he had received from those of Athens, so oft as he sat down to dinner, ordered one of his pages three times to repeat in his ear, "Sir, remember the Athenians;"² and then, again, the places which I revisit, and the books I read over again, still smile upon me with a fresh novelty.

It is not without good reason said "that he who has not a good memory should never take upon him the trade of lying." I know very well that the grammarians³ distinguish betwixt an untruth and a lie, and say that to tell an untruth is to tell a thing that is false, but that we ourselves believe to be true; and that the definition of the word to lie in Latin, from which our French is taken, is to tell a thing which we know in our conscience to be untrue; and it is of this last sort of liars only that I now speak. Now, these do either wholly contrive and invent the untruths they utter, or so alter and disguise a true story that it ends in a lie. When they disguise and often alter the same story, according to their own fancy, 'tis very hard for them, at one time or another, to escape being trapped, by reason that the real truth of the thing, having first taken possession of the memory, and being there lodged impressed by the medium of knowledge and science, it will be difficult that it should not represent itself to the imagination, and shoulder out falsehood, which cannot there have so sure and settled footing as the other; and the circumstances of the first true knowledge evermore running in their minds, will be apt to make them forget those that are illegitimate, and only, forged by their own fancy. In what they, wholly invent, forasmuch as there is no contrary impression to jostle their invention there seems to be less danger of tripping; and yet even this by reason it is a vain body and without any hold, is very apt to escape the memory, if it be not well assured. Of which I had very pleasant experience, at the expense of such as profess only to form and accommodate their speech to the affair they

¹ Cicero, *Pro Ligar.* c. 12.

² Herod., v. 105.

³ Nigidius, *Aulus Gellius*, xi. ii; *Nonius*, v. 80.

have in hand, or to humour of the great folks to whom they are speaking; for the circumstances to which these men stick not to enslave their faith and conscience being subject to several changes, their language must vary accordingly: whence it happens that of the same thing they tell one man that it is this, and another that it is that, giving it several colours; which men, if they once come to confer notes, and find out the cheat, what becomes of this fine art? To which may be added, that they must of necessity very often ridiculously trap themselves; for what memory can be sufficient to retain so many different shapes as they have forged upon one and the same subject? I have known many in my time very ambitious of the repute of this fine wit; but they do not see that if they have the reputation of it, the effect can no longer be.

In plain truth, lying is an accursed vice. We are not men, nor have other tie upon one another, but by our word. If we did but discover the horror and gravity of it, we should pursue it with fire and sword, and more justly than other crimes. I see that parents commonly, and with indiscretion enough, correct their children for little innocent faults, and torment them for wanton tricks, that have neither impression nor consequence; whereas, in my opinion, lying only, and, which is of something a lower form, obstinacy, are the faults which are to be severely whipped out of them, both in their infancy and in their progress, otherwise they grow up and increase with them; and after a tongue has once got the knack of lying, 'tis not to be imagined how impossible it is to reclaim it whence it comes to pass that we see some, who are otherwise very honest men, so subject and enslaved to this vice. I have an honest lad to my tailor, whom I never knew guilty of one truth, no, not when it had been to his advantage. If falsehood had, like truth, but one face only, we should be upon better terms; for we should then take for certain the contrary to what the liar says: but the reverse of truth has a hundred thousand forms, and a field indefinite, without bound or limit. The Pythagoreans make good to be certain and finite, and evil, infinite and uncertain. There are a thousand ways to miss the white, there is only one to hit it. For my own part, I have this vice in so great horror, that I am not sure I could prevail with my conscience to secure myself from the most manifest and extreme danger by an impudent and solemn lie. An ancient father says

“that a dog we know is better company than a man whose language we do not understand.”

“As a foreigner cannot be said to supply us the place of a man.”

—Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* vii. I

And how much less sociable is false speaking than silence?

King Francis I. vaunted that he had by this means nonplussed Francesco Taverna, ambassador of Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, a man very famous for his science in talking in those days. This gentleman had been sent to excuse his master to his Majesty about a thing of very great consequence, which was this: the King, still to maintain some intelligence with Italy, out of which he had lately been driven, and particularly with the duchy of Milan, had thought it convenient to have a gentleman on his behalf to be with that Duke: an ambassador in effect, but in outward appearance a private person who pretended to reside there upon his own particular affairs; for the Duke, much more depending upon the Emperor, especially at a time when he was in a treaty of marriage with his niece, daughter to the King of Denmark, who is now dowager of Lorraine, could not manifest any practice and conference with us without his great interest. For this commission one Merveille, a Milanese gentleman, and an equerry to the King, being thought very fit, was accordingly despatched thither with private credentials, and instructions as ambassador, and with other letters of recommendation to the Duke about his own private concerns, the better to mask and colour the business; and was so long in that court, that the Emperor at last had some inkling of his real employment there; which was the occasion of what followed after, as we suppose; which was, that under pretence of some murder, his trial was in two days despatched, and his head in the night struck off in prison. Messire Francesco being come, and prepared with a long counterfeit history of the affair (for the King had applied himself to all the princes of Christendom, as well as to the Duke himself, to demand satisfaction), had his audience at the morning council; where, after he had for the support of his cause laid open several plausible justifications of the fact, that his master had never looked upon this Merveille for other than a private gentleman and his own subject, who

was there only in order to his own business, neither had he ever lived under any other aspect; absolutely disowning that he had ever heard he was one of the King's household or that his Majesty so much as knew him, so far was he from taking him for an ambassador: the King, in his turn, pressing him with several objections and demands, and challenging him on all sides, tripped him up at last by asking, why, then, the execution was performed by night, and as it were by stealth? At which the poor confounded ambassador, the more handsomely to disengage himself, made answer, that the Duke would have been very loth, out of respect to his Majesty, that such an execution should have been performed by day. Anyone may guess if he was not well rated when he came home, for having so grossly tripped in the presence of a prince of so delicate a nostril as King Francis.

Pope Julius II. having sent an ambassador to the King of England to animate him against King Francis, the ambassador having had his audience, and the King, before he would give an answer, insisting upon the difficulties he should find in setting on foot so great a preparation as would be necessary to attack so potent a King, and urging some reasons to that effect, the ambassador very unseasonably replied that he had also himself considered the same difficulties, and had represented them to the Pope. From which saying of his, so directly opposite to the thing propounded and the business he came about, which was immediately to incite him to war, the King of England first derived the argument (which he afterward found to be true), that this ambassador, in his own mind, was on the side of the French; of which having advertised his master, his estate at his return home was confiscated, and he himself very narrowly escaped the losing of his head.⁴

Of Prognostications

FOR what concerns oracles, it is certain that a good while before the coming of Jesus Christ they had begun to lose their credit; for we see that Cicero troubled to find out the cause of their decay, and he has these words:

⁴ Erasmi Op. (1703), iv. col. 684.

“What is the reason that the oracles at Delphi are no longer uttered: not merely in this age of ours, but for a long time past, insomuch that nothing is more in contempt?”

—Cicero, *De Divin.*, ii. 57.

But as to the other prognostics, calculated from the anatomy of beasts at sacrifices (to which purpose Plato does, in part, attribute the natural constitution of the intestines of the beasts themselves), the scraping of poultry, the flight of birds—

“We think some sorts of birds are purposely created to serve the purposes of augury.”—Cicero, *De Natura Deor.*, ii. 64.

claps of thunder, the overflowing of rivers—

“The Aruspices discern many things, the Augurs foresee many things, many things are announced by oracles, many by vaticinations, many by dreams, many by portents.”

—Cicero, *De Natura Deor.*, ii. 65.

—and others of the like nature, upon which antiquity founded most of their public and private enterprises, our religion has totally abolished them. And although there yet remain amongst us some practices of divination from the stars, from spirits, from the shapes and complexions of men, from dreams and the like (a notable example of the wild curiosity of our nature to grasp at and anticipate future things, as if we had not enough to do to digest the present)—

“Why, ruler of Olympus, hast thou to anxious mortals thought fit to add this care, that they should know by, omens future slaughter?. . . Let whatever thou art preparing be sudden. Let the mind of men be blind to fate in store; let it be permitted to the timid to hope.”—Lucan, ii. 14.

“It is useless to know what shall come to pass; it is a miserable thing to be tormented to no purpose.”

—Cicero, *De Natura Deor.*, iii. 6.

yet are they of much less authority now than heretofore. Which makes so much more remarkable the example of Francesco, Marquis of Saluzzo, who being lieutenant to King Francis I. in his ultramontane army, infinitely favoured and esteemed in our court, and obliged to the king's bounty for the marquisate itself, which had been forfeited by his brother; and as to the rest, having no manner of provocation given him to do it, and even his own affection opposing any such disloyalty, suffered himself to be so terrified, as it was confidently reported, with the fine prognostics that were spread abroad everywhere in favour of the Emperor Charles V., and to our disadvantage (especially in Italy, where these foolish prophecies were so far believed, that at Rome great sums of money were ventured out upon return of greater, when the prognostics came to pass, so certain they made themselves of our ruin), that, having often bewailed, to those of his acquaintance who were most intimate with him, the mischiefs that he saw would inevitably fall upon the Crown of France and the friends he had in that court, he revolted and turned to the other side; to his own misfortune, nevertheless, what constellation soever governed at that time. But he carried himself in this affair like a man agitated by divers passions; for having both towns and forces in his hands, the enemy's army under Antonio de Leyva close by him, and we not at all suspecting his design, it had been in his power to have done more than he did; for we lost no men by this infidelity of his, nor any town, but Fossano only, and that after a long siege and a brave defence.⁵

“A wise God covers with thick night the path of the future, and laughs at the man who alarms himself without reason.”

—Hor., *Od.*, iii. 29.

“He lives happy and master of himself who can say as each day passes on, ‘I HAVE LIVED:’ whether to-morrow our Father shall give us a clouded sky or a clear day.”—Hor., *Od.*, iii. 29.

⁵ In 1536.

“A mind happy, cheerful in the present state, will take good care not to think of what is beyond it.”—*Ibid.*, ii. 25.

And those who take this sentence in a contrary sense interpret it amiss:

“These things are so far reciprocal that if there be divination, there must be deities; and if deities, divination.”

—Cicero, *De Divin.*, i. 6.

Much more wisely Pacuvius—

“As to those who understand the language of birds, and who rather consult the livers of animals other than their own, I had rather hear them than attend to them.”

—Cicero, *De Divin.*, i. 57, *ex Pacuvio*.

The so celebrated art of divination amongst the Tuscans took its beginning thus: A labourer striking deep with his cutter into the earth, saw the demigod Tages ascend, with an infantine aspect, but endued with a mature and senile wisdom. Upon the rumour of which, all the people ran to see the sight, by whom his words and science, containing the principles and means to attain to this art, were recorded, and kept for many ages.⁶ A birth suitable to its progress; I, for my part, should sooner regulate my affairs by the chance of a die than by such idle and vain dreams. And, indeed, in all republics, a good share of the government has ever been referred to chance. Plato, in the civil regimen that he models according to his own fancy, leaves to it the decision of several things of very great importance, and will, amongst other things, that marriages should be appointed by lot; attributing so great importance to this accidental choice as to ordain that the children begotten in such wedlock be brought up in the country, and those begotten in any other be thrust out as spurious and base; yet so, that if any of those exiles, notwithstanding, should, peradventure, in growing up give any good hope of himself, he might be recalled, as, also, that such as had been retained,

⁶ Cicero, *De Divin.*, ii. 23.

should be exiled, in case they gave little expectation of themselves in their early growth.

I see some who are mightily given to study and comment upon their almanacs, and produce them to us as an authority when anything has fallen out pat; and, for that matter, it is hardly possible but that these alleged authorities sometimes stumble upon a truth amongst an infinite number of lies.

“For who shoots all day at butts that does not sometimes hit the white?”—Cicero, *De Divin.*, ii. 59.

I think never the better of them for some such accidental hit. There would be more certainty in it if there were a rule and a truth of always lying. Besides, nobody records their flimflams and false prognostics, forasmuch as they are infinite and common; but if they chop upon one truth, that carries a mighty report, as being rare, incredible, and prodigious. So Diogenes, surnamed the Atheist, answered him in Samothrace, who, showing him in the temple the several offerings and stories in painting of those who had escaped shipwreck, said to him, “Look, you who think the gods have no care of human things, what do you say to so many persons preserved from death by their especial favour?” “Why, I say,” answered he, “that their pictures are not here who were cast away, who are by much the greater number.”⁷

Cicero observes that of all the philosophers who have acknowledged a deity, Xenophanes the Colophonian only has endeavoured to eradicate all manner of divination⁸; which makes it the less a wonder if we have now and then seen some of our princes, sometimes to their own cost, rely too much upon these vanities. I had given anything with my own eyes to see those two great marvels, the book of Joachim the Calabrian abbot, which foretold all the future Popes, their names and qualities; and that of the Emperor Leo, which prophesied all the emperors and patriarchs of Greece. This I have been an eyewitness of, that in public confusions, men astonished at their fortune, have abandoned their own reason, superstitiously to seek out in the stars the ancient causes and menaces of

⁷ Cicero, *De Natura Deor.*, i. 37.

⁸ Cicero, *De Divin.*, i. 3.

the present mishaps, and in my time have been so strangely successful in it, as to make me believe that this being an amusement of sharp and volatile wits, those who have been versed in this knack of unfolding and untying riddles, are capable, in any sort of writing, to find out what they desire. But above all, that which gives them the greatest room to play in, is the obscure, ambiguous, and fantastic gibberish of the prophetic canting, where their authors deliver nothing of clear sense, but shroud all in riddle, to the end that posterity may interpret and apply it according to its own fancy.

The demon of Socrates might, perhaps, be no other but a certain impulsion of the will, which obtruded itself upon him without the advice or consent of his judgment; and in a soul so enlightened as his was, and so prepared by a continual exercise of wisdom and virtue, 'tis to be supposed those inclinations of his, though sudden and undigested, were very important and worthy to be followed. Every one finds in himself some image of such agitations, of a prompt, vehement, and fortuitous opinion; and I may well allow them some authority, who attribute so little to our prudence, and who also myself have had some, weak in reason, but violent in persuasion and dissuasion, which were most frequent with Socrates⁹ by which I have suffered myself to be carried away so fortunately, and so much to my own advantage, that they might have been judged to have had something in them of a divine inspiration.

Of Constancy

THE law of resolution and constancy does not imply that we ought not, as much as in us lies, to decline and secure ourselves from the mischiefs and inconveniences that threaten us; nor, consequently, that we shall not fear lest they should surprise us: on the contrary, all decent and honest ways and means of securing ourselves from harms, are not only permitted, but, moreover, commendable, and the business of constancy chiefly is, bravely to stand to, and stoutly to suffer those inconveniences which are not possibly to be avoided. So that there is no supple motion of body, nor any movement in the handling of arms, how irregular or

⁹ Plato, in his account of Theages the Pythagorean.

ungraceful soever, that we need condemn, if they serve to protect us from the blow that is made against us.

Several very warlike nations have made use of a retreating and flying way of fight as a thing of singular advantage, and, by so doing, have made their backs more dangerous to their enemies than their faces. Of which kind of fighting the Turks still retain something in their practice of arms; and Socrates, in Plato, laughs at Laches, who had defined fortitude to be a standing firm in the ranks against the enemy. "What!" says he, "would it, then, be a reputed cowardice to overcome them by giving ground?" urging, at the same time, the authority of Homer, who commends in Æneas the science of flight. And whereas Laches, considering better of it, admits the practice as to the Scythians, and, in general, all cavalry whatever, he again attacks him with the example of the Lacedæmonian foot—a nation of all other the most obstinate in maintaining their ground—who, in the battle of Plataea, not being able to break into the Persian phalanx, bethought themselves to disperse and retire, that by the enemy supposing they fled, they might break and disunite that vast body of men in the pursuit, and by that stratagem obtained the victory.

As for the Scythians, 'tis said of them, that when Darius went his expedition to subdue them, he sent, by a herald, highly to reproach their king, that he always retired before him and declined a battle; to which Idanthyrse,¹⁰ for that was his name, returned answer, that it was not for fear of him, or of any man living, that he did so, but that it was the way of marching in practice with his nation, who had neither tilled fields, cities, nor houses to defend, or to fear the enemy should make any advantage of but that if he had such a stomach to fight, let him but come to view their ancient places of sepulture, and there he should have his fill.

Nevertheless, as to cannon-shot, when a body of men are drawn up in the face of a train of artillery, as the occasion of war often requires, it is unhandsome to quit their post to avoid the danger, forasmuch as by reason of its violence and swiftness we account it inevitable; and many a one, by ducking, stepping aside, and such other motions of fear, has been, at all events, sufficiently laughed at by his companions. And yet, in the expedition that the Emperor Charles V. made against us into

¹⁰ Herod., iv. 127.

Provence, the Marquis de Guast going to reconnoitre the city of Arles, and advancing out of the cover of a windmill, under favour of which he had made his approach, was perceived by the Seigneurs de Bonneval and the Seneschal of Agenois, who were walking upon the *théâtre aux arènes*; who having shown him to the Sieur de Villiers, commissary of the artillery, he pointed a culverin so admirably well, and levelled it so exactly right against him, that had not the Marquis, seeing fire given to it, slipped aside, it was certainly concluded the shot had taken him full in the body. And, in like manner, some years before, Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, and father to the queen-mother,¹¹ laying siege to Mondolfo, a place in the territories of the Vicariat in Italy, seeing the cannoneer give fire to a piece that pointed directly against him, it was well for him that he ducked, for otherwise the shot, that only grazed the top of his head, had doubtless hit him full in the breast. To say truth, I do not think that these evasions are performed upon the account of judgment; for how can any man living judge of high or low aim on so sudden an occasion? And it is much more easy to believe that fortune favoured their apprehension, and that it might be as well at another time to make them face the danger, as to seek to avoid it. For my own part, I confess I cannot forbear starting when the rattle of a harquebuse thunders in my ears on a sudden, and in a place where I am not to expect it, which I have also observed in others, braver fellows than I.

Neither do the Stoics pretend that the soul of their philosopher need be proof against the first visions and fantasies that surprise him; but, as to a natural subjection, consent that he should tremble at the terrible noise of thunder, or the sudden clatter of some falling ruin, and be affrighted even to paleness and convulsion; and so in other passions, provided his judgment remain sound and entire, and that the seat of his reason suffer no concussion nor alteration, and that he yield no consent to his fright and discomposure. To him who is not a philosopher, a fright is the same thing in the first part of it, but quite another thing in the second; for the impression of passions does not remain superficially in him, but penetrates farther, even to the very seat of reason, infecting and corrupting it, so that he judges according to his fear, and conforms his behaviour to it.

¹¹ Catherine de' Medici, mother of Henry III.

In this verse you may see the true state of the wise Stoic learnedly and plainly expressed:—

“Though tears flow, the mind remains unmoved.”

—Virgil, *Æneid*, iv. 449.

The Peripatetic sage does not exempt himself totally from perturbations of mind, but he moderates them.

Of the Punishment of Cowardice

I ONCE heard of a prince, and a great captain, having a narration given him as he sat at table of the proceeding against Monsieur de Vervins, who was sentenced to death for having surrendered Boulogne to the English,¹² openly maintaining that a soldier could not justly be put to death for want of courage. And, in truth, 'tis reason that a man should make a great difference betwixt faults that merely proceed from infirmity, and those that are visibly the effects of treachery and malice: for, in the last, we act against the rules of reason that nature has imprinted in us; whereas, in the former, it seems as if we might produce the same nature, who left us in such a state of imperfection and weakness of courage, for our justification. Insomuch that many have thought we are not fairly questionable for anything but what we commit against our conscience; and it is partly upon this rule that those ground their opinion who disapprove of capital or sanguinary punishments inflicted upon heretics and misbelievers; and theirs also who advocate or a judge is not accountable for having from mere ignorance failed in his administration.

But as to cowardice, it is certain that the most usual way of chastising it is by ignominy and it is supposed that this practice brought into use by the legislator Charondas; and that, before his time, the laws of Greece punished those with death who fled from a battle; whereas he ordained only that they be for three days exposed in the public dressed in woman's attire, hoping yet for some service from them, having awakened their courage by this open shame:

¹² To Henry VIII. in 1544.

“Suffundere malis hominis sanguinem quam effundere.”

It appears also that the Roman laws did anciently punish those with death who had run away; for Ammianus Marcellinus says that the Emperor Julian commanded ten of his soldiers, who had turned their backs in an encounter against the Parthians, to be first degraded, and afterward put to death, according, says he, to the ancient laws,¹³ and yet elsewhere for the like offence he only condemned others to remain amongst the prisoners under the baggage ensign. The severe punishment the people of Rome inflicted upon those who fled from the battle of Cannæ, and those who ran away with Gnæus Fulvius at his defeat, did not extend to death. And yet, methinks, 'tis to be feared, lest disgrace should make such delinquents desperate, and not only faint friends, but enemies.

Of late memory,¹⁴ the Seigneur de Frauget, lieutenant to the Mareschal de Chatillon's company, having by the Mareschal de Chabannes been put in government of Fuentarabia in the place of Monsieur de Lude, and having surrendered it to the Spaniard, he was for that condemned to be degraded from all nobility, and both himself and his posterity declared ignoble, taxable, and for ever incapable of bearing arms, which severe sentence was afterwards accordingly executed at Lyons.¹⁵ And, since that, all the gentlemen who were in Guise when the Count of Nassau entered into it, underwent the same punishment, as several others have done since for the like offence. Notwithstanding, in case of such a manifest ignorance or cowardice as exceeds all ordinary example, 'tis but reason to take it for a sufficient proof of treachery and malice, and for such to be punished.

¹³ Ammianus Marcellinus, xxiv. 4; xxv. i.

¹⁴ In 1523.

¹⁵ In 1536.

Of Fear

“I was amazed, my hair stood on end,
and my voice stuck in my throat.”

—Virgil, *Aeneid*, ii. 774.

I AM not so good a naturalist (as they call it) as to discern by what secret springs fear has its motion in us; but, be this as it may, 'tis a strange passion, and such a one that the physicians say there is no other whatever that sooner dethrones our judgment from its proper seat; which is so true, that I myself have seen very many become frantic through fear; and, even in those of the best settled temper it is most certain that it begets a terrible astonishment and confusion during the fit. I omit the vulgar sort, to whom it one while represents their great-grandsires risen out of their graves in their shrouds, another while werewolves, nightmares, and chimæras; but even amongst soldiers, a sort of men over whom, of all others, it ought to have the least power, how often has it converted flocks of sheep into armed squadrons, reeds and bullrushes into pikes and lances, friends into enemies, and the French white cross into the red cross of Spain! When Monsieur de Bourbon took Rome¹⁶ an ensign who was upon guard at Borgo San Pietro was seized with such a fright upon the first alarm, that he threw himself out at a breach with his colours upon his shoulder, and ran directly upon the enemy, thinking he had retreated toward the inward defences of the city, and with much ado, seeing Monsieur de Bourbon's people, who thought it had been a sally upon them, draw up to receive him, at last came to himself, and saw his error; and then facing about, he retreated full speed through the same breach by which he had gone out, but not till he had first blindly advanced above three hundred paces into the open field. It did not, however, fall out so well with Captain Giulio's ensign, at the time when St. Paul was taken from us by the Comte de Bures and Monsieur de Reu, for he, being so astonished with fear as to throw himself, colours and all, out of a porthole, was immediately, cut to pieces by the enemy; and in the same siege, it was a very memorable fear that so seized, contracted, and froze up the heart of a gentleman, that he sank down, stone-dead, in the breach,

¹⁶ In 1527.

without any manner of wound or hurt at all. The like madness does sometimes push on a whole multitude; for in one of the encounters that Germanicus had with the Germans, two great parties were so amazed with fear that they ran two opposite ways, the one to the same place from which the other had fled.¹⁷ Sometimes it adds wings to the heels, as in the two first: sometimes it nails them to the ground, and fetters them from moving; as we read of the Emperor Theophilus, who, in a battle he lost against the Agarenes, was so astonished and stupefied that he had no power to fly—

“So much does fear dread even the means of safety.”

—Quint. Curt., ii. II.

—till such time as Manuel, one of the principal commanders of his army, having jogged and shaken him so as to rouse him out of his trance, said to him, “Sir, if you will not follow me, I will kill you; for it is better you should lose your life than, by being taken, lose your empire.”¹⁸ But fear does then manifest its utmost power when it throws us upon a valiant despair, having before deprived us of all sense both of duty and honour. In the first pitched battle the Romans lost against Hannibal, under the Consul Sempronius, a body of ten thousand foot, that had taken fright, seeing no other escape for their cowardice, went and threw themselves headlong upon the great battalion of the enemies, which with marvellous force and fury they charged through and through, and routed with a very great slaughter of the Carthaginians, thus purchasing an ignominious flight at the same price they might have gained a glorious victory.¹⁹

The thing in the world I am most afraid of is fear, that passion alone, in the trouble of it, exceeding all other accidents. What affliction could be greater or more just than that of Pompey’s friends, who, in his ship, were spectators of that horrible murder? Yet so it was, that the fear of the Egyptian vessels they saw coming to board them, possessed them with so great alarm that it is observed they thought of nothing but calling upon the mariners to make haste, and by force of oars to escape away, till

¹⁷ Tacit, *Annal.*, i. 63.

¹⁸ Zonaras, *lib.* iii.

¹⁹ Livy, *xxi.* 56.

being arrived at Tyre, and delivered from fear, they had leisure to turn their thoughts to the loss of their captain, and to give vent to those tears and lamentations that the other more potent passion had till then suspended.

“Then fear drove out all intelligence from my mind.”

—Ennius, *ap. Cicero, Tusc.*, iv. 8.

Such as have been well rubbed in some skirmish, may yet, all wounded and bloody as they are, be brought on again the next day to charge; but such as have once conceived a good sound fear of the enemy, will never be made so much as to look him in the face. Such as are in immediate fear of a losing their estates, of banishment, or of slavery, live in perpetual anguish, and lose all appetite and repose; whereas such as are actually poor, slaves, or exiles, oftentimes live as merrily as other folk. And the many people who, impatient of the perpetual alarms of fear, have hanged or drowned themselves, or dashed themselves to pieces, give us sufficiently to understand that fear is more importunate and insupportable than death itself.

The Greeks acknowledged another kind of fear, differing from any we have spoken of yet, that surprises us without any visible cause, by an impulse from heaven, so that whole nations and whole armies have been struck with it. Such a one was that which brought so wonderful a desolation upon Carthage, where nothing was to be heard but affrighted voices and outcries; where the inhabitants were seen to sally out of their houses as to an alarm, and there to charge, wound, and kill one another, as if they had been enemies come to surprise their city. All things were in disorder and fury till, with prayers and sacrifices, they had appeased their gods²⁰; and this is that they call panic terrors.²¹

²⁰ Diod. *Sic.*, xv. 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*; Plutarch on Isis and Osiris, c. 8.

That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die

CICERO says²² “that to study philosophy is nothing but to prepare one’s self to die.” The reason of which is, because study and contemplation do in some sort withdraw from us our soul, and employ it separately from the body, which is a kind of apprenticeship and a resemblance of death; or, else, because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world do in the end conclude in this point, to teach us not to fear to die. And to say the truth, either our reason mocks us, or it ought to have no other aim but our contentment only, nor to endeavour anything but, in sum, to make us live well, and, as the Holy Scripture says, at our ease. All the opinions of the world agree in this, that pleasure is our end, though we make use of divers means to attain it: they would, otherwise, be rejected at the first motion; for who would give ear to him that should propose affliction and misery for his end? The controversies and disputes of the philosophical sects upon this point are merely verbal:

“Let us skip over those subtle trifles.”

—Seneca, *Ep.*, 117.

—there is more in them of opposition and obstinacy than is consistent with so sacred a profession; but whatsoever personage a man takes upon himself to perform, he ever mixes his own part with it.

Let the philosophers say what they will, the thing at which we all aim, even in virtue is pleasure. It amuses me to rattle in ears this word, which they so nauseate to and if it signify some supreme pleasure and contentment, it is more due to the assistance of virtue than to any other assistance whatever. This pleasure, for being more gay, more sinewy, more robust and more manly, is only the more seriously voluptuous, and we ought give it the name of pleasure, as that which is more favourable, gentle, and natural, and not that from which we have denominated it. The other and meaner pleasure, if it could deserve this fair name, it ought to be by way of competition, and not of privilege. I find it less exempt from traverses and inconveniences than virtue itself; and, besides that the enjoyment is more momentary, fluid, and frail, it has its watchings, fasts,

²² *Tusc.*, i. 31.

and labours, its sweat and its blood; and, moreover, has particular to itself so many several sorts of sharp and wounding passions, and so dull a satiety attending it, as equal it to the severest penance. And we mistake if we think that these incommodities serve it for a spur and a seasoning to its sweetness (as in nature one contrary is quickened by another), or say, when we come to virtue, that like consequences and difficulties overwhelm and render it austere and inaccessible; whereas, much more aptly than in voluptuousness, they ennoble, sharpen, and heighten the perfect and divine pleasure they procure us. He renders himself unworthy of it who will counterpoise its cost with its fruit, and neither understands the blessing nor how to use it. Those who preach to us that the quest of it is craggy, difficult, and painful, but its fruition pleasant, what do they mean by that but to tell us that it is always unpleasing? For what human means will ever attain its enjoyment? The most perfect have been fain to content themselves to aspire unto it, and to approach it only, without ever possessing it. But they are deceived, seeing that of all the pleasures we know, the very pursuit is pleasant. The attempt ever relishes of the quality of the thing to which it is directed, for it is a good part of, and consubstantial with, the effect. The felicity and beatitude that glitters in Virtue, shines throughout all her appurtenances and avenues, even to the first entry and utmost limits.

Now, of all the benefits that virtue confers upon us, the contempt of death is one of the greatest, as the means that accommodates human life with a soft and easy tranquillity, and gives us a pure and pleasant taste of living, without which all other pleasure would be extinct. Which is the reason why all the rules centre and concur in this one article. And although they all in like manner, with common accord, teach us also to despise pain, poverty, and the other accidents to which human life is subject, it is not, nevertheless, with the same solicitude, as well by reason these accidents are not of so great necessity, the greater part of mankind passing over their whole lives without ever knowing what poverty is, and some without sorrow or sickness, as Xenophilus the musician, who lived a hundred and six years in a perfect and continual health; as also because, at the worst, death can, whenever we please, cut short and put an end to all other inconveniences. But as to death, it is inevitable:

“We are all bound one voyage; the lot of all, sooner or later, is to come out of the urn. All must to eternal exile sail away.”

—Hor., *Od.*, ii. 3, 25.

—and, consequently, if it frights us, ’tis a perpetual torment, for which there is no sort of consolation. There is no way by which it may not reach us. We may continually turn our heads this way and that, as in a suspected country:

“Ever, like Tantalus’s stone, hangs over us.”

—Cicero, *De Finib.*, i. 18.

Our courts of justice often send back condemned criminals to be executed upon the place where the crime was committed; but, carry them to fine houses by the way, prepare for them the best entertainment you can—

“Sicilian dainties will not tickle their palates, nor the melody of birds and harps bring back sleep.”

—Hor., *Od.*, iii. 1, 18.

Do you think they can relish it? And that the fatal end of their journey being continually before their eyes, would not alter and deprave their palate from tasting these regalios?

“He considers the route, computes the time of travelling, measuring his life by the length of the journey; and torments himself by thinking of the blow to come.”

—Claudianus, *in Ruf.*, ii. 137.

The end of our race is death; ’tis the necessary object of our aim, which, if it frights us, how is it possible to advance a step without a fit of ague? The remedy the vulgar use is not to think on’t; but from what brutish stupidity can they derive so gross a blindness? They must bridle the ass by the tail:

“Who in his folly seeks to advance backwards.”
—Lucretius, iv. 474.

’tis no wonder if he be often trapped in the pitfall. They affright people with the very mention of death, and many cross themselves, as it were the name of the devil. And because the making a man’s will is in reference to dying, not a man will be persuaded to take a pen in hand to that purpose, till the physician has passed sentence upon and totally given him over, and then betwixt and terror, God knows in how fit a condition of understanding he is to do it.

The Romans, by reason that this poor syllable *death* sounded so harshly to their ears and seemed so ominous, found out a way to soften and spin it out by a periphrasis, and instead of pronouncing such a one is dead, said, “Such a one has lived,” or “Such a one has ceased to live.”²³ for, provided there was any mention of life in the case, though past, it carried yet some sound of consolation. And from them it is that we have borrowed our expression, “The late Monsieur such and such a one.”²⁴ Peradventure, as the saying is, the term we have lived is worth our money. I was born betwixt eleven and twelve o’clock in the forenoon the last day of February 1533, according to our computation, beginning the year the 1st of January²⁵ and it is now but just fifteen days since I was complete nine-and-thirty years old; I make account to live, at least, as many more. In the meantime, to trouble a man’s self with the thought of a thing so far off were folly. But what? Young and old die upon the same terms; no one departs out of life otherwise than if he had but just before entered into it; neither is any man so old and decrepit, who, having heard of Methuselah, does not think he has yet twenty good years to come. Fool that thou art! Who has assured unto thee the term of life? Thou dependest upon physicians’ tales: rather consult effects and experience. According to the common course of things, ’tis long since that thou hast lived by extraordinary favour; thou hast already outlived the ordinary term of life. And that it is so, reckon up thy acquaintance, how many

²³ Plutarch, *Life of Cicero*, c. 22.

²⁴ “feu Monsieur un tel.”

²⁵ This was in virtue of an ordinance of Charles IX. in 1563. Previously the year commenced at Easter, so that the 1st January 1563 became the first day of the year 1564.

more have died before they arrived at thy age than have attained unto it; and of those who have ennobled their lives by their renown, take but an account, and I dare lay a wager thou wilt find more who have died before than after five-and-thirty years of age. It is full both of reason and piety, too, to take example by the humanity of Jesus Christ Himself; now, He ended His life at three-and-thirty years. The greatest man, that was no more than a man, Alexander, died also at the same age. How many several ways has death to surprise us?

“Be as cautious as he may, man can never foresee the danger that may at any hour befall him.”—Hor. *O.* ii. 13, 13.

To omit fevers and pleurisies, who would ever have imagined that a duke of Brittany²⁶ should be pressed to death in a crowd as that duke was at the entry of Pope Clement, my neighbour, into Lyons?²⁷ Hast thou not seen one of our kings²⁸ killed at a tilting, and did not one of his ancestors die by jostle of a hog?²⁹ Æschylus, threatened with the fall of a house, was to much purpose circumspect to avoid that danger, seeing that he was knocked on the head by a tortoise falling out of an eagle’s talons in the air. Another was choked with a grape-stone;³⁰ an emperor killed with the scratch of a comb in combing his head. Æmilius Lepidus with a stumble at his own threshold,³¹ and Aufidius with a jostle against the door as he entered the council-chamber. And betwixt the very thighs of women, Cornelius Gallus the proctor; Tigillinus, captain of the watch at Rome; Ludovico, son of Guido di Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua; and (of worse example) Speusippus, a Platonic philosopher, and one of our Popes. The poor judge Bebius gave adjournment in a case for eight days; but he himself, meanwhile, was condemned by death, and his own stay of life expired. Whilst Caius Julius, the physician, was anointing the eyes

²⁶ Jean II. died 1305.

²⁷ Montaigne speaks of him as if he had been a contemporary neighbour, perhaps because he was the Archbishop of Bordeaux. Bertrand de Got was Pope under the title of Clement V., 1305–14.

²⁸ Henry II., killed in a tournament, July 10, 1559.

²⁹ Philip, eldest son of Louis le Gros.

³⁰ Val. Max., ix. 12, ext. 2.

³¹ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, vii. 33.

of a patient, death closed his own; and, if I may bring in an example of my own blood, a brother of mine, Captain St. Martin, a young man, three-and-twenty years old, who had already given sufficient testimony of his valour, playing a match at tennis, received a blow of a ball a little above his right ear, which, as it gave no manner of sign of wound or contusion, he took no notice of it, nor so much as sat down to repose himself, but, nevertheless, died within five or six hours after of an apoplexy occasioned by that blow.

These so frequent and common examples passing every day before our eyes, how is it possible a man should disengage himself from the thought of death, or avoid fancying that it has us every moment by the throat? What matter is it, you will say, which way it comes to pass, provided a man does not terrify himself with the expectation? For my part, I am of this mind, and if a man could by any means avoid it, though by creeping under a calf's skin, I am one that should not be ashamed of the shift; all I aim at is, to pass my time at my ease, and the recreations that will most contribute to it, I take hold of, as little glorious and exemplary as you will:

“I had rather seem mad and a sluggard, so that my defects are agreeable to myself, or that I am not painfully conscious of them, than be wise, and captious.”

—Hor., *Ep.*, ii. 2, 126.

But 'tis folly to think of doing anything that way. They go, they come, they gallop and dance, and not a word of death. All this is very fine; but withal, when it comes either to themselves, their wives, their children, or friends, surprising them at unawares and unprepared, then, what torment, what outcries, what madness and despair! Did you ever see anything so subdued, so changed, and so confounded? A man must, therefore, make more early provision for it; and this brutish negligence, could it possibly lodge in the brain of any man of sense (which I think utterly impossible), sells us its merchandise too dear. Were it an enemy that could be avoided, I would then advise to borrow arms even of cowardice itself; but seeing it is not, and that it will catch you as well flying and playing the poltroon, as standing to't like an honest man:

“He pursues the flying poltroon, nor spares the hamstrings of the unwarlike youth who turns his back.”

—Hor., *Ep.*, iii. 2, 14.

And seeing that no temper of arms is of proof to secure us:

“Let him hide beneath iron or brass in his fear, death will pull his head out of his armour.”—Propertius iii. 18.

—let us learn bravely to stand our ground, and fight him. And to begin to deprive him of the greatest advantage he has over us, let us take a way quite contrary to the common course. Let us disarm him of his novelty and strangeness, let us converse and be familiar with him, and have nothing so frequent in our thoughts as death. Upon all occasions represent him to our imagination in his every shape; at the stumbling of a horse, at the falling of a tile, at the least prick with a pin, let us presently consider, and say to ourselves, “Well, and what if it had been death itself?” and, thereupon, let us encourage and fortify ourselves. Let us evermore, amidst our jollity and feasting, set the remembrance of our frail condition before our eyes, never suffering ourselves to be so far transported with our delights, but that we have some intervals of reflecting upon, and considering how many several ways this jollity of ours tends to death, and with how many dangers it threatens it. The Egyptians were wont to do after this manner, who in the height of their feasting and mirth, caused a dried skeleton of a man to be brought into the room to serve for a memento to their guests:

“Think each day when past is thy last; the next day, as unexpected, will be the more welcome.”

—Hor., *Ep.*, i. 4, 13.

Where death waits for us is uncertain; let us look for him everywhere. The premeditation of death is the premeditation of liberty; he who has learned to die has unlearned to serve. There is nothing evil in life for him who rightly comprehends that the privation of life is no evil: to know, how to die delivers us from all subjection and constraint. Paulus

Æmilius answered him whom the miserable King of Macedon, his prisoner, sent to entreat him that he would not lead him in his triumph, "Let him make that request to himself."³² In truth, in all things, if nature do not help a little, it is very hard for art and industry to perform anything to purpose. I am in my own nature not melancholic, but meditative; and there is nothing I have more continually entertained myself withal than imaginations of death, even in the most wanton time of my age:

"When my florid age rejoiced in pleasant spring."

—Catullus, lxviii.

In the company of ladies, and at games, some have perhaps thought me possessed with some jealousy, or the uncertainty of some hope, whilst I was entertaining myself with the remembrance of some one, surprised, a few days before, with a burning fever of which he died, returning from an entertainment like this, with his head full of idle fancies of love and jollity, as mine was then, and that, for aught I knew, the same destiny was attending me.

"Presently the present will have gone, never to be recalled."

—Lucretius, iii. 928.

Yet did not this thought wrinkle my forehead any more than any other. It is impossible but we must feel a sting in such imaginations as these, at first; but with often turning and returning them in one's mind, they, at last, become so familiar as to be no trouble at all: otherwise, I, for my part, should be in a perpetual fright and frenzy; for never man was so distrustful of his life, never man so uncertain as to its duration. Neither health, which I have hitherto ever enjoyed very strong and vigorous, and very seldom interrupted, does prolong, nor sickness contract my hopes. Every minute, methinks, I am escaping, and it eternally runs in my mind, that what may be done to-morrow, may be done to-day. Hazards and dangers do, in truth, little or nothing hasten our end; and if we consider how many thousands more remain and hang over our heads, besides the accident that immediately threatens us, we shall find that the sound and

³² Plutarch, *Life of Paulus Æmilius*, c. 17; Cicero, *Tusc.*, v. 40.

the sick, those that are abroad at sea, and those that sit by the fire, those who are engaged in battle, and those who sit idle at home, are the one as near it as the other.

“No man is more fragile than another: no man more certain than another of to-morrow.”—Seneca, *Ep.*, 91.

For anything I have to do before I die, the longest leisure would appear too short, were it but an hour's business I had to do. A friend of mine the other day turning over my tablets, found therein a memorandum of something I would have done after my decease, whereupon I told him, as it was really true, that though I was no more than a league's distance only from my own house, and merry and well, yet when that thing came into my head, I made haste to write it down there, because I was not certain to live till I came home. As a man that am eternally brooding over my own thoughts, and confine them to my own particular concerns, I am at all hours as well prepared as I am ever like to be, and death, whenever he shall come, can bring nothing along with him I did not expect long before. We should always, as near as we can, be booted and spurred, and ready to go, and, above all things, take care, at that time, to have no business with any one but one's self:

“Why for so short a life tease ourselves with so many projects?”
—Hor., *Od.*, ii. 16, 17.

for we shall there find work enough to do, without any need of addition. One man complains, more than of death, that he is thereby prevented of a glorious victory; another, that he must die before he has married his daughter, or educated his children; a third seems only troubled that he must lose the society of his wife; a fourth, the conversation of his son, as the principal comfort and concern of his being. For my part, I am, thanks be to God, at this instant in such a condition, that I am ready to dislodge, whenever it shall please Him, without regret for anything whatsoever. I disengage myself throughout from all worldly relations; my leave is soon taken of all but myself. Never did any one prepare to bid adieu to the world more absolutely and unreservedly, and to shake hands with all

manner of interest in it, than I expect to do. The deadeſt deaths are the beſt:

“‘Wretch that I am,’ they cry, ‘one fatal day has deprived me of all joys of life.’”—Lucretius, iii. 911.

And the builder,

“The works remain incomplete, the tall pinnacles of the walls unmade.”—*Æneid*, iv. 88.

A man muſt deſign nothing that will require ſo much time to the finiſhing, or, at leaſt, with no ſuch paſſionate deſire to ſee it brought to perfection. We are born to action:

“When I ſhall die, let it be doing that I had deſigned.”

—Ovid, *Amor.*, ii. 10, 36.

I would always have a man to be doing, and, as much as in him lies, to extend and ſpin out the offices of life; and then let death take me planting my cabbages, indifferent to him, and ſtill leſs of my gardens not being finiſhed. I ſaw one die, who, at his laſt gasp, complained of nothing ſo much as that deſtiny was about to cut the thread of a chronicle he was then compiling, when he was gone no farther than the fifteenth or ſixteenth of our kings:

“They do not add, that dying, we have no longer a deſire to poſſeſs things.”—Lucretius, iii. 913.

We are to diſcharge ourſelves from theſe vulgar and hurtful humours. To this purpoſe it was that men firſt appointed the places of ſepulture adjoining the churches, and in the moſt frequented places of the city, to accuſtom, ſays Lycurgus, the common people, women, and children, that they ſhould not be ſtartled at the ſight of a corpeſe, and to the end, that the continual ſpectacle of bones, graves, and funeral obſequies ſhould put us in mind of our frail condition:

“It was formerly the custom to enliven banquets with slaughter, and to combine with the repast the dire spectacle of men contending with the sword, the dying in many cases falling upon the cups, and covering the tables with blood.”

—Silius Italicus, xi. 51.

And as the Egyptians after their feasts were wont to present the company with a great image of death, by one that cried out to them, “Drink and be merry, for such shalt thou be when thou art dead”; so it is my custom to have death not only in my imagination, but continually in my mouth. Neither is there anything of which I am so inquisitive, and delight to inform myself, as the manner of men’s deaths, their words, looks, and bearing; nor any places in history I am so intent upon; and it is manifest enough, by my crowding in examples of this kind, that I have a particular fancy for that subject. If I were a writer of books, I would compile a register, with a comment, of the various deaths of men: he who should teach men to die would at the same time teach them to live. Dicaearchus made one, to which he gave that title; but it was designed for another and less profitable end.

Peradventure, some one may object, that the pain and terror of dying so infinitely exceed all manner of imagination, that the best fencer will be quite out of his play when it comes to the push. Let them say what they will: to premeditate is doubtless a very great advantage; and besides, is it nothing to go so far, at least, without disturbance or alteration? Moreover, Nature herself assists and encourages us: if the death be sudden and violent, we have not leisure to fear; if otherwise, I perceive that as I engage further in my disease, I naturally enter into a certain loathing and disdain of life. I find I have much more ado to digest this resolution of dying, when I am well in health, than when languishing of a fever; and by how much I have less to do with the commodities of life, by reason that I begin to lose the use and pleasure of them, by so much I look upon death with less terror. Which makes me hope, that the further I remove from the first, and the nearer I approach to the latter, I shall the more easily exchange the one for the other. And, as I have experienced in other occurrences, that, as Cæsar says, things often appear greater to us at distance than near at hand, I have found, that being well, I have had

maladies in much greater horror than when really afflicted with them. The vigour wherein I now am, the cheerfulness and delight wherein I now live, make the contrary estate appear in so great a disproportion to my present condition, that, by imagination, I magnify those inconveniences by one-half, and apprehend them to be much more troublesome, than I find them really to be, when they lie the most heavy upon me; I hope to find death the same.

Let us but observe in the ordinary changes and declinations we daily suffer, how nature deprives us of the light and sense of our bodily decay. What remains to an old man of the vigour of his youth and better days?

“Alas, to old men what portion of life remains!”

—Maximian, *vel* Pseudo Gallus, i. 16.

Cæsar, to an old weather-beaten soldier of his guards, who came to ask him leave that he might kill himself, taking notice of his withered body and decrepit motion, pleasantly answered, “Thou fanciest, then, that thou art yet alive.”³³ Should a man fall into this condition on the sudden, I do not think humanity capable of enduring such a change: but nature, leading us by the hand, an easy and, as it were, an insensible pace, step by step conducts us to that miserable state, and by that means makes it familiar to us, so that we are insensible of the stroke when our youth dies in us, though it be really a harder death than the final dissolution of a languishing body, than the death of old age; forasmuch as the fall is not so great from an uneasy being to none at all, as it is from a sprightly and flourishing being to one that is troublesome and painful. The body, bent and bowed, has less force to support a burden; and it is the same with the soul, and therefore it is, that we are to raise her up firm and erect against the power of this adversary. For, as it is impossible she should ever be at rest, whilst she stands in fear of it; so, if she once can assure herself, she may boast (which is a thing as it were surpassing human condition) that it is impossible that disquiet, anxiety, or fear, or any other disturbance, should inhabit or have any place in her:

³³ Seneca, *Ep.*, 77.

“Not the menacing look of a tyrant shakes her well-settled soul, nor turbulent Auster, the prince of the stormy Adriatic, nor yet the strong hand of thundering Jove, such a temper moves.”

—Hor., *Od.*, iii. 3, 3.

She is then become sovereign of all her lusts and passions, mistress of necessity, shame, poverty, and all the other injuries of fortune. Let us, therefore, as many of us as can, get this advantage; 'tis the true and sovereign liberty here on earth, that fortifies us wherewithal to defy violence and injustice, and to contemn prisons and chains:

“I will keep thee in fetters and chains, in custody of a savage keeper.—A god will when I ask Him, set me free. This god I think is death. Death is the term of all things.

—Hor., *Ep.*, i. 16, 76.

Our very religion itself has no surer human foundation than the contempt of death. Not only the argument of reason invites us to it—for why should we fear to lose a thing, which being lost, cannot be lamented?—but, also, seeing we are threatened by so many sorts of death, is it not infinitely worse eternally to fear them all, than once to undergo one of them? And what matters it, when it shall happen, since it is inevitable? To him that told Socrates, “The thirty tyrants have sentenced thee to death”; “And nature them,” said he.³⁴ What a ridiculous thing it is to trouble ourselves about taking the only step that is to deliver us from all trouble! As our birth brought us the birth of all things, so in our death is the death of all things included. And therefore to lament that we shall not be alive a hundred years hence, is the same folly as to be sorry we were not alive a hundred years ago. Death is the beginning of another life. So did we weep, and so much it cost us to enter into this, and so did we put off our former veil in entering into it. Nothing can be a grievance that is but once. Is it reasonable so long to fear a thing that will so soon be despatched? Long life, and short, are by death made all one; for there is no long, nor short, to things that are no

³⁴ Socrates was not condemned to death by the thirty tyrants, but by the Athenians. —Diogenes Lærtius, ii. 35.

more. Aristotle tells us that there are certain little beasts upon the banks of the river Hypanis, that never live above a day: they which die at eight of the clock in the morning, die in their youth, and those that die at five in the evening, in their decrepitude: which of us would not laugh to see this moment of continuance put into the consideration of weal or woe? The most and the least, of ours, in comparison with eternity, or yet with the duration of mountains, rivers, stars, trees, and even of some animals, is no less ridiculous.³⁵

But nature compels us to it. “Go out of this world,” says she, “as you entered into it; the same pass you made from death to life, without passion or fear, the same, after the same manner, repeat from life to death. Your death is a part of the order of the universe, ’tis a part of the life of the world.

“‘Mortals, amongst themselves, live by turns, and, like the runners in the games, give up the lamp, when they have won the race, to the next comer.’—Lucretius, ii. 75, 78.

“Shall I exchange for you this beautiful contexture of things? ’Tis the condition of your creation; death is a part of you, and whilst you endeavour to evade it, you evade yourselves. This very being of yours that you now enjoy is equally divided betwixt life and death. The day of your birth is one day’s advance towards the grave:

“‘The first hour that gave us life took away also an hour.’
—Seneca, *Her. Fur.*, 3 Chor. 874.

“‘As we are born we die, and the end commences with the beginning.’
—Manilius, *Ast.*, iv. 16.

“All the whole time you live, you purloin from life and live at the expense of life itself. The perpetual work of your life is but to lay the foundation of death. You are in death, whilst you are in life, because you still are after death, when you are no more alive; or, if you had rather have it so, you are dead after life, but dying all the while you live; and

³⁵ Seneca, *Consol. ad Marciam*, c. 20.

death handles the dying much more rudely than the dead, and more sensibly and essentially. If you have made your profit of life, you have had enough of it; go your way satisfied.

“‘Why not depart from life as a sated guest from a feast?’

—Lucretius, iii. 951.

“If you have not known how to make the best use of it, if it was unprofitable to you, what need you care to lose it, to what end would you desire longer to keep it?

“‘Why seek to add longer life, merely to renew ill-spent time, and be again tormented?’—Lucretius, iii. 914.

“Life in itself is neither good nor evil; it is the scene of good or evil as you make it. And, if you have lived a day, you have seen all: one day is equal and like to all other days. There is no other light, no other shade; this very sun, this moon, these very stars, this very order and disposition of things, is the same your ancestors enjoyed, and that shall also entertain your posterity:

“‘Your grandsires saw no other thing; nor will your posterity.’

—Manilius, i. 529.

“And, come the worst that can come, the distribution and variety of all the acts of my comedy are performed in a year. If you have observed the revolution of my four seasons, they comprehend the infancy, the youth, the virility, and the old age of the world: the year has played his part, and knows no other art but to begin again; it will always be the same thing:

“‘We are turning in the same circle, ever therein confined.’

—Lucretius, iii. 1093.

“‘The year is ever turning around in the same footsteps.’

—Virgil, *Georg.*, ii. 402.

“I am not prepared to create for you any new recreations:

“‘I can devise, nor find anything else to please you: ’tis the same thing over and over again.’—Lucretius iii. 957.

“Give place to others, as others have given place to you. Equality is the soul of equity. Who can complain of being comprehended in the same destiny, wherein all are involved? Besides, live as long as you can, you shall by that nothing shorten the space you are to be dead; ’tis all to no purpose; you shall be every whit as long in the condition you so much fear, as if you had died at nurse:

“‘Live triumphing over as many ages as you will, death still will remain eternal.’—Lucretius, iii. 1103.

“And yet I will place you in such a condition as you shall have no reason to be displeased.

“‘Know you not that, when dead, there can be no other living self to lament you dead, standing on your grave.’
—Idem., *ibid.*, 898.

“Nor shall you so much as wish for the life you are so concerned about:

“‘No one then troubles himself about himself, or about life.’
—Idem, *ibid.*, 932.

* * * * *

Nor has any regret about himself.’—Idem, *ibid.*, 935.

“Death is less to be feared than nothing, if there could be anything less than nothing.

“‘Death would seem much less to us—if indeed there could be less in that which we see to be nothing.’—Idem, *ibid.*, 939.

“Neither can it any way concern you, whether you are living or dead: living, by reason that you are still in being; dead, because you are no more. Moreover, no one dies before his hour: the time you leave behind was no more yours than that was lapsed and gone before you came into the world; nor does it any more concern you.

“Consider how as nothing to us is the old age of times past.”

—Lucretius iii. 985

“Wherever your life ends, it is all there. The utility of living consists not in the length of days, but in the use of time; a man may have lived long, and yet lived but a little. Make use of time while it is present with you. It depends upon your will, and not upon the number of days, to have a sufficient length of life. Is it possible you can imagine never to arrive at the place towards which you are continually going? And yet there is no journey but hath its end. And, if company will make it more pleasant or more easy to you, does not all the world go the self-same way?

““All things, then, life over, must follow thee.”

—Lucretius, iii. 981.

“Does not all the world dance the same brawl that you do? Is there anything that does not grow old, as well as you? A thousand men, a thousand animals, a thousand other creatures, die at the same moment that you die:

“No night has followed day, no day has followed night, in which there has not been heard sobs and sorrowing cries, the companions of death and funerals.”—Lucretius, v. 579.

“To what end should you endeavour to draw back, if there be no possibility to evade it? You have seen examples enough of those who have been well pleased to die, as thereby delivered from heavy miseries; but have you ever found any who have been dissatisfied with dying? It must, therefore, needs be very foolish to condemn a thing you have neither experimented in your own person, nor by that of any other. Why

dost thou complain of me and of destiny? Do we do thee any wrong? Is it for thee to govern us, or for us to govern thee? Though, peradventure, thy age may not be accomplished, yet thy life is: a man of low stature is as much a man as a giant; neither men nor their lives are measured by the ell. Chiron refused to be immortal, when he was acquainted with the conditions under which he was to enjoy it, by the god of time itself and its duration, his father Saturn. Do but seriously consider how much more insupportable and painful an immortal life would be to man than what I have already given him. If you had not death, you would eternally curse me for having deprived you of it; I have mixed a little bitterness with it, to the end, that seeing of what convenience it is, you might not too greedily and indiscreetly seek and embrace it: and that you might be so established in this moderation, as neither to nauseate life, nor have any antipathy for dying, which I have decreed you shall once do, I have tempered the one and the other betwixt pleasure and pain. It was I that taught Thales, the most eminent of your sages, that to live and to die were indifferent; which made him, very wisely, answer him, ‘Why then he did not die?’ ‘Because,’ said he, ‘it is indifferent.’³⁶ Water, earth, air, and fire, and the other parts of this creation of mine, are no more instruments of thy life than they are of thy death. Why dost thou fear thy last day? It contributes no more to thy dissolution, than every one of the rest: the last step is not the cause of lassitude: it does not confess it. Every day travels towards death; the last only arrives at it.” These are the good lessons our mother Nature teaches.

I have often considered with myself whence it should proceed, that in war the image of death, whether we look upon it in ourselves or in others, should, without comparison, appear less dreadful than at home in our own houses (for if it were not so, it would be an army of doctors and whining milksops), and that being still in all places the same, there should be, notwithstanding, much more assurance in peasants and the meaner sort of people, than in others of better quality. I believe, in truth, that it is those terrible ceremonies and preparations wherewith we set it out, that more terrify us than the thing itself; a new, quite contrary way of living; the cries of mothers, wives, and children; the visits of astounded and afflicted friends; the attendance of pale and blubbering servants; a

³⁶Diogenes Laërtius, i. 35.

dark room, set round with burning tapers; our beds environed with physicians and divines; in sum, nothing but ghostliness and horror round about us; we seem dead and buried already. Children are afraid even of those they are best acquainted with, when disguised in a visor; and so 'tis with us; the visor must be removed as well from things as from persons, that being taken away, we shall find nothing underneath but the very same death that a mean servant or a poor chambermaid died a day or two ago, without any manner of apprehension. Happy is the death that deprives us of leisure for preparing such ceremonials.

Of the Force of Imagination

“A strong imagination begets the event itself.”

—*Axiom. Scholast.*

I AM one of those who are most sensible of the power of imagination: every one is jostled by it, but some are overthrown by it. It has a very piercing impression upon me; and I make it my business to avoid, wanting force to resist it. I could live by the sole help of healthful and jolly company: the very sight of another's pain materially pains me, and I often usurp the sensations of another person. A perpetual cough in another tickles my lungs and throat. I more unwillingly visit the sick in whom by love and duty I am interested, than those I care not for, to whom I less look. I take possession of the disease I am concerned at, and take it to myself. I do not at all wonder that fancy should give fevers and sometimes kill such as allow it too much scope, and are too willing to entertain it. Simon Thomas was a great physician of his time: I remember, that happening one day at Toulouse to meet him at a rich old fellow's house, who was troubled with weak lungs, and discoursing with the patient about the method of his cure, he told him, that one thing which would be very conducive to it, was to give me such occasion to be pleased with his company, that I might come often to see him, by which means, and by fixing his eyes upon the freshness of my complexion, and his imagination upon the sprightliness and vigour that glowed in my youth, and possessing all his senses with the flourishing age wherein I then was, his habit of body might, peradventure, be amended; but he

forgot to say that mine, at the same time, might be made worse. Gallus Vibius so much bent his mind to find out the essence and motions of madness, that, in the end, he himself went out of his wits, and to such a degree, that he could never after recover his judgment, and might brag that he was become a fool by too much wisdom. Some there are who through fear anticipate the hangman; and there was the man, whose eyes being unbound to have his pardon read to him, was found stark dead upon the scaffold, by the stroke of imagination. We start, tremble, turn pale, and blush, as we are variously moved by imagination; and, being a-bed, feel our bodies agitated with its power to that degree, as even sometimes to expiring. And boiling youth, when fast asleep, grows so warm with fancy, as in a dream to satisfy amorous desires:

*“Ut, quasi transactis sæpe omnibus rebus, profundant
Fluminis ingentes fluctus, vestemque cruentent.”*

Although it be no new thing to see horns grown in a night on the forehead of one that had none when he went to bed, notwithstanding, what befell Cippus, King of Italy, is memorable; who having one day been a very delighted spectator of a bullfight, and having all the night dreamed that he had horns on his head, did, by the force of imagination, really cause them to grow there. Passion gave to the son of Croesus the voice which nature had denied him. And Antiochus fell into a fever, inflamed with the beauty of Stratonice, too deeply imprinted in his soul. Pliny pretends to have seen Lucius Cossitius, who from a woman was turned into a man upon her very wedding-day. Pontanus and others report the like metamorphosis to have happened in these latter days in Italy. And, through the vehement desire of him and his mother:

“Vota puer solvit, quæ femina voverat, Iphis.”

Myself passing by Vitry le Francois, saw a man the Bishop of Soissons had, in confirmation, called Germain, whom all the inhabitants of the place had known to be a girl till two-and-twenty years of age, called Mary. He was, at the time of my being there, very full of beard, old, and not married. He told us, that by straining himself in a leap his

male organs came out; and the girls of that place have, to this day, a song, wherein they advise one another not to take too great strides, for fear of being turned into men, as Mary Germain was. It is no wonder if this sort of accident frequently happen; for if imagination have any power in such things, it is so continually and vigorously bent upon this subject, that to the end it may not so often relapse into the same thought and violence of desire, it were better, once for all, to give these young wenches the things they long for.

Some attribute the scars of King Dagobert and of St. Francis to the force of imagination. It is said, that by it bodies will sometimes be removed from their places; and Celsus tells us of a priest whose soul would be ravished into such an ecstasy that the body would, for a long time, remain without sense or respiration. St. Augustine makes mention of another, who, upon the hearing of any lamentable or doleful cries, would presently fall into a swoon, and be so far out of himself, that it was in vain to call, bawl in his ears, pinch or burn him, till he voluntarily came to himself; and then he would say, that he had heard voices as it were afar off, and did feel when they pinched and burned him; and, to prove that this was no obstinate dissimulation in defiance of his sense of feeling, it was manifest, that all the while he had neither pulse nor breathing.

'Tis very probable, that visions, enchantments, and all extraordinary effects of that nature, derive their credit principally from the power of imagination, working and making its chiefest impression upon vulgar and more easy souls, whose belief is so strangely imposed upon, as to think they see what they do not see.

I am not satisfied whether those pleasant ligatures³⁷ with which this age of ours is so occupied, that there is almost no other talk, are not mere voluntary impressions of apprehension and fear; for I know, by experience, in the case of a particular friend of mine, one for whom I can be as responsible as for myself, and a man that cannot possibly fall under any manner of suspicion of insufficiency, and as little of being enchanted,

³⁷ *Les nouements d'aiguillettes*, as they were called, knots tied by some one, at a wedding, on a strip of leather, cotton, or silk, and which, especially when passed through the wedding-ring, were supposed to have the magical effect of preventing a consummation of the marriage until they were untied. See Louandre, *La Sorcellerie*, 1853, p. 73. The same superstition and appliance existed in England.

who having heard a companion of his make a relation of an unusual frigidity that surprised him at a very unseasonable time; being afterwards himself engaged upon the same account, the horror of the former story on a sudden so strangely possessed his imagination, that he ran the same fortune the other had done; and from that time forward, the scurvy remembrance of his disaster running in his mind and tyrannising over him, he was subject to relapse into the same misfortune. He found some remedy, however, for this fancy in another fancy, by himself frankly confessing and declaring beforehand to the party with whom he was to have to do, this subjection of his, by which means, the agitation of his soul was, in some sort, appeased; and knowing that, now, some such misbehaviour was expected from him, the restraint upon his faculties grew less. And afterwards, at such times as he was in no such apprehension, when setting about the act (his thoughts being then disengaged and free, and his body in its true and natural estate) he was at leisure to cause the part to be handled and communicated to the knowledge of the other party, he was totally freed from that vexatious infirmity. After a man has once done a woman right, he is never after in danger of misbehaving himself with that person, unless upon the account of some excusable weakness. Neither is this disaster to be feared, but in adventures, where the soul is overextended with desire or respect, and, especially, where the opportunity is of an unforeseen and pressing nature; in those cases, there is no means for a man to defend himself from such a surprise, as shall put him altogether out of sorts. I have known some, who have secured themselves from this mischance, by coming half sated elsewhere, purposely to abate the ardour of the fury, and others, who, being grown old, find themselves less impotent by being less able; and one, who found an advantage in being assured by a friend of his, that he had a counter-charm of enchantments that would secure him from this disgrace. The story itself is not, much amiss, and therefore you shall have it.

A count of a very great family, and with whom I was very intimate, being married to a fair lady, who had formerly been courted by one who was at the wedding, all his friends were in very great fear; but especially an old lady his kinswoman, who had the ordering of the solemnity, and in whose house it was kept, suspecting his rival would offer foul play by these sorceries. Which fear she communicated to me. I bade her rely

upon me: I had, by chance, about me a certain flat plate of gold, whereon were graven some celestial figures, supposed good against sunstroke or pains in the head, being applied to the suture: where, that it might the better remain firm, it was sewed to a ribbon to be tied under the chin; a foppery cousin-german to this of which I am speaking. Jacques Pelletier, who lived in my house, had presented this to me for a singular rarity. I had a fancy to make some use of this knack, and therefore privately told the Count, that he might possibly run the same fortune other bridegrooms had sometimes done, especially some one being in the house, who, no doubt, would be glad to do him such a courtesy: but let him boldly go to bed. For I would do him the office of a friend, and, if need were, would not spare a miracle it was in my power to do, provided he would engage to me, upon his honour, to keep it to himself; and only, when they came to bring him his caudle,³⁸ if matters had not gone well with him, to give me such a sign, and leave the rest to me. Now he had had his ears so battered, and his mind so prepossessed with the eternal tattle of this business, that when he came to't, he did really find himself tied with the trouble of his imagination, and, accordingly, at the time appointed, gave me the sign. Whereupon, I whispered him in the ear, that he should rise, under pretence of putting us out of the room, and after a jesting manner pull my nightgown from my shoulders—we were of much about the same height—throw it over his own, and there keep it till he had performed what I had appointed him to do, which was, that when we were all gone out of the chamber, he should withdraw to make water, should three times repeat such and such words, and as often do such and such actions; that at every of the three times, he should tie the ribbon I put into his hand about his middle, and be sure to place the medal that was fastened to it, the figures in such a posture, exactly upon his reins, which being done, and having the last of the three times so well girt and fast tied the ribbon that it could neither untie nor slip from its place, let him confidently return to his business, and withal not forget to spread my gown upon the bed, so that it might be sure to cover them both. These ape's tricks are the main of the effect, our fancy being so far seduced as to believe that such strange means must, of necessity, proceed from some

³⁸ A custom in France to bring the bridegroom a caudle in the middle of the night on his wedding-night.

abstruse science: their very inanity gives them weight and reverence. And, certain it is, that my figures approved themselves more venereal than solar, more active than prohibitive. 'Twas a sudden whimsey, mixed with a little curiosity, that made me do a thing so contrary to my nature; for I am an enemy to all subtle and counterfeit actions, and abominate all manner of trickery, though it be for sport, and to an advantage; for though the action may not be vicious in itself, its mode is vicious.

Amasis, King of Egypt, having married Laodice, a very beautiful Greek virgin, though noted for his abilities elsewhere, found himself quite another man with his wife, and could by no means enjoy her; at which he was so enraged, that he threatened to kill her, suspecting her to be a witch. As 'tis usual in things that consist in fancy, she put him upon devotion, and having accordingly made his vows to Venus, he found himself divinely restored the very first night after his oblations and sacrifices. Now women are to blame to entertain us with that disdainful, coy, and angry countenance, which extinguishes our vigour, as it kindles our desire; which made the daughter-in-law of Pythagoras³⁹ say, "That the woman who goes to bed to a man, must put off her modesty with her petticoat, and put it on again with the same." The soul of the assailant, being disturbed with many several alarms, readily loses the power of performance; and whoever the imagination has once put this trick upon, and confounded with the shame of it (and she never does it but at the first acquaintance, by reason men are then more ardent and eager, and also, at this first account a man gives of himself, he is much more timorous of miscarrying), having made an ill beginning, he enters into such fever and despatch at the accident, as are apt to remain and continue with him upon following occasions.

Married people, having all their time before them, ought never to compel or so much as to offer at the feat, if they do not find themselves quite ready: and it is less unseemly to fail of handselling the nuptial sheets, when a man perceives himself full of agitation and trembling, and to await another opportunity at more private and more composed leisure, than to make himself perpetually miserable, for having misbehaved himself and been baffled at the first assault. Till possession be taken, a

³⁹ Theano, the lady in question was the wife, not the daughter-in-law of Pythagoras.

man that knows himself subject to this infirmity, should leisurely and by degrees make several little trials and light offers, without obstinately attempting at once, to Force an absolute conquest over his own mutinous and indisposed faculties. Such as know their members to be naturally obedient, need take no other care but only to counterplot their fantasies.

The indocile liberty of this member is very remarkable, so unfortunately unruly in its tumidity and impatience, when we do not require it, and so unseasonably disobedient, when we stand most in need of it: so imperiously contesting in authority with the will, and with so much haughty obstinacy denying all solicitation, both of hand and mind. And yet, though his rebellion is so universally complained of, and that proof is thence deduced to condemn him, if he had, nevertheless, feed me to plead his cause, I should peradventure, bring the rest of his fellow-members into suspicion of plotting this mischief against him, out of pure envy at the importance and pleasure especial to his employment; and to have, by confederacy, armed the whole world against him, by malevolently charging him alone, with their common offence. For let any one consider, whether there is any one part of our bodies that does not often refuse to perform its office at the precept of the will, and that does not often exercise its function in defiance of her command. They have every one of them passions of their own, that rouse and awaken, stupefy and benumb them, without our leave or consent. How often do the involuntary motions of the countenance discover our inward thoughts, and betray our most private secrets to the bystanders. The same cause that animates this member, does also, without our knowledge, animate the lungs, pulse, and heart, the sight of a pleasing object imperceptibly diffusing a flame through all our parts, with a feverish motion. Is there nothing but these veins and muscles that swell and flag without the consent, not only of the will, but even of our knowledge also? We do not command our hairs to stand on end, nor our skin to shiver either with fear or desire; the hands often convey themselves to parts to which we do not direct them; the tongue will be interdict, and the voice congealed, when we know not how to help it. When we have nothing to eat, and would willingly forbid it, the appetite does not, for all that, forbear to stir up the parts that are subject to it, no more nor less than the other appetite we were speaking of, and in like manner, as unseasonably leaves us,

when it thinks fit. The vessels that serve to discharge the belly have their own proper dilatations and compressions, without and beyond our concurrence, as well as those which are destined to purge the reins; and that which, to justify the prerogative of the will, St. Augustine urges, of having seen a man who could command his rear to discharge as often together as he pleased, Vives, his commentator, yet further fortifies with another example in his time,—of one that could break wind in tune; but these cases do not suppose any more pure obedience in that part; for is anything commonly more tumultuary or indiscreet? To which let me add, that I myself knew one so rude and ungoverned, as for forty years together made his master vent with one continued and unintermitted outbursting, and 'tis like will do so till he die of it. And I could heartily wish, that I only knew by reading, how often a man's belly, by the denial of one single puff, brings him to the very door of an exceeding painful death; and that the emperor⁴⁰ who gave liberty to let fly in all places, had, at the same time, given us power to do it. But for our will, in whose behalf we prefer this accusation, with how much greater probability may we reproach herself with mutiny and sedition, for her irregularity and disobedience? Does she always will what we would have her to do? Does she not often will what we forbid her to will, and that to our manifest prejudice? Does she suffer herself, more than any of the rest, to be governed and directed by the results of our reason? To conclude, I should move, in the behalf of the gentleman, my client, it might be considered, that in this fact, his cause being inseparably and indistinctly conjoined with an accessory, yet he only is called in question, and that by arguments and accusations, which cannot be charged upon the other; whose business, indeed, it is sometimes inopportunist to invite, but never to refuse, and invite, moreover, after a tacit and quiet manner; and therefore is the malice and injustice of his accusers most manifestly apparent. But be it how it will, protesting against the proceedings of the advocates and judges, nature will, in the meantime, proceed after her own way, who had done but well, had she endowed this member with some particular privilege; the author of the sole immortal work of mortals; a divine work,

⁴⁰ The Emperor Claudius, who, however, according to Suetonius (*Vita*, c. 32), only intended to authorise this singular privilege by an edict.

according to Socrates; and love, the desire of immortality, and himself an immortal demon.

Some one, perhaps, by such an effect of imagination may have had the good luck to leave behind him here, the scrofula, which his companion who has come after, has carried with him into Spain. And 'tis for this reason you may see why men in such cases require a mind prepared for the thing that is to be done. Why do the physicians possess, before hand, their patients' credulity with so many false promises of cure, if not to the end, that the effect of imagination may supply the imposture of their decoctions? They know very well, that a great master of their trade has given it under his hand, that he has known some with whom the very sight of physic would work. All which conceits come now into my head, by the remembrance of a story was told me by a domestic apothecary of my father's, a blunt Swiss, a nation not much addicted to vanity and lying, of a merchant he had long known at Toulouse, who being a valetudinary, and much afflicted with the stone, had often occasion to take clysters, of which he caused several sorts to be prescribed him by the physicians, according to the accidents of his disease; which, being brought him, and none of the usual forms, as feeling if it were not too hot, and the like, being omitted, he lay down, the syringe advanced, and all ceremonies performed, injection alone excepted; after which, the apothecary being gone, and the patient accommodated as if he had really received a clyster, he found the same operation and effect that those do who have taken one indeed; and if at any time the physician did not find the operation sufficient, he would usually give him two or three more doses, after the same manner. And the fellow swore, that to save charges (for he paid as if he had really taken them) this sick man's wife, having sometimes made trial of warm water only, the effect discovered the cheat, and finding these would do no good, was fain to return to the old way.

A woman fancying she had swallowed a pin in a piece of bread, cried and lamented as though she had an intolerable pain in her throat, where she thought she felt it stick; but an ingenious fellow that was brought to her, seeing no outward tumour nor alteration, supposing it to be only a conceit taken at some crust of bread that had hurt her as it went down, caused her to vomit, and, unseen, threw a crooked pin into the basin, which the woman no sooner saw, but believing she had cast it up,

she presently found herself eased of her pain. I myself knew a gentleman, who having treated a large company at his house, three or four days after bragged in jest (for there was no such thing), that he had made them eat of a baked cat; at which, a young gentlewoman, who had been at the feast, took such a horror, that falling into a violent vomiting and fever, there was no possible means to save her. Even brute beasts are subject to the force of imagination as well as we; witness dogs, who die of grief for the loss of their masters; and bark and tremble and start in their sleep; so horses will kick and whinny in their sleep.

Now all this may be attributed to the close affinity and relation betwixt the soul and the body intercommunicating their fortunes; but 'tis quite another thing when the imagination works not only upon one's own particular body, but upon that of others also. And as an infected body communicates its malady to those that approach or live near it, as we see in the plague, the smallpox, and sore eyes, that run through whole families and cities:

“When we look at people with sore eyes, our own eyes become sore. Many things are hurtful to our bodies by transition.”

—Ovid, *De Rem. Amor.*, 615.

—so the imagination, being vehemently agitated, darts out infection capable of offending the foreign object. The ancients had an opinion of certain women of Scythia, that being animated and enraged against any one, they killed him only with their looks. Tortoises and ostriches hatch their eggs with only looking on them, which infers that their eyes have in them some ejaculative virtue. And the eyes of witches are said to be assailant and hurtful:

“Some eye, I know not whose is bewitching my tender lambs.”

—Virgil, *Eclog.*, iii. 103.

Magicians are no very good authority with me. But we experimentally see that women impart the marks of their fancy to the children they carry in the womb; witness her that was brought to bed of a Moor; and there was presented to Charles the Emperor and King of Bohemia, a girl

from about Pisa, all over rough and covered with hair, whom her mother said to be so conceived by reason of a picture of St. John the Baptist, that hung within the curtains of her bed.

It is the same with beasts; witness Jacob's sheep, and the hares and partridges that the snow turns white upon the mountains. There was at my house, a little while ago, a cat seen watching a bird upon the top of a tree: these, for some time, mutually fixing their eyes one upon another, the bird at last let herself fall dead into the cat's claws, either dazzled by the force of its own imagination, or drawn by some attractive power of the cat. Such as are addicted to the pleasures of the field, have, I make no question, heard the story of the falconer, who having earnestly fixed his eyes upon a kite in the air; laid a wager that he would bring her down with the sole power of his sight, and did so, as it was said; for the tales I borrow I charge upon the consciences of those from whom I have them. The discourses are my own, and found themselves upon the proofs of reason, not of experience; to which every one has liberty to add his own examples; and who has none, let him not forbear, the number and varieties of accidents considered, to believe that there are plenty of them; if I do not apply them well, let some other do it for me. And, also, in the subject of which I treat, our manners and motions, testimonies and instances; how fabulous soever, provided they are possible, serve as well as the true; whether they have really happened or no, at Rome or Paris, to John or Peter, 'tis still within the verge of human capacity, which serves me to good use. I see, and make my advantage of it, as well in shadow as in substance; and amongst the various readings thereof in history, I cull out the most rare and memorable to fit my own turn. There are authors whose only end and design it is to give an account of things that have happened; mine, if I could arrive unto it, should be to deliver of what may happen. There is a just liberty allowed in the schools, of supposing similitudes, when they have none at hand. I do not, however, make any use of that privilege, and as to that matter, in superstitious religion, surpass all historical authority. In the examples which I here bring in, of what I have heard, read, done, or said, I have forbidden myself to dare to alter even the most light and indifferent circumstances; my conscience does not falsify one tittle; what my ignorance may do, I cannot say.

And this it is that makes me sometimes doubt in my own mind, whether a divine, or a philosopher, and such men of exact and tender prudence and conscience, are fit to write history: for how can they stake their reputation upon a popular faith? How be responsible for the opinions of men they do not know? And with what assurance deliver their conjectures for current pay? Of actions performed before their own eyes, wherein several persons were actors, they would be unwilling to give evidence upon oath before a judge; and there is no man, so familiarly known to them, for whose intentions they would become absolute caution. For my part, I think it less hazardous to write of things past, than present, by how much the writer is only to give an account of things every one knows he must of necessity borrow upon trust.

I am solicited to write the affairs of my own time by some, who fancy I look upon them with an eye less blinded with passion than another, and have a clearer insight into them by reason of the free access fortune has given me to the heads of various factions; but they do not consider, that to purchase the glory of Sallust, I would not give myself the trouble, sworn enemy as I am to obligation, assiduity, or perseverance: that there is nothing so contrary to my style, as a continued narrative, I so often interrupt and cut myself short in my writing for want of breath; I have neither composition nor explanation worth anything, and am ignorant, beyond a child, of the phrases and even the very words proper to express the most common things; and for that reason it is, that I have undertaken to say only what I can say, and have accommodated my subject to my strength. Should I take one to be my guide, peradventure I should not be able to keep pace with him; and in the freedom of my liberty might deliver judgments, which upon better thoughts, and according to reason, would be illegitimate and punishable. Plutarch would say of what he has delivered to us, that it is the work of others: that his examples are all and everywhere exactly true: that they are useful to posterity, and are presented with a lustre that will light us the way to virtue, is his own work. It is not of so dangerous consequence, as in a medicinal drug, whether an old story be so or so.

Of Custom, and That We Should Not Easily Change a Law Received

HE seems to me to have had a right and true apprehension of the power of custom, who first invented the story of a country-woman who, having accustomed herself to play with and carry a young calf in her arms, and daily continuing to do so as it grew up, obtained this by custom, that, when grown to be a great ox, she was still able to bear it. For, in truth, custom is a violent and treacherous schoolmistress. She, by little and little, slyly and unperceived, slips in the foot of her authority, but having by this gentle and humble beginning, with the benefit of time, fixed and established it, she then unmasks a furious and tyrannic countenance, against which we have no more the courage or the power so much as to lift up our eyes. We see her, at every turn, forcing and violating the rules of nature:

“Custom is the best master of all things.”

—Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, xxvi. 2.

I refer to her Plato’s cave in his *Republic*, and the physicians, who so often submit the reasons of their art to her authority; as the story of that king, who by custom brought his stomach to that pass, as to live by poison, and the maid that Albertus reports to have lived upon spiders. In that new world of the Indies, there were found great nations, and in very differing climates, who were of the same diet, made provision of them, and fed them for their tables; as also, they did grasshoppers, mice, lizards, and bats; and in a time of scarcity of such delicacies, a toad was sold for six crowns, all which they cook, and dish up with several sauces. There were also others found, to whom our diet, and the flesh we eat, were venomous and mortal:

“The power of custom is very great: huntsmen will lie out all night in the snow, or suffer themselves to be burned up by the sun on the mountains; boxers, hurt by the cæstus, never utter a groan.”—Cicero, *Tusc.*, ii. 17.

These strange examples will not appear so strange if we consider what we have ordinary experience of, how much custom stupefies our senses. We need not go to what is reported of the people about the cataracts of the Nile; and what philosophers believe of the music of the spheres, that the bodies of those circles being solid and smooth, and coming to touch and rub upon one another, cannot fail of creating a marvellous harmony, the changes and cadences of which cause the revolutions and dances of the stars; but that the hearing sense of all creatures here below, being universally, like that of the Egyptians, deafened, and stupefied with the continual noise, cannot, how great soever, perceive it.⁴¹ Smiths, millers, pewterers, forgers, and armourers could never be able to live in the perpetual noise of their own trades, did it strike their ears with the same violence that it does ours.

My perfumed doublet gratifies my own scent at first; but after I have worn it three days together, 'tis only pleasing to the bystanders. This is yet more strange, that custom, notwithstanding long intermissions and intervals, should yet have the power to unite and establish the effect of its impressions upon our senses, as is manifest in such as live near unto steeples and the frequent noise of the bells. I myself lie at home in a tower, where every morning and evening a very great bell rings out the *Ave Maria*: the noise shakes my very tower, and at first seemed insupportable to me; but I am so used to it, that I hear it without any manner of offence, and often without awaking at it.

Plato⁴² reprehending a boy for playing at nuts, "Thou reprovest me," says the boy, "for a very little thing." "Custom," replied Plato, "is no little thing." I find that our greatest vices derive their first propensity from our most tender infancy, and that our principal education depends upon the nurse. Mothers are mightily pleased to see a child writhe off the neck of a chicken, or to please itself with hurting a dog or a cat; and such wise fathers there are in the world, who look upon it as a notable mark of a martial spirit, when they hear a son miscall, or see him domineer over a poor peasant, or a lackey, that dares not reply, nor turn again; and a great

⁴¹ This passage is taken from Cicero, "Dream of Scipio"; see his *De Republica*, vi. II. The Egyptians were said to be stunned by the noise of the Cataracts.

⁴² Diogenes Laërtius, iii. 38. But he whom Plato censured was not a boy playing at nuts, but a man throwing dice.

sign of wit, when they see him cheat and overreach his playfellow by some malicious treachery and deceit. Yet these are the true seeds and roots of cruelty, tyranny, and treason; they bud and put out there, and afterwards shoot up vigorously, and grow to prodigious bulk, cultivated by custom. And it is a very dangerous mistake to excuse these vile inclinations upon the tenderness of their age, and the triviality of the subject: first, it is nature that speaks, whose declaration is then more sincere, and inward thoughts more undisguised, as it is more weak and young; secondly, the deformity of cozenage does not consist nor depend upon the difference betwixt crowns and pins; but I rather hold it more just to conclude thus: why should he not cozen in crowns since he does it in pins, than as they do, who say they only play for pins, they would not do it if it were for money? Children should carefully be instructed to abhor vices for their own contexture; and the natural deformity of those vices ought so to be represented to them, that they may not only avoid them in their actions, but especially so to abominate them in their hearts, that the very thought should be hateful to them, with what mask soever they may be disguised.

I know very well, for what concerns myself, that from having been brought up in my childhood to a plain and straightforward way of dealing, and from having had an aversion to all manner of juggling and foul play in my childish sports and recreations (and, indeed, it is to be noted, that the plays of children are not performed in play, but are to be judged in them as their most serious actions), there is no game so small wherein from my own bosom naturally, and without study or endeavour, I have not an extreme aversion from deceit. I shuffle and cut and make as much clatter with the cards, and keep as strict account for farthings, as it were for double pistoles; when winning or losing against my wife and daughter, 'tis indifferent to me, as when I play in good earnest with others, for round sums. At all times, and in all places, my own eyes are sufficient to look to my fingers; I am not so narrowly watched by any other, neither is there any I have more respect to.

I saw the other day, at my own house, a little fellow, a native of Nantes, born without arms, who has so well taught his feet to perform the services his hands should have done him, that truly these have half forgotten their natural office; and, indeed, the fellow calls them his

hands; with them he cuts anything, charges and discharges a pistol, threads a needle, sews, writes, puts off his hat, combs his head, plays at cards and dice, and all this with as much dexterity as any other could do who had more, and more proper limbs to assist him. The money I gave him—for he gains his living by shewing these feats—he took in his foot, as we do in our hand. I have seen another who, being yet a boy, flourished a two-handed sword, and, if I may so say, handled a halberd with the mere motions of his neck and shoulders for want of hands; tossed them into the air, and caught them again, darted a dagger, and cracked a whip as well as any coachman in France.

But the effects of custom are much more manifest in the strange impressions she imprints in our minds, where she meets with less resistance. What has she not the power to impose upon our judgments and beliefs? Is there any so fantastic opinion (omitting the gross impostures of religions, with which we see so many great nations, and so many understanding men, so strangely besotted; for this being beyond the reach of human reason, any error is more excusable in such as are not endued, through the divine bounty, with an extraordinary illumination from above), but, of other opinions, are there any so extravagant, that she has not planted and established for laws in those parts of the world upon which she has been pleased to exercise her power? And therefore that ancient exclamation was exceeding just:

“Is it not a shame for a natural philosopher, that is, for an observer and hunter of nature, to seek testimony of the truth from minds prepossessed by custom?”

—Cicero, *De Natura Deor.*, i. 30.

I do believe, that no so absurd or ridiculous fancy can enter into human imagination, that does not meet with some example of public practice, and that, consequently, our reason does not ground and back up. There are people, amongst whom it is the fashion to turn their backs upon him they salute, and never look upon the man they intend to honour. There is a place, where, whenever the king spits, the greatest ladies of his court put out their hands to receive it; and another nation,

where the most eminent persons about him stoop to take up his ordure in a linen cloth. Let us here steal room to insert a story.

A French gentleman was always wont to blow his nose with his fingers (a thing very much against our fashion), and he justifying himself for so doing, and he was a man famous for pleasant repartees, he asked me, what privilege this filthy excrement had, that we must carry about us a fine handkerchief to receive it, and, which was more, afterwards to lap it carefully up, and carry it all day about in our pockets, which, he said, could not but be much more nauseous and offensive, than to see it thrown away, as we did all other evacuations. I found that what he said was not altogether without reason, and by being frequently in his company, that slovenly action of his was at last grown familiar to me; which nevertheless we make a face at, when we hear it reported of another country. Miracles appear to be so, according to our ignorance of nature, and not according to the essence of nature the continually being accustomed to anything, blinds the eye of our judgment. Barbarians are no more a wonder to us, than we are to them; nor with any more reason, as every one would confess, if after having travelled over those remote examples, men could settle themselves to reflect upon, and rightly to confer them, with their own. Human reason is a tincture almost equally infused into all our opinions and manners, of what form soever they are; infinite in matter, infinite in diversity. But I return to my subject.

There are peoples, where, his wife and children excepted, no one speaks to the king but through a tube. In one and the same nation, the virgins discover those parts that modesty should persuade them to hide, and the married women carefully cover and conceal them. To which, this custom, in another place, has some relation, where chastity, but in marriage, is of no esteem, for unmarried women may prostitute themselves to as many as they please, and being got with child, may lawfully take physic, in the sight of every one, to destroy their fruit. And, in another place, if a tradesman marry, all of the same condition, who are invited to the wedding, lie with the bride before him; and the greater number of them there is, the greater is her honour, and the opinion of her ability and strength: if an officer marry, 'tis the same, the same with a labourer, or one of mean condition; but then it belongs to the lord of the place to perform that office; and yet a severe loyalty during marriage is

afterward strictly enjoined. There are places where brothels of young men are kept for the pleasure of women; where the wives go to war as well as the husbands, and not only share in the dangers of battle, but, moreover, in the honours of command. Others, where they wear rings not only through their noses, lips, cheeks, and on their toes, but also weighty gimmals of gold thrust through their paps and buttocks; where, in eating, they wipe their fingers upon their thighs, genitories, and the soles of their feet: where children are excluded, and brothers and nephews only inherit; and elsewhere, nephews only, saving in the succession of the prince: where, for the regulation of community in goods and estates, observed in the country, certain sovereign magistrates have committed to them the universal charge and overseeing of the agriculture, and distribution of the fruits, according to the necessity of every one where they lament the death of children, and feast at the decease of old men: where they lie ten or twelve in a bed, men and their wives together: where women, whose husbands come to violent ends, may marry again, and others not: where the condition of women is looked upon with such contempt, that they kill all the native females, and buy wives of their neighbours to supply their use; where husbands may repudiate their wives, without showing any cause, but wives cannot part from their husbands, for what cause soever; where husbands may sell their wives in case of sterility; where they boil the bodies of their dead, and afterward pound them to a pulp, which they mix with their wine, and drink it; where the most coveted sepulture is to be eaten by dogs, and elsewhere by birds; where they believe the souls of the blessed live in all manner of liberty, in delightful fields, furnished with all sorts of delicacies, and that it is these souls, repeating the words we utter, which we call Echo; where they fight in the water, and shoot their arrows with the most mortal aim, swimming; where, for a sign of subjection, they lift up their shoulders, and hang down their heads; where they put off their shoes when they enter the king's palace; where the eunuchs, who take charge of the sacred women, have, moreover, their lips and noses cut off, that they may not be loved; where the priests put out their own eyes, to be better acquainted with their demons, and the better to receive their oracles; where every one makes to himself a deity of what he likes best; the hunter of a lion or a fox, the fisher of some fish; idols of every human action or passion; in which place, the sun, the

moon, and the earth are the principal deities, and the form of taking an oath is, to touch the earth, looking up to heaven; where both flesh and fish is eaten raw; where the greatest oath they take is, to swear by the name of some dead person of reputation, laying their hand upon his tomb; where the new year's gift the king sends every year to the princes, his vassals, is fire, which being brought, all the old fire is put out, and the neighbouring people are bound to fetch of the new, every one for themselves, upon pain of high treason; where, when the king, to betake himself wholly to devotion, retires from his administration (which often falls out), his next successor is obliged to do the same, and the right of the kingdom devolves to the third in succession: where they vary the form of government, according to the seeming necessity of affairs: depose the king when they think good, substituting certain elders to govern in his stead, and sometimes transferring it into the hands of the commonality: where men and women are both circumcised and also baptized: where the soldier, who in one or several engagements, has been so fortunate as to present seven of the enemies' heads to the king, is made noble: where they live in that rare and unsociable opinion of the mortality of the soul: where the women are delivered without pain or fear: where the women wear copper leggings upon both legs, and if a louse bite them, are bound in magnanimity to bite them again, and dare not marry, till first they have made their king a tender of their virginity, if he please to accept it: where the ordinary way of salutation is by putting a finger down to the earth, and then pointing it up toward heaven: where men carry burdens upon their heads, and women on their shoulders; where the women make water standing, and the men squatting: where they send their blood in token of friendship, and offer incense to the men they would honour, like gods: where, not only to the fourth, but in any other remote degree, kindred are not permitted to marry: where the children are four years at nurse, and often twelve; in which place, also, it is accounted mortal to give the child suck the first day after it is born: where the correction of the male children is peculiarly designed to the fathers, and to the mothers of the girls; the punishment being to hang them by the heels in the smoke: where they circumcise the women: where they eat all sorts of herbs, without other scruple than of the badness of the smell: where all things are open the finest houses, furnished in the

richest manner, without doors, windows, trunks, or chests to lock, a thief being there punished double what they are in other places: where they crack lice with their teeth like monkeys, and abhor to see them killed with one's nails: where in all their lives they neither cut their hair nor pare their nails; and, in another place, pare those of the right hand only, letting the left grow for ornament and bravery: where they suffer the hair on the right side to grow as long as it will, and shave the other; and in the neighbouring provinces, some let their hair grow long before, and some behind, shaving close the rest: where parents let out their children, and husbands their wives, to their guests to hire: where a man may get his own mother with child, and fathers make use of their own daughters or sons, without scandal: where, at their solemn feasts, they interchangeably lend their children to one another, without any consideration of nearness of blood. In one place, men feed upon human flesh; in another, 'tis reputed a pious office for a man to kill his father at a certain age; elsewhere, the fathers dispose of their children, whilst yet in their mothers' wombs, some to be preserved and carefully brought up, and others to be abandoned or made away. Elsewhere the old husbands lend their wives to young men; and in another place they are in common without offence; in one place particularly, the women take it for a mark of honour to have as many gay fringed tassels at the bottom of their garment, as they have lain with several men. Moreover, has not custom made a republic of women separately by themselves? Has it not put arms into their hands, and made them raise armies and fight battles? And does she not, by her own precept, instruct the most ignorant vulgar, and make them perfect in things which all the philosophy in the world could never beat into the heads of the wisest men? For we know entire nations, where death was not only despised, but entertained with the greatest triumph; where children of seven years old suffered themselves to be whipped to death, without changing countenance; where riches were in such contempt, that the meanest citizen would not have deigned to stoop to take up a purse of crowns. And we know regions, very fruitful in all manner of provisions, where, notwithstanding, the most ordinary diet, and that they are most pleased with, is only bread, cresses, and water. Did not custom, moreover, work that miracle in Chios that, in seven hundred years, it was

never known that ever maid or wife committed any act to the prejudice of her honour?

To conclude; there is nothing, in my opinion, that she does not, or may not do; and therefore, with very good reason it is that Pindar calls her the ruler of the world. He that was seen to beat his father, and reproved for so doing, made answer, that it was the custom of their family; that, in like manner, his father had beaten his grandfather, his grandfather his great-grandfather, "And this," says he, pointing to his son, "when he comes to my age, shall beat me." And the father, whom the son dragged and hauled along the streets, commanded him to stop at a certain door, for he himself, he said, had dragged his father no farther, that being the utmost limit of the hereditary outrage the sons used to practise upon the fathers in their family. It is as much by custom as infirmity, says Aristotle, that women tear their hair, bite their nails, and eat coals and earth, and more by custom than nature that men abuse themselves with one another.

The laws of conscience, which we pretend to be derived from nature, proceed from custom; every one, having an inward veneration for the opinions and manners approved and received amongst his own people, cannot, without very great reluctance, depart from them, nor apply himself to them without applause. In times past, when those of Crete would curse any one, they prayed the gods to engage him in some ill custom. But the principal effect of its power is, so to seize and ensnare us, that it is hardly in us to disengage ourselves from its gripe, or so to come to ourselves, as to consider of and to weigh the things it enjoins. To say the truth, by reason that we suck it in with our milk, and that the face of the world presents itself in this posture to our first sight, it seems as if we were born upon condition to follow on this track; and the common fancies that we find in repute everywhere about us, and infused into our minds with the seed of our fathers, appear to be the most universal and genuine; from whence it comes to pass, that whatever is off the hinges of custom, is believed to be also off the hinges of reason; how unreasonably for the most part, God knows.

If, as we who study ourselves have learned to do, every one who hears a good sentence, would immediately consider how it does in any way touch his own private concern, every one would find, that it was not

so much a good saying, as a severe lash to the ordinary stupidity of his own judgment: but men receive the precepts and admonitions of truth, as directed to the common sort, and never to themselves; and instead of applying them to their own manners, do only very ignorantly and unprofitably commit them to memory. But let us return to the empire of custom.

Such people as have been bred up to liberty, and subject to no other dominion but the authority of their own will, look upon all other form of government as monstrous and contrary to nature. Those who are inured to monarchy do the same; and what opportunity soever fortune presents them with to change, even then, when with the greatest difficulties they have disengaged themselves from one master, that was troublesome and grievous to them, they presently run, with the same difficulties, to create another; being unable to take into hatred subjection itself.

'Tis by the mediation of custom, that every one is content with the place where he is planted by nature; and the Highlanders of Scotland no more pant after Touraine; than the Scythians after Thessaly. Darius asking certain Greeks what they would take to assume the custom of the Indians, of eating the dead bodies of their fathers (for that was their use, believing they could not give them a better nor more noble sepulture than to bury them in their own bodies), they made answer, that nothing in the world should hire them to do it; but having also tried to persuade the Indians to leave their custom, and, after the Greek manner, to burn the bodies of their fathers, they conceived a still greater horror at the motion.⁴³ Every one does the same, for use veils from us the true aspect of things.

“There is nothing at first so grand, so admirable, which by degrees people do not regard with less admiration.”

—Lucretius, ii. 1027.

Taking upon me once to justify something in use amongst us, and that was received with absolute authority for a great many leagues round about us, and not content, as men commonly do, to establish it only by force of law and example, but inquiring still further into its origin, I

⁴³Herodotus, iii. 38.

found the foundation so weak, that I who made it my business to confirm others, was very near being dissatisfied myself. 'Tis by this receipt that Plato⁴⁴ undertakes to cure the unnatural and preposterous loves of his time, as one which he esteems of sovereign virtue, namely, that the public opinion condemns them; that the poets, and all other sorts of writers, relate horrible stories of them; a recipe, by virtue of which the most beautiful daughters no more allure their fathers' lust; nor brothers, of the finest shape and fashion, their sisters' desire; the very fables of Thyestes, Oedipus, and Macareus, having with the harmony of their song, infused this wholesome opinion and belief into the tender brains of children. Chastity is, in truth, a great and shining virtue, and of which the utility is sufficiently known; but to treat of it, and to set it off in its true value, according to nature, is as hard as 'tis easy to do so according to custom, laws, and precepts. The fundamental and universal reasons are of very obscure and difficult research, and our masters either lightly pass them over, or not daring so much as to touch them, precipitate them-selves into the liberty and protection of custom, there puffing themselves out and triumphing to their heart's content: such as will not suffer themselves to be withdrawn from this original source, do yet commit a greater error, and subject themselves to wild opinions; witness Chrysippus,⁴⁵ who, in so many of his writings, has strewed the little account he made of incestuous conjunctions, committed with how near relations soever.

Whoever would disengage himself from this violent prejudice of custom, would find several things received with absolute and undoubting opinion, that have no other support than the hoary head and rivelled face of ancient usage. But the mask taken off, and things being referred to the decision of truth and reason, he will find his judgment as it were altogether overthrown, and yet restored to a much more sure estate. For example, I shall ask him, what can be more strange than to see a people obliged to obey laws they never understood; bound in all their domestic affairs, as marriages, donations, wills, sales, and purchases, to rules they cannot possibly know, being neither written nor published in their own language, and of which they are of necessity to purchase both the interpretation and the use? Not according to the ingenious opinion of

⁴⁴ *Laws*, viii. 6.

⁴⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhon. Hypotyp.*, i. 14.

Isocrates,⁴⁶ who counselled his king to make the traffics and negotiations of his subjects, free, frank, and of profit to them, and their quarrels and disputes burdensome, and laden with heavy impositions and penalties; but, by a prodigious opinion, to make sale of reason itself, and to give to laws a course of merchandise. I think myself obliged to fortune that, as our historians report, it was a Gascon gentleman, a countryman of mine, who first opposed Charlemagne, when he attempted to impose upon us Latin and imperial laws.

What can be more savage, than to see a nation where, by lawful custom, the office of a judge is bought and sold, where judgments are paid for with ready money, and where justice may legitimately be denied to him that has not wherewithal to pay; a merchandise in so great repute, as in a government to create a fourth estate of wrangling lawyers, to add to the three ancient ones of the church, nobility, and people; which fourth estate, having the laws in their own hands, and sovereign power over men's lives and fortunes, makes another body separate from nobility: whence it comes to pass, that there are double laws, those of honour and those of justice, in many things altogether opposite one to another; the nobles as rigorously condemning a lie taken, as the other do a lie revenged: by the law of arms, he shall be degraded from all nobility and honour who puts up with an affront; and by the civil law, he who vindicates his reputation by revenge incurs a capital punishment: he who applies himself to the law for reparation of an offence done to his honour, disgraces himself; and he who does not, is censured and punished by the law. Yet of these two so different things, both of them referring to one head, the one has the charge of peace, the other of war; those have the profit, these the honour; those the wisdom, these the virtue; those the word, these the action; those justice, these valour; those reason, these force; those the long robe, these the short;—divided betwixt them.

For what concerns indifferent things, as clothes, who is there seeking to bring them back to their true use, which is the body's service and convenience, and upon which their original grace and fitness depend; for the most fantastic, in my opinion, that can be imagined, I will instance amongst others, our flat caps, that long tail of velvet that hangs down

⁴⁶ Discourse to Nicocles.

from our women's heads, with its party-coloured trappings; and that vain and futile model of a member we cannot in modesty so much as name, which, nevertheless, we make show and parade of in public. These considerations, notwithstanding, will not prevail upon any understanding man to decline the common mode; but, on the contrary, methinks, all singular and particular fashions are rather marks of folly and vain affectation than of sound reason, and that a wise man, within, ought to withdraw and retire his soul from the crowd, and there keep it at liberty and in power to judge freely of things; but as to externals, absolutely to follow and conform himself to the fashion of the time. Public society has nothing to do with our thoughts, but the rest, as our actions, our labours, our fortunes, and our lives, we are to lend and abandon them to its service and to the common opinion, as did that good and great Socrates who refused to preserve his life by a disobedience to the magistrate, though a very wicked and unjust one for it is the rule of rules, the general law of laws, that every one observe those of the place wherein he lives.

“It is good to obey the laws of one's country.”

—Excerpta ex *Trag. Græcis*, Grotio interp., 1626, p. 937.

And now to another point. It is a very great doubt, whether any so manifest benefit can accrue from the alteration of a law received, let it be what it will, as there is danger and inconvenience in altering it; forasmuch as government is a structure composed of divers parts and members joined and united together, with so strict connection, that it is impossible to stir so much as one brick or stone, but the whole body will be sensible of it. The legislator of the Thurians⁴⁷ ordained, that whosoever would go about either to abolish an old law, or to establish a new, should present himself with a halter about his neck to the people, to the end, that if the innovation he would introduce should not be approved by every one, he might immediately be hanged; and he of the Lacedæmonians employed his life to obtain from his citizens a faithful promise that none of his laws should be violated.⁴⁸ The Ephoros who so rudely cut the two strings that Phrynis had added to music never stood to examine whether that addition

⁴⁷ Charondas; *Diod. Sic.*, xii. 24.

⁴⁸ Lycurgus; Plutarch, in *Vita*, c. 22.

made better harmony, or that by its means the instrument was more full and complete; it was enough for him to condemn the invention, that it was a novelty, and an alteration of the old fashion. Which also is the meaning of the old rusty sword carried before the magistracy of Marseilles.

For my own part, I have a great aversion from a novelty, what face or what pretence soever it may carry along with it, and have reason, having been an eyewitness of the great evils it has produced. For those which for so many years have lain so heavy upon us, it is not wholly accountable; but one may say, with colour enough, that it has accidentally produced and begotten the mischiefs and ruin that have since happened, both without and against it; it, principally, we are to accuse for these disorders:

“Alas! The wounds were made by my own weapons.”

—Ovid, *Ep. Phyll. Demophoonti*, vers. 48.

They who give the first shock to a state, are almost naturally the first overwhelmed in its ruin the fruits of public commotion are seldom enjoyed by him who was the first motor; he beats and disturbs the water for another’s net. The unity and contexture of this monarchy, of this grand edifice, having been ripped and torn in her old age, by this thing called innovation, has since laid open a rent, and given sufficient admittance to such injuries: the royal majesty with greater difficulty declines from the summit to the middle, then it falls and tumbles headlong from the middle to the bottom. But if the inventors do the greater mischief, the imitators are more vicious to follow examples of which they have felt and punished both the horror and the offence. And if there can be any degree of honour in ill-doing, these last must yield to the others the glory of contriving, and the courage of making the first attempt. All sorts of new disorders easily draw, from this primitive and ever-flowing fountain, examples and precedents to trouble and discompose our government: we read in our very laws, made for the remedy of this first evil, the beginning and pretences of all sorts of wicked enterprises; and that befalls us, which Thucydides said of the civil wars of his time, that, in favour of public vices, they gave them new and more

plausible names for their excuse, sweetening and disguising their true titles; which must be done, forsooth, to reform our conscience and belief:

“Fine words truly.”
—Ter. *And.*, i. I, 114.

but the best pretence for innovation is of very dangerous consequence:

“We are ever wrong in changing ancient ways.”
—Livy, xxxiv. 54.

And freely to speak my thoughts, it argues a strange self-love and great presumption to be so fond of one’s own opinions, that a public peace must be overthrown to establish them, and to introduce so many inevitable mischiefs, and so dreadful a corruption of manners, as a civil war and the mutations of state consequent to it, always bring in their train, and to introduce them, in a thing of so high concern, into the bowels of one’s own country. Can there be worse husbandry than to set up so many certain and knowing vices against errors that are only contested and disputable? And are there any worse sorts of vices than those committed against a man’s own conscience, and the natural light of his own reason? The Senate, upon the dispute betwixt it and the people about the administration of their religion, was bold enough to return this evasion for current pay:

“Those things belong to the gods to determine than to them; let the gods, therefore, take care that their sacred mysteries were not profaned.”—Livy, x. 6.

according to what the oracle answered to those of Delphos who, fearing to be invaded by the Persians in the Median war, inquired of Apollo, how they should dispose of the holy treasure of his temple; whether they should hide, or remove it to some other place? He returned them answer, that they should stir nothing from thence, and only take care of themselves, for he was sufficient to look to what belonged to him.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Herodotus, viii. 36.

The Christian religion has all the marks of the utmost utility and justice: but none more manifest than the severe injunction it lays indifferently upon all to yield absolute obedience to the civil magistrate, and to maintain and defend the laws. Of which, what a wonderful example has the divine wisdom left us, that, to establish the salvation of mankind, and to conduct His glorious victory over death and sin, would do it after no other way, but at the mercy of our ordinary forms of justice subjecting the progress and issue of so high and so salutiferous an effect, to the blindness and injustice of our customs and observances; sacrificing the innocent blood of so many of His elect, and so long a loss of so many years, to the maturing of this inestimable fruit? There is a vast difference betwixt the case of one who follows the forms and laws of his country, and of another who will undertake to regulate and change them; of whom the first pleads simplicity, obedience, and example for his excuse, who, whatever he shall do, it cannot be imputed to malice; 'tis at the worst but misfortune:

“For who is there that antiquity, attested and confirmed by the fairest monuments, cannot move?”—Cicero, *De Divin.*, i. 40.

besides what Isocrates says, that defect is nearer allied to moderation than excess: the other is a much more ruffling gamester; for whosoever shall take upon him to choose and alter, usurps the authority of judging, and should look well about him, and make it his business to discern clearly the defect of what he would abolish, and the virtue of what he is about to introduce.

This so vulgar consideration is that which settled me in my station, and kept even my most extravagant and ungoverned youth under the rein, so as not to burden my shoulders with so great a weight, as to render myself responsible for a science of that importance, and in this to dare, what in my better and more mature judgment, I durst not do in the most easy and indifferent things I had been instructed in, and wherein the temerity of judging is of no consequence at all; it seeming to me very unjust to go about to subject public and established customs and institutions, to the weakness and instability of a private and particular fancy (for private reason has but a private jurisdiction), and to attempt

that upon the divine, which no government will endure a man should do, upon the civil laws; with which, though human reason has much more commerce than with the other, yet are they sovereignly judged by their own proper judges, and the extreme sufficiency serves only to expound and set forth the law and custom received, and neither to wrest it, nor to introduce anything, of innovation. If, sometimes, the divine providence has gone beyond the rules to which it has necessarily bound and obliged us men, it is not to give us any dispensation to do the same; those are masterstrokes of the divine hand, which we are not to imitate, but to admire, and extraordinary examples, marks of express and particular purposes, of the nature of miracles, presented before us for manifestations of its almightiness, equally above both our rules and force, which it would be folly and impiety to attempt to represent and imitate; and that we ought not to follow, but to contemplate with the greatest reverence: acts of His personage, and not for us. Cotta very opportunely declares:

“When matter of religion is in question, I follow the high priests T. Coruncanius, P. Scipio, P. Sævola, and not Zeno, Cleanthes, or Chrysippus.”—Cicero, *De Natura Deor.*, iii. 2.

God knows, in the present quarrel of our civil war, where there are a hundred articles to dash out and to put in, great and very considerable, how many there are who can truly boast, they have exactly and perfectly weighed and understood the grounds and reasons of the one and the other party; 'tis a number, if they make any number, that would be able to give us very little disturbance. But what becomes of all the rest, under what ensigns do they march, in what quarter do they lie? Theirs have the same effect with other weak and ill-applied medicines; they have only set the humours they would purge more violently in work, stirred and exasperated by the conflict, and left them still behind. The potion was too weak to purge, but strong enough to weaken us; so that it does not work, but we keep it still in our bodies, and reap nothing from the operation but intestine gripes and dolours.

So it is, nevertheless, that Fortune still reserving her authority in defiance of whatever we are able to do or say, sometimes presents us with a necessity so urgent, that 'tis requisite the laws should a little yield and give way; and when one opposes the increase of an innovation that thus intrudes itself by violence, to keep a man's self in so doing, in all places and in all things within bounds and rules against those who have the power, and to whom all things are lawful that may in any way serve to advance their design, who have no other law nor rule but what serves best to their own purpose, 'tis a dangerous obligation and an intolerable inequality:

“Putting faith in a treacherous person, opens the door to harm.”

—Seneca, *Ædip.*, act iii., verse 686.

forasmuch as the ordinary discipline of a healthful state does not provide against these extraordinary accidents; it presupposes a body that supports itself in its principal members and offices, and a common consent to its obedience and observation. A legitimate proceeding is cold, heavy, and constrained, and not fit to make head against a headstrong and unbridled proceeding. 'Tis known to be to this day cast in the dish of those two great men, Octavius and Cato, in the two civil wars of Sylla and Cæsar, that they would rather suffer their country to undergo the last extremities, than relieve their fellow-citizens at the expense of its laws, or be guilty of any innovation; for in truth, in these last necessities, where there is no other remedy, it would, peradventure, be more discreetly done, to stoop and yield a little to receive the blow, than, by opposing without possibility of doing good, to give occasion to violence to trample all under foot; and better to make the laws do what they can, when they cannot do what they would. After this manner did he⁵⁰ who suspended them for four-and-twenty hours, and he who, for once shifted a day in the calendar, and that other⁵¹ who of the month of June made a second of May. The Lacedæmonians themselves, who were so religious observers of the laws of their country, being straitened by one of their own edicts, by which it was expressly forbidden to choose the same man twice to be admiral; and

⁵⁰ Agesilaus.

⁵¹ Alexander the Great.

on the other side, their affairs necessarily requiring, that Lysander should again take upon him that command, they made one Aratus admiral; 'tis true, but withal, Lysander went general of the navy; and, by the same subtlety, one of their ambassadors being sent to the Athenians to obtain the revocation of some decree, and Pericles remonstrating to him, that it was forbidden to take away the tablet wherein a law had once been engrossed, he advised him to turn it only, that being not forbidden; and Plutarch commends Philopœmen, that being born to command, he knew how to do it, not only according to the laws, but also to overrule even the laws themselves, when the public necessity so required.

Of Pedantry

I WAS often, when a boy, wonderfully concerned to see, in the Italian farces, a pedant always brought in for the fool of the play, and that the title of Magister was in no greater reverence amongst us: for being delivered up to their tuition, what could I do less than be jealous of their honour and reputation? I sought indeed to excuse them by the natural incompatibility betwixt the vulgar sort and men of a finer thread, both in judgment and knowledge, forasmuch as they go a quite contrary way to one another: but in this, the thing I most stumbled at was, that the finest gentlemen were those who most despised them; witness our famous poet Du Bellay—

“Mais je hay par sur tout un scavoir pedantesque.”⁵²

And 'twas so in former times; for Plutarch says that Greek and Scholar were terms of reproach and contempt amongst the Romans. But since, with the better experience of age, I find they had very great reason so to do, and that—

“The greatest clerks are not the wisest men.”
—A proverb given in Rabelais' *Gargantua*, i. 39.

⁵² “Of all things I hate pedantic learning.”—Du Bellay.

But whence it should come to pass, that a mind enriched with the knowledge of so many things should not become more quick and sprightly, and that a gross and vulgar understanding should lodge within it, without correcting and improving itself, all the discourses and judgments of the greatest minds the world ever had, I am yet to seek. To admit so many foreign conceptions, so great, and so high fancies, it is necessary (as a young lady, one of the greatest princesses of the kingdom, said to me once, speaking of a certain person) that a man's own brain must be crowded and squeezed together into a less compass, to make room for the others; I should be apt to conclude, that as plants are suffocated and drowned with too much nourishment, and lamps with too much oil, so with too much study and matter is the active part of the understanding which, being embarrassed, and confounded with a great diversity of things, loses the force and power to disengage itself, and by the pressure of this weight, is bowed, subjected, and doubled up. But it is quite otherwise; for our soul stretches and dilates itself proportionably as it fills; and in the examples of elder times, we see, quite contrary, men very proper for public business, great captains, and great statesmen very learned withal.

And, as to the philosophers, a sort of men remote from all public affairs, they have been sometimes also despised by the comic liberty of their times; their opinions and manners making them appear, to men of another sort, ridiculous. Would you make them judges of a lawsuit, of the actions of men? They are ready to take it upon them, and straight begin to examine if there be life, if there be motion, if man be any other than an ox;⁵³ what it is to do and to suffer? What animals law and justice are? Do they speak of the magistrates, or to him, 'tis with a rude, irreverent, and indecent liberty. Do they hear their prince, or a king commended? They make no more of him, than of a shepherd, goatherd, or neatherd: a lazy Coridon, occupied in milking and shearing his herds and flocks, but more rudely and harshly than the herd or shepherd himself. Do you repute any man the greater for being lord of two

⁵³ If Montaigne has copied all this from Plato's *Theatetes*, p.127, F., as it is plain by all which he has added immediately after, that he has taken it from that dialogue, he has grossly mistaken Plato's sentiment, who says here no more than this, that the philosopher is so ignorant of what his neighbour does, that he scarce knows whether he is a man, or some other animal.—Coste.

thousand acres of land? They laugh at such a pitiful pittance, as laying claim themselves to the whole world for their possession. Do you boast of your nobility, as being descended from seven rich successive ancestors? They look upon you with an eye of contempt, as men who have not a right idea of the universal image of nature, and that do not consider how many predecessors every one of us has had, rich, poor, kings, slaves, Greeks, and barbarians; and though you were the fiftieth descendant from Hercules, they look upon it as a great vanity, so highly to value this, which is only a gift of fortune. And 'twas so the vulgar sort contemned them, as men ignorant of the most elementary and ordinary things; as presumptuous and insolent.

But this Platonic picture is far different from that these pedants are presented by. Those were envied for raising themselves above the common sort, for despising the ordinary actions and offices of life, for having assumed a particular and inimitable way of living, and for using a certain method of high-flight and obsolete language, quite different from the ordinary way of speaking; but these are contemned as being as much below the usual form, as incapable of public employment, as leading a life and conforming themselves to the mean and vile manners of the vulgar:

“I hate men who jabber about philosophy, but do nothing.”

—Pacuvius, *ap. Gellium*, xiii. 8.

For what concerns the philosophers, as I have said, if they were in science, they were yet much greater in action. And, as it is said of the geometrician of Syracuse,⁵⁴ who having been disturbed from his contemplation, to put some of his skill in practice for the defence of his country, that he suddenly set on foot dreadful and prodigious engines, that wrought effects beyond all human expectation; himself, notwithstanding, disdaining all his handiwork, and thinking in this he had played the mere mechanic, and violated the dignity of his art, of which these performances of his he accounted but trivial experiments and playthings so they, whenever they have been put upon the proof of action, have been seen to fly to so high a pitch, as made it very well appear, their souls

⁵⁴ Archimedes.

were marvellously elevated, and enriched by the knowledge of things. But some of them, seeing the reins of government in the hands of incapable men, have avoided all management of political affairs; and he who demanded of Crates, how long it was necessary to philosophise, received this answer: "Till our armies are no more commanded by fools."⁵⁵ Heraclitus resigned the royalty to his brother; and, to the Ephesians, who reproached him that he spent his time in playing with children before the temple: "Is it not better," said he, "to do so, than to sit at the helm of affairs in your company?" Others having their imagination advanced above the world and fortune, have looked upon the tribunals of justice, and even the thrones of kings, as paltry and contemptible; insomuch, that Empedocles refused the royalty that the Agrigentines offered to him. Thales, once inveighing in discourse against the pains and care men put themselves to to become rich, was answered by one in the company, that he did like the fox, who found fault with what he could not obtain. Whereupon, he had a mind, for the jest's sake, to show them to the contrary; and having, for this occasion, made a muster of all his wits, wholly to employ them in the service of profit and gain, he set a traffic on foot, which in one year brought him in so great riches, that the most experienced in that trade could hardly in their whole lives, with all their industry, have raked so much together.⁵⁶ That which Aristotle reports of some who called both him and Anaxagoras, and others of their profession, wise but not prudent, in not applying their study to more profitable things—though I do not well digest this verbal distinction—that will not, however, serve to excuse my pedants, for to see the low and necessitous fortune wherewith they are content, we have rather reason to pronounce that they are neither wise nor prudent.

But letting this first reason alone, I think it better to say, that this evil proceeds from their applying themselves the wrong way to the study of the sciences; and that, after the manner we are instructed, it is no wonder if neither the scholars nor the masters become, though more learned, ever the wiser, or more able. In plain truth, the cares and expense our parents are at in our education, point at nothing, but to furnish our heads with knowledge; but not a word of judgment and virtue. Cry out, of one that

⁵⁵ Diogenes Lærtius, vi. 92.

⁵⁶ Diogenes Lærtius, *Life of Thales*, i. 26; Cicero, *De Divin.*, i. 49.

passes by, to the people: “O, what a learned man!” and of another, “O, what a good man!”⁵⁷ They will not fail to turn their eyes, and address their respect to the former. There should then be a third crier, “O, the blockheads!” Men are apt presently to inquire, does such a one understand Greek or Latin? Is he a poet? Or does he write in prose? But whether he be grown better or more discreet, which are qualities of principal concern, these are never thought of. We should rather examine, who is better learned, than who is more learned.

We only labour to stuff the memory, and leave the conscience and the understanding unfurnished and void. Like birds who fly abroad to forage for grain, and bring it home in the beak, without tasting it themselves, to feed their young; so our pedants go picking knowledge here and there, out of books, and hold it at the tongue’s end, only to spit it out and distribute it abroad. And here I cannot but smile to think how I have paid myself in showing the foppery of this kind of learning, who myself am so manifest an example; for, do I not the same thing throughout almost this whole composition? I go here and there, culling out of several books the sentences that best please me, not to keep them (for I have no memory to retain them in), but to transplant them into this; where, to say the truth, they are no more mine than in their first places. We are, I conceive, knowing only in present knowledge, and not at all in what is past, or more than is that which is to come. But the worst on’t is, their scholars and pupils are no better nourished by this kind of inspiration; and it makes no deeper impression upon them, but passes from hand to hand, only to make a show to be tolerable company, and to tell pretty stories, like a counterfeit coin in counters, of no other use or value, but to reckon with, or to set up at cards:

“They have learned to speak from others, not from themselves.”

—Cicero, *Tusc. Quæst.* v. 36.

“Speaking is not so necessary as governing.”

—Seneca, *Ep.*, 108.

⁵⁷ Translated from Seneca, *Ep.*, 88.

Nature, to show that there is nothing barbarous where she has the sole conduct, oftentimes, in nations where art has the least to do, causes productions of wit, such as may rival the greatest effect of art whatever. In relation to what I am now speaking of, the Gascon proverb, derived from a cornpipe, is very quaint and subtle:

“You may blow till your eyes start out; but if once you offer to stir your fingers, it is all over.”

We can say, Cicero says thus; these were the manners of Plato; these are the very words of Aristotle: but what do we say ourselves? What do we judge? A parrot would say as much as that.

And this puts me in mind of that rich gentleman of Rome⁵⁸ who had been solicitous, with very great expense, to procure men that were excellent in all sorts of science, whom he had always attending his person, to the end, that when amongst his friends any occasion fell out of speaking of any subject whatsoever, they might supply his place, and be ready to prompt him, one with a sentence of Seneca, another with a verse of Homer, and so forth, every one according to his talent; and he fancied this knowledge to be his own, because it was in the heads of those who lived upon his bounty; as they also do, whose learning consists in having noble libraries. I know one, who, when I question him what he knows, he presently calls for a book to show me, and dares not venture to tell me so much, as that he has piles in his posteriors, till first he has consulted his dictionary, what piles and what posteriors are.

We take other men’s knowledge and opinions upon trust; which is an idle and superficial learning. We must make it our own. We are in this very like him, who having need of fire, went to a neighbour’s house to fetch it, and finding a very good one there, sat down to warm himself without remembering to carry any with him home.⁵⁹ What good does it do us to have the stomach full of meat, if it do not digest, if it be not incorporated with us, if it does not nourish and support us? Can we imagine that Lucullus, whom letters, without any manner of experience,

⁵⁸ Calvisius Sabinus. Seneca, *Ep.*, 27.

⁵⁹ Plutarch, *How a Man should Listen*.

made so great a captain, learned to be so after this perfunctory manner?⁶⁰ We suffer ourselves to lean and rely so strongly upon the arm of another, that we destroy our own strength and vigour. Would I fortify myself against the fear of death, it must be at the expense of Seneca: would I extract consolation for myself or my friend, I borrow it from Cicero. I might have found it in myself, had I been trained to make use of my own reason. I do not like this relative and mendicant understanding; for though we could become learned by other men's learning, a man can never be wise but by his own wisdom:

"I hate the wise man, who in his own concern is not wise."
—Euripides, ap. Cicero, *Ep. Fam.*, xiii. 15.

Whence Ennius:

"That wise man knows nothing, who cannot profit himself by his wisdom."—Cicero, *De Offic.*, iii. 15.

"If he be grasping, or a boaster, and something softer than an Euganean lamb."

—Juvenal, *Sat.*, viii. 14.

"For wisdom is not only to be acquired, but to be utilised."
—Cicero, *De Finib.*, i. I.

Dionysius⁶¹ laughed at the grammarians, who set themselves to inquire into the miseries of Ulysses, and were ignorant of their own; at musicians, who were so exact in tuning their instruments, and never tuned their manners; at orators, who made it a study to declare what is justice, but never took care to do it. If the mind be not better disposed, if the judgment be no better settled, I had much rather my scholar had spent his time at tennis, for, at least, his body would by that means be in better exercise and breath. Do but observe him when he comes back from school, after fifteen or sixteen years that he has been there; there is

⁶⁰ Cicero, *Acad.*, ii. I.

⁶¹ It was not Dionysius, but Diogenes the cynic. Diogenes Lærtius, vi. 27.

nothing so unfit for employment; all you shall find he has got, is, that his Latin and Greek have only made him a greater coxcomb than when he went from home. He should bring back his soul replete with good literature, and he brings it only swelled and puffed up with vain and empty shreds and patches of learning; and has really nothing more in him than he had before.⁶²

These pedants of ours, as Plato says of the Sophists, their cousin-germans, are, of all men, they who most pretend to be useful to mankind, and who alone, of all men, not only do not better and improve that which is committed to them, as a carpenter or a mason would do, but make them much worse, and make us pay them for making them worse, to boot. If the rule which Protagoras proposed to his pupils were followed—either that they should give him his own demand, or make affidavit upon oath in the temple how much they valued the profit they had received under his tuition, and satisfy him accordingly—my pedagogues would find themselves sorely gravelled, if they were to be judged by the affidavits of my experience. My Perigordin patois very pleasantly calls these pretenders to learning, *lettre-ferits*, as a man should say, letter-marked—men on whom letters have been stamped by the blow of a mallet. And, in truth, for the most part, they appear to be deprived even of common sense; for you see the husbandman and the cobbler go simply and fairly about their business, speaking only of what they know and understand; whereas these fellows, to make parade and to get opinion, mustering this ridiculous knowledge of theirs, that floats on the superficies of the brain, are perpetually perplexing, and entangling themselves in their own nonsense. They speak fine words sometimes, 'tis true, but let somebody that is wiser apply them. They are wonderfully well acquainted with Galen, but not at all with the disease of the patient; they have already deafened you with a long rattle-row of laws, but understand nothing of the case in hand; they have the theory of all things, let who will put it in practice.

I have sat by, when a friend of mine, in my own house, for sport-sake, has with one of these fellows counterfeited a jargon of Galimatias, patched up of phrases without head or tail, saving that he interlarded here and there some terms that had relation to their dispute, and held the

⁶² Plato's *Dialogues*: Protagoras.

coxcomb in play a whole afternoon together, who all the while thought he had answered pertinently and learnedly to all his objections; and yet this was a man of letters, and reputation, and a fine gentleman of the long robe:

“O you, of patrician blood, to whom it is permitted to live with[out] eyes in the back of your head, beware of grimaces at you from behind.”—Persius, *Sat.*, i. 61.

Whosoever shall narrowly pry into and thoroughly sift this sort of people, wherewith the world is so pestered, will, as I have done, find, that for the most part, they neither understand others, nor themselves; and that their memories are full enough, but the judgment totally void and empty; some excepted, whose own nature has of itself formed them into better fashion. As I have observed, for example, in Adrian Turnebus, who having never made other profession than that of mere learning only, and in that, in my opinion, he was the greatest man that has been these thousand years, had nothing at all in him of the pedant, but the wearing of his gown, and a little exterior fashion, that could not be civilised to courtier ways, which in themselves are nothing. I hate our people, who can worse endure an ill-contrived robe than an ill-contrived mind, and take their measure by the leg a man makes, by his behaviour, and so much as the very fashion of his boots, what kind of man he is. For within there was not a more polished soul upon earth. I have often purposely put him upon arguments quite wide of his profession, wherein I found he had so clear an insight, so quick an apprehension, so solid a judgment, that a man would have thought he had never practised any other thing but arms, and been all his life employed in affairs of State. These are great and vigorous natures,

“Whom benign Titan (Prometheus) has framed of better clay.”
—Juvenal, xiv. 34.

that can keep themselves upright in despite of a pedantic education. But it is not enough that our education does not spoil us; it must, moreover, alter us for the better.

Some of our Parliaments, when they are to admit officers, examine only their learning; to which some of the others also add the trial of understanding, by asking their judgment of some case in law; of these the latter, methinks, proceed with the better method; for although both are necessary, and that it is very requisite they should be defective in neither, yet, in truth, knowledge is not so absolutely necessary as judgment; the last may make shift without the other, but the other never without this. For as the Greek verse says: "To what use serves learning, if understanding be away."⁶³ Would to God that, for the good of our judicature, these societies were as well furnished with understanding and conscience as they are with knowledge.

"We do not study for life, but only for the school."
—Seneca, *Ep.*, 106.

We are not to tie learning to the soul, but to work and incorporate them together: not to tincture it only, but to give it a thorough and perfect dye; which, if it will not take colour, and meliorate its imperfect state, it were without question better to let it alone. 'Tis a dangerous weapon, that will hinder and wound its master, if put into an awkward and unskilful hand:

"So that it were better not to have learned."
—Cicero, *Tusc. Quæst.*, ii. 4.

And this, peradventure, is the reason why neither we nor theology require much learning in women; and that Francis, Duke of Brittany, son of John V., one talking with him about his marriage with Isabella the daughter of Scotland, and adding that she was homely bred, and without any manner of learning, made answer, that he liked her the better, and that a woman was wise enough, if she could distinguish her husband's shirt from his doublet. So that it is no so great wonder, as they make of it, that our ancestors had letters in no greater esteem, and that even to this day they are but rarely met with in the principal councils of princes; and if the end and design of acquiring riches, which is the only thing we propose to ourselves, by the means of law, physic, pedantry, and even

⁶³ Apud Stobæus, tit. iii., p.37 (1609).

divinity itself, did not uphold and keep them in credit, you would, with doubt, see them in as pitiful a condition as ever. And what loss would this be, if they neither instruct us to think well nor to do well?⁶⁴ All other knowledge is hurtful to him who has not the science of goodness.

But the reason I glanced upon but now, may it not also hence proceed, that, our studies in France having almost no other aim but profit, except as to those who, by nature born to offices and employments rather of glory than gain, addict themselves to letters, if at all, only for so short a time (being taken from their studies before they can come to have any taste of them, to a profession that has nothing to do with books), there ordinarily remain no others to apply themselves wholly to learning, but people of mean condition, who in that only seek the means to live; and by such people, whose souls are, both by nature and by domestic education and example, of the basest alloy the fruits of knowledge are immaturely gathered and ill digested, and delivered to their recipients quite another thing. For it is not for knowledge to enlighten a soul that is dark of itself, nor to make a blind man see. Her business is not to find a man's eyes, but to guide, govern, and direct them, provided he have sound feet and straight legs to go upon. Knowledge is an excellent drug, but no drug has virtue enough to preserve itself from corruption and decay, if the vessel be tainted and impure wherein it is put to keep. Such a one may have a sight clear enough who looks askint, and consequently sees what is good, but does not follow it, and sees knowledge, but makes no use of it. Plato's principal institution in his Republic is to fit his citizens with employments suitable to their nature. Nature can do all, and does all. Cripples are very unfit for exercises of the body, and lame souls for exercises of the mind. Degenerate and vulgar souls are unworthy of philosophy. If we see a shoemaker with his shoes out at the toes, we say, 'tis no wonder; for, commonly, none go worse shod than they. In like manner, experience often presents us a physician worse physicked, a divine less reformed, and (constantly) a scholar of less sufficiency, than other people. Old Aristo of Chios had reason to say that philosophers did their auditors harm, forasmuch as most of the souls of those that heard them were not capable of deriving benefit from

⁶⁴ Seneca, Ep., 95. "Since the *savans* have made their appearance among us, the good people have become eclipsed."—Rousseau, *Discours sur les Lettres*.

instruction, which, if not applied to good, would certainly be applied to ill:

“They proceeded effeminate debauchees from the school of Aristippus, cynics from that of Zeno.”

—Cicero, *De Natura Deor.*, iii., 31.

In that excellent institution that Xenophon attributes to the Persians, we find that they taught their children virtue, as other nations do letters. Plato tells us that the eldest son in their royal succession was thus brought up; after his birth he was delivered, not to women, but to eunuchs of the greatest authority about their kings for their virtue, whose charge it was to keep his body healthful and in good plight; and after he came to seven years of age, to teach him to ride and to go a-hunting. When he arrived at fourteen he was transferred into the hands of four, the wisest, the most just, the most temperate, and most valiant of the nation; of whom the first was to instruct him in religion, the second to be always upright and sincere, the third to conquer his appetites and desires, and the fourth to despise all danger.

It is a thing worthy of very great consideration, that in that excellent, and, in truth, for its perfection, prodigious form of civil regimen set down by Lycurgus, though so solicitous of the education of children, as a thing of the greatest concern, and even in the very seat of the Muses, he should make so little mention of learning; as if that generous youth, disdaining all other subjection but that of virtue, ought to be supplied, instead of tutors to read to them arts and sciences, with such masters as should only instruct them in valour, prudence, and justice; an example that Plato has followed in his laws. The manner of their discipline was to propound to them questions in judgment upon men and their actions; and if they commended or condemned this or that person or fact, they were to give a reason for so doing; by which means they at once sharpened their understanding, and learned what was right. Astyages, in Xenophon, asks Cyrus to give an account of his last lesson; and thus it was, “A great boy in our school, having a little short cassock, by force took a longer from another that was not so tall as he, and gave him his own in exchange: whereupon I, being appointed judge of the controversy, gave judgment,

that I thought it best each should keep the coat he had, for that they both of them were better fitted with that of one another than with their own: upon which my master told me, I had done ill, in that I had only considered the fitness of the garments, whereas I ought to have considered the justice of the thing, which required that no one should have anything forcibly taken from him that is his own.” And Cyrus adds that he was whipped for his pains, as we are in our villages for forgetting the first aorist of τυπω.

My pedant must make me a very learned oration, *in genere demonstrativo*, before he can persuade me that his school is like unto that. They knew how to go the readiest way to work; and seeing that science, when most rightly applied and best understood, can do no more but teach us prudence, moral honesty, and resolution, they thought fit, at first hand, to initiate their children with the knowledge of effects, and to instruct them, not by hearsay and rote, but by the experiment of action, in lively forming and moulding them; not only by words and precepts, but chiefly by works and examples; to the end it might not be a knowledge in the mind only, but its complexion and habit: not an acquisition, but a natural possession. One asking to this purpose, Agesilaus, what he thought most proper for boys to learn? “What they ought to do when they come to be men,” said he.⁶⁵ It is no wonder, if such an institution produced so admirable effects.

They used to go, it is said, to the other cities of Greece, to inquire out rhetoricians, painters, and musicians; but to Lacedæmon for legislators, magistrates, and generals of armies; at Athens they learned to speak well: here to do well; there to disengage themselves from a sophistical argument, and to unravel the imposture of captious syllogisms; here to evade the baits and allurements of pleasure, and with a noble courage and resolution to conquer the menaces of fortune and death; those cudgelled their brains about words, these made it their business to inquire into things; there was an eternal babble of the tongue, here a continual exercise of the soul. And therefore it is nothing strange if, when Antipater demanded of them fifty children for hostages, they made answer, quite contrary to what we should do, that they would rather give

⁶⁵ Plutarch, *Apothegms of the Lacedæmonians*. Rousseau adopts the expression in his *Discours sur des Lettres*.

him twice as many full-grown men, so much did they value the loss of their country's education. When Agesilaus courted Xenophon to send his children to Sparta to be bred, "it is not," said he, "there to learn logic or rhetoric, but to be instructed in the noblest of all sciences, namely, the science to obey and to command."⁶⁶

It is very pleasant to see Socrates, after his manner, rallying Hippias,⁶⁷ who recounts to him what a world of money he has got, especially in certain little villages of Sicily, by teaching school, and that he made never a penny at Sparta: "What a sottish and stupid people," said Socrates, "are they, without sense or understanding, that make no account either of grammar or poetry, and only busy themselves in studying the genealogies and successions of their kings, the foundations, rises, and declensions of states, and such tales of a tub!" After which, having made Hippias from one step to another acknowledge the excellency of their form of public administration, and the felicity and virtue of their private life, he leaves him to guess at the conclusion he makes of the inutilities of his pedantic arts.

Examples have demonstrated to us that in military affairs, and all others of the like active nature, the study of sciences more softens and untempers the courages of men than it in any way fortifies and excites them. The most potent empire that at this day appears to be in the whole world is that of the Turks, a people equally inured to the estimation of arms and the contempt of letters. I find Rome was more valiant before she grew so learned. The most warlike nations at this time in being are the most rude and ignorant: the Scythians, the Parthians, Tamerlane, serve for sufficient proof of this. When the Goths overran Greece, the only thing that preserved all the libraries from the fire was, that some one possessed them with an opinion that they were to leave this kind of furniture entire to the enemy, as being most proper to divert them from the exercise of arms, and to fix them to a lazy and sedentary life. When our King Charles VIII., almost without striking a blow, saw himself possessed of the kingdom of Naples and a considerable part of Tuscany, the nobles about him attributed this unexpected facility of conquest to

⁶⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Agesilaus*, c. 7.

⁶⁷ Plato's *Dialogues*: Hippias Major.

this, that the princes and nobles of Italy, more studied to render themselves ingenious and learned, than vigorous and warlike.

Of Friendship

HAVING considered the proceedings of a painter that serves me, I had a mind to imitate his way. He chooses the fairest place and middle of any wall, or panel, wherein to draw a picture, which he finishes with his utmost care and art, and the vacuity about it he fills with grotesques, which are odd fantastic figures without any grace but what they derive from their variety, and the extravagance of their shapes. And in truth, what are these things I scribble, other than grotesques and monstrous bodies, made of various parts, without any certain figure, or any other than accidental order, coherence, or proportion?

“A fair woman in her upper form terminates in a fish.”

—Horace, *De Arte Poetica*, v. 4.

In this second part I go hand in hand with my painter; but fall very short of him in the first and the better, my power of handling not being such, that I dare to offer at a rich piece, finely polished, and set off according to art. I have therefore thought fit to borrow one of Estienne de la Boetie, and such a one as shall honour and adorn all the rest of my work—namely, a discourse that he called “Voluntary Servitude;” but, since, those who did not know him have properly enough called it “*Le contre Un*.” He wrote in his youth⁶⁸ by way of essay, in honour of liberty against tyrants; and it has since run through the hands of men of great learning and judgment, not without singular and merited commendation; for it is finely written, and as full as anything can possibly be. And yet one may confidently say it is far short of what he was able to do; and if in that more mature age, wherein I had the happiness to know him, he had taken a design like this of mine, to commit his thoughts to writing, we should have seen a great many rare things, and such as would have gone very near to have rivalled the best writings of antiquity: for in natural parts especially, I know no man comparable to him. But he has

⁶⁸ “Not being as yet eighteen years old.”—Edition of 1588.

left nothing behind him, save this treatise only (and that too by chance, for I believe he never saw it after it first went out of his hands), and some observations upon that edict of January⁶⁹ made famous by our civil-wars, which also shall elsewhere, peradventure, find a place. These were all I could recover of his remains, I to whom with so affectionate a remembrance, upon his death-bed, he by his last will bequeathed his library and papers, the little book of his works only excepted, which I committed to the press. And this particular obligation I have to this treatise of his, that it was the occasion of my first coming acquainted with him; for it was showed to me long before I had the good fortune to know him; and the first knowledge of his name, proving the first cause and foundation of a friendship, which we afterwards improved and maintained, so long as God was pleased to continue us together, so perfect, inviolate, and entire, that certainly the like is hardly to be found in story, and amongst the men of this age, there is no sign nor trace of any such thing in use; so much concurrence is required to the building of such a one, that 'tis much, if fortune bring it but once to pass in three ages.

There is nothing to which nature seems so much to have inclined us, as to society; and Aristotle says that the good legislators had more respect to friendship than to justice. Now the most supreme point of its perfection is this: for, generally, all those that pleasure, profit, public or private interest create and nourish, are so much the less beautiful and generous, and so much the less friendships, by how much they mix another cause, and design, and fruit in friendship, than itself. Neither do the four ancient kinds, natural, social, hospitable, venereal, either separately or jointly, make up a true and perfect friendship.

That of children to parents is rather respect: friendship is nourished by communication, which cannot by reason of the great disparity, be betwixt these, but would rather perhaps offend the duties of nature; for neither are all the secret thoughts of fathers fit to be communicated to children, lest it beget an indecent familiarity betwixt them; nor can the advices and reproofs, which is one of the principal offices of friendship, be properly performed by the son to the father. There are some countries where 'twas the custom for children to kill their fathers; and others, where the fathers killed their children, to avoid their being an impediment

⁶⁹ 1562, which granted to the Huguenots the public exercise of their religion.

one to another in life; and naturally the expectations of the one depend upon the ruin of the other. There have been great philosophers who have made nothing of this tie of nature, as Aristippus for one, who being pressed home about the affection he owed to his children, as being come out of him, presently fell to spit, saying, that this also came out of him, and that we also breed worms and lice; and that other, that Plutarch endeavoured to reconcile to his brother: "I make never the more account of him," said he, "for coming out of the same hole." This name of brother does indeed carry with it a fine and delectable sound, and for that reason, he and I called one another brothers but the complication of interests, the division of estates, and that the wealth of the one should be the property of the other, strangely relax and weaken the fraternal tie: brothers pursuing their fortune and advancement by the same path, 'tis hardly possible but they must of necessity often jostle and hinder one another. Besides, why is it necessary that the correspondence of manners, parts, and inclinations, which begets the true and perfect friendships, should always meet in these relations? The father and the son may be of quite contrary humours, and so of brothers: he is my son, he is my brother; but he is passionate, ill-natured, or a fool. And moreover, by how much these are friendships that the law and natural obligation impose upon us, so much less is there of our own choice and voluntary freedom; whereas that voluntary liberty of ours has no production more promptly and; properly its own than affection and friendship. Not that I have not in my own person experimented all that can possibly be expected of that kind, having had the best and most indulgent father, even to his extreme old age, that ever was, and who was himself descended from a family for many generations famous and exemplary for brotherly concord:

"And I myself, known for paternal love toward my brothers."

—Horace, *Ode* ii. 2, 6.

We are not here to bring the love we bear to women, though it be an act of our own choice, into comparison, nor rank it with the others. The fire of this, I confess,

“Nor is the goddess unknown to me who mixes a sweet bitterness with my love.”—Catullus, lxxviii. 17.

is more active, more eager, and more sharp: but withal, 'tis more precipitant, fickle, moving, and inconstant; a fever subject to intermissions and paroxysms, that has seized but on one part of us. Whereas in friendship, 'tis a general and universal fire, but temperate and equal, a constant established heat, all gentle and smooth, without poignancy or roughness. Moreover, in love, 'tis no other than frantic desire for that which flies from us:

“As the hunter pursues the hare, in cold and heat, to the mountain, to the shore, nor cares for it farther when he sees it taken, and only delights in chasing that which flees from him.”

—Aristo, x. 7.

so soon as it enters unto the terms of friendship, that is to say, into a concurrence of desires, it vanishes and is gone, fruition destroys it, as having only a fleshly end, and such a one as is subject to satiety. Friendship, on the contrary, is enjoyed proportionably as it is desired; and only grows up, is nourished and improved by enjoyment, as being of itself spiritual, and the soul growing still more refined by practice. Under this perfect friendship, the other fleeting affections have in my younger years found some place in me, to say nothing of him, who himself so confesses but too much in his verses; so that I had both these passions, but always so, that I could myself well enough distinguish them, and never in any degree of comparison with one another; the first maintaining its flight in so lofty and so brave a place, as with disdain to look down, and see the other flying at a far humbler pitch below.

As concerning marriage, besides that it is a covenant, the entrance into which only is free, but the continuance in it forced and compulsory, having another dependence than that of our own free will, and a bargain commonly contracted to other ends, there almost always happens a thousand intricacies in it to unravel, enough to break the thread and to divert the current of a lively affection: whereas friendship has no manner of business or traffic with aught but itself. Moreover, to say truth, the

ordinary talent of women is not such as is sufficient to maintain the conference and communication required to the support of this sacred tie; nor do they appear to be endued with constancy of mind, to sustain the pinch of so hard and durable a knot. And doubtless, if without this, there could be such a free and voluntary familiarity contracted, where not only the souls might have this entire fruition, but the bodies also might share in the alliance, and a man be engaged throughout, the friendship would certainly be more full and perfect; but it is without example that this sex has ever yet arrived at such perfection; and, by the common consent of the ancient schools, it is wholly rejected from it.

That other Grecian licence is justly abhorred by our manners, which also, from having, according to their practice, a so necessary disparity of age and difference of offices betwixt the lovers, answered no more to the perfect union and harmony that we here require than the other:

“For what is that friendly love? Why does no one love a deformed youth or a comely old man?”

—Cicero, *Tusc. Quæst.*, iv. 33.

Neither will that very picture that the Academy presents of it, as I conceive, contradict me, when I say, that this first fury inspired by the son of Venus into the heart of the lover, upon sight of the flower and prime of a springing and blossoming youth, to which they allow all the insolent and passionate efforts that an immoderate ardour can produce, was simply founded upon external beauty, the false image of corporal generation; for it could not ground this love upon the soul, the sight of which as yet lay concealed, was but now springing, and not of maturity to blossom; that this fury, if it seized upon a low spirit, the means by which it preferred its suit were rich presents, favour in advancement to dignities, and such trumpery, which they by no means approve; if on a more generous soul, the pursuit was suitably generous, by philosophical instructions, precepts to revere religion, to obey the laws, to die for the good of one's country; by examples of valour, prudence, and justice, the lover studying to render himself acceptable by the grace and beauty of the soul, that of his body being long since faded and decayed, hoping by this mental society to establish a more firm and lasting contract. When

this courtship came to effect in due season (for that which they do not require in the lover, namely, leisure and discretion in his pursuit, they strictly require in the person loved, forasmuch as he is to judge of an internal beauty, of difficult knowledge and abstruse discovery), then there sprung in the person loved the desire of a spiritual conception; by the mediation of a spiritual beauty. This was the principal; the corporeal, an accidental and secondary matter; quite the contrary as to the lover. For this reason they prefer the person beloved, maintaining that the gods in like manner preferred him too, and very much blame the poet Æschylus for having, in the loves of Achilles and Patroclus, given the lover's part to Achilles, who was in the first and beardless flower of his adolescence, and the handsomest of all the Greeks. After this general community, the sovereign, and most worthy part presiding and governing, and performing its proper offices, they say, that thence great utility was derived, both by private and public concerns; that it constituted the force and power of the countries where it prevailed, and the chiefest security of liberty and justice. Of which the healthy loves of Harmodius and Aristogiton are instances. And therefore it is that they called it sacred and divine, and conceive that nothing but the violence of tyrants and the baseness of the common people are inimical to it. Finally, all that can be said in favour of the Academy is, that it was a love which ended in friendship, which well enough agrees with the Stoical definition of love:

“Love is a desire of contracting friendship arising from the beauty of the object.”—Cicero, *Tusc. Quæst.*, vi. 34.

I return to my own more just and true description:

“Those are only to be reputed friendships that are fortified and confirmed by judgment and the length of time.”

—Cicero, *De Amicit.*, c. 20.

For the rest, what we commonly call friends and friendships, are nothing but acquaintance and familiarities, either occasionally contracted, or upon some design, by means of which there happens some little intercourse betwixt our souls. But in the friendship I speak of, they mix and

work themselves into one piece, with so universal a mixture, that there is no more sign of the seam by which they were first conjoined. If a man should importune me to give a reason why I loved him, I find it could no otherwise be expressed, than by making answer: because it was he, because it was I. There is, beyond all that I am able to say, I know not what inexplicable and fated power that brought on this union. We sought one another long before we met, and by the characters we heard of one another, which wrought upon our affections more than, in reason, mere reports should do; I think 'twas by some secret appointment of heaven. We embraced in our names; and at our first meeting, which was accidentally at a great city entertainment, we found ourselves so mutually taken with one another, so acquainted, and so endeared betwixt ourselves, that from thenceforward nothing was so near to us as one another. He wrote an excellent Latin satire, since printed, wherein he excuses the precipitation of our intelligence, so suddenly come to perfection, saying, that destined to have so short a continuance, as begun so late (for we were both full-grown men, and he some years the older), there was no time to lose, nor were we tied to conform to the example of those slow and regular friendships, that require so many precautions of long preliminary conversation: This has no other idea than that of itself, and can only refer to itself: this is no one special consideration, nor two, nor three, nor four, nor a thousand; 'tis I know not what quintessence of all this mixture, which, seizing my whole will, carried it to plunge and lose itself in his, and that having seized his whole will, brought it back with equal concurrence and appetite to plunge and lose itself in mine. I may truly say lose, reserving nothing to ourselves that was either his or mine.⁷⁰

When Lælius,⁷¹ in the presence of the Roman consuls, who after they had sentenced Tiberius Gracchus, prosecuted all those who had had any familiarity with him also; came to ask Caius Blossius, who was his chiefest friend, how much he would have done for him, and that he made answer: “All things.”—“How! All things!” said Lælius. “And what if he had commanded you to fire our temples?”—“He would never have commanded me that,” replied Blossius.—“But what if he had?” said

⁷⁰ All this relates to Estienne de la Boetie.

⁷¹ Cicero, *De Amicit.*, c. II.

Lælius.—“I would have obeyed him,” said the other. If he was so perfect a friend to Gracchus as the histories report him to have been, there was yet no necessity of offending the consuls by such a bold confession, though he might still have retained the assurance he had of Gracchus’ disposition. However, those who accuse this answer as seditious, do not well understand the mystery; nor presuppose, as it was true, that he had Gracchus’ will in his sleeve, both by the power of a friend, and the perfect knowledge he had of the man: they were more friends than citizens, more friends to one another than either enemies or friends to their country, or than friends to ambition and innovation; having absolutely given up themselves to one another, either held absolutely the reins of the other’s inclination; and suppose all this guided by virtue, and all this by the conduct of reason, which also without these it had not been possible to do, Blossius’ answer was such as it ought to be. If any of their actions flew out of the handle, they were neither (according to my measure of friendship) friends to one another, nor to themselves. As to the rest, this answer carries no worse sound, than mine would do to one that should ask me: “If your will should command you to kill your daughter, would you do it?” and that I should make answer, that I would; for this expresses no consent to such an act, forasmuch as I do not in the least suspect my own will, and as little that of such a friend. ’Tis not in the power of all the eloquence in the world, to dispossess me of the certainty I have of the intentions and resolutions of my friend; nay, no one action of his, what face soever it might bear, could be presented to me, of which I could not presently, and at first sight, find out the moving cause. Our souls had drawn so unanimously together, they had considered each other with so ardent an affection, and with the like affection laid open the very bottom of our hearts to one another’s view, that I not only knew his as well as my own; but should certainly in any concern of mine have trusted my interest much more willingly with him, than with myself.

Let no one, therefore, rank other common friendships with such a one as this. I have had as much experience of these as another, and of the most perfect of their kind: but I do not advise that any should confound the rules of the one and the other, for they would find themselves much deceived. In those other ordinary friendships, you are to walk with bridle

in your hand, with prudence and circumspection, for in them the knot is not so sure that a man may not half suspect it will slip. "Love him," said Chilo,⁷² "so as if you were one day to hate him; and hate him so as you were one day to love him." This precept, though abominable in the sovereign and perfect friendship I speak of, is nevertheless very sound as to the practice of the ordinary and customary ones, and to which the saying that Aristotle had so frequent in his mouth, "O my friends, there is no friend," may very fitly be applied. In this noble commerce, good offices, presents, and benefits, by which other friendships are supported and maintained, do not deserve so much as to be mentioned; and the reason is the concurrence of our wills; for, as the kindness I have for myself receives no increase, for anything I relieve myself withal in time of need (whatever the Stoics say), and as I do not find myself obliged to myself for any service I do myself: so the union of such friends, being truly perfect, deprives them of all idea of such duties, and makes them loathe and banish from their conversation these words of division and distinction, benefits, obligation, acknowledgment, entreaty, thanks, and the like. All things, wills, thoughts, opinions, goods, wives, children, honours, and lives, being in effect common betwixt them, and that absolute concurrence of affections being no other than one soul in two bodies (according to that very proper definition of Aristotle), they can neither lend nor give anything to one another. This is the reason why the lawgivers, to honour marriage with some resemblance of this divine alliance, interdict all gifts betwixt man and wife; inferring by that, that all should belong to each of them, and that they have nothing to divide or to give to each other.

If, in the friendship of which I speak, one could give to the other, the receiver of the benefit would be the man that obliged his friend; for each of them contending and above all things studying how to be useful to the other, he that administers the occasion is the liberal man, in giving his friend the satisfaction of doing that towards him which above all things he most desires. When the philosopher Diogenes wanted money, he used to say, that he redemanded it of his friends, not that he demanded it. And to let you see the practical working of this, I will here produce an ancient and singular example. Eudamidas, a Corinthian, had two friends,

⁷² Aulus Gellius, i. 3.

Charixenus a Sicyonian and Areteus a Corinthian; this man coming to die, being poor, and his two friends rich, he made his will after this manner. "I bequeath to Areteus the maintenance of my mother, to support and provide for her in her old age; and to Charixenus I bequeath the care of marrying my daughter, and to give her as good a portion as he is able; and in case one of these chance to die, I hereby substitute the survivor in his place." They who first saw this will made themselves very merry at the contents: but the legatees, being made acquainted with it, accepted it with very great content; and one of them, Charixenus, dying within five days after, and by that means the charge of both duties devolving solely on him, Areteus nurtured the old woman with very great care and tenderness, and of five talents he had in estate, he gave two and a half in marriage with an only daughter he had of his own, and two and a half in marriage with the daughter of Eudamidas, and on one and the same day solemnised both their nuptials.

This example is very full, if one thing were not to be objected, namely the multitude of friends for the perfect friendship I speak of is indivisible; each one gives himself so entirely to his friend, that he has nothing left to distribute to others: on the contrary, is sorry that he is not double, treble, or quadruple, and that he has not many souls and many wills, to confer them all upon this one object. Common friendships will admit of division; one may love the beauty of this person, the good-humour of that, the liberality of a third, the paternal affection of a fourth, the fraternal love of a fifth, and so of the rest: but this friendship that possesses the whole soul, and there rules and sways with an absolute sovereignty, cannot possibly admit of a rival. If two at the same time should call to you for succour, to which of them would you run? Should they require of you contrary offices, how could you serve them both? Should one commit a thing to your silence that it were of importance to the other to know, how would you disengage yourself? A unique and particular friendship dissolves all other obligations whatsoever: the secret I have sworn not to reveal to any other, I may without perjury communicate to him who is not another, but myself. 'Tis miracle enough certainly, for a man to double himself, and those that talk of tripling, talk they know not of what. Nothing is extreme, that has its like; and he who shall suppose, that of two, I love one as much as the other, that they mutually

love one another too, and love me as much as I love them, multiplies into a confraternity the most single of units, and whereof, moreover, one alone is the hardest thing in the world to find. The rest of this story suits very well with what I was saying; for Eudamidas, as a bounty and favour, bequeaths to his friends a legacy of employing themselves in his necessity; he leaves them heirs to this liberality of his, which consists in giving them the opportunity of conferring a benefit upon him; and doubtless, the force of friendship is more eminently apparent in this act of his, than in that of Areteus. In short, these are effects not to be imagined nor comprehended by such as have not experience of them, and which make me infinitely honour and admire the answer of that young soldier to Cyrus, by whom being asked how much he would take for a horse, with which he had won the prize of a race, and whether he would exchange him for a kingdom? —“No, truly, sir,” said he, “but I would give him with all my heart, to get thereby a true friend, could I find out any man worthy of that alliance.”⁷³ He did not say ill in saying, “could I find”: for though one may almost everywhere meet with men sufficiently qualified for a superficial acquaintance, yet in this, where a man is to deal from the very bottom of his heart, without any manner of reservation, it will be requisite that all the wards and springs be truly wrought and perfectly sure.

In confederations that hold but by one end, we are only to provide against the imperfections that particularly concern that end. It can be of no importance to me of what religion my physician or my lawyer is; this consideration has nothing in common with the offices of friendship which they owe me; and I am of the same indifference in the domestic acquaintance my servants must necessarily contract with me. I never inquire, when I am to take a footman, if he be chaste, but if he be diligent; and am not solicitous if my muleteer be given to gaming, as if he be strong and able; or if my cook be a swearer, if he be a good cook. I do not take upon me to direct what other men should do in the government of their families, there are plenty that meddle enough with that, but only give an account of my method in my own:

⁷³ Xenophon, *Cyropadia*, viii. 3.

“This has been my way; as for you, do as you find needful.”

—Terence, *Heaut.*, i. I., 28.

For table-talk, I prefer the pleasant and witty before the learned and the grave; in bed, beauty before goodness; in common discourse the ablest speaker, whether or no there be sincerity in the case. And, as he that was found astride upon a hobby-horse, playing with his children, entreated the person who had surprised him in that posture to say nothing of it till himself came to be a father,⁷⁴ supposing that the fondness that would then possess his own soul, would render him a fairer judge of such an action; so I, also, could wish to speak to such as have had experience of what I say: though, knowing how remote a thing such a friendship is from the common practice, and how rarely it is to be found, I despair of meeting with any such judge. For even these discourses left us by antiquity upon this subject, seem to me flat and poor, in comparison of the sense I have of it, and in this particular, the effects surpass even the precepts of philosophy.

“While I have sense left to me, there will never be anything more acceptable to me than an agreeable friend.”

—Horace, *Sat.*, i. 5, 44.

The ancient Menander declared him to be happy that had had the good fortune to meet with but the shadow of a friend: and doubtless he had good reason to say so, especially if he spoke by experience: for in good earnest, if I compare all the rest of my life, though, thanks be to God, I have passed my time pleasantly enough, and at my ease, and the loss of such a friend excepted, free from any grievous affliction, and in great tranquillity of mind, having been contented with my natural and original commodities, without being solicitous after others; if I should compare it all, I say, with the four years I had the happiness to enjoy the sweet society of this excellent man, 'tis nothing but smoke, an obscure and tedious night. From the day that I lost him:

⁷⁴ Plutarch, *Life of Agesilaus*, c. 9.

“A day for me ever sad, for ever sacred, so have you willed ye gods.”
—*Aeneid*, v. 49.

I have only led a languishing life; and the very pleasures that present themselves to me, instead of administering anything of consolation, double my affliction for his loss. We were halves throughout, and to that degree, that methinks, by outliving him, I defraud him of his part.

“I have determined that it will never be right for me to enjoy any pleasure, so long as he, with whom I shared all pleasures is away.”—Terence, *Heaut.*, i. I. 97.

I was so grown and accustomed to be always his double in all places and in all things, that methinks I am no more than half of myself:

“If that half of my soul were snatch away from me by an untimely stroke, why should the other stay? That which remains will not be equally dear, will not be whole: the same day will involve the destruction of both.”—Horace, *Ode* ii. 17, 5.

Or:

“If a superior force has taken that part of my soul, why do I, the remaining one, linger behind? What is left is not so dear, nor an entire thing: this day has wrought the destruction of both.”
—Horace, *Ode*, ii. 17, 5.

There is no action or imagination of mine wherein I do not miss him; as I know that he would have missed me: for as he surpassed me by infinite degrees in virtue and all other accomplishments, so he also did in the duties of friendship:

“What shame can there, or measure, in lamenting so dear a friend?”
—Horace, *Ode* i. 24, I.

“O brother, taken from me miserable! With thee, all our joys have vanished, those joys which, in thy life, thy dear love nourished. Dying, thou, my brother, hast destroyed all my happiness. My whole soul is buried with thee. Through whose death I have banished from my mind these studies, and all the delights of the mind. Shall I address thee? I shall never hear thy voice. Never shall I behold thee hereafter. O brother, dearer to me than life. Nought remains, but assuredly I shall ever love thee.”—Catullus, lxxviii. 20; lxxv.

But let us hear a boy of sixteen speak:

“Because I have found that that work has been since brought out, and with a mischievous design, by those who aim at disturbing and changing the condition of our government, without troubling themselves to think whether they are likely to improve it: and because they have mixed up his work with some of their own performance, I have refrained from inserting it here. But that the memory of the author may not be injured, nor suffer with such as could not come near-hand to be acquainted with his principles, I here give them to understand, that it was written by him in his boyhood, and that by way of exercise only, as a common theme that has been hackneyed by a thousand writers. I make no question but that he himself believed what he wrote, being so conscientious that he would not so much as lie in jest: and I moreover know, that could it have been in his own choice, he had rather have been born at Venice, than at Sarlac; and with reason. But he had another maxim sovereignty imprinted in his soul, very religiously to obey and submit to the laws under which he was born. There never was a better citizen, more affectionate to his country; nor a greater enemy to all the commotions and innovations of his time: so that he would much rather have employed his talent to the extinguishing of those civil flames, than have added any fuel to them; he had a mind fashioned to the model of better ages. Now, in exchange of this serious piece, I will present you with another of a more gay and frolic air, from the same hand, and written at the same age.”

That We Are to Avoid Pleasures, Even at the Expense of Life

I HAD long ago observed most of the opinions of the ancients to concur in this, that it is high time to die when there is more ill than good in living, and that to preserve life to our own torment and inconvenience is contrary to the very rules of nature, as these old laws instruct us.

“Either tranquil life, or happy death. It is well to die when life is wearisome. It is better to die than to live miserable.”

—Stobæus, *Serm.* xx.

But to push this contempt of death so far as to employ it to the removing our thoughts from the honours, riches, dignities, and other favours and goods, as we call them, of fortune, as if reason were not sufficient to persuade us to avoid them, without adding this new injunction, I had never seen it either commanded or practised, till this passage of Seneca fell into my hands; who advising Lucilius, a man of great power and authority about the emperor, to alter his voluptuous and magnificent way of living, and to retire himself from this worldly vanity and ambition, to some solitary, quiet, and philosophical life, and the other alleging some difficulties: “I am of opinion,” says he, “either that thou leave that life of thine, or life itself; I would, indeed, advise thee to the gentle way, and to untie, rather than to break, the knot thou hast indiscreetly knit, provided, that if it be not otherwise to be untied, thou resolutely break it. There is no man so great a coward, that had not rather once fall than to be always falling.” I should have found this counsel conformable enough to the Stoical roughness: but it appears the more strange, for being borrowed from Epicurus, who writes the same thing upon the like occasion to Idomeneus. And I think I have observed something like it, but with Christian moderation, amongst our own people.

St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, that famous enemy of the Arian heresy, being in Syria, had intelligence thither sent him, that Abra, his only daughter, whom he left at home under the eye and tuition of her mother, was sought in marriage by the greatest noblemen of the country, as being a virgin virtuously brought up, fair, rich, and in the flower of her age; whereupon he wrote to her (as appears upon record), that she should

remove her affection from all the pleasures and advantages proposed to her; for that he had in his travels found out a much greater and more worthy fortune for her, a husband of much greater power and magnificence, who would present her with robes and jewels of inestimable value; wherein his design was to dispossess her of the appetite and use of worldly delights, to join her wholly to God; but the nearest and most certain way to this, being, as he conceived, the death of his daughter; he never ceased, by vows, prayers, and orisons, to beg of the Almighty, that He would please to call her out of this world, and to take her to Himself; as accordingly it came to pass; for soon after his return, she died, at which he expressed a singular joy. This seems to outdo the other, forasmuch as he applies himself to this means at the outset, which they only take subsidiarily; and, besides, it was towards his only daughter. But I will not omit the latter end of this story, though it be for my purpose; St. Hilary's wife, having understood from him how the death of their daughter was brought about by his desire and design, and how much happier she was to be removed out of this world than to have stayed in it, conceived so vivid an apprehension of the eternal and heavenly beatitude, that she begged of her husband, with the extremest importunity, to do as much for her; and God, at their joint request, shortly after calling her to Him, it was a death embraced with singular and mutual content.

Of the Custom of Wearing Clothes

WHATEVER I shall say upon this subject, I am of necessity to invade some of the bounds of custom, so careful has she been to shut up all the avenues. I was disputing with myself in this shivering season, whether the fashion of going naked in those nations lately discovered is imposed upon them by the hot temperature of the air, as we say of the Indians and Moors, or whether it be the original fashion of mankind. Men of understanding, forasmuch as all things under the sun, as the Holy Writ declares, are subject to the same laws, were wont in such considerations as these, where we are to distinguish the natural laws from those which have been imposed by man's invention, to have recourse to the general polity of the world, where there can be nothing counterfeit. Now, all other creatures being sufficiently furnished with all things necessary for

the support of their being⁷⁵—it is not to be imagined that we only are brought into the world in a defective and indigent condition, and in such a state as cannot subsist without external aid. Therefore it is that I believe, that as plants, trees, and animals, and all things that have life, are seen to be by nature sufficiently clothed and covered, to defend them from the injuries of weather:

“And that for this reason nearly all things are clothed with skin, or hair, or shells, or bark, or some such thing.”

—Lucretius, iv. 936.

So were we: but as those who by artificial light put out that of day, so we by borrowed forms and fashions have destroyed our own. And 'tis plain enough to be seen, that 'tis custom only which renders that impossible that otherwise is nothing so; for of those nations who have no manner of knowledge of clothing, some are situated under the same temperature that we are, and some in much colder climates. And besides, our most tender parts are always exposed to the air, as the eyes, mouth, nose, and ears; and our country labourers, like our ancestors in former times, go with their breasts and bellies open. Had we been born with a necessity upon us of wearing petticoats and breeches, there is no doubt but nature would have fortified those parts she intended should be exposed to the fury of the seasons with a thicker skin, as she has done the finger-ends and the soles of the feet. And why should this seem hard to believe? I observe much greater distance betwixt my habit and that of one of our country boors, than betwixt his and that of a man who has no other covering but his skin. How many men, especially in Turkey, go naked upon the account of devotion? Someone asked a beggar, whom he saw in his shirt in the depth of winter, as brisk and frolic as he who goes muffled up to the ears in furs, how he was able to endure to go so? “Why, sir,” he answered, “you go with your face bare: I am all face.” The Italians have a story of the Duke of Florence’s fool, whom his master asking how, being so thinly clad, he was able to support the cold, when he himself, warmly wrapped up as he was, was hardly able to do it? “Why,” replied the fool, “use my receipt to put on all your clothes you

⁷⁵ Montaigne’s expression is, “with needle and thread.”—W. C. H.

have at once, and you'll feel no more cold than I." King Massinissa, to an extreme old age, could never be prevailed upon to go with his head covered, how cold, stormy, or rainy soever the weather might be; which also is reported of the Emperor Severus. Herodotus tells us, that in the battles fought betwixt the Egyptians and the Persians, it was observed both by himself and by others, that of those who were left dead upon the field, the heads of the Egyptians were without comparison harder than those of the Persians, by reason that the last had gone with their heads always covered from their infancy, first with biggins, and then with turbans, and the others always shaved and bare. King Agesilaus continued to a decrepit age to wear always the same clothes in winter that he did in summer. Cæsar, says Suetonius, marched always at the head of his army, for the most part on foot, with his head bare, whether it was rain or sunshine, and as much is said of Hannibal:

"Bareheaded he marched in snow, exposed to pouring rain and the utmost rigour of the weather."—Silius Italicus, i. 250.

A Venetian who has long lived in Pegu, and has lately returned thence, writes that the men and women of that kingdom, though they cover all their other parts, go always barefoot and ride so too; and Plato very earnestly advises for the health of the whole body, to give the head and the feet no other clothing than what nature has bestowed. He whom the Poles have elected for their king,⁷⁶ since ours came thence, who is, indeed, one of the greatest princes of this age, never wears any gloves, and in winter or whatever weather can come, never wears other cap abroad than that he wears at home. Whereas I cannot endure to go unbuttoned or untied; my neighbouring labourers would think themselves in chains, if they were so braced. Varro is of opinion, that when it was ordained we should be bare in the presence of the gods and before the magistrate, it was so ordered rather upon the score of health, and to inure us to the injuries of weather, than upon the account of reverence; and since we are now talking of cold, and Frenchmen used to wear variety of colours (not I myself, for I seldom wear other than black or white, in imitation of my father), let us add another story out of *Le Capitaine*

⁷⁶ Stephen Bathory.

Martin du Bellay, who affirms, that in the march to Luxembourg he saw so great frost, that the munition-wine was cut with hatchets and wedges, and delivered out to the soldiers by weight, and that they carried it away in baskets: and Ovid,

“The wine when out of the cask retains the form of the cask; and is given out not in cups, but in bits.”—Ovid, *Trist.*, iii. 10, 23.

At the mouth of Lake Mæotis the frosts are so very sharp, that in the very same place where Mithridates' lieutenant had fought the enemy dryfoot and given them a notable defeat, the summer following he obtained over them a naval victory. The Romans fought at a very great disadvantage, in the engagement they had with the Carthaginians near Piacenza, by reason that they went to the charge with their blood congealed and their limbs numbed with cold, whereas Hannibal had caused great fires to be dispersed quite through his camp to warm his soldiers, and oil to be distributed amongst them, to the end that anointing themselves, they might render their nerves more supple and active, and fortify the pores against the violence of the air and freezing wind, which raged in that season.

The retreat the Greeks made from Babylon into their own country is famous for the difficulties and calamities they had to overcome; of which this was one, that being encountered in the mountains of Armenia with a horrible storm of snow, they lost all knowledge of the country and of the ways, and being driven up, were a day and a night without eating or drinking; most of their cattle died, many of themselves were starved to death, several struck blind with the force of the hail and the glare of the snow, many of them maimed in their fingers and toes, and many stiff and motionless with the extremity of the cold, who had yet their understanding entire.

Alexander saw a nation, where they bury their fruit-trees in winter to protect them from being destroyed by the frost, and we also may see the same.

But, so far as clothes go, the King of Mexico changed four times a day his apparel, and never put it on again, employing that he left off in

his continual liberalities and rewards; and neither pot, dish, nor other utensil of his kitchen or table was ever served twice.

Of Solitude

LET us pretermitt that long comparison betwixt the active and the solitary life; and as for the fine sayings with which ambition and avarice palliate their vices, that we are not born for ourselves but for the public,⁷⁷ let us boldly appeal to those who are in public affairs; let them lay their hands upon their hearts, and then say whether, on the contrary, they do not rather aspire to titles and offices and that tumult of the world to make their private advantage at the public expense. The corrupt ways by which in this our time they arrive at the height to which their ambitions aspire, manifestly enough declares that their ends cannot be very good. Let us tell ambition that it is she herself who gives us a taste of solitude; for what does she so much avoid as society? What does she so much seek as elbowroom? A man many do well or ill everywhere; but if what Bias says be true, that the greatest part is the worse part, or what the Preacher says: there is not one good of a thousand:

“Good men forsooth are scarce: there are hardly as many as there are gates of Thebes or mouths of the rich Nile.”

—Juvenal, *Sat.*, xiii. 26.

the contagion is very dangerous in the crowd. A man must either imitate the vicious or hate them both are dangerous things, either to resemble them because they are many or to hate many because they are unressembling to ourselves. Merchants who go to sea are in the right when they are cautious that those who embark with them in the same bottom be neither dissolute blasphemers nor vicious other ways, looking upon such society as unfortunate. And therefore it was that Bias pleasantly said to some, who being with him in a dangerous storm implored the assistance of the gods: “Peace, speak softly,” said he, “that they may not know you are here in my company.”⁷⁸ And of more

⁷⁷This is the eulogium passed by Lucan on Cato of Utica, ii. 383.

⁷⁸Diogenes Lærtius.

pressing example, Albuquerque, viceroy in the Indies for Emmanuel, king of Portugal, in an extreme peril of shipwreck, took a young boy upon his shoulders, for this only end that, in the society of their common danger his innocence might serve to protect him, and to recommend him to the divine favour, that they might get safe to shore. 'Tis not that a wise man may not live everywhere content, and be alone in the very crowd of a palace; but if it be left to his own choice, the schoolman will tell you that he should fly the very sight of the crowd: he will endure it if need be; but if it be referred to him, he will choose to be alone. He cannot think himself sufficiently rid of vice, if he must yet contend with it in other men. Charondas punished those as evil men who were convicted of keeping ill company. There is nothing so unsociable and sociable as man, the one by his vice, the other by his nature. And Antisthenes, in my opinion, did not give him a satisfactory answer, who reproached him with frequenting ill company, by saying that the physicians lived well enough amongst the sick, for if they contribute to the health of the sick, no doubt but by the contagion, continual sight of, and familiarity with diseases, they must of necessity impair their own.

Now the end, I take it, is all one, to live at more leisure and at one's ease: but men do not always take the right way. They often think they have totally taken leave of all business, when they have only exchanged one employment for another: there is little less trouble in governing a private family than a whole kingdom. Wherever the mind is perplexed, it is in an entire disorder, and domestic employments are not less troublesome for being less important. Moreover, for having shaken off the court and the exchange, we have not taken leave of the principal vexations of life:

“Reason and prudence, not a place with a commanding view of the great ocean, banish care.”—Horace, *Ep.*, i. 2.

ambition, avarice, irresolution, fear, and inordinate desires, do not leave us because we forsake our native country:

“Black care sits behind the horse man.”

—Horace, *Od.* iii. 1, 40.

they often follow us even to cloisters and philosophical schools; nor deserts, nor caves, hair-shirts, nor fasts, can disengage us from them:

“The fatal shaft adheres to the side.”

—*Æneid*, iv. 73.

One telling Socrates that such a one was nothing improved by his travels: “I very well believe it,” said he, “for he took himself along with him.”

“Why do we seek climates warmed by another sun? Who is the man that by fleeing from his country, can also flee from himself?”

—Horace, *Od.*, ii. 16, 18.

If a man do not first discharge both himself and his mind of the burden with which he finds himself oppressed, motion will but make it press the harder and sit the heavier, as the lading of a ship is of less encumbrance when fast and bestowed in a settled posture. You do a sick man more harm than good in removing him from place to place; you fix and establish the disease by motion, as stakes sink deeper and more firmly into the earth by being moved up and down in the place where they are designed to stand. Therefore, it is not enough to get remote from the public; 'tis not enough to shift the soil only; a man must flee from the popular conditions that have taken possession of his soul, he must sequester and come again to himself:

“You say, perhaps, you have broken your chains: the dog who after long efforts has broken his chain, still in his flight drags a heavy portion of it after him.”—Persius, *Sat.*, v. 158.

We still carry our fetters along with us. 'Tis not an absolute liberty; we yet cast back a look upon what we have left behind us; the fancy is still full of it:

“But unless the mind is purified, what internal combats and dangers must we incur in spite of all our efforts! How many bitter anxieties, how many terrors, follow upon unregulated

passion! What destruction befalls us from pride, lust, petulant anger! What evils arise from luxury and sloth!"—Lucretius, v. 4.

Our disease lies in the mind, which cannot escape from itself; and therefore is to be called home and confined within itself: that is the true solitude, and that may be enjoyed even in populous cities and the courts of kings, though more commodiously apart.

Now, since we will attempt to live alone, and to waive all manner of conversation amongst them, let us so order it that our content may depend wholly upon ourselves; let us dissolve all obligations that ally us to others; let us obtain this from ourselves, that we may live alone in good earnest, and live at our ease too.

Stilpo having escaped from the burning of his town, where he lost wife, children, and goods, Demetrius Poliorcetes seeing him, in so great a ruin of his country, appear with an undisturbed countenance, asked him if he had received no loss? To which he made answer, No; and that, thank God, nothing was lost of his.⁷⁹ This also was the meaning of the philosopher Antisthenes, when he pleasantly said, that "men should furnish themselves with such things as would float, and might with the owner escape the storm";⁸⁰ and certainly a wise man never loses anything if he have himself. When the city of Nola was ruined by the barbarians, Paulinus, who was bishop of that place, having there lost all he had, himself a prisoner, prayed after this manner: "O Lord, defend me from being sensible of this loss; for Thou knowest they have yet touched nothing of that which is mine."⁸¹ The riches that made him rich and the goods that made him good, were still kept entire. This it is to make choice of treasures that can secure themselves from plunder and violence, and to hide them in such a place into which no one can enter and that is not to be betrayed by any but ourselves. Wives, children, and goods must be had, and especially health, by him that can get it; but we are not so to set our hearts upon them that our happiness must have its dependence upon them; we must reserve a backshop, wholly our own and entirely free, wherein to settle our true liberty, our principal solitude

⁷⁹ Seneca, *Ep.* 7.

⁸⁰ Diogenes Lærtius, vi. 6.

⁸¹ St. Augustin, *De Civit. Dei*, i. 10.

and retreat. And in this we must for the most part entertain ourselves with ourselves, and so privately that no exotic knowledge or communication be admitted there; there to laugh and to talk, as if without wife, children, goods, train, or attendance, to the end that when it shall so fall out that we must lose any or all of these, it may be no new thing to be without them. We have a mind pliable in itself, that will be company; that has wherewithal to attack and to defend, to receive and to give: let us not then fear in this solitude to languish under an uncomfortable vacuity.

“In solitude, be company for thyself.”

—Tibullus, vi. 13. 12.

Virtue is satisfied with herself, without discipline, without words, without effects. In our ordinary actions there is not one of a thousand that concerns ourselves. He that thou seest scrambling up the ruins of that wall, furious and transported, against whom so many harquebuss-shots are levelled; and that other all over scars, pale, and fainting with hunger, and yet resolved rather to die than to open the gates to him; dost thou think that these men are there upon their own account? No; peradventure in the behalf of one whom they never saw and who never concerns himself for their pains and danger, but lies wallowing the while in sloth and pleasure: this other slaving, blear-eyed, slovenly fellow, that thou seest come out of his study after midnight, dost thou think he has been tumbling over books to learn how to become a better man, wiser, and more content? No such matter; he will there end his days, but he will teach posterity the measure of Plautus’ verses and the true orthography of a Latin word. Who is it that does not voluntarily exchange his health, his repose, and his very life for reputation and glory, the most useless, frivolous, and false coin that passes current amongst us? Our own death does not sufficiently terrify and trouble us; let us, moreover, charge ourselves with those of our wives, children, and family: our own affairs do not afford us anxiety enough; let us undertake those of our neighbours and friends, still more to break our brains and torment us:

“Ah! Can any man conceive in his mind or realise what is dearer than he is to himself?”—Terence, *Adelph.*, i. I, 13.

Solitude seems to me to wear the best favour in such as have already employed their most active and flourishing age in the world's service, after the example of Thales. We have lived enough for others; let us at least live out the small remnant of life for ourselves; let us now call in our thoughts and intentions to ourselves, and to our own ease and repose. 'Tis no light thing to make a sure retreat; it will be enough for us to do without mixing other enterprises. Since God gives us leisure to order our removal, let us make ready, truss our baggage, take leave betimes of the company, and disentangle ourselves from those violent importunities that engage us elsewhere and separate us from ourselves.

We must break the knot of our obligations, how strong soever, and hereafter love this or that, but espouse nothing but ourselves: that is to say, let the remainder be our own, but not so joined and so close as not to be forced away without flaying us or tearing out part of our whole. The greatest thing in the world is for a man to know that he is his own. 'Tis time to wean ourselves from society when we can no longer add anything to it; he who is not in a condition to lend must forbid himself to borrow. Our forces begin to fail us; let us call them in and concentrate them in and for ourselves. He that can cast off within himself and resolve the offices of friendship and company, let him do it. In this decay of nature which renders him useless, burdensome, and importunate to others, let him take care not to be useless, burdensome, and importunate to himself. Let him soothe and caress himself, and above all things be sure to govern himself with reverence to his reason and conscience to that degree as to be ashamed to make a false step in their presence:

“For 'tis rarely seen that men have respect and reverence enough for themselves.”—Quintilian, x. 7.

Socrates says that boys are to cause themselves to be instructed, men to exercise themselves in well-doing, and old men to retire from all civil and military employments, living at their own discretion, without the obligation to any office. There are some complexions more proper for these precepts of retirement than others. Such as are of a soft and dull apprehension, and of a tender will and affection, not readily to be subdued or employed, whereof I am one, both by natural condition and by

reflection, will sooner incline to this advice than active and busy souls, which embrace: all, engage in all, are hot upon everything, which offer, present, and give themselves up to every occasion. We are to use these accidental and extraneous commodities, so far as they are pleasant to us, but by no means to lay our principal foundation there; 'tis no true one; neither nature nor reason allows it so to be. Why therefore should we, contrary to their laws, enslave our own contentment to the power of another? To anticipate also the accidents of fortune, to deprive ourselves of the conveniences we have in our own power, as several have done upon the account of devotion, and some philosophers by reasoning; to be one's own servant, to lie hard, to put out our own eyes, to throw our wealth into the river, to go in search of grief; these, by the misery of this life, aiming at bliss in another; those by laying themselves low to avoid the danger of falling: all such are acts of an excessive virtue. The stoutest and most resolute natures render even their seclusion glorious and exemplary:

“When means are deficient, I laud a safe and humble condition, content with little: but when things grow better and more easy, I all the same say that you alone are wise and live well, whose invested money is visible in beautiful villas.”

—Horace, *Ep.*, i. 15, 42.

A great deal less would serve my turn well enough. 'Tis enough for me, under fortune's favour, to prepare myself for her disgrace, and, being at my ease, to represent to myself, as far as my imagination can stretch, the ill to come; as we do at jousts and tiltings, where we counterfeit war in the greatest calm of peace. I do not think Arcesilaus the philosopher the less temperate and virtuous for knowing that he made use of gold and silver vessels, when the condition of his fortune allowed him so to do; I have indeed a better opinion of him than if he had denied himself what he used with liberality and moderation. I see the utmost limits of natural necessity: and considering a poor man begging at my door, oftentimes more jocund and more healthy than I myself am, I put myself into his place, and attempt to dress my mind after his mode; and running, in like manner, over other examples, though I fancy death, poverty, contempt,

and sickness treading on my heels, I easily resolve not to be affrighted, forasmuch as a less than I takes them with so much patience; and am not willing to believe that a less understanding can do more than a greater, or that the effects of precept cannot arrive to as great a height as those of custom. And knowing of how uncertain duration these accidental conveniences are, I never forget, in the height of all my enjoyments, to make it my chiefest prayer to Almighty God, that He will please to render me content with myself and the condition wherein I am. I see young men very gay and frolic, who nevertheless keep a mass of pills in their trunk at home, to take when they've got a cold, which they fear so much the less, because they think they have remedy at hand. Every one should do in like manner, and, moreover, if they find themselves subject to some more violent disease, should furnish themselves with such medicines as may numb and stupefy the part.

The employment a man should choose for such a life ought neither to be a laborious nor an unpleasing one; otherwise 'tis to no purpose at all to be retired. And this depends upon every one's liking and humour. Mine has no manner of complacency for husbandry, and such as love it ought to apply themselves to it with moderation:

“Endeavour to make circumstances subject to me, and not me subject to circumstances.”—Horace, *Ep.*, i. i, 19.

Husbandry is otherwise a very servile employment, as Sallust calls it; though some parts of it are more excusable than the rest, as the care of gardens, which Xenophon attributes to Cyrus; and a mean may be found out betwixt the sordid and low application, so full of perpetual solicitude, which is seen in men who make it their entire business and study, and the stupid and extreme negligence, letting all things go at random which we see in others.

“Democritus' cattle eat his corn and spoil his fields, whilst his soaring mind ranges abroad without the body.”

—Horace, *Ep.*, i, 12, 12.

But let us hear what advice the younger Pliny gives his friend Caninius Rufus upon the subject of solitude: "I advise thee, in the full and plentiful retirement wherein thou art, to leave to thy hinds the care of thy husbandry, and to addict thyself to the study of letters, to extract from thence something that may be entirely and absolutely thine own." By which he means reputation; like Cicero, who says that he would employ his solitude and retirement from public affairs to acquire by his writings an immortal life.

"Is all that thy learning nothing, unless another knows that thou knowest?"—Persius, *Sat.*, i. 23.]

It appears to be reason, when a man talks of retiring from the world, that he should look quite out of [for] himself. These do it but by halves: they design well enough for themselves when they shall be no more in it; but still they pretend to extract the fruits of that design from the world, when absent from it, by a ridiculous contradiction.

The imagination of those who seek solitude upon the account of devotion, filling their hopes and courage with certainty of divine promises in the other life, is much more rationally founded. They propose to themselves God, an infinite object in goodness and power; the soul has there wherewithal, at full liberty, to satiate her desires: afflictions and sufferings turn to their advantage, being undergone for the acquisition of eternal health and joy; death is to be wished and longed for, where it is the passage to so perfect a condition; the asperity of the rules they impose upon themselves is immediately softened by custom, and all their carnal appetites baffled and subdued, by refusing to humour and feed them, these being only supported by use and exercise. This sole end of another happily immortal life is that which really merits that we should abandon the pleasures and conveniences of this; and he who can really and constantly inflame his soul with the ardour of this vivid faith and hope, erects for himself in solitude a more voluptuous and delicious life than any other sort of existence.

Neither the end, then, nor the means of this advice pleases me, for we often fall out of the frying-pan into the fire.⁸² This book-employment is as painful as any other, and as great an enemy to health, which ought to be the first thing considered; neither ought a man to be allured with the pleasure of it, which is the same that destroys the frugal, the avaricious, the voluptuous, and the ambitious man.

“This plodding occupation of bookes is as painfull as any other, and as great an enemy unto health, which ought principally to be considered. And a man should not suffer him selfe to be inveigled by the pleasure he takes in them.”

—Florio, edit. 1613, p. 122.

The sages give us caution enough to beware the treachery of our desires, and to distinguish true and entire pleasures from such as are mixed and complicated with greater pain. For the most of our pleasures, say they, wheedle and caress only to strangle us, like those thieves the Egyptians called Philistæ; if the headache should come before drunkenness, we should have a care of drinking too much; but pleasure, to deceive us, marches before and conceals her train. Books are pleasant, but if, by being over-studious, we impair our health and spoil our good humour, the best pieces we have, let us give it over; I, for my part, am one of those who think, that no fruit derived from them can recompense so great a loss. As men who have long felt themselves weakened by indisposition, give themselves up at last to the mercy of medicine and submit to certain rules of living, which they are for the future never to transgress; so he who retires, weary of and disgusted with the common way of living, ought to model this new one he enters into by the rules of reason, and to institute and establish it by premeditation and reflection. He ought to have taken leave of all sorts of labour, what advantage soever it may promise, and generally to have shaken off all those passions which disturb the tranquillity of body and soul, and then choose the way that best suits with his own humour:

⁸² Or: we always relapse ill from fever into fever.

“*Unusquisque sua noverit ire via.*”

In husbandry, study, hunting, and all other exercises, men are to proceed to the utmost limits of pleasure, but must take heed of engaging further, where trouble begins to mix with it. We are to reserve so much employment only as is necessary to keep us in breath and to defend us from the inconveniences that the other extreme of a dull and stupid laziness brings along with it. There are sterile knotty sciences, chiefly hammered out for the crowd; let such be left to them who are engaged in the world's service. I for my part care for no other books, but either such as are pleasant and easy, to amuse me, or those that comfort and instruct me how to regulate my life and death:

“Silently meditating in the healthy groves, whatever is worthy of a wise and good man.”—Horace, *Ep.*, i. 4, 4.

Wiser men, having great force and vigour of soul, may propose to themselves a rest wholly spiritual but for me, who have a very ordinary soul, it is very necessary to support myself with bodily conveniences; and age having of late deprived me of those pleasures that were more acceptable to me, I instruct and whet my appetite to those that remain, more suitable to this other reason. We ought to hold with all our force, both of hands and teeth, the use of the pleasures of life that our years, one after another, snatch away from us:

“Let us pluck life's sweets, 'tis for them we live: by and by we shall be ashes, a ghost, a mere subject of talk.”

—Persius, *Sat.*, v. 151.

Now, as to the end that Pliny and Cicero propose to us of glory, 'tis infinitely wide of my account. Ambition is of all others the most contrary humour to solitude; glory and repose are things that cannot possibly inhabit in one and the same place. For so much as I understand, these have only their arms and legs disengaged from the crowd; their soul and intention remain confined behind more than ever:

“Dost thou, then, old man, collect food for others’ ears?”

—Persius, *Sat.*, i. 22.

they have only retired to take a better leap, and by a stronger motion to give a brisker charge into the crowd. Will you see how they shoot short? Let us put into the counterpoise the advice of two philosophers, of two very different sects, writing, the one to Idomeneus, the other to Lucilius, their friends, to retire into solitude from worldly honours and affairs. “You have,” say they, “hitherto lived swimming and floating; come now and die in the harbour: you have given the first part of your life to the light, give what remains to the shade. It is impossible to give over business, if you do not also quit the fruit; therefore disengage yourselves from all concern of name and glory; ’tis to be feared the lustre of your former actions will give you but too much light, and follow you into your most private retreat. Quit with other pleasures that which proceeds from the approbation of another man: and as to your knowledge and parts, never concern yourselves; they will not lose their effect if yourselves be the better for them. Remember him, who being asked why he took so much pains in an art that could come to the knowledge of but few persons? ‘A few are enough for me,’ replied he; ‘I have enough with one; I have enough with never an one.’⁸³ He said true; you and a companion are theatre enough to one another, or you to yourself. Let the people be to you one, and be you one to the whole people. ’Tis an unworthy ambition to think to derive glory from a man’s sloth and privacy: you are to do like the beasts of chase, who efface the track at the entrance into their den. You are no more to concern yourself how the world talks of you, but how you are to talk to yourself. Retire yourself into yourself, but first prepare yourself there to receive yourself: it were a folly to trust yourself in your own hands, if you cannot govern yourself. A man may miscarry alone as well as in company. Till you have rendered yourself one before whom you dare not trip, and till you have a bashfulness and respect for yourself;

⁸³ Seneca, *Ep.*, 7.

“Let honest things be ever present to the mind.”

—Cicero, *Tusc. Quæst.*, ii. 22.

present continually to your imagination Cato, Phocion, and Aristides, in whose presence the fools themselves will hide their faults, and make them controllers of all your intentions; should these deviate from virtue, your respect to those will set you right; they will keep you in this way to be contented with yourself; to borrow nothing of any other but yourself; to stay and fix your soul in certain and limited thoughts, wherein she may please herself, and having understood the true and real goods, which men the more enjoy the more they understand, to rest satisfied, without desire of prolongation of life or name.” This is the precept of the true and natural philosophy, not of a boasting and prating philosophy, such as that of the two former.

Of Sleep

REASON directs that we should always go the same way, but not always at the same pace. And, consequently, though a wise man ought not so much to give the reins to human passions as to let him deviate from the right path, he may, notwithstanding, without prejudice to his duty, leave it to them to hasten or to slacken his speed, and not fix himself like a motionless and insensible Colossus. Could virtue itself put on flesh and blood, I believe the pulse would beat faster going on to assault than in going to dinner: that is to say, there is a necessity she should heat and be moved upon this account. I have taken notice, as of an extraordinary thing, of some great men, who in the highest enterprises and most important affairs have kept themselves in so settled and serene a calm, as not at all to break their sleep. Alexander the Great, on the day assigned for that furious battle betwixt him and Darius, slept so profoundly and so long in the morning, that Parmenio was forced to enter his chamber, and coming to his bedside, to call him several times by his name, the time to go to fight compelling him so to do. The Emperor Otho, having put on a resolution to kill himself that night, after having settled his domestic affairs, divided his money amongst his servants, and set a good edge upon a sword he had made choice of for the purpose, and now staying

only to be satisfied whether all his friends had retired in safety, he fell into so sound a sleep that the gentlemen of his chamber heard him snore. The death of this emperor has in its circumstances paralleling that of the great Cato, and particularly this just related for Cato being ready to despatch himself, whilst he only stayed his hand in expectation of the return of a messenger he had sent to bring him news whether the senators he had sent away were put out from the Port of Utica, he fell into so sound a sleep, that they heard him snore in the next room; and the man, whom he had sent to the port, having awakened him to let him know that the tempestuous weather had hindered the senators from putting to sea, he despatched away another messenger, and composing again himself in the bed, settled to sleep, and slept till by the return of the last messenger he had certain intelligence they were gone. We may here further compare him with Alexander in the great and dangerous storm that threatened him by the sedition of the tribune Metellus, who, attempting to publish a decree for the calling in of Pompey with his army into the city at the time of Catiline's conspiracy, was only and that stoutly opposed by Cato, so that very sharp language and bitter menaces passed betwixt them in the senate about that affair; but it was the next day, in the forenoon, that the controversy was to be decided, where Metellus, besides the favour of the people and of Cæsar—at that time of Pompey's faction—was to appear accompanied with a rabble of slaves and gladiators; and Cato only fortified with his own courage and constancy; so that his relations, domestics, and many virtuous people of his friends were in great apprehensions for him; and to that degree, that some there were who passed over the whole night without sleep, eating, or drinking, for the danger they saw him running into; his wife and sisters did nothing but weep and torment themselves in his house; whereas, he, on the contrary, comforted every one, and after having supped after his usual manner, went to bed, and slept profoundly till morning, when one of his fellow-tribunes roused him to go to the encounter. The knowledge we have of the greatness of this man's courage by the rest of his life, may warrant us certainly to judge that his indifference proceeded from a soul so much elevated above such accidents, that he disdained to let it take any more hold of his fancy than any ordinary incident.

In the naval engagement that Augustus won of Sextus Pompeius in Sicily, just as they were to begin the fight, he was so fast asleep that his friends were compelled to wake him to give the signal of battle: and this was it that gave Mark Antony afterwards occasion to reproach him that he had not the courage so much as with open eyes to behold the order of his own squadrons, and not to have dared to present himself before the soldiers, till first Agrippa had brought him news of the victory obtained. But as to the young Marius, who did much worse (for the day of his last battle against Sylla, after he had marshalled his army and given the word and signal of battle, he laid him down under the shade of a tree to repose himself, and fell so fast asleep that the rout and flight of his men could hardly waken him, he having seen nothing of the fight), he is said to have been at that time so extremely spent and worn out with labour and want of sleep, that nature could hold out no longer. Now, upon what has been said, the physicians may determine whether sleep be so necessary that our lives depend upon it: for we read that King Perseus of Macedon, being prisoner at Rome, was killed by being kept from sleep; but Pliny instances such as have lived long without sleep. Herodotus speaks of nations where the men sleep and wake by half-years, and they who write the life of the sage Epimenides affirm that he slept seven-and-fifty years together.

Of Names

WHAT variety of herbs soever are shuffled together in the dish, yet the whole mass is swallowed up under one name of a sallet. In like manner, under the consideration of names, I will make a hodge-podge of divers articles.

Every nation has certain names, that, I know not why, are taken in no good sense, as with us, John, William, Benedict. In the genealogy of princes, also, there seem to be certain names fatally affected, as the Ptolemies of Egypt, the Henries in England, the Charleses in France, the Baldwins in Flanders, and the Williams of our ancient Aquitaine, from whence, 'tis said, the name of Guyenne has its derivation; which would seem far fetched were there not as crude derivations in Plato himself. Item, 'tis a frivolous thing in itself, but nevertheless worthy to be

recorded for the strangeness of it, that is written by an eyewitness, that Henry, Duke of Normandy, son of Henry II., king of England, making a great feast in France, the concourse of nobility and gentry was so great, that being, for sport's sake, divided into troops, according to their names, in the first troop, which consisted of Williams, there were found an hundred and ten knights sitting at the table of that name, without reckoning the ordinary gentlemen and servants.

It is as pleasant to distinguish the tables by the names of the guests as it was in the Emperor Geta to distinguish the several courses of his meat by the first letters of the meats themselves; so that those that began with B were served up together, as brawn, beef, bream, bustards, beccaficos; and so of the others. Item, there is a saying that it is a good thing to have a good name, that is to say, credit and a good repute; but besides this, it is really convenient to have a well-sounding name, such as is easy of pronunciation and easy to be remembered, by reason that kings and other great persons do by that means the more easily know and the more hardly forget us; and indeed of our own servants we more frequently call and employ those whose names are most ready upon the tongue. I myself have seen Henry II., when he could not for his heart hit of a gentleman's name of our country of Gascony, and moreover was fain to call one of the queen's maids of honour by the general name of her race, her own family name being so difficult to pronounce or remember; and Socrates thinks it worthy a father's care to give fine names to his children.

Item, 'tis said, that the foundation of Nôtre Dame la Grande at Poitiers took its original from hence that a debauched young fellow formerly living in that place, having got to him a wench, and, at her first coming in, asking her name, and being answered that it was Mary, he felt himself so suddenly pierced through with the awe of religion and the reverence to that sacred name of the Blessed Virgin, that he not only immediately sent the girl away, but became a reformed man and so continued the remainder of his life; and that, in consideration of this miracle, there was erected upon the place where this young man's house stood, first a chapel dedicated to our Lady and afterwards the church that we now see standing there. This vocal and auricular reproof wrought upon the conscience, and that right into the soul; this that follows, insinuated itself merely by the senses. Pythagoras being in company with

some wild young fellows, and perceiving that, heated with the feast, they conspired to go violate an honest house, commanded the singing wench to alter her wanton airs; and by a solemn, grave, and spondaic music, gently enchanted and laid asleep their ardour.

Item, will not posterity say that our modern reformation has been wonderfully delicate and exact, in having not only combated errors and vices, and filled the world with devotion, humility, obedience, peace, and all sorts of virtue; but in having proceeded so far as to quarrel with our ancient baptismal names of Charles, Louis, Francis, to fill the world with Methuselahs, Ezechiels, and Malachis, names of a more spiritual sound? A gentleman, a neighbour of mine, a great admirer of antiquity, and who was always extolling the excellences of former times in comparison with this present age of ours, did not, amongst the rest, forget to dwell upon the lofty and magnificent sound of the gentleman's names of those days, Don Grumedan, Quedregan, Agesilan, which, but to hear named he conceived to denote other kind of men than Pierre, Guillot, and Michel.

Item, I am mightily pleased with Jacques Amyot for leaving, throughout a whole French oration, the Latin names entire, without varying and garbling them to give them a French cadence. It seemed a little harsh and rough at first; but already custom, by the authority of his Plutarch, has overcome that novelty. I have often wished that such as write histories in Latin would leave our names as they find them and as they are; for in making Vaudemont into Vallemontanus, and metamorphosing names to make them suit better with the Greek or Latin, we know not where we are, and with the persons of the men lose the benefit of the story.

To conclude, 'tis a scurvy custom and of very ill consequence that we have in our kingdom of France to call every one by the name of his manor or seignury; 'tis the thing in the world that the most prejudices and confounds families and descents. A younger brother of a good family, having a manor left him by his father, by the name of which he has been known and honoured, cannot handsomely leave it; ten years after his decease it falls into the hand of a stranger, who does the same: do but judge whereabouts we shall be concerning the knowledge of these men. We need look no further for examples than our own royal family, where every partition creates a new surname, whilst, in the meantime, the original of the family is totally lost. There is so great liberty taken in

these mutations, that I have not in my time seen any one advanced by fortune to any extraordinary condition who has not presently had genealogical titles added to him, new and unknown to his father, and who has not been inoculated into some illustrious stem by good luck; and the obscurest families are the most apt for falsification. How many gentlemen have we in France who by their own account are of royal extraction? More, I think, than who will confess they are not. Was it not a pleasant passage of a friend of mine? There were, several gentlemen assembled together about the dispute of one seigneur with another; which other had, in truth, some preeminence of titles and alliances above the ordinary gentry. Upon the debate of this prerogative, every one, to make himself equal to him, alleged, this one extraction, that another; this, the near resemblance of name, that, of arms; another, an old worm-eaten patent; the very least of them was great-grandchild to some foreign king. When they came to sit down, to dinner, my friend, instead of taking his place amongst them, retiring with most profound conges, entreated the company to excuse him for having hitherto lived with them at the saucy rate of a companion; but being now better informed of their quality, he would begin to pay them the respect due to their birth and grandeur, and that it would ill become him to sit down among so many princes—ending this farce with a thousand reproaches: “Let us, in God’s name, satisfy ourselves with what our fathers were contented with, with what we are. We are great enough, if we rightly understand how to maintain it. Let us not disown the fortune and condition of our ancestors, and let us lay aside these ridiculous pretences, that can never be wanting to any one that has the impudence to allege them.”

Arms have no more security than surnames. I bear azure powdered with trefoils or, with a lion’s paw of the same armed gules in fesse. What privilege has this to continue particularly in my house? A son-in-law will transport it into another family, or some paltry purchaser will make them his first arms. There is nothing wherein there is more change and confusion.

But this consideration leads me, perforce, into another subject. Let us pry a little narrowly into, and, in God’s name, examine upon what foundation we erect this glory and reputation for which the world is turned topsy-turvy: wherein do we place this renown that we hunt after

with so much pains? It is, in the end, Peter or William that carries it, takes it into his possession, and whom it only concerns. O what a valiant faculty is hope, that in a mortal subject, and in a moment, makes nothing of usurping infinity, immensity, eternity, and of supplying its master's indigence, at its pleasure, with all things he can imagine or desire! Nature has given us this passion for a pretty toy to play withal. And this Peter or William, what is it but a sound, when all is done? Or three or four dashes with a pen, so easy to be varied that I would fain know to whom is to be attributed the glory of so many victories, to Guesquin, to Glesquin, or to Gueaquin? And yet there would be something of greater moment in the case than in Lucian, that Sigma should serve Tau with a process; for

“They aim at no slight or jocular rewards.”

—*Aeneid*, xii. 764.

the chase is there in very good earnest: the question is, which of these letters is to be rewarded for so many sieges, battles, wounds, imprisonments, and services done to the crown of France by this famous constable? Nicholas Denisot⁸⁴ never concerned himself further than the letters of his name, of which he has altered the whole contexture to build up by anagram the Count d'Alsinois, whom he has handsomely endowed with the glory of his poetry and painting. The historian Suetonius was satisfied with only the meaning of his name, which made him cashier his father's surname, Lenis, to leave Tranquillus successor to the reputation of his writings. Who would believe that Captain Bayard should have no honour but what he derives from the deeds of Peter Terrail; and that Antonio Iscalin should suffer himself to his face to be robbed of the honour of so many navigations and commands at sea and land by Captain Paulin and the Baron de la Garde? Secondly, these are dashes of the pen common to a thousand people. How many are there, in every family, of the same name and surname? And how many more in several families, ages, and countries? History tells us of three of the name of Socrates, of five Platos, of eight Aristotles, of seven Xenophons, of twenty Demetrii, and of twenty Theodores; and how many more she was not acquainted with we may imagine. Who hinders my groom from calling himself

⁸⁴ Painter and poet, born at Le Mans, 1515.

Pompey the Great? But after all, what virtue, what authority, or what secret springs are there that fix upon my deceased groom, or the other Pompey, who had his head cut off in Egypt, this glorious renown, and these so much honoured flourishes of the pen, so as to be of any advantage to them?

“Do you believe the dead regard such things?”

—*Æneid*, iv. 34.

What sense have the two companions in greatest esteem amongst me, Epaminondas, of this fine verse that has been so many ages current in his praise,

“The glory of the Spartans is extinguished by my plans.”

—Cicero, *Tusc. Quæ.*, v. 17.

or Africanus, of this other,

“From where the sun rises over the Palus Mæotis, to where it sets, there is no one whose acts can compare with mine.”

—Idem, *ibid.*

Survivors indeed tickle themselves with these fine phrases, and by them incited to jealousy and desire, inconsiderately and according to their own fancy, attribute to the dead this their own feeling, vainly flattering themselves that they shall one day in turn be capable of the same character. However:

“For these the Roman, the Greek, and the Barbarian commander hath aroused himself; he has incurred thence causes of danger and toil: so much greater is the thirst for fame than for virtue.”

—Juvenal, x. 137.

Of the Vanity of Words

A RHETORICIAN of times past said, that to make little things appear great was his profession. This was a shoemaker, who can make a great shoe for a little foot.⁸⁵ They would in Sparta have sent such a fellow to be whipped for making profession of a tricky and deceitful act; and I fancy that Archidamus, who was king of that country, was a little surprised at the answer of Thucydides, when inquiring of him, which was the better wrestler, Pericles, or he, he replied, that it was hard to affirm; for when I have thrown him, said he, he always persuades the spectators that he had no fall and carries away the prize.⁸⁶ The women who paint, pounce, and plaster up their ruins, filling up their wrinkles and deformities, are less to blame, because it is no great matter whether we see them in their natural complexions; whereas these make it their business to deceive not our sight only but our judgments, and to adulterate and corrupt the very essence of things. The republics that have maintained themselves in a regular and well-modelled government, such as those of Lacedæmon and Crete, had orators in no very great esteem. Aristo wisely defined rhetoric to be “a science to persuade the people;” Socrates and Plato “an art to flatter and deceive.” And those who deny it in the general description, verify it throughout in their precepts. The Mohammedans will not suffer their children to be instructed in it, as being useless, and the Athenians, perceiving of how pernicious consequence the practice of it was, it being in their city of universal esteem, ordered the principal part, which is to move the affections, with their exordiums and perorations, to be taken away. ’Tis an engine invented to manage and govern a disorderly and tumultuous rabble, and that never is made use of, but like physic to the sick, in a discomposed state. In those where the vulgar or the ignorant, or both together, have been all-powerful and able to give the law, as in those of Athens, Rhodes, and Rome, and where the public affairs have been in a continual tempest of commotion, to such places have the orators always repaired. And in truth, we shall find few persons in those republics who have pushed their fortunes to any great degree of eminence without the assistance of eloquence. Pompey, Cæsar,

⁸⁵ A saying of Agesilaus.

⁸⁶ Quintilian, ii. 15.

Crassus, Lucullus, Lentulus, Metellus, thence took their chiefest spring, to mount to that degree of authority at which they at last arrived, making it of greater use to them than arms, contrary to the opinion of better times; for, L. Volumnius speaking publicly in favour of the election of Q. Fabius and Pub. Decius, to the consular dignity: "These are men," said he, "born for war and great in execution; in the combat of the tongue altogether wanting; spirits truly consular. The subtle, eloquent, and learned are only good for the city, to make prætors of, to administer justice."⁸⁷ Eloquence most flourished at Rome when the public affairs were in the worst condition and most disquieted with intestine commotions; as a free and untilled soil bears the worst weeds. By which it should seem that a monarchical government has less need of it than any other: for the stupidity and facility natural to the common people, and that render them subject to be turned and twined and, led by the ears by this charming harmony of words, without weighing or considering the truth and reality of things by the force of reason: this facility, I say, is not easily found in a single person, and it is also more easy by good education and advice to secure him from the impression of this poison. There was never any famous orator known to come out of Persia or Macedon.

I have entered into this discourse upon the occasion of an Italian I lately received into my service, and who was clerk of the kitchen to the late Cardinal Caraffa till his death. I put this fellow upon an account of his office: when he fell to discourse of this palate-science, with such a settled countenance and magisterial gravity, as if he had been handling some profound point of divinity. He made a learned distinction of the several sorts of appetites; of that a man has before he begins to eat, and of those after the second and third service; the means simply to satisfy the first, and then to raise and actuate the other two; the ordering of the sauces, first in general, and then proceeded to the qualities of the ingredients and their effects; the differences of salads according to their seasons, those which ought to be served up hot, and which cold; the manner of their garnishment and decoration to render them acceptable to the eye. After which he entered upon the order of the whole service, full of weighty and important considerations:

⁸⁷ Livy, x. 22.

“Nor with less discrimination observes how we should carve a hare, and how a hen.” or, “Nor with the least discrimination relates how we should carve hares, and how cut up a hen.”

—Juvenal, *Sat.*, v. 123.

and all this set out with lofty and magnificent words, the very same we make use of when we discourse of the government of an empire. Which learned lecture of my man brought this of Terence into my memory:

“This is too salty, that’s burnt, that’s not washed enough; that’s well; remember to do so another time. Thus do I ever advise them to have things done properly, according to my capacity; and lastly, Demea, I command my cooks to look into every dish as if it were a mirror, and tell them what they should do.”

—Terence, *Adelph.*, iii. 3, 71.

And yet even the Greeks themselves very much admired and highly applauded the order and disposition that Paulus Æmilius observed in the feast he gave them at his return from Macedon. But I do not here speak of effects, I speak of words only. I do not know whether it may have the same operation upon other men that it has upon me, but when I hear our architects thunder out their bombast words of pilasters, architraves, and cornices, of the Corinthian and Doric orders, and suchlike jargon, my imagination is presently possessed with the palace of Apollidon; when, after all, I find them but the paltry pieces of my own kitchen door.

To hear men talk of metonomies, metaphors, and allegories, and other grammar words, would not one think they signified some rare and exotic form of speaking? And yet they are phrases that come near to the babble of my chambermaid.

And this other is a gullery of the same stamp, to call the offices of our kingdom by the lofty titles of the Romans, though they have no similitude of function, and still less of authority and power. And this also, which I doubt will one day turn to the reproach of this age of ours, unworthily and indifferently to confer upon any we think fit the most glorious surnames with which antiquity honoured but one or two persons in several ages. Plato carried away the surname of Divine, by so universal

a consent that never any one repined at it, or attempted to take it from him; and yet the Italians, who pretend, and with good reason, to more sprightly wits and sounder sense than the other nations of their time, have lately bestowed the same title upon Aretin, in whose writings, save tumid phrases set out with smart periods, ingenious indeed but far-fetched and fantastic, and the eloquence, be it what it may, I see nothing in him above the ordinary writers of his time, so far is he from approaching the ancient divinity. And we make nothing of giving the surname of great to princes who have nothing more than ordinary in them.

Of Smells

IT has been reported of some, as of Alexander the Great, that their sweat exhaled an odoriferous smell, occasioned by some rare and extraordinary constitution, of which Plutarch and others have been inquisitive into the cause. But the ordinary constitution of human bodies is quite otherwise, and their best and chiefest excellency is to be exempt from smell. Nay, the sweetness even of the purest breath has nothing in it of greater perfection than to be without any offensive smell, like those of healthful children, which made Plautus say of a woman:

“She smells sweetest, who smells not at all.”

—Plautus, *Mostel*, i. 3, 116.

And such as make use of fine exotic perfumes are with good reason to be suspected of some natural imperfection which they endeavour by these odours to conceal. To smell, though well, is to stink:

“You laugh at us, Coracinus, because we are not scented; I would, rather than smell well, not smell at all.”

—Martial, vi. 55, 4.

And elsewhere:

“Posthumus, he who ever smells well does not smell well.”

—Idem, ii. 12, 14.

I am nevertheless a great lover of good smells, and as much abominate the ill ones, which also I scent at a greater distance, I think, than other men:

“My nose is quicker to scent a fetid sore or a rank armpit, than a dog to smell out the hidden sow.”

—Horace, *Epod.*, xii. 4.

Of smells, the simple and natural seem to me the most pleasing. Let the ladies look to that, for 'tis chiefly their concern: amid the most profound barbarism, the Scythian women, after bathing, were wont to powder and crust their faces and all their bodies with a certain odoriferous drug growing in their country, which being cleansed off, when they came to have familiarity with men they were found perfumed and sleek. 'Tis not to be believed how strangely all sorts of odours cleave to me, and how apt my skin is to imbibe them. He that complains of nature that she has not furnished mankind with a vehicle to convey smells to the nose had no reason; for they will do it themselves, especially to me; my very mustachios, which are full, perform that office; for if I stroke them but with my gloves or handkerchief, the smell will not out a whole day; they manifest where I have been, and the close, luscious, devouring, viscid melting kisses of youthful ardour in my wanton age left a sweetness upon my lips for several hours after. And yet I have ever found myself little subject to epidemic diseases, that are caught, either by conversing with the sick or bred by the contagion of the air, and have escaped from those of my time, of which there have been several sorts in our cities and armies. We read of Socrates, that though he never departed from Athens during the frequent plagues that infested the city, he only was never infected.

Physicians might, I believe, extract greater utility from odours than they do, for I have often observed that they cause an alteration in me and work upon my spirits according to their several virtues; which makes me approve of what is said, that the use of incense and perfumes in churches, so ancient and so universally received in all nations and religions, was intended to cheer us, and to rouse and purify the senses, the better to fit us for contemplation.

I could have been glad, the better to judge of it, to have tasted the culinary art of those cooks who had so rare a way of seasoning exotic

odours with the relish of meats; as it was particularly observed in the service of the king of Tunis, who in our days⁸⁸ landed at Naples to have an interview with Charles the Emperor. His dishes were larded with odoriferous drugs, to that degree of expense that the cookery of one peacock and two pheasants amounted to a hundred ducats to dress them after their fashion; and when the carver came to cut them up, not only the dining-room, but all the apartments of his palace and the adjoining streets were filled with an aromatic vapour which did not presently vanish.

My chiefest care in choosing my lodgings is always to avoid a thick and stinking air; and those beautiful cities, Venice and Paris, very much lessen the kindness I have for them, the one by the offensive smell of her marshes, and the other of her dirt.

Of Prayers

I PROPOSE formless and undetermined fancies, like those who publish doubtful questions, to be after a disputed upon in the schools, not to establish truth but to seek it; and I submit them to the judgments of those whose office it is to regulate, not my writings and actions only, but moreover my very thoughts. Let what I here set down meet with correction or applause, it shall be of equal welcome and utility to me, myself beforehand condemning as absurd and impious, if anything shall be found, through ignorance or inadvertency, couched in this rhapsody, contrary to the holy resolutions and prescriptions of the Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church, into which I was born and in which I will die. And yet, always submitting to the authority of their censure, which has an absolute power over me, I thus rashly venture at everything, as in treating upon this present subject.

I know not if or no I am wrong, but since, by a particular favour of the divine bounty, a certain form of prayer has been prescribed and dictated to us, word by word, from the mouth of God Himself, I have ever been of opinion that we ought to have it in more frequent use than we yet have; and if I were worthy to advise, at the sitting down to and rising from our tables, at our rising from and going to bed, and in every particular action wherein prayer is used, I would that Christians always

⁸⁸ Muley-Hassam, in 1543.

make use of the Lord's Prayer, if not alone, yet at least always. The Church may lengthen and diversify prayers, according to the necessity of our instruction, for I know very well that it is always the same in substance and the same thing; but yet such a privilege ought to be given to that prayer, that the people should have it continually in their mouths; for it is most certain that all necessary petitions are comprehended in it, and that it is infinitely proper for all occasions. 'Tis the only prayer I use in all places and conditions, and which I still repeat instead of changing; whence it also happens that I have no other so entirely by heart as that.

It just now came into my mind, whence it is we should derive that error of having recourse to God in all our designs and enterprises, to call Him to our assistance in all sorts of affairs, and in all places where our weakness stands in need of support, without considering whether the occasion be just or otherwise; and to invoke His name and power, in what state soever we are, or action we are engaged in, howsoever vicious. He is indeed, our sole and unique protector, and can do all things for us: but though He is pleased to honour us with this sweet paternal alliance, He is, notwithstanding, as just as He is good and mighty; and more often exercises His justice than His power, and favours us according to that, and not according to our petitions.

Plato in his Laws, makes three sorts of belief injurious to the gods; "that there are none; that they concern not themselves about our affairs; that they never refuse anything to our vows, offerings, and sacrifices." The first of these errors (according to his opinion, never continued rooted in any man from his infancy to his old age); the other two, he confesses, men might be obstinate in.

God's justice and His power are inseparable; 'tis in vain we invoke His power in an unjust cause. We are to have our souls pure and clean, at that moment at least wherein we pray to Him, and purified from all vicious passions; otherwise we ourselves present Him the rods wherewith to chastise us; instead of repairing anything we have done amiss, we double the wickedness and the offence when we offer to Him, to whom we are to sue for pardon, an affection full of irreverence and hatred. Which makes me not very apt to applaud those whom I observe to be so frequent on their knees, if the actions nearest to the prayer do not give me some evidence of amendment and reformation:

“If a night adulterer, thou coverest thy head with a Santonic cowl.”⁸⁹
—Juvenal, *Sat.*, viii. 144.

And the practice of a man who mixes devotion with an execrable life seems in some sort more to be condemned than that of a man conformable to his own propension and dissolute throughout; and for that reason it is that our Church denies admittance to and communion with men obstinate and incorrigible in any notorious wickedness. We pray only by custom and for fashion's sake; or rather, we read or pronounce our prayers aloud, which is no better than an hypocritical show of devotion; and I am scandalised to see a man cross himself thrice at the Benedicite, and as often at Grace (and the more, because it is a sign I have in great veneration and continual use, even when I yawn), and to dedicate all the other hours of the day to acts of malice, avarice, and injustice. One hour to God, the rest to the devil, as if by composition and compensation. 'Tis a wonder to see actions so various in themselves succeed one another with such an uniformity of method as not to interfere nor suffer any alteration, even upon the very confines and passes from the one to the other. What a prodigious conscience must that be that can be at quiet within itself whilst it harbours under the same roof, with so agreeing and so calm a society, both the crime and the judge?

A man whose whole meditation is continually working upon nothing but impurity which he knows to be so odious to Almighty God, what can he say when he comes to speak to Him? He draws back, but immediately falls into a relapse. If the object of divine justice and the presence of his Maker did, as he pretends, strike and chastise his soul, how short soever the repentance might be, the very fear of offending the Infinite Majesty would so often present itself to his imagination that he would soon see himself master of those vices that are most natural and vehement in him. But what shall we say of those who settle their whole course of life upon the profit and emolument of sins, which they know to be mortal? How many trades and vocations have we admitted and countenanced amongst us, whose very essence is vicious? And he that, confessing himself to me, voluntarily told me that he had all his lifetime professed and

⁸⁹ The Santones were the people who inhabited Saintonge in France, from whom the Romans derived the use of hoods or cowls covering the head and face.

practised a religion, in his opinion damnable and contrary to that he had in his heart, only to preserve his credit and the honour of his employments, how could his courage suffer so infamous a confession? What can men say to the divine justice upon this subject? Their repentance consisting in a visible and manifest reparation, they lose the colour of alleging it both to God and man. Are they so impudent as to sue for remission without satisfaction and without penitence? I look upon these as in the same condition with the first: but the obstinacy is not there so easy to be overcome. This contrariety and volubility of opinion so sudden, so violent, that they feign, are a kind of miracle to me: they present us with the state of an indigestible agony of mind.

It seemed to me a fantastic imagination in those who, these late years past, were wont to reproach every man they knew to be of any extraordinary parts, and made profession of the Catholic religion, that it was but outwardly; maintaining, moreover, to do him honour forsooth, that whatever he might pretend to the contrary he could not but in his heart be of their reformed opinion. An untoward disease, that a man should be so riveted to his own belief as to fancy that others cannot believe otherwise than as he does; and yet worse, that they should entertain so vicious an opinion of such great parts as to think any man so qualified, should prefer any present advantage of fortune to the promises of eternal life and the menaces of eternal damnation. They may believe me: could anything have tempted my youth, the ambition of the danger and difficulties in the late commotions had not been the least motives.

It is not without very good reason, in my opinion, that the Church interdicts the promiscuous, indiscreet, and irreverent use of the holy and divine Psalms, with which the Holy Ghost inspired King David. We ought not to mix God in our actions, but with the highest reverence and caution; that poesy is too holy to be put to no other use than to exercise the lungs and to delight our ears; it ought to come from the conscience, and not from the tongue. It is not fit that a prentice in his shop, amongst his vain and frivolous thoughts, should be permitted to pass away his time and divert himself with such sacred things. Neither is it decent to see the Holy Book of the holy mysteries of our belief tumbled up and down a hall or a kitchen they were formerly mysteries, but are now become sports and recreations. 'Tis a book too serious and too venerable

to be cursorily or slightly turned over: the reading of the scripture ought to be a temperate and premeditated act, and to which men should always add this devout preface, *sursum corda*, preparing even the body to so humble and composed a gesture and countenance as shall evidence a particular veneration and attention. Neither is it a book for everyone to fist, but the study of select men set apart for that purpose, and whom Almighty God has been pleased to call to that office and sacred function: the wicked and ignorant grow worse by it. 'Tis not a story to tell, but a history to revere, fear, and adore. Are not they then pleasant men who think they have rendered this fit for the people's handling by translating it into the vulgar tongue? Does the understanding of all therein contained only stick at words? Shall I venture to say further, that by coming so near to understand a little, they are much wider of the whole scope than before. A pure and simple ignorance and wholly depending upon the exposition of qualified persons, was far more learned and salutary than this vain and verbal knowledge, which has only temerity and presumption.

And I do further believe that the liberty every one has taken to disperse the sacred writ into so many idioms carries with it a great deal more of danger than utility. The Jews, Mohammedans, and almost all other peoples, have reverentially espoused the language wherein their mysteries were first conceived, and have expressly, and not without colour of reason, forbidden the alteration of them into any other. Are we assured that in Biscay and in Brittany there are enough competent judges of this affair to establish this translation into their own language? The universal Church has not a more difficult and solemn judgment to make. In preaching and speaking the interpretation is vague, free, mutable, and of a piece by itself; so 'tis not the same thing.

One of our Greek historians age justly censures the he lived in, because the secrets of the Christian religion were dispersed into the hands of every mechanic, to expound and argue upon, according to his own fancy, and that we ought to be much ashamed, we who by God's especial favour enjoy the pure mysteries of piety, to suffer them to be profaned by the ignorant rabble; considering that the Gentiles expressly forbad Socrates, Plato, and the other sages to inquire into or so much as mention the things committed to the priests of Delphi; and he says, moreover, that the factions of princes upon theological subjects are armed

not with zeal but fury; that zeal springs from the divine wisdom and justice, and governs itself with prudence and moderation, but degenerates into hatred and envy, producing tares and nettles instead of corn and wine when conducted by human passions. And it was truly said by another, who, advising the Emperor Theodosius, told him that disputes did not so much rock the schisms of the Church asleep, as it roused and animated heresies; that, therefore, all contentions and dialectic disputations were to be avoided, and men absolutely to acquiesce in the prescriptions and formulas of faith established by the ancients. And the Emperor Andronicus having overheard some great men at high words in his palace with Lapodius about a point of ours of great importance, gave them so severe a check as to threaten to cause them to be thrown into the river if they did not desist. The very women and children nowadays take upon them to lecture the oldest and most experienced men about the ecclesiastical laws; whereas the first of those of Plato forbids them to inquire so much as into the civil laws, which were to stand instead of divine ordinances; and, allowing the old men to confer amongst themselves or with the magistrate about those things, he adds, provided it be not in the presence of young or profane persons.

A bishop has left in writing that at the other end of the world there is an isle, by the ancients called Dioscorides, abundantly fertile in all sorts of trees and fruits, and of an exceedingly healthful air; the inhabitants of which are Christians, having churches and altars, only adorned with crosses without any other images, great observers of fasts and feasts, exact payers of their tithes to the priests, and so chaste, that none of them is permitted to have to do with more than one woman in his life⁹⁰—as to the rest, so content with their condition, that environed with the sea they know nothing of navigation, and so simple that they understand not one syllable of the religion they profess and wherein they are so devout: a thing incredible to such as do not know that the Pagans, who are so zealous idolaters, know nothing more of their gods than their bare names and their statues. The ancient beginning of ‘Menalippus’, a tragedy of Euripides, ran thus:

⁹⁰ What Osorius says is that these people only had one wife at a time.

“O Jupiter! For that name alone of what thou art to me is known.”

I have also known in my time some men’s writings found fault with for being purely human and philosophical, without any mixture of theology; and yet, with some show of reason, it might, on the contrary, be said that the divine doctrine, as queen and regent of the rest, better keeps her state apart, that she ought to be sovereign throughout, not subsidiary and suffragan, and that, peradventure, grammatical, rhetorical, logical examples may elsewhere be more suitably chosen, as also the material for the stage, games, and public entertainments, than from so sacred a matter; that divine reasons are considered with greater veneration and attention by themselves, and in their own proper style, than when mixed with and adapted to human discourse; that it is a fault much more often observed that the divines write too humanly, than that the humanists write not theologically enough. Philosophy, says St. Chrysostom, has long been banished the holy schools, as an handmaid altogether useless and thought unworthy to look, so much as in passing by the door, into the sanctuary of the holy treasures of the celestial doctrine; that the human way of speaking is of a much lower form and ought not to adopt for herself the dignity and majesty of divine eloquence. Let who will *verbis indisciplinatis* talk of fortune, destiny, accident, good and evil hap, and other suchlike phrases, according to his own humour; I for my part propose fancies merely human and merely my own, and that simply as human fancies, and separately considered, not as determined by any decree from heaven, incapable of doubt or dispute; matter of opinion, not matter of faith; things which I discourse of according to my own notions, not as I believe, according to God; after a laical, not clerical, and yet always after a very religious manner, as children prepare their exercises, not to instruct but to be instructed.

And might it not be said, that an edict enjoining all people but such as are public professors of divinity, to be very reserved in writing of religion, would carry with it a very good colour of utility and justice—and to me, amongst the rest peradventure, to hold my prating? I have been told that even those who are not of our Church nevertheless amongst themselves expressly forbid the name of God to be used in common discourse, nor so much even by way of interjection, exclamation, assertion

of a truth, or comparison; and I think them in the right: upon what occasion soever we call upon God to accompany and assist us, it ought always to be done with the greatest reverence and devotion.

There is, as I remember, a passage in Xenophon where he tells us that we ought so much the more seldom to call upon God, by how much it is hard to compose our souls to such a degree of calmness, patience, and devotion as it ought to be in at such a time; otherwise our prayers are not only vain and fruitless, but vicious: “forgive us,” we say, “our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us”; what do we mean by this petition but that we present to God a soul free from all rancour and revenge? And yet we make nothing of invoking God’s assistance in our vices, and inviting Him into our unjust designs:

“Which you can only impart to the gods, when you have gained them over.”—Persius, ii. 4.

the covetous man prays for the conservation of his vain and superfluous riches; the ambitious for victory and the good conduct of his fortune; the thief calls Him to his assistance, to deliver him from the dangers and difficulties that obstruct his wicked designs, or returns Him thanks for the facility he has met with in cutting a man’s throat; at the door of the house men are going to storm or break into by force of a petard, they fall to prayers for success, their intentions and hopes of cruelty, avarice, and lust.

“This therefore, with which you seek to draw the ear of Jupiter, say to Staius. ‘O Jupiter! O good Jupiter!’ let him cry. Think you Jupiter himself would not cry out upon it?”—Persius, ii. 21.

Marguerite, Queen of Navarre,⁹¹ tells of a young prince, who, though she does not name him, is easily enough by his great qualities to be known, who going upon an amorous assignation to lie with an advocate’s wife of Paris, his way thither being through a church, he never passed that holy place going to or returning from his pious exercise, but he always kneeled down to pray. Wherein he would employ the divine favour, his soul being full of such virtuous meditations, I leave others to

⁹¹ In the *Heptameron*.

judge, which, nevertheless, she instances for a testimony of singular devotion. But this is not the only proof we have that women are not very fit to treat of theological affairs.

A true prayer and religious reconciling of ourselves to Almighty God cannot enter into an impure soul, subject at the very time to the dominion of Satan. He who calls God to his assistance whilst in a course of vice, does as if a cut-purse should call a magistrate to help him, or like those who introduce the name of God to the attestation of a lie.

“We whisper our guilty prayers.”

—Lucan, v. 104.

There are few men who durst publish to the world the prayers they make to Almighty God:

“’Tis not convenient for every one to bring the prayers he mutters out of the temple, and to give his wishes to the public ear.”

—Persius, ii. 6.

and this is the reason why the Pythagoreans would have them always public and heard by every one, to the end they might not prefer indecent or unjust petitions as this man:

“When he has clearly said Apollo! He moves his lips, fearful to be heard; he murmurs: O fair Laverna,⁹² grant me the talent to deceive; grant me to appear holy and just; shroud my sins with night, and cast a cloud over my frauds.”—Horace, *Ep.*, i. 16, 59.

The gods severely punished the wicked prayers of OEdipus in granting them: he had prayed that his children might amongst themselves determine the succession to his throne by arms, and was so miserable as to see himself taken at his word. We are not to pray that all things may go as we would have them, but as most concurrent with prudence.

We seem, in truth, to make use of our prayers as of a kind of jargon, and as those do who employ holy words about sorceries and magical

⁹² Laverna was the goddess of thieves.

operations; and as if we reckoned the benefit we are to reap from them as depending upon the contexture, sound, and jingle of words, or upon the grave composing of the countenance. For having the soul contaminated with concupiscence, not touched with repentance, or comforted by any late reconciliation with God, we go to present Him such words as the memory suggests to the tongue, and hope from thence to obtain the remission of our sins. There is nothing so easy, so sweet, and so favourable, as the divine law: it calls and invites us to her, guilty and abominable as we are; extends her arms and receives us into her bosom, foul and polluted as we at present are, and are for the future to be. But then, in return, we are to look upon her with a respectful eye; we are to receive this pardon with all gratitude and submission, and for that instant at least, wherein we address ourselves to her, to have the soul sensible of the ills we have committed, and at enmity with those passions that seduced us to offend her; neither the gods nor good men (says Plato) will accept the present of a wicked man:

“If a pure hand has touched the altar, the pious offering of a small cake and a few grains of salt will appease the offended gods more effectually than costly sacrifices.”

—Horace, *Od.*, iii. 23, 17.

Of Age

I CANNOT allow of the way in which we settle for ourselves the duration of our life. I see that the sages contract it very much in comparison of the common opinion: “what,” said the younger Cato to those who would stay his hand from killing himself, “am I now of an age to be reproached that I go out of the world too soon?” And yet he was but eight-and-forty years old. He thought that to be a mature and advanced age, considering how few arrive unto it. And such as, soothing their thoughts with I know not what course of nature, promise to themselves some years beyond it, could they be privileged from the infinite number of accidents to which we are by a natural subjection exposed, they might have some reason so to do. What an idle conceit is it to expect to die of a decay of strength, which is the effect of extremest age, and to propose to ourselves no

shorter lease of life than that, considering it is a kind of death of all others the most rare and very seldom seen? We call that only a natural death; as if it were contrary to nature to see a man break his neck with a fall, be drowned in shipwreck, be snatched away with a pleurisy or the plague, and as if our ordinary condition did not expose us to these inconveniences. Let us no longer flatter ourselves with these fine words; we ought rather, peradventure, to call that natural which is general, common, and universal.

To die of old age is a death rare, extraordinary, and singular, and, therefore, so much less natural than the others; 'tis the last and extremest sort of dying: and the more remote, the less to be hoped for. It is, indeed, the bourn beyond which we are not to pass, and which the law of nature has set as a limit, not to be exceeded; but it is, withal, a privilege she is rarely seen to give us to last till then. 'Tis a lease she only signs by particular favour, and it may be to one only in the space of two or three ages, and then with a pass to boot, to carry him through all the traverses and difficulties she has strewed in the way of this long career. And therefore my opinion is, that when once forty years we should consider it as an age to which very few arrive. For seeing that men do not usually proceed so far, it is a sign that we are pretty well advanced; and since we have exceeded the ordinary bounds, which is the just measure of life, we ought not to expect to go much further; having escaped so many precipices of death, whereinto we have seen so many other men fall, we should acknowledge that so extraordinary a fortune as that which has hitherto rescued us from those eminent perils, and kept us alive beyond the ordinary term of living, is not like to continue long.

'Tis a fault in our very laws to maintain this error: these say that a man is not capable of managing his own estate till he be five-and-twenty years old, whereas he will have much ado to manage his life so long. Augustus cut off five years from the ancient Roman standard, and declared that thirty years old was sufficient for a judge. Servius Tullius superseded the knights of above seven-and-forty years of age from the fatigues of war; Augustus dismissed them at forty-five; though methinks it seems a little unreasonable that men should be sent to the fireside till five-and-fifty or sixty years of age. I should be of opinion that our vocation and employment should be as far as possible extended for the

public good: I find the fault on the other side, that they do not employ us early enough. This emperor was arbiter of the whole world at nineteen, and yet would have a man to be thirty before he could be fit to determine a dispute about a gutter. For my part, I believe our souls are adult at twenty as much as they are ever like to be, and as capable then as ever. A soul that has not by that time given evident earnest of its force and virtue will never after come to proof. The natural qualities and virtues produce what they have of vigorous and fine, within that term or never,

“If the thorn does not prick at its birth, ’twill hardly ever prick at all.”

as they say in Dauphiné.

Of all the great human actions I ever heard or read of, of what sort soever, I have observed, both in former ages and our own, more were performed before the age of thirty than after; and this oftentimes in the very lives of the same men. May I not confidently instance in those of Hannibal and his great rival Scipio? The better half of their lives they lived upon the glory they had acquired in their youth; great men after, ’Tis true, in comparison of others; but by no means in comparison of themselves. As to my own particular, I do certainly believe that since that age, both my understanding and my constitution have rather decayed than improved, and retired rather than advanced. ’Tis possible, that with those who make the best use of their time, knowledge and experience may increase with their years; but vivacity, promptitude, steadiness, and other pieces of us, of much greater importance, and much more essentially our own, languish and decay:

“When once the body is shaken by the violence of time, blood and vigour ebbing away, the judgment halts, the tongue and the mind dote.”—Lucretius, iii. 452.

Sometimes the body first submits to age, sometimes the mind; and I have seen enough who have got a weakness in their brains before either in their legs or stomach; and by how much the more it is a disease of no great pain to the sufferer, and of obscure symptoms, so much greater is the danger. For this reason it is that I complain of our laws, not that they

keep us too long to our work, but that they set us to work too late. For the frailty of life considered, and to how many ordinary and natural rocks it is exposed, one ought not to give up so large a portion of it to childhood, idleness, and apprenticeship.

Of Drunkenness

THE world is nothing but variety and dissemblance, vices are all alike, as they are vices, and peradventure the Stoics understand them so; but although they are equally vices, yet they are not all equal vices; and he who has transgressed the ordinary bounds a hundred paces:

“Beyond or within which the right cannot exist.”

—Horace, *Sat.*, i, 1, 107.

should not be in a worse condition than he that has advanced but ten, is not to be believed; or that sacrilege is not worse than stealing a cabbage:

*“Nec vincet ratio hoc, tantumdem ut peccet, idemque,
qui teneros caules alieni fregerit horti,
Et qui nocturnus divum sacra legerit.”*

There is in this as great diversity as in anything whatever. The confounding of the order and measure of sins is dangerous: murderers, traitors, and tyrants get too much by it, and it is not reasonable they should flatter their consciences, because another man is idle, lascivious, or not assiduous at his devotion. Every one overrates the offence of his companions, but extenuates his own. Our very instructors themselves rank them sometimes, in my opinion, very ill. As Socrates said that the principal office of wisdom was to distinguish good from evil, we, the best of whom are vicious, ought also to say the same of the science of distinguishing betwixt vice and vice, without which, and that very exactly performed, the virtuous and the wicked will remain confounded and unrecognised.

Now, amongst the rest, drunkenness seems to me to be a gross and brutish vice. The soul has greater part in the rest, and there are some

vices that have something, if a man may so say, of generous in them; there are vices wherein there is a mixture of knowledge, diligence, valour, prudence, dexterity, and address; this one is totally corporeal and earthly. And the rudest nation this day in Europe is that alone where it is in fashion. Other vices discompose the understanding: this totally overthrows it and renders the body stupid:

“When the power of wine has penetrated us, a heaviness of the limbs follows, the legs of the tottering person are impeded; the tongue grows torpid, the mind is dimmed, the eyes swim; noise, hiccup, and quarrels arise.”—Lucretius, i. 3, 475.

The worst state of man is that wherein he loses the knowledge and government of himself. And ’tis said amongst other things upon this subject, that, as the must fermenting in a vessel, works up to the top whatever it has in the bottom, so wine, in those who have drunk beyond measure, vents the most inward secrets:

“Thou disclorest to the merry Lyacus⁹³ the cares and secret counsel of the wise.”—Horace, *Od.*, xxi. 1, 114.

Josephus tells us that by giving an ambassador the enemy had sent to him his full dose of liquor, he wormed out his secrets. And yet, Augustus, committing the most inward secrets of his affairs to Lucius Piso, who conquered Thrace, never found him faulty in the least, no more than Tiberias did Cossus, with whom he intrusted his whole counsels, though we know they were both so given to drink that they have often been fain to carry both the one and the other drunk out of the Senate:

“Their veins full, as usual, of yesterday’s wine.”
—Virgil, *Ecl.*, vi. 15.

And the design of killing Cæsar was as safely communicated to Cimber, though he would often be drunk, as to Cassius, who drank nothing but water. As to which Cassius pleasantly said: “What, shall I bear a tyrant, I

⁹³ Lyacus, a name given to Bacchus.

who cannot bear wine?" We see our Germans, when drunk as the devil, know their post, remember the word, and keep to their ranks:

"Nor is a victory easily obtained over men so drunk, they can scarce speak or stand."—Juvenal, *Sat.*, xv. 47.

I could not have believed there had been so profound, senseless, and dead a degree of drunkenness had I not read in history that Attalus having, to put a notable affront upon him, invited to supper the same Pausanias, who upon the very same occasion afterwards killed Philip of Macedon, a king who by his excellent qualities gave sufficient testimony of his education in the house and company of Epaminondas, made him drink to such a pitch that he could after abandon his beauty, as of a hedge strumpet, to the muleteers and servants of the basest office in the house. And I have been further told by a lady whom I highly honour and esteem, that near Bordeaux and about Castres where she lives, a country woman, a widow of chaste repute, perceiving in herself the first symptoms of breeding, innocently told her neighbours that if she had a husband she should think herself with child; but the causes of suspicion every day more and more increasing, and at last growing up to a manifest proof, the poor woman was reduced to the necessity of causing it to be proclaimed in her parish church, that whoever had done that deed and would frankly confess it, she did not only promise to forgive, but moreover to marry him, if he liked the motion; whereupon a young fellow that served her in the quality of a labourer, encouraged by this proclamation, declared that he had one holiday found her, having taken too much of the bottle, so fast asleep by the chimney and in so indecent a posture, that he could conveniently do his business without waking her; and they yet live together man and wife.

It is true that antiquity has not much decried this vice; the writings even of several philosophers speak very tenderly of it, and even amongst the Stoics there are some who advise folks to give themselves sometimes the liberty to drink, nay, to drunkenness, to refresh the soul:

"In this trial of power formerly they relate that the great Socrates deserved the palm."—Cornelius Gallus, *Ep.*, i. 47.

That censor and reprover of others, Cato, was reproached that he was a hard drinker:

“And of old Cato⁹⁴ it is said, that his courage was often warmed with wine.”—Horace, *Od.* xxi. 3, 11.

Cyrus, that so renowned king, amongst the other qualities by which he claimed to be preferred before his brother Artaxerxes, urged this excellence, that he could drink a great deal more than he. And in the best governed nations this trial of skill in drinking is very much in use. I have heard Silvius, an excellent physician of Paris, say that lest the digestive faculties of the stomach should grow idle, it were not amiss once a month to rouse them by this excess, and to spur them lest they should grow dull and rusty; and one author tells us that the Persians used to consult about their most important affairs after being well warmed with wine.

My taste and constitution are greater enemies to this vice than my discourse; for besides that I easily submit my belief to the authority of ancient opinions, I look upon it indeed as an unmanly and stupid vice, but less malicious and hurtful than the others, which, almost all, more directly jostle public society. And if we cannot please ourselves but it must cost us something, as they hold, I find this vice costs a man's conscience less than the others, besides that it is of no difficult preparation, nor hard to be found, a consideration not altogether to be despised. A man well advanced both in dignity and age, amongst three principal commodities that he said remained to him of life, reckoned to me this for one, and where would a man more justly find it than amongst the natural conveniences? But he did not take it right, for delicacy and the curious choice of wines is therein to be avoided. If you found your pleasure upon drinking of the best, you condemn yourself to the penance of drinking of the worst. Your taste must be more indifferent and free; so delicate a palate is not required to make a good toper. The Germans drink almost indifferently of all wines with delight; their business is to pour down and not to taste; and it's so much the better for them: their pleasure is so much the more plentiful and nearer at hand. Secondly, to drink, after the French fashion, but at two meals, and then very moderately, is to be too

⁹⁴ Cato the Elder.

sparing of the favours of the god. There is more time and constancy required than so. The ancients spent whole nights in this exercise, and oftentimes added the day following to eke it out, and therefore we are to take greater liberty and stick closer to our work. I have seen a great lord of my time, a man of high enterprise and famous success, that without setting himself to't, and after his ordinary rate of drinking at meals, drank not much less than five quarts of wine, and at his going away appeared but too wise and discreet, to the detriment of our affairs. The pleasure we hold in esteem for the course of our lives ought to have a greater share of our time dedicated to it; we should, like shopboys and labourers, refuse no occasion nor omit any opportunity of drinking, and always have it in our minds. Methinks we every day abridge and curtail the use of wine, and that the after breakfasts, dinner snatches, and collations I used to see in my father's house, when I was a boy, were more usual and frequent then than now.

Is it that we pretend to a reformation? Truly, no: but it may be we are more addicted to Venus than our fathers were. They are two exercises that thwart and hinder one another in their vigour. Lechery weakens our stomach on the one side; and on the other sobriety renders us more spruce and amorous for the exercise of love.

'Tis wonderful what strange stories I have heard my father tell of the chastity of that age wherein he lived. It was for him to say it, being both by art and nature cut out and finished for the service of ladies. He spoke well and little: ever mixing his language with some illustration out of authors most in use, especially in Spanish, and among the Spanish he whom they called Marcus Aurelius⁹⁵ was ordinarily in his mouth. His behaviour was gently grave, humble, and very modest; he was very solicitous of neatness and propriety both in his person and clothes, whether on horseback or afoot, he was monstrously punctual in his word; and of a conscience and religion generally tending rather towards superstition than otherwise. For a man of little stature, very strong, well proportioned, and well knit; of a pleasing countenance inclining to brown, and very adroit in all noble exercises. I have yet in the house to be seen canes poured full of lead, with which they say he exercised his arms for throwing the bar or the stone, or in fencing; and shoes with

⁹⁵ Guevara's *Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*.

leaden soles to make him lighter for running or leaping. Of his vaulting he has left little miracles behind him: I have seen him when past three score laugh at our exercises, and throw himself in his furred gown into the saddle, make the tour of a table upon his thumbs and scarce ever mount the stairs into his chamber without taking three or four steps at a time. But as to what I was speaking of before; he said there was scarce one woman of quality of ill fame in the whole province: he would tell of strange confidences, and some of them his own, with virtuous women, free from any manner of suspicion of ill, and for his own part solemnly swore he was a virgin at his marriage; and yet it was after a long practice of arms beyond the mountains, of which wars he left us a journal under his own hand, wherein he has given a precise account from point to point of all passages, both relating to the public and to himself. And he was, moreover, married at a well advanced maturity, in the year 1528, the three-and-thirtieth year of his age, upon his way home from Italy. But let us return to our bottles.

The incommodities of old age, that stand in need of some refreshment and support, might with reason beget in me a desire of this faculty, it being as it were the last pleasure the course of years deprives us of. The natural heat, say the good-fellows, first seats itself in the feet: that concerns infancy; thence it mounts into the middle region, where it makes a long abode and produces, in my opinion, the sole true pleasures of human life; all other pleasures in comparison sleep; towards the end, like a vapour that still mounts upward, it arrives at the throat, where it makes its final residence, and concludes the progress. I do not, nevertheless, understand how a man can extend the pleasure of drinking beyond thirst, and forge in his imagination an appetite artificial and against nature; my stomach would not proceed so far; it has enough to do to deal with what it takes in for its necessity. My constitution is not to care for drink but as following eating and washing down my meat, and for that reason my last draught is always the greatest. And seeing that in old age we have our palate furred with phlegms or depraved by some other ill constitution, the wine tastes better to us as the pores are cleaner washed and laid more open. At least, I seldom taste the first glass well. Anacharsis wondered that the Greeks drank in greater glasses towards the end of a

meal than at the beginning; which was, I suppose, for the same reason the Germans do the same, who then begin the battle of drink.

Plato forbids children wine till eighteen years of age, and to get drunk till forty; but, after forty, gives them leave to please themselves, and to mix a little liberally in their feasts the influence of Dionysos, that good deity who restores to younger men their gaiety and to old men their youth; who mollifies the passions of the soul, as iron is softened by fire; and in his Lazes allows such merry meetings, provided they have a discreet chief to govern and keep them in order, as good and of great utility; drunkenness being, he says, a true and certain trial of every one's nature, and, withal, fit to inspire old men with mettle to divert themselves in dancing and music; things of great use, and that they dare not attempt when sober. He, moreover, says that wine is able to supply the soul with temperance and the body with health. Nevertheless, these restrictions, in part borrowed from the Carthaginians, please him: that men forbear excesses in the expeditions of war; that every judge and magistrate abstain from it when about the administrations of his place or the consultations of the public affairs; that the day is not to be employed with it, that being a time due to other occupations, nor the night on which a man intends to get children.

'Tis said that the philosopher Stilpo, when oppressed with age, purposely hastened his end by drinking pure wine. The same thing, but not designed by him, despatched also the philosopher Arcesilaus. But 'tis an old and pleasant question, whether the soul of a wise man can be overcome by the strength of wine?

“Si munitæ adhibet vim sapientiæ.”

To what vanity does the good opinion we have of ourselves push us? The most regular and most perfect soul in the world has but too much to do to keep itself upright, and from being overthrown by its own weakness. There is not one of a thousand that is right and settled so much as one minute in a whole life, and that may not very well doubt, whether according to her natural condition she ever can be; but to join constancy to it is her utmost perfection; I mean when nothing should jostle and discompose her, which a thousand accidents may do. 'Tis to much

purpose that the great poet Lucretius keeps such a clatter with his philosophy, when, behold! He goes mad with a love philtre. Is it to be imagined that an apoplexy will not stun Socrates as well as a porter? Some men have forgotten their own names by the violence of a disease; and a slight wound has turned the judgment of others topsy-turvy. Let him be as wise as he will, after all he is but a man; and than that what is there more frail, more miserable, or more nothing? Wisdom does not force our natural dispositions,

“Sweat and paleness come over the whole body, the tongue is rendered powerless, the voice dies away, the eyes are darkened, there is ringing in the ears, the limbs sink under us by the influence of fear.”—Lucretius, iii. 155.

he must shut his eyes against the blow that threatens him; he must tremble upon the margin of a precipice, like a child; nature having reserved these light marks of her authority, not to be forced by our reason and the stoic virtue, to teach man his mortality and our weakness; he turns pale with fear, red with shame, and groans with the cholic, if not with desperate outcry, at least with hoarse and broken voice:

“Let him not think himself exempt from that which is incidental to men in general.”—Terence, *Heauton*, i. 1, 25.

The poets, that feign all things at pleasure, dare not acquit their greatest heroes of tears:

“Thus he speaks, weeping, and then sets sail with his fleet.”
—*Æneid*, vi. i.

’Tis sufficient for a man to curb and moderate his inclinations, for totally to suppress them is not in him to do. Even our great Plutarch, that excellent and perfect judge of human actions, when he sees Brutus and Torquatus kill their children, begins to doubt whether virtue could proceed so far, and to question whether these persons had not rather been

stimulated by some other passion.⁹⁶ All actions exceeding the ordinary bounds are liable to sinister interpretation, for as much as our liking no more holds with what is above than with what is below it. Let us leave that other sect, that sets up an express profession of scornful superiority:⁹⁷ but when even in that sect, reputed the most quiet and gentle, we hear these rhodomontades of Metrodorus:

“Fortune, I have got the better of thee, and have made all the avenues so sure thou canst not come at me.”

—Cicero, *Tusc. Quæst.*, v. 9.

when Anaxarchus, by command of Nicocreon the tyrant of Cyprus, was put into a stone mortar, and laid upon with mauls of iron, ceases not to say, “Strike, batter, break; ’tis not Anaxarchus, ’tis but his sheath that you pound and bray so”; when we hear our martyrs cry out to the tyrant from the middle of the flame, “This side is roasted enough, fall to and eat, it is enough done; fall to work with the other;” when we hear the child in Josephus’ torn piece-meal with pincers, defying Antiochus, and crying out with a constant and assured voice: “Tyrant, thou lovest thy labour, I am still at ease; where is the pain, where are the torments with which thou didst so threaten me? Is this all thou canst do? My constancy torments thee more than thy cruelty does me. O pitiful coward, thou faintest, and I grow stronger; make me complain, make me bend, make me yield if thou canst; encourage thy guards, cheer up thy executioners; see, see they faint, and can do no more; arm them, flesh them anew, spur them up”; truly, a man must confess that there is some phrenzy, some fury, how holy soever, that at that time possesses those souls. When we come to these Stoical sallies: “I had rather be mad than voluptuous,” a saying of Antisthenes. When Sextius tells us, “he had rather be fettered with affliction than pleasure”: when Epicurus takes upon him to play with his gout, and, refusing health and ease, defies all torments, and despising the lesser pains, as disdaining to contend with them, he covets and calls out for others sharper, more violent, and more worthy of him;

⁹⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Publicola*, c. 3.

⁹⁷ The Stoics.

“And instead of timid beasts, wishes the foaming boar or tawny lion would come from the mountain.”—*Æneid*, iv. 158.

who but must conclude that these are wild sallies pushed on by a courage that has broken loose from its place? Our soul cannot from her own seat reach so high; 'tis necessary she must leave it, raise herself up, and, taking the bridle in her teeth, transport her man so far that he shall afterwards himself be astonished at what he has done; as, in war, the heat of battle impels generous soldiers to perform things of so infinite danger, as afterwards, recollecting them, they themselves are the first to wonder at; as it also fares with the poets, who are often rapt with admiration of their own writings, and know not where again to find the track through which they performed so fine a Career; which also is in them called fury and rapture. And as Plato says, 'tis to no purpose for a sober-minded man to knock at the door of poesy: so Aristotle says, that no excellent soul is exempt from a mixture of madness; and he has reason to call all transports, how commendable soever, that surpass our own judgment and understanding, madness; forasmuch as wisdom is a regular government of the soul, which is carried on with measure and proportion, and for which she is to herself responsible. Plato argues thus, that the faculty of prophesying is so far above us, that we must be out of ourselves when we meddle with it, and our prudence must either be obstructed by sleep or sickness, or lifted from her place by some celestial rapture.

Of Conscience

THE *Sieur de la Brousse*, my brother, and I, travelling one day together during the time of our civil wars, met a gentleman of good sort. He was of the contrary party, though I did not know so much, for he pretended otherwise: and the mischief on't is, that in this sort of war the cards are so shuffled, your enemy not being distinguished from yourself by any apparent mark either of language or habit, and being nourished under the same law, air, and manners, it is very hard to avoid disorder and confusion. This made me afraid myself of meeting any of our troops in a place where I was not known, that I might not be in fear to tell my name, and peradventure of something worse; as it had befallen me before,

where, by such a mistake, I lost both men and horses, and amongst others an Italian gentleman my page, whom I bred with the greatest care and affection, was miserably slain, in whom a youth of great promise and expectation was extinguished. But the gentleman my brother and I met had so desperate, half-dead a fear upon him at meeting with any horse, or passing by any of the towns that held for the King, that I at last discovered it to be alarms of conscience. It seemed to the poor man as if through his visor and the crosses upon his cassock, one would have penetrated into his bosom and read the most secret intentions of his heart; so wonderful is the power of conscience. It makes us betray, accuse, and fight against ourselves, and for want of other witnesses, to give evidence against ourselves:

“The torturer of the soul brandishing a sharp scourge within.”

—Juvenal, iii. 195.

This story is in every child’s mouth: Bessus the Pæonian, being reproached for wantonly pulling down a nest of young sparrows and killing them, replied, that he had reason to do so, seeing that those little birds never ceased falsely to accuse him of the murder of his father. This parricide had till then been concealed and unknown, but the revenging fury of conscience caused it to be discovered by him himself, who was to suffer for it. Hesiod corrects the saying of Plato, that punishment closely follows sin, it being, as he says, born at the same time with it. Whoever expects punishment already suffers it, and whoever has deserved it expects it. Wickedness contrives torments against itself:

“Ill designs are worst to the contriver.”

—*Apud Aul. Gellium*, iv. 5.

as the wasp stings and hurts another, but most of all itself, for it there loses its sting and its use for ever,

“And leave their own lives in the wound.”

—Virgil, *Geo.*, iv. 238.

Cantharides have somewhere about them, by a contrariety of nature, a counterpoison against their poison. In like manner, at the same time that men take delight in vice, there springs in the conscience a displeasure that afflicts us sleeping and waking with various tormenting imaginations:

“Surely where many, often talking in their sleep, or raving in disease, are said to have betrayed themselves, and to have given publicity to offences long concealed.”—Lucretius, v. 1157.

Apollodorus dreamed that he saw himself flayed by the Scythians and afterwards boiled in a cauldron, and that his heart muttered these words “I am the cause of all these mischiefs that have befallen thee.” Epicurus said that no hiding-hole could conceal the wicked, since they could never assure themselves of being hid whilst their conscience discovered them to themselves.

“’Tis the first punishment of sin that no man absolves himself.” or: “This is the highest revenge, that by its judgment no offender is absolved.”—Juvenal, xiii. 2.

As an ill conscience fills us with fear, so a good one gives us greater confidence and assurance; and I can truly say that I have gone through several hazards with a more steady pace in consideration of the secret knowledge I had of my own will and the innocence of my intentions:

“As a man’s conscience is, so within hope or fear prevails, suiting to his design.”—Ovid, *Fast.*, i. 485.

Of this are a thousand examples; but it will be enough to instance three of one and the same person. Scipio, being one day accused before the people of Rome of some crimes of a very high nature, instead of excusing himself or flattering his judges: “It will become you well,” said he, “to sit in judgment upon a head, by whose means you have the power to judge all the world.” Another time, all the answer he gave to several impeachments brought against him by a tribune of the people, instead of

making his defence: "Let us go, citizens," said he, "let us go render thanks to the gods for the victory they gave me over the Carthaginians as this day," and advancing himself before towards the Temple, he had presently all the assembly and his very accuser himself following at his heels. And Petilius, having been set on by Cato to demand an account of the money that had passed through his hands in the province of Antioch, Scipio being come into the senate to that purpose, produced a book from under his robe, wherein he told them was an exact account of his receipts and disbursements; but being required to deliver it to the prothonotary to be examined, he refused, saying, he would not do himself so great a disgrace; and in the presence of the whole senate tore the book with his own hands to pieces. I do not believe that the most seared conscience could have counterfeited so great an assurance. He had naturally too high a spirit and was accustomed to too high a fortune, says Titius Livius, to know how to be criminal, and to lower himself to the meanness of defending his innocence. The putting men to the rack is a dangerous invention, and seems to be rather a trial of patience than of truth. Both he who has the fortitude to endure it conceals the truth, and he who has not: for why should pain sooner make me confess what really is, than force me to say what is not? And, on the contrary, if he who is not guilty of that whereof he is accused, has the courage to undergo those torments, why should not he who is guilty have the same, so fair a reward as life being in his prospect? I believe the ground of this invention proceeds from the consideration of the force of conscience: for, to the guilty, it seems to assist the rack to make him confess his fault and to shake his resolution; and, on the other side, that it fortifies the innocent against the torture. But when all is done, 'tis, in plain truth, a trial full of uncertainty and danger what would not a man say, what would not a man do, to avoid so intolerable torments?

"Pain will make even the innocent lie."

—Publius Syrus, *De Dolore*.

Whence it comes to pass, that him whom the judge has racked that he may not die innocent, he makes him die both innocent and racked. A thousand and a thousand have charged their own heads by false con-

fessions, amongst whom I place Philotas, considering the circumstances of the trial Alexander put upon him and the progress of his torture. But so it is that some say it is the least evil human weakness could invent; very inhumanly, notwithstanding, and to very little purpose, in my opinion.

Many nations less barbarous in this than the Greeks and Romans who call them so, repute it horrible and cruel to torment and pull a man to pieces for a fault of which they are yet in doubt. How can he help your ignorance? Are not you unjust, that, not to kill him without cause, do worse than kill him? And that this is so, do but observe how often men prefer to die without reason than undergo this examination, more painful than execution itself; and that oft-times by its extremity anticipates execution, and perform it. I know not where I had this story, but it exactly matches the conscience of our justice in this particular. A country-woman, to a general of a very severe discipline, accused one of his soldiers that he had taken from her children the little soup meat she had left to nourish them withal, the army having consumed all the rest; but of this proof there was none. The general, after having cautioned the woman to take good heed to what she said, for that she would make herself guilty of a false accusation if she told a lie, and she persisting, he presently caused the soldier's belly to be ripped up to clear the truth of the fact, and the woman was found to be right. An instructive sentence.

The End